Einojuhani Rautavaara in memoriam

In his eulogy for Einojuhani Rautavaara, Kalevi Aho described the indelible impression Rautavaara made as a composition teacher, as a colleague and as a feast of wisdom. Aho met the maestro for the last time a year ago. Rautavaara was physically fragile, but his mind was as sharp as ever, and his eyes retained the familiar keenly exploring and at times muscious gaze. At that final meeting he remarked that he had already discovered in the sounds of his inner world all the musical material that he wanted to use and that he had completed his musical universe.

You have made it your mission to promote the music by Allan Pettersson (1911–1980) to the world at large. Why?
Because in my opinion he is one of Scandinavia’s foremost symphonists. Not even in Sweden do we get the experience to hear his fantastic music to the extent that it deserves. Of all his 17 symphonies there are masterpieces on the same level as those by Beethoven and Mahler.

You often compare Petterson with Mahler. What do they have in common? Petterson and Mahler are actually quite different, but they had similar fates. In 1911, when Mahler died, he was known mostly as a conductor, and people called his music over-orchestrated and meistermeutial. In the same way, one speaks even today of Petterson’s symphonies as being difficult and heavy works. However, Petterson could do the same music on a smaller scale, and he could understand his audience better. He never wrote what we know as “Whatever happens is for the best.”

You just got back from a Nordic/Baltic tour with the Arctic Philharmonic performing Symphony No. 7. What is it that has made this symphony so well-loved?
It is the fact that people have had the opportunity to hear the symphony in a number of cities, and the music has also been used in TV-films and as ballet music. But as I said before, all his symphonies have equally good qualities.

When other symphonists would you like to single out as worthy of noting? And have you found a new favourite?
In nearly all the places where I have conducted Petterson’s music there have been very enthusiastic reactions. And, as the saying goes, “One man’s meat is another man’s poison.”

Two opera premières in 2016:
The Mine (Källas) was in the repertoire of the Hungarian State Opera in Budapest in October-November. This was the first stage performance of the work which was composed in 1953-57 (See reviews).
The Gift of the Magi (Tietäjien lahjo) received its European stage premiére at the Sibelius Academy in November (See news).

Footnotes:
Kalevi Aho lists four reasons why he believes Rautavaara’s works will remain in the core repertoire:
• His works are always highly original, never sounding like typical contemporary music.
• They are not technically over-demanding and can be performed within the confines of a normal rehearsal schedule.
• His output is huge and includes works in all genres and for many different kinds of ensembles. His extensive output of choral and vocal music is particularly noteworthy.
• Included is a handful of major hits: Concertos arrivi for both soloists and orchestra, the Seventh Symphony (Angel of Light) and a number of choral works, some piano cycles and so on, that serve as gateway to a wider exploration of his music.

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Christian Lindberg and the Allan Pettersson Project

In 2011 BIS and the Norrköping Symphony Orchestra initiated the Allan Pettersson Project, the purpose of which is to record and issue all of Pettersson’s symphonies on CD. The recordings have been combined with live performances of one or two symphonies each year, concerts which have enticed Pettersson enthusiasts from all over the world to come to Norrköping. The promoter of the project is conductor and trombonist Christian Lindberg, who here tells his views about Pettersson’s music.

You have conducted Pettersson’s music with many orchestras around the world. How is it received?
In nearly all the places where I have conducted Pettersson, including the Scandinavian and Baltic Countries, Germany, the UK, Belgium, Romania, Taiwan (the list is long), his music has been received with a tremendous positive way with rave reviews and standing ovations.

What would your main message be to orchestras and conductors who are thinking about taking up Allan Pettersson’s music in the repertoire?
To the conductor: Learn the symphonies from memory! The themes, the melodies, the motifs, the structure must be in your body to be able to convey the intricate details to your audience. To orchestras: Just go for it! But be sure that the musicians get their parts in good time before the rehearsal. It is still too early for me to disclose, but I can in any case say that Vienna is definite, and we promise that the fantastic and knowledgeable audience there will get an experience they will never forget!

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