

SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR PEHR HENRIK NORDGREN

1. Your new work for string orchestra *Kuvia maaseudun menneisyydestä* (Pictures on Rural Past) was recently premiered. What sort of work did you have in mind, and does it have anything in common with your popular *Portraits of Country Fiddlers*?

The commissioner did hint that it could be similar in type to the *Fiddlers*. Which is why I have used old Finnish folk tunes, but freely adapted them. I wanted to do an independent work, not a *Portraits of Country Fiddlers* No. 2. The rural panorama includes such things as a lament and a shepherd's tune noted down in Ingria in the 1910s, a roundelay, moods tinged with the sadness of the American emigrant, and a polska and march by the legendary Ostrobothnian fiddler **Elias Tallari**. The first part of the work is sad, but the mood gradually grows brighter and the lively ending may be interpreted as a manifestation of faith in the future. The Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra and **Juha Kangas** premiered the work in Helsinki on 28 October.

2. You've had two new concertos premiered over the past year. Can you tell us something about them?

The *Concerto No. 5 for Cello and Orchestra op. 135* was completed in 2005 and premiered in the same year by the Tapiola Sinfonietta and cellist **Erkki Rautio** under the baton of **Okko Kamu**. It is dedicated to Rautio, to whom I once also dedicated my second cello concerto. I got the idea for it in the Åland islands in summer 2004 when Rautio and guitarist **Petri Kumela** premiered my duo called *Klippgrund* (Reefs). My admiration of this magnificent visionary cello playing aroused in me a spontaneous desire to do yet another concerto. Like most of my concertos it is in one movement and scored for small orchestra.

The *Concerto for Accordion and Orchestra op. 133* also dates from 2005 and was premiered at the Musica nova Helsinki festival on 8 March 2005 by **Mika Väyrynen** (to whom it's dedicated), the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and **Sakari Oramo**. The first and last of the three movements are relatively restrained and meditative, whereas the middle one, which is longer than the other two put together, is rhythmically intensive and in places even violent. Although the accordion is often associated with folk music (and although I have used folk music motifs and

folk instruments such as the kantele in many of my works), there are no folk music allusions at all in this concerto. I used the accordion, with its own, typical characteristics, as one instrument among many. In particular I am interested in the timbral dimensions to be found in the accordion. The second movement is technically the most difficult, but I have tried to avoid superficial virtuosity.

3. You have composed an unusually large number of concertos. Why is this, and how do your concertos in general come about?

The *Accordion Concerto* is my thirtieth concerto. The main reason for the large number is that I have received so many requests from musicians themselves. I've been lucky in that I've been able to work with superb and inspiring musicians who've grasped the 'message' of my music and done a brilliant job on their solo parts. Composing a concerto is exceedingly challenging: you can't offer a good musician just anything; you have to make a tremendous effort to achieve the best possible result.

Another reason for my liking lies in the concerto format itself: the solo represents the individual, the orchestra society – to put it simply. This set-up never ceases to fascinate me. I have composed five concertos for cello, four for violin, three for viola, three for piano, two for kantele and one for viola and double bass. In my list of works you will also find concertos for clarinet, French horn, trumpet, trombone, saxophone and accordion, and one for traditional Japanese instruments. Just recently I agreed to do a concerto for organ and strings. The initiative came from **Jan Lehtola**, who will perform it with the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra during the 2007/8 season. This is a new, demanding challenge, and all the more interesting because I've never before composed for the organ.

4. Several discs have recently been released of your music. What do they mean to the composer?

When I was young, virtually no records were made in Finland of contemporary art music. All that has changed completely. For the composer, a record signifies above all that his music will spread all over the world. And you may get nice feedback from the most surprising quarters.



Photo: Maarit Kyröharju/Fimic

5. Tell us something about your plans for the future. Will you be writing any more symphonies, for example?

I began work on an *eighth symphony* last year, but I had to put it aside because of other commissions. Right now I'm working on a commission for the Tapiola Chamber Choir for a piece called *De sole et luna*. The text is by **Maynus de Manyeris** of Milan, who died in 1370, and it belongs to his collection 'Dyalogus creaturarum optime moralizatus'. Alongside that I'll be continuing my symphony.

6. What messages would you send to a) a young composer, b) a child in a city and c) Santa Claus?

- a) Don't hesitate, have faith in your talent, your resources and the future.
- b) Come out into the country; it's not as awful as it used to be!
- c) Make your gifts good health.

7. What score, novel and book of poetry would you take with you to a desert island – and where would that island be?

I might take Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* and Eino Leino's *Helkavirsiä* (Whit Songs) I–II. The desert island could be somewhere in the island province of Åland – if such an island still exists.