

# The Boston Musical Intelligencer

## Radius Still Reaching After 16 Seasons

by David Patterson  
May 3, 2015

To close its 16<sup>th</sup> season, Radius Ensemble reached broadly for inclusiveness and transcendence in performances from a duet to its largest-ever ensemble. A solid crowd at Longy discovered a somewhat less familiar work of Robert Schumann and up-and-coming Gabriela Lena Frank's newest, while fearsome chromaticism from Sofia Gubaidalina countered chaste triads of Arvo Pärt.



Forty-three year old Gabriela Lena Frank identifies herself as Chinese, Lithuanian-Jewish, and Peruvian. For her, music is the means to “explore those far-flung components, excavating the sounds of her roots to gain deeper understanding of where she’s come from, who she is, and her context in the larger story of human existence.” Short picturesque scenes for flute and cello entitled *Four Pre-Inca Sketches* from 2008 finds her unearthing the Moche civilization’s flute, a pre-Colombian culture’s “bird-man,” a Lambayesque woman calling out in the desert wind, and panpipes that would have sounded in the Cahuachi Temple in southern Peru.

With but two instruments, one, the cello, being a real foreigner to this time and these cultures, Frank conveys Latino fare often through perpetual fired up rhythms and off-kilter tonalities familiar to us through European tradition. The last of the four, “Broken Panpipe from Nazca,” connected; its imaginative shadowing took the flute to descriptive and musical terms through an overblowing technique laid over a double-stopped series of sliding cello drones. Sarah Brady and Miriam Bolkosky synched and sang out the miniature vision to give rise to a most enticing and sound journey, despite its brevity.

Schumann’s *Märchenerzählungen* (Fairy Tales) Op. 132 for clarinet, viola and piano from 1853 was a real treat. In every one of its four movements, clarinetist Eran Egozy, violist Noriko Futagami Herndon, and pianist Sarah Bob sought out their lyricism and boldness, the latter not infrequently referencing marching. Schumann and Radius were at their best in the peaceful and tender third movement. The quieter, the lovelier the music rolled out. Egozy’s tone tended to blare in the higher register and louder dynamics.

Was Sophia Gubaidulina’s (1989) String Trio as transcendent as Radius pronounced it to be? The great musical gift the Russian possesses is always apparent in this work. As the years pass, its terror, its dread remain. Its language, minimalist in ways, unrelenting dissonance, and slow undercurrent of big pulses, has become ostentatious to a more and more noticeable extent. That being said, violinist Gabriela Diaz, Herdon, and Bolkosky made anguish of an anguished opus. Ebbing applause seemed to have suggested appreciation for the devout rendition. The semi-improvised pages could have found less squareness, the near realistic moaning and screaming less tied to a bar-line.

Coming in a myriad of instrumentations, Arvo Pärt's *Fratres* dating from 1977 this time materialized in a version for winds and percussion. Here, Radius presented nine of its members, its largest ensemble to date. Gone are the fast, fiddle-styled arpeggios, left are timbres of oboes, Montbach and Cicconetti, clarinets, Egozy and Gorczyca, bassoons, Howarth and Ellison, and Trant on percussion.

The seven-nine-eleven phrase pattern created out of the most basic building blocks of harmony, the triad, over and again morphed slightly this way and that. Instrumental coloration, key to this version, became a thing of exacting and earthy beauty at the many fingertips of the "super-sized" Radius. Transcendent? Probably not, but a heaven-sent opportunity coming on the heels of Gubaidulina to relax and stare into the euphoric sound-machine of Boston's own Radius it certainly was.