

# Marie SAMUELSSON

– a composer with a passion for sounds

## Where do you find the inspiration for your composing?

It starts out very musically, with a sound idea or a tonal image that comes into my head. I often get inspired by concrete sounds. I then write it all down and get new ideas from what I have written. You might say that I fill in musically the first sound idea with rhythm, melody and harmony, which in turn are changed and refined to fit new contexts.

## Do you decide upon the title at an early stage or is it something that comes later on?

The titles are many times directly associated with the first sound ideas. It is exciting to try to find a title that “poetically” describes the parameters I am working with, and I imagine it being a way in to the piece. You are sometimes told that newly written music is too abstract for the listener. Then it can be appropriate with titles that are not dull, but rather create a kind of vision around the piece.

## Who is Bastet – the Sun Goddess who has given the name to your Violin Concerto?

She is an Egyptian goddess who according to the myth was forced to kill the snake Apep every evening so that the sun could rise the next morning. Bastet has many different characteristics and temperaments: she is both life-giving and sometimes struggling. This gave an ample scope to the work. From a purely musical standpoint, the sound ideas in the concerto consist of, among other things, a glissando in a motive that derives from Arabian music, which recurs now and then in the work. There is no actual competition between soloist and orchestra, the orchestra rather answers and spurs on the soloist. I imagine the violin wandering around in different soundscapes.

*“For me it begins with a sound idea”, says Marie Samuelsson, who is now increasing her collaboration with Gehrmans with four new orchestral works.*

## Your Violin Concerto is considered a seminal work in your production. In what way?

It was above all a starting point for me to express myself on a larger scale and in a longer duration. The work was also a big success and Anna Lindal, for whom it was composed, has performed it a number of times with various orchestras, including the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and the Helsinki Philharmonic.

## Air Drum III (Lufttrumma III) has become something of a hit. How did you get the idea of using air shafts as percussion instruments?

I wanted to find some percussion instrument that was big and grandiose and had a somewhat different sound. The idea of using something that people left behind: recycling,




Photo: Mats Bäcker

that is, appealed to me. But I also wanted the air shafts' sounds and timbres to be reflected in the orchestral texture, so there is a connection there. And then, of course, it makes for attractive stage scenery. I prefer that they shine the lighting on the air shafts so they can be seen.

### How would you describe your own music?

It is communicative, direct and varied, sometimes with very rhythmical accents, other times more meditative, beautiful and poetical. For me it is important to work organically with music. Music should flow. Then I like to look around in what is recent by bringing in concrete sounds and filling them in musically, and not just keeping to what is traditional. I don't believe one can place me in any special "ism", but to a certain extent I work with a sophisticated minimalism combined with a detailed aesthetics of timbre that I have developed in my contacts with IRCAM in Paris and lessons with **Pär Lindgren** at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm.

### What do you want to convey with your music?

Music should be like another world to become absorbed in; at the same time there should be energy. I should very much like to point out mankind's possibilities for change. There should always be something positive in the midst of those gloomy, slightly sorrowful undertones that one can find in my works. There has to be hope. An obvious example of this is my orchestral piece *Fear and Hope*  from 2006, which was inspired by the writings of **Aung San Suu Kyi**, the champion of democracy in Burma. But it is also something that reappears throughout all of my music.

### In 2007 the Weekend Festival at the Stockholm Concert Hall was dedicated to you. What did this mean for you?

It was of course a momentous experience in my career as a composer. During four days 19 of my works were performed: orchestral and chamber music, dance works, electroacoustic music, and *Singla*, a work commissioned for the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic. Large audiences attended and contacts were made for new forms of collaboration. But above all it was a summing-up of my creativity and a starting point for something new.

### What are you working on just now?

This year I have finished two large-scale commissions: *Flygande linjer och dân* (Flying Lines and Booming) for the Stockholm Chamber Orchestra (SNYKO) and the horn concerto *The Horn in the Wind* for **Sören Hermansson** and the Swedish Wind Ensemble. My next work will be a short fanfare for brass quintet, and I am currently working on a chamber opera for the 2010 season. It will be my first opera, and I'm really excited about it. It is a little like tying up loose ends: I can make use of various ideas that I've worked with earlier, and I really enjoy composing for voice. ■