

Hannu Pohjannoro

– a creator of exquisite worlds of timbre

Pohjannoro's fully chromatic idiom, his rich rhythmic constructions and precisely notated shades of timbre link his music with the Modernist tradition. For him, searching for new expressive devices and questioning tradition are not, however, ends in themselves. On the contrary, familiarity with tradition means much to him.

"The search for the new associated with Modernism is a romantic idea. I don't really believe in the chances of finding anything new, except to a very limited degree: rather, I'm looking for things that are new to me in my new works. Nor are extremes necessarily interesting. Most interesting is the strange, that which defies explanation, that cannot really be grasped."

From aphorism to broader sweeps

In such early works as *eilisen linnut* (the birds of yesterday, 1994) for chamber ensemble and *syksyn huoneet* (rooms of autumn, 1997) for string quartet, Pohjannoro adopted a dense, post-Serialist idiom akin to that of Webern. Melodies flash past in little snatches, and the textures change in quick cuts. The tone is clear and bright.

"Webern meant a lot to me when I was young. So did Kurtág and Feldman. An interest in aphoristic things has, in other respects, too, been a typical trait for me, and things like haiku and tanka poetry interest me."

Not for nothing does Pohjannoro allude to Japanese poetry, for the poetic titles of his works (which are, almost without exception, written without any uppercase letters) could well be lines from haikus or tankas. There are, however, no programmatic allusions or secret meanings hidden behind the titles.

Though the music of Pohjannoro has continued to bear certain basic stylistic traits, there have been changes at the level of expression. The chamber concerto *tuulenpolku* (the wind trail, 2000) already has a more clear-cut dramatic structure and breathes in broader sweeps, its harmonies are softer and its rhythms more muscular. An interesting detour into the world of microintervals is *hämäränpyörre* (twilight whirl, 1999) for clarinet and string orchestra.

"I am moving away from miniature worlds towards broader formal spans and entities. The units of my music are expanding," says Pohjannoro of his musical development.

In recent years, Pohjannoro has composed for a variety of instrumental combinations. *time exposures* (2005) is scored for percussion quartet, *valo katsoo* (the light is beholding all, 2008) for two guitars, and *Ecce Homo* (2008) for chamber orchestra. *valoa vasten aika* (time through light,



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Tone colour and detail are among the key words chosen by Hannu Pohjannoro (b. 1963) to describe his music. A composer known for his exquisite worlds of timbre, his graphically etched lines and polished details, he avoids lavish displays of emotion and instead focuses on the lyrical poetry of little gestures, on volatility and limit states – things that cannot be defined precisely.

2011), a commission from the Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra, is for a solo-like horn quartet and orchestra.

"The expression and gestures are broader, and the amount of information given in the notation spreads, as it were, into a larger space. There is more room and time to hear and experience the sound."

Making a little go a long way

Pohjannoro's musical thinking is fired by the classical ideal of making as much as possible out of as little as possible. His works are marked by consistency, the effective utilisation of a certain basic corpus of material. There are no allusions to other music.

"What I'm looking for is not simple complexity but complexity in the encounter of simple things."

The age-old tension between word and music appeals to Pohjannoro in vocal music, though he has so far composed rather little in this genre.

"I treat the poem with great respect. The poet has given each detail, each comma and indent, re-

ally careful consideration and I want to be just as precise. The timbre and rhythmic aspects are important to me as a composer, but of course I am also influenced by the content of the poem; both the poem and the music must have a certain feel. I have to lay myself open to poetry, and wait to see what the text conjures forth."

Various technical challenges have set him reflecting on the basic premises of composition:

"Just recently I've been trying to establish a more immediate approach to composing. Not thinking things to death in advance. I acknowledge the polarity of constructivism and the aesthetics of expression but also the fact that both are needed: the friction between them is a fundamental element of my composing."

KIMMO KORHONEN