

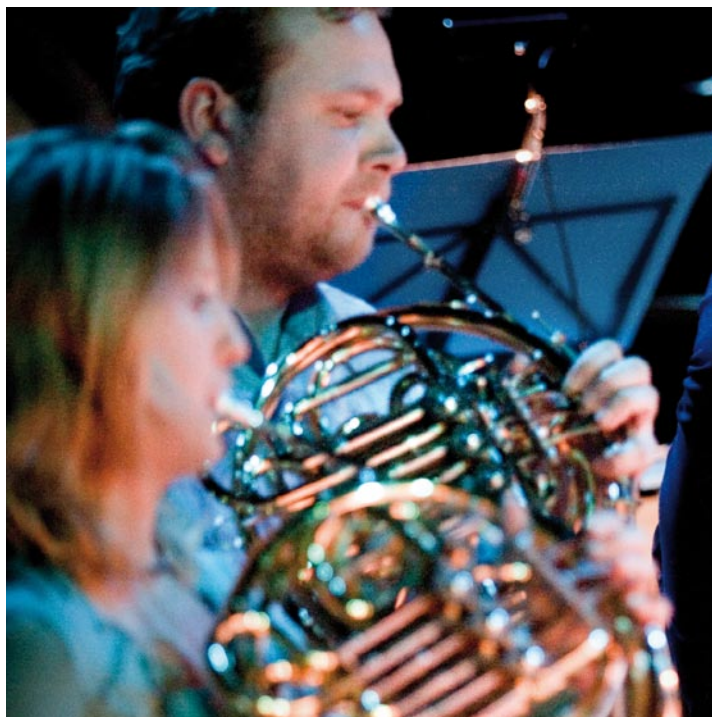
Nuorvala aims at a

A notable variety of influences – microtonality, American minimalism, New Romanticism, popular music, techno – has been regarded as a special feature of **Juhani Nuorvala's** idiom. Despite this Nuorvala (born 1961) is not a collage artist; instead he has tried to blend various ingredients to create a mode of expression entirely his own. He has composed chamber, orchestral and electronic works. During recent years he has created the music and sound for several plays at the Finnish National Theatre, in addition to writing an opera (*Flash Flash*, 2005) based on the life of **Andy Warhol**.

In this article Nuorvala tells about his music to composer **Olli Virtaperko**.

O.V. As I see it, the primary parameter in your works is the relentless beat determining the rhythmic ambience. Where does this frenzied rhythmic drive spring from?

J.N. It seems natural to me for a composer of concert music to be open to the dance and popular music of his own day and age. I had a normal youth filled with pop and rock, and I got keen on popular music again later as I became immersed in its most virile new sub-genre, electronic dance music. It would be strangely inhibited if such experiences were not heard in any way



physical element in music

in the music I compose. The strong pulse gives the music a physical, bodily element. I get the strongest of all musical experiences when that element is present.

O.V. In other words you aim at a strong physical element; both as a listener and as a composer?

J.N. Precisely. The biggest experiences are produced by music that appeals not only to the mind of the listener but also straight to the body! That's my ideal of music. Of course there's also lots of lovely music not founded in the least on powerful rhythms and hefty sounds. I myself have created some gently-floating, ambient-style music. Sounding out fragile shades of colour, likewise getting inside pure intervals as I do in my new works, are very sensual phenomena.

O.V. This application of tuning systems other than equal temperament is interesting. You were already striving to find harmonies based on the overtone series in some of your earlier works, such as the *String Quartet No. 2* (1997) and the *Clarinet Concerto* (1998). But you've explored this world even more intensively in, say, your recent works for kantele, haven't you?

J.N. Yes I have. My first composition using non-standard tuning was in fact the *Three Im-*



Juhani Nuorvala (Photo: Saara Vuorjoki/Fimic)

promptus for clarinet and kantele of 1995. Before that I had used micro-intervals in the manner of the spectralists in *Pinta ja säe* (Surface and Phrase, 1991) for orchestra and as 'blue notes' in my *String Quartet No. 1* (1992). In the *Impromptus* and my *String Quartet No. 2* I use pitches of a single overtone series; in other words they are harmonically static.

In the present decade I have immersed myself even deeper in the world of tuning systems and extended just intonation. I now write chord progressions and counterpoint. This gives me far more than 12 pitch classes – 35, for example! So just intonation is also about microtonality. My opera *Flash Flash* is written entirely in this way, and so is my new choral work. Extended just intonation (extended here meaning that it also uses interval ratios based on primes higher than 5) is fascinating and fruitful for two reasons: first, it sounds fantastic and second, it offers an enormous number of new pitch relations as well as a precise and inspiring conceptual model for handling them: ratios. For me, it is also an opportunity to compose tonal music in a way that is fresh. For my music has in any case been in some way tonal for more than a decade now. All this experimenting, listening and studying is possible thanks to the new technology: synthesisers

and computers. I reckon that greatly because of them the hegemony enjoyed by equal temperament for only about two hundred years will be undermined.

O.V. Despite your stylistic diversity, you have mainly worked with classical music. Why is that?

J.N. Even though I don't very consciously or solemnly reflect on the role in the history of classical music of the piece I am working on, I do of course operate within this tradition and naturally draw on and react to it. And because some only notice the pop sheen and sound in my pop-influenced pieces, I may in speaking of them specifically stress their "learned" features, the techniques and forms of classical music. The training, skills, artistic vision and cultural background of the classical composer of the 21st century make him an interesting and welcome partner or contributor to a number of "cultural frames of reference". My mind is open to them, too, so long as the work is artistically rewarding. ■



Sanna Kurki-Suonio and the NBE players performing Nuorvala's music (Photo: Ewout Rooks)

🔊 Sound samples are available at www.fennicagehrman.fi/highlights.htm