

# Lotta Wennäkoski

## paints sumptuous worlds of shimmering timbres

SANDPAPER BLOCKS

While Wennäkoski's career has unfolded, the orchestra has become an increasingly prominent medium for her. "I want dynamic form but music must also have air. Which is maybe why the orchestra interests me. I want to hear the whole cross-section," she says.

"My compositions may be born in many ways. But there must be some idea that permeates all the levels, and from which I can derive the name, the sound and possibly even the harmony. Musical phenomena alone do not inspire me; instead, I readily take impulses from the extra-musical world."

Thus **Lotta Wennäkoski** (b. 1970) describes the genesis of her works. But though the initial impulses are usually extra-musical, she does not compose descriptive programme music as such; rather, she moulds the ideas provided by the impulses into musical expression. Within the framework of a Modernist aesthetic, her works constitute a coherent, organically-growing entity, and the changes taking place within them have been ones of expression rather than of style.

Lotta Wennäkoski first emerged as a composer in the 1990s, when she was studying composition at the Sibelius Academy, mostly with **Eero Hämeenniemi**, and where she graduated in 2000. Her other teachers at the Academy included **Kaija Saariaho** and **Paavo Heininen**, and in the Netherlands she studied with a teacher representing a very different approach, **Louis Andriessen**.

The biggest categories in Lotta Wennäkoski's output are works for orchestra and for instrumental ensembles. Her most sizeable achievement to date is her score for the Finnish silent movie *Amor Omnia* lasting nearly an hour-and-a-half. She composed this for symphony orchestra and later did a shorter version for concert use (*Amor Omnia Suite*, 2014). She has also written some vocal music and works with elements of other arts, but she does not regard herself as a particularly crossover composer. Some of her works reflect her desire to take a stand on such grave, pressing issues as human trafficking and forced prostitution, as in the monodrama *Lelele* of 2010–2011.

### "Timbres mean a lot to me"

The world of timbre in Wennäkoski's music is rich and multi-coloured, but also transparent. She often incorporates noise and unconventional ways of producing sound.

"Timbres mean a lot to me," she says. "But I don't consider myself a spectral composer. I want



Photo: Maarit Kytöharju/Music Finland

dynamic form. Transparency is also important; music must have air. Which is maybe why the orchestra interests me. I want to hear the whole cross-section."

As her career has unfolded, the orchestra has in fact become an increasingly prominent medium for her.

"An orchestra is a laborious instrument but I love it. Chamber music is lighter to produce, but you can do more distinctive things with an orchestra. The potential combinations seem to be endless."

### "I'm interested in fast music"

The earlier works of Lotta Wennäkoski were dominated by lingering, fragile moods; as a result, she began to be described as a lyricist. A lyrical element still exists in her music, but in the recent works her range of expression has become much broader, deeper and stronger. She has also upped her tempos, and she more and more often structures the flow by means of a clear pulse.

"I've recently been interested in fast music; I do quick timbral music."

An example of Wennäkoski's recent rapid-pulsed idiom is *Hava* (2007). Composed for the Tapiola Sinfonietta, it is a work she describes as "scherzo-like". It is indeed a quick-figured work in which the focal element of the gestures and textures is the idea of falling, "like the feeling of leaves floating down".

Quick gestures and a rich colour palette are also a feature of the flute concerto *Soie* (2008–2009), inspired by various fabrics. The coarse, noise-like sounds in the middle movement, *Lin gros* (Coarse Linen), for example, express the texture of linen, while the closing movement, *Soie*, has a silky, rustling feel.

Lotta Wennäkoski's latest project is a commission for the Scottish Chamber Orchestra for delivery in 2015. For this, the client has requested some not specifically-formulated allusion to the music of **Jean Sibelius** as a tribute to that composer on the 150th anniversary of his birth. Wennäkoski's orchestral music will also soon be featured on a new CD by Ondine Records.

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