

# Q&A GÉNIA

Russian virtuoso pianist & composer **GÉNIA** is also the creator of Piano-Yoga®. She performs at Out Hear in February, and teaches a four-week Piano-Yoga® course this autumn and winter



**What attracted you to the piano as a child?** My first teacher was my great-grandmother, the pianist Regina Horowitz, sister of Vladimir Horowitz. She gave me an upright piano when I was just four. I don't think I'd be a pianist if it wasn't for her; she made it so fun. Even when I was tiny I'd play the right hand part of Liszt's Etudes with her...

**Who were your musical heroes growing up?** I listened to a lot of the great recordings of Vladimir Horowitz, and I just thought all grown-ups played like that! My great-grandmother also played so beautifully, with musicians like David Oistrakh. I listened to recordings, too, of Emil Gilels and the operas of Verdi, Bellini and Donizetti as my father, though a mathematician, had a consuming love for Italian opera. When I was

young, though, I didn't think of becoming a musician. I danced and acted too, and my ambition was to look after animals.

**How has yoga informed your music-making beyond its physical enabling?** Yoga is so much more than a physical discipline, it's a whole philosophy. The physical side is just one 'limb' of eight. The way yoga exercises can help to clarify the mind has helped my music-making profoundly. When I go to the piano after yoga, I would say the quality of my practice is improved by 40%: my whole body is connected. I so often see piano students suffering anxieties which can be quite simply alleviated through yoga exercises. When I have a lot of concerts, yoga focuses and channels my energies.

**You'll be performing your own music in this Out Hear event: when did you realise you wanted to compose?** I was working with a lot of composers and improvising. One heard me and suggested I should be writing it down. I feel life in London is very full, so last year I took myself off to Paris to create a studio album. Some of the pieces have already been played in Caffè Nero shops this summer, some I will play at my concert for Out Hear and others will appear when the whole album *Thoughts of Today, Dreams of Tomorrow* is complete.

**Max de Wardener is a composer whose music is clearly important to you...**

Max has been writing for me for a long time, and this will be our third concert at Kings Place. I love the way he works with rhythms and sounds: he thinks about the piano from a very percussive, conceptual point of view, but he also writes lovely melodies, developed in intricate ways. He's open to feedback, and I learn a lot from performing his music so it's a very creative exercise.

**You are also playing Sofia Gubaidulina's Sonata and works by Karen Tanaka: tell us about them.** Gubaidulina's Piano Sonata was introduced to me by pianist Andrew Ball, when I was asked to design a contemporary programme for a Park Lane Group concert. He was so generous and came along with a huge pile of scores, saying 'this one is a bit mad'. Instantly, I wanted to play it! It's an early piece (1965) when Gubaidulina was wild and carefree, using the

inside of the piano – it often doesn't sound anything like a piano. It's so dynamic: I recorded it for my album *Unveiled* (Black Box). Karen Tanaka's pieces are very different: she's a wonderful composer and a very quiet person, who I've met several times. Her pieces are both minimalist and highly virtuosic. You can hear my performance of her *Techno Etude* on YouTube.

**You've been working in the studio with Nik Bärtsch this summert... Nik's motto is 'ecstasy through asceticism' and I've been very challenged by his music for me. He creates these incredibly complex rhythms which you then have to sustain for a long time. Once you are in the middle of that texture, it's like waving a magic wand over the audience, putting them into a trance.**

**What would your 12-year-old self think of you now?** She would laugh! She'd be happy that I managed to pursue several different things, to retain that childhood sense of play, I think. I'm very privileged to have had the opportunity to live a creative life.

For details of GÉNIA's PianoYoga® Certificate Courses (Sundays once-monthly) please visit [www.piano-yoga.com](http://www.piano-yoga.com) or [www.kingsplace.co.uk/piano-yoga](http://www.kingsplace.co.uk/piano-yoga)

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**Out Hear:**  
**GÉNIA plays**  
**Max de Wardener,**  
**Karen Tanaka,**  
**Sofia Gubaidulina**  
9 February  
See Listings p66 for details