

# Daniel Nelson: Chaplin Songs

*“Let us fight to free the world – to do away with national barriers – to do away with greed, with hate and intolerance.” These words taken from Charlie Chaplin’s “The Great Dictator” inspired Daniel Nelson to write his Chaplin Songs, which will be premiered by soprano Camilla Tilling and the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Choir on 21 October at Berwaldhallen in Stockholm.*



Photo: Ella Nelson

When Daniel Nelson one summer evening in 2017 went to a Coldplay concert in Gothenburg, he knew neither Chaplin’s film masterpiece “The Great Dictator” nor its famous final speech.

– The concert began with an extract from the film’s monologue with Charlie Chaplin as orator. It moved me so much that the week after I looked up the whole speech on YouTube. There was an incredible passion and presence in the text that I wanted very much to express in music.

Daniel Nelson realised that, despite having been written almost 80 years ago, the speech was still of great relevance today. The text asks mankind to choose an empathetic and compassionate way forward in the world. It asks us to treat all individuals equally and help one another; not to follow evil blindly but instead to choose love and inclusivity; and to protect and defend democracy.

– But the truth is, that just now we see a world where far-right-populist winds are blowing over an ever-greater part of the Western world, even in Sweden, and that these winds are bringing with them the intolerance of minorities and diversities that germinate in anti-democratic societies. Chaplin’s text is a historical document that should remind us that this is not the way forward. We have seen this before, and if we choose this way, we shall all be losers.

Chaplin Songs is a monumental work, both in length (45 minutes) and in the somewhat hefty orchestration, also including a sizable choir and a soprano soloist.

– The music contains everything that I can do and that I know about my craft of composition. It is very impassioned, and I hope that it can express the strong emotion and power inherent in Chaplin’s epic text. I am really looking forward to the premiere. This work has been spinning around in my brain for almost six years. It is unbelievably exciting!

## Steampunk Blizzard

Another of Nelson’s orchestral works that has met with success is the concert opener with the suggestive title *Steampunk Blizzard* 🎧. Steampunk is an aesthetic based on a retro-futuristic fascination with the industrialism of the Victorian era.

– At the time that I wrote the work I happened to be reading HG Wells’ classic steampunk novel “The Time Machine”. Instead of his time machine I visualised a scenario where an imaginary snow machine keeps working on and on to finally produce a tiny little snowstorm. The title of the work is, simply, a depiction of the fictitious machine’s function.

The music is permeated by the Steampunk theme as Nelson has tried to get the whole orchestra to sound like a gigantic machine.

– I wanted the listener to hear the gearwheels and cogs that scrape up against one another, how



Charlie Chaplin in "The Great Dictator"

the pieces of metal in the machine strike one another and form peculiar, repeated rhythms that chew and drive the music on. It is a dark, oily, metallic sound-image that discharges into a dazzling, cheerful bell sound, when the machine reaches its peak and produces the whirling snow-storm. It is a very narrative kind of music.

The piece was premiered already in 2017 by the Orchestre National d'île de France, and has thereafter been performed by orchestras in Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland and the USA. It was last performed by the Munich Philharmonic under **Santtu-Matias Rouvali**, who really has taken a fancy to it.

— The reception of the work has been overwhelming, especially by the orchestra musicians, who have thanked me and expressed their joy in getting the opportunity to play the piece. And audiences like it as well. That is just fantastic!

Last spring saw the premiere of a piece for solo violin, *The Vein Bleeds Silver*, a commission from the Swedish Radio Channel 2 for the Swedish rising-star violinist, **Johan Dalene**. Daniel Nelson found the words "the vein bleeds silver" in a novel that he read. They alluded to the idea of a source that is almost inexhaustible when it comes to producing things that are positive. Everything that flows from the source is good and it never runs out.

— The work I wrote for Johan is actually a nine-minute-long chaconne with four chords that

# PREMIERES

## September–December 2022

### KALEVI AHO

#### Prologue to Suite Italienne

Janne Rättyä, accordion  
15.9. Inari, Finland (Lapland Chamber Music Festival)

#### Sonata for Accordion

Janne Valkeajoki  
1.10. Bern, Switzerland

### BENJAMIN STAERN

#### Rainbow

Östgöta Symphonic Wind Band  
16.9. Linköping, Sweden

### KIMMO HAKOLA

#### Sento - The seven features of emotion

for solo violin  
**Unio** for violin and piano  
Kaija Saarikettu, vln, Kimmo Hakola, pf  
18.9. Kaustinen, Finland (Kaustinen Chamber Music Week)

### JYRKI LINJAMA

#### String Quartet No. 4

Jyväskylän Symphony Quartet  
2.10. Jyväskylä, Finland

#### Bells and Dance for piano

Matti Pohjoisaho  
5.10. Kokkola, Finland

#### Sonata da chiesa IV for guitar

Andrzej Wilkus  
29.10. Kauniainen, Finland

### TOBIAS BROSTRÖM

#### Symphony No. 1 – Albedo

Gothenburg SO/Santtu-Matias Rouvali  
7.10. Gothenburg, Sweden

### MIKKO HEINIÖ

#### Ehtooveisut

Key Ensemble & Kryssostomos Chamber Choir  
8.10. Turku, Finland

### SVEN-DAVID SANDSTRÖM

#### The Book of Life (opera)

Norrköping SO/Eric Ericson Chamber Choir/Tobias Ringborg, sol. Miriam Treich, Jeremy Carpenter, Matilda Paulsson, Jakob Högström, Joel Anmno, Olle Persson etc.  
14.10. Norrköping, Sweden

### MATTHEW WHITTALL

#### Silence Speaks (Helsinki Variations)

Helsinki PO/Susanna Mälkki  
14.10. Helsinki, Finland

### DANIEL NELSON

#### Chaplin Songs

Swedish Radio SO & Choir/Andrew Manze, sol. Camilla Tilling, sop.  
21.10. Stockholm, Sweden

### TIINA MYLLÄRINEN

#### String Quartet "(Bad) dreams come true"

Uusinta Ensemble  
28.10. Turku, Finland

### MATTHEW PETERSON

#### An Inner Sky

Swedish Radio Choir/Kaspar Putnins  
29.10. Stockholm, Sweden (Sven-David Sandström Memorial Concert)

### ALEX FREEMAN

#### Ghost Light

for chorus and orchestra  
Helsinki PO and Helsinki Music Centre Choir/Nils Schwecckendiek  
11.11. Helsinki, Finland

### JACOB MÜHLRAD

#### Transcendent Pitch

Fredrik Ekdahl, bassoon  
18.11. Stockholm, Sweden

### OLLI KORTEKANGAS

#### Songs of Meena

for soprano and orchestra  
Helsinki PO/Osmo Vänskä, sol. Tuuli Takala  
30.11. Helsinki, Finland

### VELI-MATTI PUUMALA

#### Violin Concerto

Finnish RSO/Jukka-Pekka Saraste, sol. Carolin Widmann  
6.12. Helsinki, Finland

### KAI NIEMINEN

#### Near the Edge of Light

for string quartet  
Q Quartets  
10.12. Liverpool, UK

### ESA PIETILÄ

#### Kairos Ludus (Concerto for violin and tenor saxophone)

Jyväskylän SO/Elena Schwartz, sol. Pekka Kuusisto, vln, Esa Pietilä, sax.  
14.12. Jyväskylä, Finland

are repeated the whole time in variation. I thought that it was an appropriate title since my four 'measly' chords became the source of so much fine music. Also, much of the work has a shimmering quality which I felt sounded very silvery, not least in the hands of such a brilliant musician as Johan.

Just now Daniel Nelson is working on a chamber opera to be staged at the Vadstena Academy.

— It is a little in the spirit of the steampunk aesthetic. However, the plot takes place rather in the historical crossroads when electricity was being introduced into society. I then received a nice request to write an accordion concerto for the Lithuanian virtuoso **Martynas Levickis** and the Bundesjugendorchester. After that awaits a dream project, namely to write a concerto for self-playing piano (Disklavier) and orchestra for the Norrlandsoperan Symphony Orchestra. It will be a sequel to George Antheil's Ballet Mécanique, in other words a "Concert Mécanique".

Kristina Fryklöf

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