



Composing a way of life for Einojuhani Rautavaara

Einojuhani Rautavaara is the epitome of Finnish classical music and probably second only to Sibelius as the Finnish composer whose works are most often performed abroad. At 85, he nowadays still composes for a few hours a day.

The 1970s were a trying time in Rautavaara's private life. A new, more tranquil period began when he married again in the mid-1980s. It was then that he discovered the mode of expression that has continued right up to the present.

"While I was composing my fifth symphony, it occurred to me that a symphony is more than just some kind of scheme or mould. It is a way of thinking, one in which there is no rush to create musical drama. There's no hurry to get things done quickly to make way for the next ones. I wanted to compose long continua I could settle down in."

Snowball effect

From then onwards, things began to happen. The scores of Rautavaara's five symphonies were published in the late 1980s and the Ondine record company released them on two discs. A booklet and sampler disc of orchestral music by him was produced by his publisher. Under gentle pressure from Ondine, the seventh symphony of 1994 was renamed *Angel of Light* 🎧. This all set a snowball effect in motion. All over the world, people eagerly began to await new orchestral works, concertos and operas by Einojuhani Rautavaara; they got wide press coverage and went out on hundreds of radio stations. Rautavaara had become a symbol of international success in contemporary music.

Though no precise public statistics are available, Einojuhani Rautavaara is, with his 216 works, probably second only to Sibelius as the Finnish composer whose works are most often performed. He still spends a few hours a day composing. "I can't manage more, but composing is a way of life for me. I'll go on doing it, I hope, until the end."

Pekka Hako

This article is a shortened version of that published in Teostory.

Einojuhani Rautavaara wrote his first compositions while still at school, sitting at the piano and experimenting with chords until he learnt to induce a state reminiscent of trance. His career got off to a brisk start when, in 1954, his *A Requiem in Our Time* won a composition competition in the United States. It was performed now and then on the radio, and heard by **Jean Sibelius**, who had by then sunk into silence at Ainola. For his 90th birthday in 1955, a US foundation gave Sibelius a grant named after conductor-composer **Sergei Koussevitzky**, to be awarded to a young composer.

"It was an unusual birthday present, and the gratifying verdict fell on me," Rautavaara still recalls in amazement. "The trip to the United States was to signify a decisive change in my development. I went and thanked Sibelius for the grant, and on my return, for the chance of spending nearly two years at the Juilliard School of Music and the Tanglewood Music Center."

Breakthrough work

Rautavaara's career as a professional composer began after the years spent in the United States. His breakthrough came when the University of Oulu commissioned him to compose something for its degree ceremony in 1972. The result was a work that has since become a classic: the *Cantus arcticus* concerto for birds and orchestra 🎧. The cries of the birds are taped.

Rautavaara was not immediately aware he had struck gold. Not until the concerto was recorded did it begin to be played by foreign radio stations, and enquiries soon poured in from all over the world. The *Cantus arcticus* is still by far the most often-performed orchestral work by him: over the past ten years it has been played 25–57 times a year at concerts across the world, and that does not include broadcasts on the radio.

Rautavaara quotes

A young person must collect traumas. They are engines, sources of energy.

An artist should have a charismatic relationship with the audience. The worst thing he can do is to express and interpret himself.

If you're very profoundly and thoroughly bohemian, you don't really have time to make art. This is my experience, because being bohemian is awfully time-consuming. It's a job in itself.

A young composer must learn everything – and not obey anything but the will of the work in progress.

Nothing in the world goes on forever. That is what's so terrific.