

# SOME REFLECTIONS ON A SYMMETRICAL YEAR

*Einojuhani Rautavaara expresses here some topical views on his future works and examines which compositions are 'alive and kicking' in the world. He also tells about his love for symmetry and his faith in meaningful coincidences.*

The situation looked so ominous at the start of the year 2002: by a series of coincidences I had three composition projects on hand all at the same time, two of them big – a *Clarinet Concerto* and an opera – and the third far from simple, being a set work for an international piano competition. Having reached the age of 73, I have as a rule learnt to avoid such a stressful situation, but the concerto had been postponed due to the negotiations between the commissioners, the Washington National Orchestra and the sponsor **Theodore Friedman**.

The premiere of the opera *Rasputin* at the Finnish National Opera was already scheduled for September 2003, so there was no time to waste on constructing a work that would last several hours in performance. I had, however, been mulling over the idea for it in my mind since the early 1990s and even made plans for the libretto. But at the time I had had to put the opera aside to make way for other projects, and only now, ten years later, was I able to return to it. As it happened, this did not matter because my subconscious had had time to work on the libretto.

I have a tendency to rely on a phenomenon termed by **Carl Gustav Jung**: 'synchronicity', so the publication of the biography of Rasputin by **Edvard Radzinsky** at precisely this moment in time seemed just as much a 'meaningful coincidence' as the fact that the bookshop assistant just happened to be pushing a trolley-load of the collected works of **Aleksis Kivi** when I was trying to make up my mind whether or not to compose an opera about Kivi in 1995. The book by Radzinsky provided some quite new information and aspects on that so ambivalent mujik. As I write this, the libretto is ready and the partcell or piano score of the first act has been composed. Naturally there will be amendments to the text right up to the very end, so it is important to know who, and what sorts of voices will be singing the leading roles. Luckily I can already hear the voices of **Matti Salminen**, **Lilli Paasikivi** and **Jorma Hynninen** in my inner ear and envisage them singing as I create their roles.

The composition of the *Clarinet Concerto* was agreed back in April 2000 when I was in New York. We were suitably detached from the ground, on the eighteenth floor of the Parker Meridien Hotel. The future soloist, **Richard Stoltzman**, for whom I was specifically to tailor the concerto, turned out to be a kind and friendly man who claimed to have been intimidated by the 'ferocious' look in some of my photos. I tried to convince him that this was just a deliberate ruse and protective mask for a timid and sensitive psyche... A year later Stoltzman came over to Helsinki and the four of us had a couple of magnificent afternoons together: he, his clarinet, my wife Sini and me. I decided I was not satisfied with the first movement, but the second, lyrical slow one succeeded in bringing out the incomparable sound of his instrument in all its beauty. When we had played it through together goodness knows how many times, something exciting happened: Richard Stoltzman executed a jubilant solo dance there in my living room. He said it was the only way he could express his joy at my composition. What greater compliment could any composer receive? By the time we met again at my home in February 2002, the opening movement of the

concerto had been completely revised and the finale was also ready. This time the thing I remember most is the discussion that followed our playing session, when Dick taught me the rudiments of Tai Chi. The concerto will be premiered in October, first in Washington and then at Carnegie Hall, New York.

The set piece for the Maj Lind Piano Competition was the outcome of my love for symmetry. Since the year, 2002, was so beautifully symmetrical, I just had to agree to do it. (The ideal would, of course, have been 20.02.2002, but that would have been too much to ask.) Symmetrical scales, inversions of melodies and mirror harmonies have in fact always been typical of my music. This work turned out to be so much a mirror game with virtuosic motifs that the only correct name for it was *Narcissus*. I am always happy to find that a composition of mine, one of my children, is 'alive and kicking', i.e. that it appears often and frequently in concert programmes the world over. The credit for this lies greatly with the performers, soloists and conductors. My *Violin Concerto* has been a particular cause for joy, especially since **Elmar Oliveira** began to play it. Over the past two years it has had at least fifteen hearings in music cities of the world. Oliveira last played it in Winnipeg in Canada, which ran a one-week Rautavaara Festival. It has also been performed by **Jaakko Kuusisto**, **Mi-kyung Lee**, **Janne Marttila** and **Arvo Leibur**, Jaakko as far away as Malaysia. I actually wrote the Violin Concerto in 1977, but it has only recently found its way into the international repertoire.

My most recent symphony, the eighth, has also gone out into the world. The recording by **Leif Segerstam** is the only Finnish one to appear on the New York Times' best-of-the-year list, and in France it has featured on Les 10 de Répertoire. **Mikko Franck** is to conduct the symphony in Gothenburg and **Osmo Vänskä** in Munich.

The orchestral *Angels and Visitations* dates from as long ago as 1978, but it was not really 'discovered' until recorded by Leif Segerstam (on the same disc as the Violin Concerto), and the ten or so performances conducted by Mikko Franck, this year in Canada and Australia, next year in Berlin, for example. It was through this work that Franck and I originally met: I was most impressed by his solemn, slow interpretation a couple of years back, and Mikko claims that it was at precisely this concert that he 'got bitten by the Rautavaara bug'. As a result of this bug, he is to conduct a series of six concerts over two weeks in May 2002. The Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra will be playing some twenty or so of my works and Mikko has chosen repertoire from right across the board. **Laura Mikkola** will be playing two piano concertos in the same concert, and the 3rd and the 4th symphonies will also be heard in two different concerts, the latter being the most 'difficult' one, adhering strictly to serialist technique. By way of consolation the concert will nevertheless end with the birds of the wilds in the *Cantus arcticus*. The series even includes opera: a concert performance of *The House of the Sun*.

Getting Finnish operas recorded has long been something of a problem, but the Finnish Cultural Foundation and other sponsors have finally managed to launch an extensive recording project. Work can thus begin in April on the recording of *Aleksis Kivi* with **Markus Lehtinen** conducting, and *The House of the Sun* is down for spring 2003. This will be conducted by Mikko Franck, who will also be doing Rasputin.

*Einojuhani Rautavaara*



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