

Seven questions for Lara Poe

1. Your background is quite cosmopolitan. Where do you currently live?

I was born in the US near Boston, but my mother is from Oulu, Finland. I spent a lot of time there, especially in the summers and around Christmas, and I also lived in Finland for a few years during high school. I graduated with a Bachelor of Music degree from Boston University and moved to London in 2016 to study for my master's degree. I am currently studying at King's College with **George Benjamin** and **Silvina Milstein**. Benjamin's teaching in particular has been instrumental in my development over the last year and a half. Prior to King's College, I completed my Artist Diploma studies at the Royal College of Music, where I studied with **Kenneth Hesketh** and others.

2. Was composing a conscious career choice for you early on?

I started composing at a very young age and even then, it was something I enjoyed. I didn't necessarily consider making it a career at the time – it came to me gradually, as I spent more and more time on it. My main instrument is the piano because I heard a lot of piano music in my childhood home. Through my piano studies I took the path to composition, and through practice I learned a lot about how sound is formed and how the meta-level of texture works.

3. What would you like to achieve through composition and how would you describe your own musical language?

There are several factors behind my work: communication, self-expression and the desire to make a difference. I also have a kind of inner compulsion to write music that I want to listen to and that I like. Composing is also a way of participating in the wider musical debate and expressing one's views in the current cultural context.

My musical language – what a difficult question! I would describe it as colourful and multifaceted. My music has elements of many different styles and traces of, say, American modernism. Certain acoustic phenomena are also important to me: my textures tend to be clear and relatively transparent, even if there are many layers. My harmonies are both spectral and based on the principles of classical melodic patterns.


4. How did your orchestral work *Kaamos* come about and how did the compositional process unfold? Tell us about your other orchestral works as well.

Kaamos started in connection with the Lahti Sibelius Festival's Taimitarha project, and my mentor was **Sebastian Fagerlund**. The performance conveniently coincided between the first



Photo: Penthouse Studios

and second lockdown, in September 2020, when there was an audience present. The soundscape of *Kaamos* is translucent and was based on the sense of silence and twilight found in the polar night of northern Lapland. I have stayed in those landscapes precisely at the darkest time of the year.


Conradanse  is based on an asymmetrical dance rhythm. The piece came about when the conducting teachers at the Royal College of Music asked me to write a *prima vista* piece for the conducting course applicants. *Conradanse* has had several performances since then, both at RCM concerts and at Tanglewood.

Our *Hospitality* was written for the Tanglewood Festival of Contemporary Music in 2019, when I along with the other composition fellows, was asked to write music for a silent film. It was the first time I was composing film music and my aim was to reflect the fast pace of the film and the important role of water and rivers in the sequence. I wanted to achieve a tight connection between the music and the visual element but not to follow every single nuance.

Noctilucous Clouds is an extended version of *Noctilucous*, which I wrote for the London Symphony Orchestra's Panufnik Scheme. *Noctilucous* means something that glimmers in the night, and in this piece, I have explored a wide range of timbral and textural possibilities for the orchestra. In the extended version more space was given to the development of the musical material.


Waltz of the Crocus Chrysanthus was commissioned by the Moonlight Symphony Orchestra. The piece is very energetic, and the rhythmic material is largely based on a waltz-like pattern.

5. Are there certain chamber music works in your catalogue that you would like to highlight?

Divergence  is a string quartet of four movements of about 25 minutes. Its first and last movements are both energetic in nature, while

the second movement is playful and the third very slow and airy.

Mainspring for alto saxophone and piano was composed for the Illuminate Women's Music concert series. The piano base is very rhythmic and moves in the lowest register, while the saxophone has percussive slap-tongue patterns.

Mirage was composed for saxophonist **Jonathan Radford's** concert series. I recorded various multiphonics played by Jonathan, made a spectral analysis of them and used them to find different ways of combining the soundscapes of flute, piano and saxophone into a coherent whole. My other published works include *Musings*  for alto saxophone, flute and piano and *Triton* for solo trumpet.

6. What sources of inspiration does your music reflect – what inspires you and gives you ideas for your work and your life?

My inspiration comes from many sources: music, for example, or natural phenomena. I often follow a sound I hear in a piece and think about how to follow it up: What is this sound? What instrumental combination would produce it? What would be the appropriate context for it?

Nature is also a great source of ideas. Long skiing trips in the middle of winter are important to me. There is something wonderful about a winter forest where everything is almost perfectly still, and nothing moves. You won't find any winter forests in London, but there are plenty of parks. I enjoy a wide range of reading and making origami – folding origami is a fascinating process.

7. What genre would you like to focus on in the future: vocal music, opera or concertos – and what are your next plans?

I have composed one short chamber opera so far, and it would be great to compose a full-length stage piece. Instrumental music is very fascinating, especially orchestral music. The joy of chamber and solo pieces comes from being able to compose for specific players and getting to know their personalities and tendencies. A concerto is in a way a combination of these, but there is also the balance between the soloist and the larger ensemble.

I have just completed a chamber music piece for the East London Music Group, consisting of a string quartet, flute, clarinet and piano. The piano is a so-called magnetic resonator piano, in which the resonance can be modified by magnets. My next project is to compose solo flute pieces for **Malla Vivolin**, and I am also planning new works for strings and larger ensembles. More information will be available soon!

Henna Salmela