

JYRKI LINJAMA

– a short self-assessment

Jyrki Linjama finds it easy to talk about his studies, posts and music but more difficult to express the personal choices and values guiding his work. He does, however, feel it is important to defend the right to be intimate in an era of growing obscenity. A composer's mission is to be 'difficult'; to swim against the tide.

Linjama started studying composition at the Sibelius Academy in 1979 with **Einojuhani Rautavaara** and **Paavo Heininen**. He also studied abroad: at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague, in private lessons in Budapest with **Zsolt Durkó** and on a scholarship at the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin, where his teacher was **Witold Szalonek**. In 2003 he obtained an artistic doctorate from the Sibelius Academy. The topic was the interface between concert and sacred music, the chief works being his *Violin Concerto No. 3* and *Vesper*. Apart from composing, Linjama says studying the violin (his main instrument), choral singing and music theory has been particularly important to him.

Jyrki Linjama taught at the Helsinki Conservatory and the Sibelius Academy, and lectured in musicology at the University of Turku 1993–2008. He has also written about music and been active in several organizations (as Chairman of the association for Finnish composers of church music, as a planner of a contemporary church music festival and on the board of the Madetoja Foundation, for example). He has also taught in educational projects, such as workshops in schools.

Mimosa-like quality

Having recently resigned from the University of Turku, Linjama is now a free-

lance composer. His opus list has grown as a result of commissions and consists equally of vocal and instrumental music, sacred and more profane, chamber and orchestral music. So far there has been no music for the stage, but since the beginning of 2009 he has been working on a church opera *Geburt des Täuflers* for the Carinthischer Sommer festival with



Jussi Tapola as dramaturg and librettist. Other major partners have been violinist **Kaija Saarikettu** and the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra.

One of his jobs at the University was to teach the history of Western classical music. It was, he says, a rewarding task, going systematically through the main concepts that have influenced musical culture. At the same time he constantly reflected on how these views resonate with his own composer identity: “One interesting field is the Baroque: an aristocratic musical culture valuing craftsmanship and consisting of guild-like professional societies – from the days before all the hype and other diverse phenomena of the contemporary ‘music industry’. Perhaps my interest has something to do with the general sensitivity of my music, its obvious mimosa-like quality. To me, it’s important to defend the right to intimacy, to richness of nuance and protection amid today’s ever-growing and increasingly widespread obscenity.”

Sensitivity and aggressiveness – can they coexist in church music?

On the other hand, Linjama points out that the core of musical culture is a fruitful tension between counterforces. The relationship between sensitivity and aggressiveness is a force which too easily gets forgotten in speaking of church music – a genre that has gradually become more and more dominant in his work. “Too often only a slightly dragging tempo is considered acceptable in a church service,” he says. “But over the long term the Christian liturgy has been a primary breeding ground for Western classical music. In my opinion, the Protestant services could, even today, be more open to professional composers and more interested in their artistic integrity. The financial standing of composers also needs enhancing.”

“All in all, the thing I find fascinating about my work is its holistic nature, affording fascinating perspectives on humanity. In general, developments are ruled by a tendency towards control and disintegration. A composer’s mission, on the other hand, is to be ‘difficult’; to swim against the tide towards comprehensiveness and creativity.”

The article is based on texts by Jyrki Linjama

Works by Jyrki Linjama published by Fennica Gehrman

Pas de deux for orchestra 

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 3

Liturgical Concerto for Organ and Strings

Partita for guitar and string quartet

Tango for cello and accordion

Three Sketches for organ