

ERKKI SALMENHAARA IN MEMORIAM

■ Composer, musicologist, Professor **Erkki Salmenhaara** died in Helsinki on 19 March 2002. He was born in Helsinki on 12 March 1941.

Erkki Salmenhaara is one of the great influential figures in Finnish musical life. As a composer he began his career in the early 1960s as one of the leading young avant-gardists, but in the latter half of the decade his style took a steep, unconventional turn in a simpler tonal direction. The big problem facing modernism in music was, he claimed, its lack of history. By using tonal elements he therefore wished to re-infuse into new music the directness and richness of signification of earlier serious music. Salmenhaara the composer nevertheless remained a figure outside the mainstream and his five symphonies, opera, four concertos and large volume of other orchestral, chamber and vocal music still await reappraisal.

It is, however, possibly as a music scholar, historian and teacher that Erkki Salmenhaara will primarily be remembered. His doctoral dissertation in 1969 addressed the music of the Hungarian composer **György Ligeti** and is still repeatedly read as one of the leading studies of this composer. In the 1960s he also wrote much-used textbooks on chord analysis, harmonisation and 20th century music. Meanwhile he was also employed as a music critic, and indeed, he was one of the finest Finland has ever known.

From the 1970s onwards his interest was caught mainly by research into Finnish music and the reassessment of forgotten works by many composers. He was the author of biographies of **Leevi Madetoja** and **Jean Sibelius**, and studied the works of such composers as **Uuno Klami**, **Erkki Melartin**, **Ernest Pingoud**, **Aarre Merikanto** and **Joonas Kokkonen**, likewise the symphonies of Brahms and the music of **Gustav Mahler**. His contribution to the History of Finnish Music project launched at the very beginning of the 1980s was invaluable; covering the period from the early 19th century right up to the Second World War, he wrote nearly two-thirds of the pages in the four-volume work published in 1996. The following year the History was awarded the prestigious Tieto-Finlandia Prize for non-fiction.

Salmenhaara also provided vital assistance to **Erik Tawaststjerna** in the creation of the latter's great biography of Sibelius,

and it was he who did the final editing of volume V. His numerous essays and critiques showed him to be a man of vision with an astonishing ability to foresee the shifts of attitude in contemporary music.

Erkki Salmenhaara was a lecturer in musicology at the University of Helsinki, Department of Musicology 1966-74, Associate Professor 1975-98 and Professor 1998-99. His contribution to Finnish musicology at the University was of the utmost importance. He was for many years editor-in-chief of the journal published by the Finnish Musicological Society and was for thirty years a member of the Society's Board. He was also Chairman of the Association of Finnish Symphony Orchestras 1974-78, Chairman of the Society of Finnish Composers 1974-76 and served on its committee 1966-74 and 1990-96. In 1994 he wrote a history of the Society in which he made a general survey of the changing status of the composer in Finland.

As a person, teacher and colleague Erkki Salmenhaara was extremely well-liked; a man who shunned ostentation, he was respected for his untiring efforts on behalf of Finnish music. Named Professor of the Year in 1996 for his merits as a teacher and scholar, he was the receiver of the major Finnish Cultural Foundation award only three weeks before his death: a fitting tribute to a life dedicated to Finnish music.

Kalevi Aho



Erkki Salmenhaara (Photo: Maarit Kytöharju)