

INTERVIURI

Un dialog cu Thorsten Gubatz¹

Andra Apostu



Foarte apropiat de cultura muzicală românească despre care scrie cu plăcere și pe care o promovează în special prin canalul său de YouTube, Thorsten Gubatz are o pregătire teoretică unică, în teologie, filosofie, literatură germană și muzică, experiențele sale în aceste domenii concretizându-se prin două teze de doctorat impresionante. Consideră relația sa cu România și Republica Moldova ca fiind parte din karma lui, dedică mult timp și pasiune acestei legături și

ar fi încântat să participe activ la viața muzicală românească și pe viitor. Tânăr, energic și dedicat ideilor sale, clarinetist de formație, preferă să compună muzică de cameră pentru instrumente cu corzi; se definește ca artist minimalist, dar compozitorul său preferat este Gustav Mahler. L-am întâlnit frecvent în ultimii ani pe scenele festivalurilor românești de muzică contemporană, în calitate de interpret și compozitor, pe canalul său de YouTube ca promotor al muzicii românești, dar și în paginile revistei Muzica în calitate de autor de studii și recenzii.

¹ Interviuul a fost consemnat și este publicat în limba engleză.

➤ **Andra Apostu:** Who is Thorsten Gubatz, who promotes Romanian music like no one else outside the country does?

Thorsten Gubatz: Oh, who am I? As far as I can say it: I'm a guy from Germany, who grew up in Nuremberg. I studied philosophy and German literature in Constance, Pittsburgh and Freiburg, where I wrote a PhD thesis on philosophers Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Being one of those academic philosophers whose motivation is clandestinely religious, after my promotion, I went to a Cistercian and then to a Benedictine monastery. When I left the latter after the temporal vows, I finished my theological studies in Münster and made a second PhD, now about composer Bernd Alois Zimmermann as a religious artist. Currently, I am caring for my old parents, and I am looking for a job in the service of Romanian music.

➤ **A.A.:** How did this passion for Romanian music – and not just for music, but also for the Romanian cultural heritage that you promote with such generosity – come about, and who inspired it in you?

T.G.: My parents are not religious, but my mother received a very old-school Protestant ecclesiastic education, so one may say she has a lot of religion in her womb. Not only did I grow in this deeply melancholically religious womb, but when I was a child, my mother always encouraged me to watch Ingmar Bergman movies. If this software is installed and constantly updated in your childhood, you will likely have a strong interest in art and religion and in their interconnection. It is not by accident that I have written PhD theses on a strongly religiously inspired philosopher, on a student of his with a particular interest in the arts, and about a strongly religiously inspired, visionary yet deeply depressed modern composer. As to classical music, my moment of epiphany came when I was eleven years old, when my brilliant music teacher at high school shocked her students with "Le sacre du printemps". From that day on, my interest in classical music has been insatiable, and I decided to learn to play an instrument, the clarinet. Some years later, I made my first attempts at composition, and I experienced my moment of epiphany concerning literature, listening to a radio program on Eugène Ionesco – my first encounter with Romanian culture. It deserves mention that I grew up in Nuremberg, where Romanians are the second-largest ethnic minority. 2.8% of the city's population are Romanians, almost 15.000 people. A half-Romanian friend of mine at high school initiated me into Romanian folk music, poetry and cuisine. My major discovery concerning Romanian contemporary music came in 2011. It was the pretty unassuming website audio.cimec.ro, created by the UCMR in 2007. Fortunately, I already

knew enough about classical music in general and about contemporary classical music in particular that I had a judgment that I knew I could rely on. I did not even know the names of, say, Anatol Vieru and Mihai Moldovan; but when I listened to Vieru's "Memorial" and to Moldovan's "Scoarțe", very quickly it was clear to me that this was first-rate modern music, Vieru's piece not being far in spirit from Xenakis, Moldovan's not far from Zimmermann. When I left the monastery in 2016, I had resumed composing, and I had become good enough about playing the clarinet and about digital recording techniques that I decided to upload music on YouTube – not only my own pieces and recordings, but also other new or neglected music, from Romania in particular.

➤ **A.A.:** You said you studied philosophy, German literature, and theology. Did you also study composition or musicology? And were there certain people here in Romania who you feel have shaped your journey as an explorer of music?

T.G.: I have no degree in music or musicology. What comes closest to a musicological degree in my career is my second PhD thesis, which was theological, but de facto also musicological, and co-supervised by a German university professor of musicology, who – to my pleasure – called it musicologically "waterproof". But as a clarinetist, musicologist and composer I am basically self-taught, although it goes by itself that nobody is completely self-taught. When composers from Romania and from the Republic of Moldova found out about my YouTube channel, they more and more welcomed me into their world. When they found out that I could play their works, they sent me their scores and wrote new ones for me. When they found out that I could analyze music and write reviews on books and concerts, they let me contribute to their meetings and publications and proofread their manuscripts. When they found out that I could compose, they invited me to their festivals. For diplomatic reasons, I will not mention single names, but they know that I am endlessly happy about and thankful for what they have done for me.

➤ **A.A.:** You've created a true hub for promoting Romanian music through your YouTube channel. How do you select the music, based on what criteria, and – very interestingly – how do you choose the visual design for the videos? We're dealing with a platform where the visual aspect is essential; people go there to WATCH videos...

T.G.: Firstly, I would not present any music on my channel that I do not like – presenting a piece means being its advocate. And over the course of

decades, I have learned to trust my judgment, especially when it is positive. Not so much when it is negative. Quite a lot of times, I have made the experience that I started the exploration of a composer's work with the wrong piece, or in the wrong mood, or with wrong expectations. Therefore, whenever I temporarily dismiss a composer, I will listen to his or her other works again, and sometimes change my mind. There are composers to whose works I simply can't connect, but this is rather rare.

Secondly, I prefer new and/or neglected music – as a YouTuber, and even more as an interpreter. There was a time when I wanted to show to myself and the rest of the world that I can play certain repertoire pieces, and how I want them to ring out. Nowadays, I hardly do this anymore. There's no time and hardly any need.

Thirdly, I prefer those composers who can't promote themselves. There are several composers who have their own channels and know very well how to present their works on YouTube. Therefore, I don't prefer them, although I don't exclude them either – when I present some of their works, I also give the links to their own channels and/or the playlists which I have created for their music. There are also some composers who have so many fans that they hardly left any gaps to fill for me. Those who need me more are the dead and neglected, and also the alive and neglected, sometimes because they do not know how to present their works on YouTube in a way that will attract attention.

12 years ago, or so, Nicolae Brânduș had a YouTube channel. He presented his own music there – pure gold, some of the greatest masterpieces of Romanian modernism and postmodernism. But it all looked so unassuming, and hardly anybody discovered it! After maybe two years, Brânduș grew tired of casting his pearls before the swine, and deleted his channel. Luckily, I had downloaded it all and reuploaded it on mine.

When I was a very young man, we always had a TV magazine at home where Rolf Hochhuth (1931-2020) had a column. Hochhuth is remembered mostly as a highly political, cantankerous playwright, but he was much more than that. In his column "Galerie der Gedichte (Gallery of Poems)" he combined poems in German language with works of visual art. Thereby he gave proof of vast erudition, good taste and little bias, selecting works by poets and visual artists from all kinds of ideological and political affiliations. He also wrote a comment on the respective poem and on the respective work of visual art, but the brilliant thing was their combination, which had an artistic character in itself, allowing of a sensually intense semantic iridescence between juxtaposition, counterpoint, reinforcement, ... and what I am doing today on YouTube is very much alike when I think about a thumbnail image

that could “comment”, that could somehow “fit” a piece of music in an intelligent and attractive way. Just as a good book cover does have power to attract attention to the text inside, a good thumbnail image does have power to attract attention to the music.

Sometimes I present the music with its score – that’s when I believe that it can make the music easier to understand, or if the score has a calligraphic quality, or for whatever other reason. I don’t always do it, since music is primarily something to be listened to, and much music communicates directly enough. Whenever a work has lyrics, I seek to provide them with an English translation. I want to make what I present as easily accessible as possible. Especially if I’m in love with a piece, I can go to great lengths in this respect.

But making the works as easily accessible as possible serves yet another goal: having them appreciated! And for this, it still takes something else, namely good expertise and good true stories. Who composed it, when did this person live, how is the work called, when was it composed? Who is playing, when and where? And I do check my sources (even Viorel Cosma, blessed be his name, wasn’t always right), I appreciate my listeners’ feedback, and I keep correcting my descriptions. Sometimes I also write a comment when I find it helpful: an analytical sketch, an opera’s synopsis, or whatever. In any case, no one shall dare call “obscure” what I present only because he or she does not know anything about it! On the one hand, there are very many wonderful and curious people out there who are eager to enjoy exploring the tropical rainforest of music that is Romanian modernism and postmodernism. Today my channel is approaching 5000 subscribers, which at least is medium size for a rare music channel. But on the other hand, I seek to strongly discourage the complacency of ignorance (“I don’t know it, neither do my peers – therefore it’s obscure, not worth caring about it”) by suggesting: This is something great, something fascinating, something everything is known about, except by you!

➤ **A.A.:** First a music lover, then a clarinetist and composer. Is that the order in which you see yourself? Which came first for you – the music lover or the clarinetist? Did what you played lead you to explore the modern repertoire further, or did you first explore the possibilities of modern musical language more as an observer and musical analyst?

T.G.: Well, in temporal order I became a clarinetist, a composer and a YouTuber because I was a music lover. But my YouTube activities and my friends from Romania and the Republic of Moldova have helped me to act in

another triad: as a composer, as a performing musician and as a musicologist. Two rather practical approaches to music, one rather theoretical approach. It is really helpful to have all of these perspectives – to know how it is to entrust as a composer one's work to someone else, how it is when someone else entrusts his or her work to you as a performer, and the enormously multifaceted relations of making music to reflecting on it.

What is most dear to me is being a composer. My high school teachers had encouraged me very much with my first attempts at composition, yet when I chose not to study music, I kept playing the clarinet, but gave up composing for almost 20 years. I played with pianists and organists, with ensembles and orchestras, but it was exclusively conservative repertoire. I learned a lot, but playing modern music meant playing alone. At least I found out how much great and neglected modern repertoire there is for solo clarinet – this niche in the world of music proved to have a gold mine of its own. When, still in the monastery, I found out that I had become good enough for making recordings, I also resumed composing, at least for my own instrument. When I learned that Anatol Vieru wrote his solo violin piece "Shqip" in 1994 for a festival of contemporary music in Tirana, I had to admit: "Good Lord, this sounds like earthly bliss: taking part as a composer in a festival of contemporary music in a city like, say, Tirana, Skopje, or Chişinău." I will



explain later why I thought of Eastern Europe. For the moment I only want to say that, at that time, this was no more than a pipe dream. I had no idea that in 2023, it would come true in Chişinău, and in Bucharest in 2024, and many times again.

With composer Alina Rötzer.
Photo by Violeta Dinescu

As to the modern repertoire – in music, as well as in literature and in architecture, my first crush was always something modern. It was from there where I started exploring everything else.

➤ **A.A.:** Although you're a clarinetist, you don't write music exclusively for your own instrument. Which musical ensemble do

you feel most comfortable using to express your creative ideas? Is there, somewhere in the future, a desire to write music for a specific genre, perhaps on a larger scale?

T.G.: For me, one of the most rewarding things about being a composer is to write for strings. I always loved to play Bach's solo works for strings in clarinet arrangements. Although most of them work on the clarinet as well, it gives a sense for what a clarinet can't do, but what a violin or a cello can. So, for the SIMN in 2024, I wrote a string trio, and a string orchestra piece for the SIMN in 2025. I also love to write for the human voice and for the organ. Last year, I composed and recorded a Latin mass for baritone and organ. There is a choral triptych of mine which has not yet rung out, and there is one especially ambitious project that I have in mind, but that's an unhatched egg.

➤ **A.A.:** How does your creative process work? How does an idea come about, and, more importantly, how do you give it form and shape?

T.G.: I mostly start with some musical idea that somehow keeps me in thrall. It is rarely something that I consciously constructed, but something structured anyway. Composing means developing its inner logic. If on this way, I meet with other ideas that can be integrated, then they will. The outcome will be kind of a story, or kind of a drama, but a genuinely musical one. Anyway, this is just a general rule; it knows many exceptions.

➤ **A.A.:** What stylistic traits do you identify in your music? Where might it be categorized – what influences does it draw upon, and what kind of musical language does it employ?

T.G.: I am a minimalist. As a very young man I adored the Japanese Noh theater, where everything is concentrated to the essential, and every detail means a lot. I returned to this kind of aesthetics with my theological master's thesis, on Jean-Marie Straub's and Danièle Huillet's film "Moses und Aron", based on Schönberg's opera. I loved this sparse and austere imagery, brimming with significance that I could make explicit. Reducing means intensifying when the context is intense. Good minimalism asks for maximalist context. It is not that I did not appreciate different approaches. My favorite composer is Mahler, as maximalist as it gets. But here as well, not one single superfluous note, as Schönberg remarked; yet, one might say, a very extroverted musical temperament. Mine is introverted. I recently composed a song which I planned to be accompanied by a piano with two monodic lines. It proved to be too much, far too much. The principle of attack and decay was useless either. One human voice with monodic organ drones were everything I

needed, anything else would have been too much and would have weakened everything. Generally, I love drones, especially those very deep organ drones which are half-heard and half-felt. Drones not only turn time into space, but they turn soulless into soulful space. A friend of mine, German composer Eva-Maria Houben, has written a piece which lasts over an hour and which consists of hardly anything else than of such organ drones. She was so right, it is so good there is a piece which is so long where hardly anything distracts from these adorable drones. But I also love melodic movements accompanied by drones. I cherish parallels, and parallel movements cutting carelessly across the harmonic layer cake where octaves are something very close and half- or even microtones are something very distant. I revel in effectively used dissonance, especially spectral dissonance, and in clusters played by organs or by multiple divisi strings. When writing for the clarinet, I prefer a rather low tessitura – many contemporary composers use the altissimo register far too often. I enjoy the beautiful, soft, mysterious multiphonics, not the shrill catfight cacophonies.

➤ **A.A.:** You mentioned in a previous interview how much you like the song. Isn't that, in this postmodern era, an outdated concept?

T.G.: For modernist conceptions of the history and future of music, this could appear like an outdated concept. For example, strictly serialist composing does not allow of larger traditional entities like melodies. But even some major serialists saw a problem in this and therefore invented all kinds of liberties in order to restore or reinvent something like the "cantabile". As to postmodernism, if everything is ironized and put into quotation marks, why not a song as well, or a style of song writing? Since all those modernist conceptions tended to be horribly exclusivist, therefore suppressive, the postmodern rebellion came by necessity.

I oppose musical postmodernism only in two respects: firstly, if it actually means an antimodernist counter-revolution, a neo-"romantic" or rather neo-banal, neo-sentimental, neo-populist rollback against the modernist openings of new horizons; and secondly, if it basically keeps the exaggerated modernist bias against tradition by ironizing it compulsively. Jörg Widmann, for example, is a wonderful artist, but with an obsessive tendency towards ironically quoting and distorting – when I listen to his music, I always wait for that moment when I sense that the ironic attitude fades out, gets brittle and transparent, that the voices he intends to quote turn out to be his own voice. Sometimes it happens, sometimes not. Dan Dediú does some very similar things as Widmann, but he does them earlier and better, and his irony

can get wonderfully brittle and transparent. If music is to be interesting to me, it needs to be authentic. There is something deeply authentic, of course, about critical distance, about irony and eclecticism, but only to a certain degree. Just because we cannot express ourselves without quoting, expressing ourselves is not identical to quoting. As prone as we may be to irony, at some point, we no longer “feel joy” or “feel pain”, but we feel joy and we feel pain – we do not “live”, but we live, and for us human beings, it is essential to express, as good or bad we can, the truth of our existence. And therefore, necessarily, postmodern exaggerated irony needs to be overcome, just as modernist exclusivism needed to be overcome.

For a composer, this means facing the history of music, asking himself or herself: What does really convince you? – And as far as I am concerned, I can say: for example, the principle of melody. Not the urge to obey this principle, or any other! Modernism has taught us how great music can be without it. No, non-melodic, or atonal, or microtonal music are not ‘inhuman’! The human spirit is not as poor a thing as to be musically confined to melody, to modal or to major-minor tonality. But any modernist or postmodernist claims about such principles being ‘exhausted’ and nowadays leading necessarily to ‘kitsch’, are ideological, suppressive bullshit – crushed and ruined by the musical life of the spirit since the 1970s, not to be mourned, and definitely not to be revived.

➤ **A.A.:** You’ve also explored the relationship between music and mathematics, conducted an experiment on this topic, and theorized the results in a study – can you tell us about that?

T.G.: Since, as I told you above, I usually start with an idea that I did not consciously construct, but which is structured anyway, such that composing means developing its inner logic, I am not a constructivist, or a semi-constructivist at best. But I make exceptions, and I am fascinated by constructivism. Where one might expect a relation like: the more calculus, the less emotion (or expression), reality proves otherwise – not only in Bach, but he is a prime example.

During the last couple of years, Violeta Dinescu has used a certain kind of structure, developed by Romanian mathematician Dan Tudor Vuza, for creating a special kind of rhythmical canons. She uses theses structures in a non-constructivist way, such that they only regulate the temporal distribution of a musical material that, in itself, is in no way determined by the structures. Therefore, I developed a method for deriving also the musical material from the structures. When I had done so concerning pitches and durations, the outcome seemed to have some musical potential for me, as long as I decided

freely – that is, according to my musical taste –, about the tempo and dynamics. Otherwise, it would have sounded just like some entirely constructed slop to me, and not like music.

➤ **A.A.:** What are your thoughts on Romanian folklore, and how did you manage to connect with it, given that you come from a Western-style folklore region, which is very different from the Eastern-style one?

T.G.: At age 15, I was very reserved about Christianity; but when I saw a program on TV on Zen Buddhism, I was thunderstruck. It would not have made any sense to tell me: “But your own culture is Christian; what can a Japanese religion mean to you?” One could as well have asked our ancestors: “But your own culture is pagan; what can a Middle Eastern religion mean to you?” Obviously, it meant much to them. This is how the life of the spirit works: by cultural appropriation. Yes, it can be and often is malign, aggressive, awkward; but so can life as such, which anyway is not a generally accepted good reason for being against life, or is it? Therefore, I am firmly opposed to condemning cultural appropriation as such, since it means condemning the life of the spirit: condemning human identities’ openness to other identities. And we live in an age where an abundance of media brings the world to us, and we grow up with that. So it’s the same with music. Nothing against authentic Western folklore; yet what is called ‘Volksmusik’ in Germany is nothing that I ever could connect with. But I had the joy of listening to ethnomusicological programs on Bavarian Radio, and I was amazed by the expressive strength and the complexity of Eastern folklore. In the East, including Russia, Hungary and Romania, the introduction of folklore techniques into classical music made this music richer, especially in terms of rhythm – in fact, it modernized classical music. The names of Bartók and Enescu symbolize a fascinating type of musical modernism that includes, in essence, the appropriation of an already extremely rich and complex folk culture. This is also why I dreamed of participating as a composer in a festival of contemporary music in a city like Tirana, Skopje or Chişinău – in places where the enormous powers of musical modernism and of Eastern European folklore could unite. When I wrote a solo violin piece for Chişinău, it started somewhat à la Hindemith, only for then being clandestinely haunted by “Cine iubeşte şi lasă”.

I also deeply love Romanian Orthodox sacred music. Even less than Gregorian chant does it suggest any reactionary attitude to me – surprisingly, since I sympathize with mainstream Orthodox political agendas even less than with that of my own church. Orthodox sacred music mostly sounds extremely human, heartfelt, and full of life to me. I have nothing at all against its musical

conservatism: What is so good should only be changed with utmost care. My favorite composer of Orthodox sacred music is Bessarabian priest Mihail Bereзовski. It is one more reason for me to love Romanian modern and contemporary music that it kept its ties with this tradition, too.

When I walked across Chişinău for the very first time, I could hear the bells of the Orthodox Cathedral. It is a kind of ringing that I don't hear often in Germany. I immediately thought that this should be transformed into a piece in the spirit of Alfred Schnittke. This means that I wanted to enrich the ringing with dissonance and with allusions to other music. The piece is called "Clopotniţa", for violin and piano. The culmination point of its harmonic order is a dissonant chord on the notes E-flat, D and G, in German: Es-D-G. Bach already used it as a musical symbol meaning "Soli Deo Gloria": "Glory to God alone". The main motif of the violin is that of the small bells, but it also resembles the beginning of Schnittke's fifth symphony. It is meant to be a joke, yet not a foolish one, but a melancholic and religious joke – ironic in the spirit of Schnittke, whose irony, as postmodern as it was, did not mean aloofness, but consciousness of the broken, fragmentary, painful, traumatic. From my part, this irony includes my consciousness of this cathedral's belonging to the Moldovan Orthodox Church, which is a metropolitanate under the Russian Orthodox Church. I know what this means. Anyway, I respect this cathedral as a beautiful house of God, and as the main landmark of Chişinău. "Clopotniţa" is a declaration of love for this city, which has brought me so much joy.

Besides, when I first attended mass in Roman Catholic churches in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova, I noticed that the Roman rite there had acquired an Orthodox touch (for example, there is hardly any communion in the hand). Only then I really noticed what a strongly Lutheran touch it has in Germany (especially because of the chorales sung by the entire community).

➤ **A.A.:** Our great composer is George Enescu, but he is not the only one, even though the world sees him as the sole representative of Romanian music. What else is there besides George Enescu, and why is it worth exploring?

T.G.: Dear world, may I have your attention, please? Concerning Romania, there are, for example, George Stephănescu (1843–1925), Stan Golestan (1875–1956), Paul Richter (1875–1950), Nicolae Bretan (1887–1968), Ion Nonna Otescu (1888–1940), Constantin C. Nottara (1890–1951), Ludovic Feldman (1893–1987), Alfred Alessandrescu (1893–1959), Marţian Negrea (1893–1973), Filip Lazăr (1894–1936), Sabin Drăgoi (1894–1968), Mihail Andricu (1895–1974), Marcel Mihalovici (1898–1985), Mansi Barberis (1899–1986), Constantin Bobescu (1899–1992), Zeno Vancea (1900–1990), Ionel

Perlea (1900–1970), Theodor Rogalski (1901–1954), Tudor Ciortea (1903–1982), Sigismund Toduță (1908–1991), Paul Constantinescu (1909–1963), Alfred Mendelsohn (1910–1966), Constantin Silvestri (1913–1969), Dinu Lipatti (1917–1950), Mircea Chiriac (1919–1994), Roman Vlad (1919–2013), Alexandru Pașcanu (1920–1989), Dumitru Bughici (1921–2008), Tudor Jarda (1922–2007), Vasile Timiș (1922–2014), Anatol Vieru (1926–1998), Theodor Grigoriu (1926–2014), Carmen Petra-Basacopol (1926–2023), Pascal Bentoiu (1927–2016), Ștefan Niculescu (1927–2008), Tiberiu Olah (1928–2002), Adrian Rațiu (1928–2005), Vasile Herman (1929–2010), Dumitru Capoianu (1929–2012), Wilhelm Georg Berger (1929–1993), Felicia Donceanu (1931–2022), Myriam Marbe (1931–1997), Dan Constantinescu (1931–1993), Doru Popovici (1932–2019), Aurel Stroe (1932–2008), Remus Georgescu (1932–2021), Liviu Dandara (1933–1991), Cornel Țăranu (1934–2023), Gheorghe Costinescu (1934–2023), Mihai Mitrea-Celarianu (1935–2003), Nicolae Brânduș (1935–2023), Nicolae Coman (1936–2016), Alexandru Hrisanide (1936–2018), Irina Odăgescu-Țuțuianu (*1937), Lucian Mețianu (*1937), Mihai Moldovan (1937–1981), Corneliu Cezar (1937–1997), Corneliu Dan Georgescu (*1938), Vasile Spătarelu (1938–2005), Liviu Glodeanu (1938–1978), Richard Oschanitzky (1939–1979), Petru Stoianov (*1939), Hans Peter Türk (*1940), Octavian Nemescu (1940–2020), Dan Voiculescu (1940–2009), Horațiu Rădulescu (1942–2008), Sabin Păuța (*1943), Costin Mioreanu (1943–2025), Dan Buciu (1943–2025), Viorel Munteanu (*1944), Iancu Dumitrescu (*1944), Ulpiu Vlad (*1945), Maya Badian (*1945), Costin Cazaban (1946–2009), Valentin Petculescu (*1947), Liana Alexandra (1947–2011), Vladimir Scolnic (*1947), Fred Popovici (*1948), Marina Vlad (1949–2022), Călin Ioachimescu (*1949), Marcel Spinei (*1950), Christian Alexandru Petrescu (*1950), Horia Șurianu (*1951), Adrian Iorgulescu (*1951), Adrian Pop (*1951), Doina Rotaru (*1951), Maia Ciobanu (*1952), Adriana Hölszky (*1953), Violeta Dinescu (*1953), Sorin Lerescu (*1953), Liviu Dănceanu (1954–2017), Carmen Maria Cârneli (*1957), Mihnea Brumariu (*1958), Livia Teodorescu-Ciocănea (*1959), Laura Manolache (*1959), George Balint (1961–2019), Mihaela Stănculescu-Vosganian (*1961), Dana Cristina Probst (*1961), Nicolae Teodoreanu (1962–2018), Ana-Maria Avram (1962–2017), Dora Cojocar (*1963), Adina Dumitrescu (*1964), Iulia Cibișescu-Duran (*1966), Dan Dediu (*1967), Diana Dembinski Vodă (*1967), Didier Schein (*1969), Laura Ana Manzat (*1969), Irinel Anghel (*1969), Ana Szilágyi (*1971), Cătălin Crețu (*1971), Mihai Măniceanu (*1976), Tudor Feraru (*1976), Cristian Bence-Muk (*1978), Gabriel Mălăncioiu (*1979), Sabina Ulubeanu (*1979), Diana Iulia Simon (*1981), Diana Rotaru (*1981), ... and as unforgivable as it may be, I will stop here, since I am certainly stupid enough for having forgotten to mention many wonderful

composers, and since it is principally impossible to write a history of the present.

Concerning Bessarabia resp. the Republic of Moldova, there are, for example, Mihail Bereзовski (1869–1940), Ștefan Neaga (1900–1951), Solomon Lobel (1910–1981), Gheorghe Neaga (1922–2003), Vasile Zagorschi (1926–2003), Zlata Tkaci (1928–2006), Vladimir Rotaru (1931–2007), Pavel Rivilis (1936–2014), Vitalii Verhola (1946–1984), Ion Macovei (1947–2011), Tudor Chiriac (*1949), Dmitri Kițenko (*1950), Gheorghe Mustea (*1951), Vladimir Beleaev (*1955), Vladimir Ciolac (*1956), Vlad Burlea (*1957), Ghenadie Ciobanu (*1957), Oleg Palymski (*1966), Snejana Pîslari (*1972), Alexander Timofeev (*1983), Lidia Ciubuc (*1990), and Veronica Ciobanu (*1993).

They all are worth exploring since they all wrote wonderful music. If you somehow belong to their world, be happy and be proud: You are part of something truly great.

➤ **A.A.:** What are your musical preferences, and what styles/aesthetic traits appeal to you? Who are your favorite composers among those active in Romania today? Without sounding undiplomatic, I just want to know what music resonates most deeply with you – what musical language do you feel suits your inner musical structure?

T.G.: I have many musical preferences, very different ones. As I said above, I love minimalist aesthetics. Mostly I am practicing it myself, and I love when others do it. But I can also love others doing something very different than I do. I love music that overwhelms me both with its intelligence, its depth and its intensity, music that grips, shocks, assaults and entrances me, music that makes me discover new worlds any time that I am listening to it again, since it is inexhaustible. Therefore, I owe my initiation into the mysteries of classical music to such a work, “Le sacre du printemps”; for the same reason, Gustav Mahler is my favorite composer; and Johann Sebastian Bach, Franz Schubert, Richard Wagner, Dmitri Shostakovich, Olivier Messiaen, Bernd Alois Zimmermann and Alfred Schnittke are other favorites of mine.

It would indeed be undiplomatic to speak of living people, but the first Romanian names that come to my mind are those of two deceased ones anyway: Nicolae Brânduș and Mihai Moldovan. Brânduș’s opera “La țiganci” and his “SinEuPhonia I” for tape, two organs and large orchestra are volcanic, transcendental masterpieces that make you wonder how they were possible in the first place, how anybody could compose and perform something like this. And when I listen to Moldovan’s orchestral pieces “Scoarțe” and “Rezonanțe”,

I wonder if he knew Zimmermann's "Photoptosis", since they are so close in spirit – at the same time highly constructivist and highly expressionist, with compression (plus quick repetition) and stretching of motifs, and so on.

Last but not least, in spite of all diplomacy, a living one! Lucian Mețianu (whom I have visited twice so far at his home in Lausanne) went to Cologne in 1969 because he wanted to study with Zimmermann, who unfortunately was already too sick. He would have loved Mețianu, who is deeply Pythagorean in spirit – a constructivist par excellence, and with that certain grace of the Muses that allows constructivists like Josquin or Bach, Xenakis or Mețianu, to write music which is more expressive than most music that was meant to be so. His first symphony is one of the greatest works of Romanian orchestral music from the 1960s, next to this era's masterpieces by Vieru, Niculescu, Olah, Stroe and the like. His monumental second symphony has never been performed, and this should change.

➤ **A.A.:** I recently discovered your book on Bernd Alois Zimmermann, whom you call a "religious artist." Why did you choose to explore his work, making this research the focus of your doctoral studies?

T.G.: Well, that's my theological PhD thesis. I have already sketched above why it does not come as a coincidence that art and religion and their interconnection are my thing, and the deeply melancholic modern spirituality of Ingmar Bergman, close in spirit across all of the Christian confessions to that of Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Karl Barth, Hugo Distler, Jehan Alain, Andrei Tarkovsky, Alfred Schnittke ... and also Zimmermann. As a very young man, I listened to his "ecclesiastical action" – on might also say "cantata" – "Ich wandte mich und sah an alles Unrecht, das geschah unter der Sonne (So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun)". The complaint about earthly injustice in Ecclesiastes 4 is combined there with Dostoevsky's story of the Grand Inquisitor, who condemns Jesus Christ in the name of the church. I could never forget it. Zimmermann completed it five days before his suicide; it is far more than only his suicide note, but it is also his suicide note. It at least ponders the possibility that most of mankind is unable to follow Christ, hence forsaken by him and predestined to damnation (Augustine's classical horror scenario). Yet, as he did with many of his major works, Zimmermann wrote under the score: "O. A. M. D. G.": "Omnia ad maiorem Dei gloriam": "Everything to the higher glory of God". No book was ever written on what this may mean – hence, how religion and art relate in the work of this major composer of the 20th century –, let alone by a theologian.

And this is how my personal interest in this artist and a scholarly desideratum came together.

➤ **A.A.:** Does your creative expression as a composer complement your perspectives as a philosopher, literary scholar, or even a theologian? This may be a somewhat personal question, but which of these roles fulfills you the most? Musician, philosopher, or theologian? Can they intertwine; can they “coexist” with one another?

T.G.: During the last years, my focus has been increasingly on music. Currently I am proofreading a philosophico-theological PhD thesis by a friend of mine that reminds me of much that I have missed while I was writing a musicologico-theological PhD thesis myself. If I don't see this as a damage, it is not because I did not respect the philosophical and theological discourse. They are seriously dealing with the basic concepts of our culture, discussing freedom in particular. These highly abstract reflections imply highly concrete practical, social, political consequences, and therefore they are good examples for showing what Hegel meant by saying that the abstract is the truly concrete. Especially in our age of global neo-authoritarianism such reflections on what we really care about in our society are highly relevant. But as far as I see, these discourses work quite well. Except for reviewing and proofreading, they don't need me. I do have a project, on the concept of “Ahnung”, which translates as “presentiment”, “premonition”, “having a certain idea” etc. This term has a prominent, but pretty unsung philosophical and theological history, and it is also a word that's often used in everyday German. In a hardly translatable way, it associates very heterogeneous dimensions of human sapience and sentience – all of which somehow work together in our daily motivations and orientations, and in particular in the creation and experience of art. I am not yet sure if this concept will allow me to say something if not new, but sufficiently original for being interesting, about the aesthetic judgment as such and its relation to religious judgment: What exactly is taste, and to what extent is religion a matter of taste? – We will see.

My most general reason for not abandoning philosophy and theology is simply that theory is a part of life. As to my musical life, I am acting in the abovementioned triad of being a composer, a performing musician and a musicologist. The musical work of art is always somehow related to the other arts, motivated and oriented by the respective worlds in which they all exist. Therefore, the work of musicology will always have to be interdisciplinary, including the philosophy and the theology of music.

In any case, what is most satisfactory is always feeling truly useful. Now that my parents are old, I can be truly useful when I care for them. When music comes to my mind that does not yet exist, but I think it should exist, or I meet with someone else's piece of music that does not ring out as it should, or does not receive as much attention as it should, and I can play it or promote it, or when I am given a book for saying how good or bad it is, or when I am handed a manuscript by somebody who can work and think, but is bad at formulating elegantly, and I can ameliorate it, then I am given a task by the spirit, and I am happy to serve the spirit, since I feel truly useful.

➤ **A.A.:** How do you see your relationship with Romania and with Romanian music and culture, and how would you like it to evolve?

T.G.: My relationship with Romania and the Republic of Moldova must be some part of my *karma*, and a most fortunate one – one of the best things that happened in my life. I would be especially happy if my working for Romanian music could also turn into a job.

SUMMARY

Andra Apostu

A dialogue with Thorsten Gubatz

Deeply connected to Romanian musical culture – which he enjoys writing about and promoting, particularly through his YouTube channel – Thorsten Gubatz has a unique theoretical background in theology, philosophy, German literature, and music; his experiences in these fields have culminated in two impressive doctoral dissertations. He considers his relationship with Romania and the Republic of Moldova to be part of his destiny; he devotes a great deal of time and passion to this connection and would be delighted to continue actively participating in Romanian musical life in the future. Young, energetic, and dedicated to his ideas, a trained clarinetist, he prefers to compose chamber music for string instruments; he defines himself as a minimalist artist, but his favorite composer is Gustav Mahler. I have frequently encountered him in recent years on the stages of Romanian contemporary music festivals, as both a performer and composer; on his YouTube channel, where he promotes Romanian music; and in the pages of *Muzica* magazine where he has published essays and reviews.