



# Concertos for all orchestral instruments

*Kalevi Aho has up to now written nineteen solo concertos and more are on the way.*

In 2002 followed one of the key works in Aho's production, the lyrical and melodious *Flute Concerto*, written for **Sharon Bezaly**. It is his most frequently performed concerto and one of the first in an afterwards growing number of easily accessible and spontaneously communicating works in which the complexity yields to a more relaxed emotional tone with a surprisingly shameless ideal of beauty in focus.

Every individual concerto represents a unique emotional and stylistic world. It is no coincidence that the *Second Piano Concerto* in which the symphony orchestra is replaced by the string orchestra, constitutes the greatest possible contrast in its neo-classicism with considerably sharper contours. After a *Concerto for Two Cellos and Orchestra*, exemplarily concentrated in expression as well as form, follows an exciting expedition that explores the lowest registers. The multifaceted *Bassoon Concerto* brilliantly enriches the genre, while the *Contrabassoon Concerto* is the second ever for the instrument. The *Double Bass Concerto* is the second Finnish work in the genre after **Einojuhani Rautavaara's** and fruitfully explores the instrument's playing techniques.

## New aesthetic dimension

In 2005 Aho completed his *Clarinet Concerto*. Once again he had the advantage of collaborating with one of the world's most talented artists in the field, **Martin Fröst**. The solo part, extremely technically demanding, is convincingly integrated into the emotionally and dramatically constructive and contrastive whole. After the mostly sombre and expressive *Viola Concerto*, written for the Lapland Chamber Orchestra as a link in Aho's – to say the least – original project of composing an entire concert programme for orchestra, we come to the second key work, the *Oboe Concerto*. Here Aho takes the decisive step into a new aesthetic dimension by means of an exceptionally personal way of integrating ethnic and oriental elements. Aho's rhythm, in the manner of percussion and coloured by ostinato, has already appeared in his musical vocabulary

and now the Arabian darbuka and the West African djembe are incorporated into his musical tool box. The oboe often utilizes quarter tones and spices the work with melismas of an Arabian fragrance.

The same means of expression also recur in the *Concerto for Saxophone Quartet and Orchestra*, written for the Raschèr Quartet, subtitled *Bells* (the suggestive bell sounds have their origin in the ringing of the bells at the funeral of his friend and colleague **Pehr Henrik Nordgren**), as well as in the absurdly demanding *Trombone Concerto* premiered in 2012.

However, the skilfully applied ethnic influences in Aho's music never feel like pasted-on effects but rather like a naturally integrated part of the musical mosaic. This is true in the highest degree for the irresistibly swinging *Percussion Concerto "Sieidi"* (Lappish for holy sacrificial rock), written for **Colin Currie**, in which Aho clearly stresses the fact that the percussion are primarily rhythm instruments and only in the second place melody and timbre instruments.

Two other recent Aho concertos, very different from one another, include the *Concerto for French Horn and Chamber Orchestra* in which the soloist's movements in space are utilised, and the *Concerto for Trumpet and Symphonic Wind Orchestra* which evinces fresh influences from jazz. A new concerto for theremin is to be premiered in October 2012 – yet another valuable addition to the series of concertos for unusual instruments. Over the years Kalevi Aho has created his own musical universe, in which extrovert virtuosity and profound introspection are effortlessly combined within the framework of an expressive and extraordinarily elastic synthesis.

Today, of the orchestral instruments, only the harp lacks its own concerto. Before that concertos for violin and soprano saxophone are waiting in line, and BIS Records continues loyally to save Aho's music for posterity.

Mats Liljeroos

**K**alevi Aho is not only Finland's most prominent living composer of symphonies, but also Finland's most productive composer of solo concertos with currently nineteen works on his opus list. Actually there are even more, as the borderlines between the different genres sometimes are blurred. This is the case with *Symphony No. 3* for violin and orchestra, *No. 8* for organ and orchestra, *No. 9* for trombone and orchestra and *No. 11* for percussion and orchestra. The *Third Chamber Symphony* is an alto saxophone concerto in disguise.

Aho started out on his career as a symphonist in 1969, and twelve years later composed his first solo concerto for his own instrument, the violin. It is one of the peaks of the Finnish violin literature after Sibelius. Here, as with Sibelius, the stunning technical demands never become ends-in-themselves but proceed logically from the existing musical and dramaturgical context. The postmodern, pluralistic aesthetics that Aho had then adopted were also manifest in the highly expressive *Cello Concerto* and in the massive *First Piano Concerto* from 1989.

## Relaxed ideal of beauty

During the 90s Aho concentrated primarily on opera, symphonies, chamber music as well as instrumental solo pieces, and his concerto production was not resumed until the beginning of the new millennium with the elegiac and cantabile *Tuba Concerto*. It was also at this time that the absolutely unique idea of composing a series of concertos for every instrument in the symphony orchestra was born.

