



Marja and Harri Vuori

## Harri Vuori in a world of myth and fantasy

*The evolution of a composer's style and expression is only seldom the result of a conscious decision. It is usually imperceptible, like the gradual gathering of a natural force. Such has been the case with Harri Vuori, whose recent works display features both familiar and new.*

Photo: Amanda Lehto

**H**arri Vuori (b. 1957) is best known as a master of the orchestra, as a composer of works inhabiting a rich, multi-coloured world of timbre. But whereas colour still holds central status, a gradual change has been taking place in other elements. "My music is indeed moving towards greater, clearer expression. It's not a radical change; the greater clarity has been mainly in the harmonies and textures," says Vuori.

Though the inventive fantasy manifest in his use of colour is possibly the most obvious feature of Vuori's music, it is not the only point of departure. Proof of this are, for example, the two symphonies (2003, 2007) , with their sweeping arches, and the sinfonietta-type *Myyttisiä kuvia* (Mythic Images, 2002). His largest-scale work so far is the orchestral score of 2009 for the silent film *Ollin oppivuodet* (The Apprenticeship of Olli, 1920). He has, on the other hand, also composed miniatures such as the *Aikakone* (Time Machine, 2011–2015) collection of 14 piano pieces for teaching purposes, grouped in order of technical and stylistic difficulty (to be published during autumn 2017).

### Dips into past millennia

Ancient myths, especially those of the Finno-Ugrian forefathers, fascinate Harri Vuori. A certain mythic dimension can also be sensed in his music, hard though it is to define exactly. "There have always been extra-musical subjects

in my works, but they have now become even more pronounced; nature and myths."

In *Kalliomaalaus* (Rock Painting, 2014) he dips deep into the past. It was inspired by the millennia-old rock paintings he has been to see in various parts of Southern Finland. As a tribute to these and the poetry of **Eeva Tikka**, he wrote not a conventional song cycle but a melodrama for narrator and chamber ensemble. The music relives the powerful archaic moods of the poems; in the closing movement, for example, which is longer than the others, he calls up shamanistic rhythms, sometimes in the 5/8 metre of the archaic poetry of the Finnish national epic, the Kalevala.

A world more akin to the fantasy of fairy and folk tales may also be a source of inspiration for Vuori. The orchestral *Elfenmusik* (2009) was inspired by the "Cottingley fairies", the photos of fairies taken by two British cousins in the early 20th century that caused long and heated debate. "The idea of entering into the imaginary world of children enchanted me; children see things that adults don't."

The result is a five-movement suite with all the magic and colour of a fairytale, seasoned with a pinch of the darker sides of the fairytale world.

Since composing a concerto for the bass clarinet (2001) and the saxophone (2004), Vuori has written one for the guitar called *Ctulhu's Dreams* (2016). This is based on the Ctulhu mythology created by the writer **H.P. Lovecraft** with its

mysterious, imaginary gods. The fact that the solo instrument is a guitar guided the colouring of the orchestral part towards more transparent effects.

### A web of nature experiences

Harri Vuori usually composes on the principle of slow but sure. At one time, he says, he used to make more drawings and sketches while he was composing, but nowadays he works things out in his head more before 'putting pen to paper'.

Sometimes the inspiration may be unexpectedly powerful. Once at his summer cottage, he heard four swans on the lake joining in diatonic song before flying right over his head. The idea of a composition lodged itself in his subconscious until one day, in the sauna, it burst out and he had to dash out of the sauna and into his study to jot it down. Knowing how seriously the Finns take their sauna, this inspiration must have been truly powerful.

The result was *Lentoon* (To Fly, 2015) for string orchestra. It is music of firm textures and webs, glissandos, sparkling spectral timbres, swishing tremolo swathes, repetitive figures and in places romantically-tinged harmonies. Though the initial inspiration was almost Sibelian, with its mythical swans, *To Fly* is contemporary poetry of timbre and texture at their richest. Timeless and modernist merge as one, as so often in the music of Harri Vuori.

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