

OLLI KOSKELIN

– a seeker of delicate timbres

Instrumental virtuosity, soft, mellow sounds, lyrical moods, intricate textures and expressionist sharpness – all are to be found in the music of this Finnish composer born in 1955. Koskelin is, however, no postmodernist combining different styles; though the emphasis varies from one work to another, most are marked by homogeneity of the expression and of the material.

Audiences first became aware of Olli Koskelin in the early 1980s, at a time when modernist trends were becoming very noticeable in Finnish music. In a few of his early works, such as the virtuosic *Exalté* for solo clarinet, he leapt on board the modernist bandwagon. Yet little by little a composer intent more on building a world of his own began to emerge. Thus such works as *Tutte le corde* for guitar and tape, and the limpidly beautiful *Courbures* for piano already reveal a lyrical venerator of beauty working with modern techniques.

Olli Koskelin has proceeded at a leisurely pace in a career beginning in the early 1980s, carefully polishing his works and painting lyrical worlds of beauty.

In 1986 Koskelin studied in France with **Tristan Murail**, yet years were to pass before the master's ideas about such things as spectral music began to materialise in the young Finn's works. With them, his sound became softer and richer in nuance, though only seldom has he employed the microintervals exploited by the spectral composers. In the orchestral *...like a planet silently breathing* (1993), for example, he weaves a fine-spun texture of ethereal string timbres, expressive wind solos and arabesque-like arpeggios.

Focus on small ensembles

Koskelin is a 'slow-but-sure' composer, and his output has not been particularly large. In speaking of his deliberative way of composing he says, like Stravinsky: "I'm somebody who can wait."

Most of all Koskelin has composed for smallish vocal or chamber ensembles and solo instruments. An orchestra

is most in evidence in his concertos for piano, clarinet and flute, plus the related lyrical, impressionistic *Seven Shades of Blue* for flute and orchestra dating from 2000.

In a special league of their own are the dance works by Koskelin. He has taught in the Department of Dance of the Theatre Academy Helsinki and established close relations with many Finnish dancers. An example of his dance works is *Coldstar* (Kylmäntähti), lasting over an hour in performance, the material of which is derived from the orchestral *...like a planet silently breathing*.

One of the most delicate of Koskelin's vocal works is *Breaking the Silence* for soprano and five instruments, the clear, bright soundscape of which was inspired by eight haikus by **Matsuo Basho** tied together in a close-knit, subtly meditative entity. Japanese haiku poetry also inspired Koskelin at a purely instrumental level in *Seven Haikus* for flute and guitar.

Lyrical and expressionist

Koskelin's poetry in sound, often characterised by its fine attention to detail, has struck a note in audiences. *Uurre* for chamber ensemble of 1997 was awarded the first prize in a competition for a new composition organised by the Society of Finnish Composers in which the audience chose the winner. Another work of this period is *Circles within* scored for 19 solo strings and painting static soundscapes.

In his works of the third millennium Koskelin has continued his search for delicate timbres, but he also displays features harking back to the expressionism of his early career. *Tintinnio* for solo flute, for example, is akin to the early *Exalté* for solo clarinet in its rhythmical exuberance and virtuosity.

The *String Quartet No. 1* is more varied in style, more expressionistic and edgy than many of Koskelin's previous works, its devices ranging from long, static sounds to sharp juxtapositions and action-packed drive. It does not, however, represent a direct return to the modernism of his early career; rather it is a sort of recapitulation and transformation of earlier phenomena at a more profound level.

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