

# Your CALL

Classical composer  
**Dobrinka Tabakova**  
answers your questions

**You were born in Bulgaria – are there any important Eastern European influences on your music?**

(Howard Sampson)

Some of the earliest piano pieces I learned, other than the compulsory Hanon and Czerny exercises, were by Bartók. These miniatures resonated with me then and still continue to do so. Bartók's respect, feeling for and reinvention of traditional music and the subsequent development by Ligeti in, say, his *Piano Études* has been one of my many inspirations.

**Are you the only musician in your family?** (Maggie Callega)

Yes, although I grew up surrounded by music at home in my mostly academic and scientist family. By listening to our large LP collection and going to concerts, that passion and love for music was passed on to me.

**Your new CD *String Paths* features a number of works for strings. How do you approach writing for stringed instruments?** (Gary Carey)

Well, my instrument is the piano, so writing for strings is a constant discovery. Possibly by not being governed by my own abilities and limitations on string instruments, I feel a freedom to just write what I hear. Of course, studying Bach or Ysaÿe (amongst many) solo works can enrich your string vocabulary.

**What was your first commission and how did it come about?** (Jayne Nash)

It was my now good friend, Maxim Rysanov, who heard a concert with a string quartet of mine in my first year at the Guildhall and asked me to write a solo viola suite for him. At the same time, I attended singers' recitals, just out of curiosity. I was asked by Robin Bowman, then head of the vocal department, to write a chamber

opera for the singers in my year as their end of year project. There was a small budget to put on a chamber opera in one of the basement rooms at the Guildhall.

**Which composers and which works have been your greatest inspiration?** (Tjinder Joshi)

A piece which made an instant impact on me was Giya Kancheli's *Third Symphony*, which I heard performed at the Southbank in the 90s. Around the same time I discovered Panufnik's *Sinfonia Sacra*, Britten's *Les Illuminations*, Messiaen's organ and orchestral works and Keith Jarrett's mesmerising *Köln Concert*, which were absolute revelations.

**Your career is truly international with works being performed all over Europe. What skills does a composer need to keep track of opportunities in a number of countries?** (Dermot McGuffey)

I have always been curious about what is going on in other countries and subscribed to newsletters. That way you feel more connected, and when opportunities arise you feel part of a context.

**Do you think the UK offers sufficient opportunities for emerging composers and what career advice would you give to a young composer?** (Niles Jackman)

As a student in London, I benefited from taking part in workshops and masterclasses and it's great to see that now there are even more similar opportunities available around the country. I would also encourage young composers to spend time at open rehearsals – you pick up priceless years of experience there.

**Do you sit down to compose music every day?** (Brendon Penrith)

Mostly, yes, although it is not regimented. I try to sketch every day, then when I have a deadline, work becomes more intense. I think this is a shared pattern among most of my composer friends.

**What has been your most exciting success so far?** (Heather Fry)

One premiere that has had particular significance for me was on being awarded the prize for an anthem for The Queen's



Sussie Ahlburg

Golden Jubilee. The award and premiere were presented at St. Paul's Cathedral, and I shall never forget how honoured I felt to be part of such an important celebration. Most recently I've had the privilege of putting a collection of pieces together and making an album (*String Paths* for ECM Records). To have perspective on your personal development and celebrate a large period of creativity this way is beyond exciting.

**What stimulates the best creative ideas for you?** (Ellis Fishman)

Beauty, in all its nuances – whether that is expressed through architecture, paintings, literature, music, nature... Sharing that heritage; witnessing the addition of new gems to that world is certainly a major inspiration.

**What are you working on at the moment?** (Joanne Foster)

Together with the filmmaker Ruth Paxton, I am working on a project for the New Music Biennial next summer. Also, I'm working with the Orchestra of the Swan on a couple of projects including one for the Shakespeare anniversary in 2016.

*A graduate of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and King's College London, Dobrinka Tabakova is an award-winning classical composer whose work exhibits a striking compositional style and distinct orchestration. [www.dobrinka.com](http://www.dobrinka.com)*