

7 questions for Pasi Lyytikäinen

1. The Kuopio Symphony Orchestra commissioned a symphony from you and premiered it in 2008. Could you describe the composition process – before that, you had mostly written chamber music and works for the stage.

The idea of composing a symphony came to me very early on. I did the first sketches for it when I was about twenty. But when I began composing it again ten years later, I did not return to these sketches and instead planned the musical material on a different footing. The main reason was that while I was composing chamber music, I had acquired masses of ideas for an orchestra. Then again, I had concentrated a lot on vocal music, so there was strong pressure to compose an orchestral work.

2. You have composed chamber music for very different line-ups, and also solo works. Can you tell us more about these?

Par for piano four hands won the Tong Piano Duet chamber music competition in London and it was premiered in Tokyo in autumn 2002. I wrote it as a sort of triumphant shout and aimed at boisterous, light and action-packed expression. *Coma* for solo piano, premiered in Berlin, combines methodical German harmony thinking with the impressionistic ethereality of French expression.

I've also had the fortune to receive a wide range of chamber music commissions. The most important of these are, for me, the trio *Zephyr* and the string quartet *La Spada del sole*. And there is also the solo accordion suite *Vuo*.

3. Though your own instrument is the flute, you haven't written all that much flute music, even though your list of works does include some for winds; such as *Necto*, premiered by the Guards Band in 2010. Is there any special reason for this?

This may sound odd, but I hardly write anything for the flute precisely because it's my own instrument. I do, it's true, dream of doing a flute concerto sometime, but that project can wait for another few years. But I have written a big suite for solo recorder, *Minimalto*.

4. The chamber opera *To Helsinki* is considered your breakthrough work. Tell us a bit about it.



Photo: Johanna Oksanen-Lyytikäinen

It marked the culmination of the musical thinking of my youthful years. In 1997, after I had moved to Helsinki to study composition, I happened to come across **Juhani Aho's** novella *To Helsinki*. The book is about a young student and the first time he travels far from home. It's ostensibly a genial story about a journey, but under the surface is a powerful tale about how a person changes, and under the influence of the people around him.

5. And what about the *Seven Songs* for soprano and orchestra, settings of poems by Saila Susiluoto, which you composed after completing the opera?

The *Seven Songs* were, apart from the solo accordion suite *Vuo*, the first work in which I started to seek out musical avenues I hadn't already explored. Whereas the expression in my chamber opera relies on spiky tragicomedy, the orchestral songs are clearly lyrical and serious. I'm still really pleased with the orchestra of the *Seven Songs*. Through it I found a lot of new expression, both vocal and orchestral. I later did a version of the cycle for soprano and piano at singers' request.

6. Last November you were a guest composer at the Moscow Autumn festival. This spring you've been a tutor on the Very Young Composers project.

Some of my chamber music was played at the Moscow Autumn festival, and my new *Chamber*

Vocalise for soprano and chamber ensemble was also premiered there. Music by me was also performed by the GamEnsemble on its Russian tour. I went along, too, lecturing about my music at the Glinka Conservatory. The festival also brought me lots more performances both for Russia and elsewhere in Europe. The virtuoso accordionist **Sergej Tchirkov**, for example, has performed *Vuo* this spring in Venice, Poland and elsewhere.

Working as a tutor on the Very Young Composers project with composer **Minna Leinonen** was a pleasure and broadened my mind. The concept of the project developed by **Jon Deak** is quite unique. In it, youngsters composed while vocational music students converted their ideas into musical notation – as authentically as possible. The new works were premiered by a chamber ensemble of players from the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Helsinki Philharmonic and the Finnish National Opera. Added to which, the youngsters did animations and sculptures.

7. What are you working on right now and what sorts of inspiring works do you expect to do in the future?

I've just finished a new work in the Everyday Opera series. Over the summer I'm going to compose a virtuoso accordion work for **Mika Väyrynen**. Sometime in the near future I also intend to complete my doctoral studies at the Sibelius Academy. I've got a fine opportunity to take part in this doctoral programme in which eight artists from different fields will be working on their degrees and at the same time developing methods for artistic research.

My aim is to amass as wide a range of resources as possible for my career as a composer. Working with different arts has been fantastic, especially as regards my works for the stage. It's been interesting to note that the majority of the questions about making art are the same regardless of genre.

Henna Salmela

Pasi Lyytikäinen (b. 1975) studied composition at the Sibelius Academy and in masterclasses with Esa-Pekka Salonen, Tristan Murail, Kaija Saariaho, Magnus Lindberg and others. His interests as a composer are wide-spread: solo, chamber, orchestral and vocal music, and opera. As a composer he has been described as a lyrical modernist. His music is characterised by compact, often softly dissonant harmony, the idea of varying motifs and a classical, polyphonic mode of writing. Some of his most recent works also have theatrical elements.