



PHOTO: PAVI KULL

Seven questions

for Erkki-Sven Tüür

It is said that your music is often influenced by visual ideas. How are they manifest?

It's not easy to explain. I treat musical material organised with varying degrees of intensity and density as an architect would treat, say, glass, metal, wood or concrete. In composing my *Architectonics* series 🎧 I was interested in the systematic binding together of atonal and tonal relationships, and I sketched some of these as abstract drawings before I began composing.

Action-Passion-Illusion 🎧 for strings has been one of your most performed works. What was your recipe for it?

In 1993 **Tõnu Kaljuste** re-formed the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra. For its opening concert he asked me to compose a short, quick piece that would begin without a lot of preliminary waffle and have a showy ending. So I did as he asked and called it "Illusion". After the premiere I felt it could be preceded by some sort of music beginning in a low register and slowly, broadly branching out. And so I composed "Passion". I then realised the work was a triptych that needed an opening movement, and the result was "Action". On the other hand, both *Passion* and *Illusion* can be performed independently.

You formed the rock group In spe at the age of 17. Is this sort of music-making still part of your life?

This spring *In spe* appeared in its original line-up at the Tartu Music Festival then celebrating its 30th anniversary. This was, however, an exception. Sometimes I listen to prog-rock to hear if anything interesting is happening.

Where do you find your greatest sources of inspiration?

You can never foresee what may be a catalyst for the invention of new musical ideas. In my opinion, you have to live with an open mind and be receptive. Anything that comes my way may prove to be inspiring. But you have to have time to listen to what is happening deep within; the right choices are made in silence.

How would you describe the intellectual climate in Estonia today from a composer's point of view?

I have to say that when I'm in Estonia, I spend most of my time in my country house on the island of Hiiumaa – either composing or just working on the land or, especially in summer, keeping my visitors company. The atmosphere there is ideal for me. I go to Tallinn from time to time, mostly in connection with musical festivals or concerts or

other cultural events. But as a city it's too small. If you want to catch real urban trends you have to go to Berlin or New York. I can't really answer that question. Somehow I'm just an onlooker on life in Estonia.

What book and CD would you take with you on a desert island?

That's a difficult question to answer. In a way I'm already on a desert island, but I've got lots of books and music here. I don't have any absolute favourites.

What are your thoughts and plans for the future?

Right now I'm working on my Eighth Symphony, a commission from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. My most distant commission at the moment is for 2013. I've been privileged to meet some magnificent musicians who are playing and conducting my works in different countries and I'm very grateful to them for this.

HENNA SALMELA