

Seven questions for Mikko Heiniö

1. You have often stayed at the Villa Karo artists' residence in Benin, most recently in January 2023. How has this been reflected in your music?

It's difficult to speak about this without being guilty of clichéd overstatement... To put it briefly: I have visited every continent outside Europe, but this is the only one I would almost have liked to remain in. In Africa, I've felt both totally at home and a total outsider. The reality literally gets you there; you truly experience it and it's not just something put across by the media. Humans and nature are closer there than in Finland. Musically, this is reflected at least in *Khora* for piano and 5 percussionists (2001), *Café au lait* for flute, clarinet, violin, cello and piano (2006), and *Täällä, kaikkialla* (Here, Everywhere) for male choir (2019) – and a piece for guitar and piano I'm working on right now.

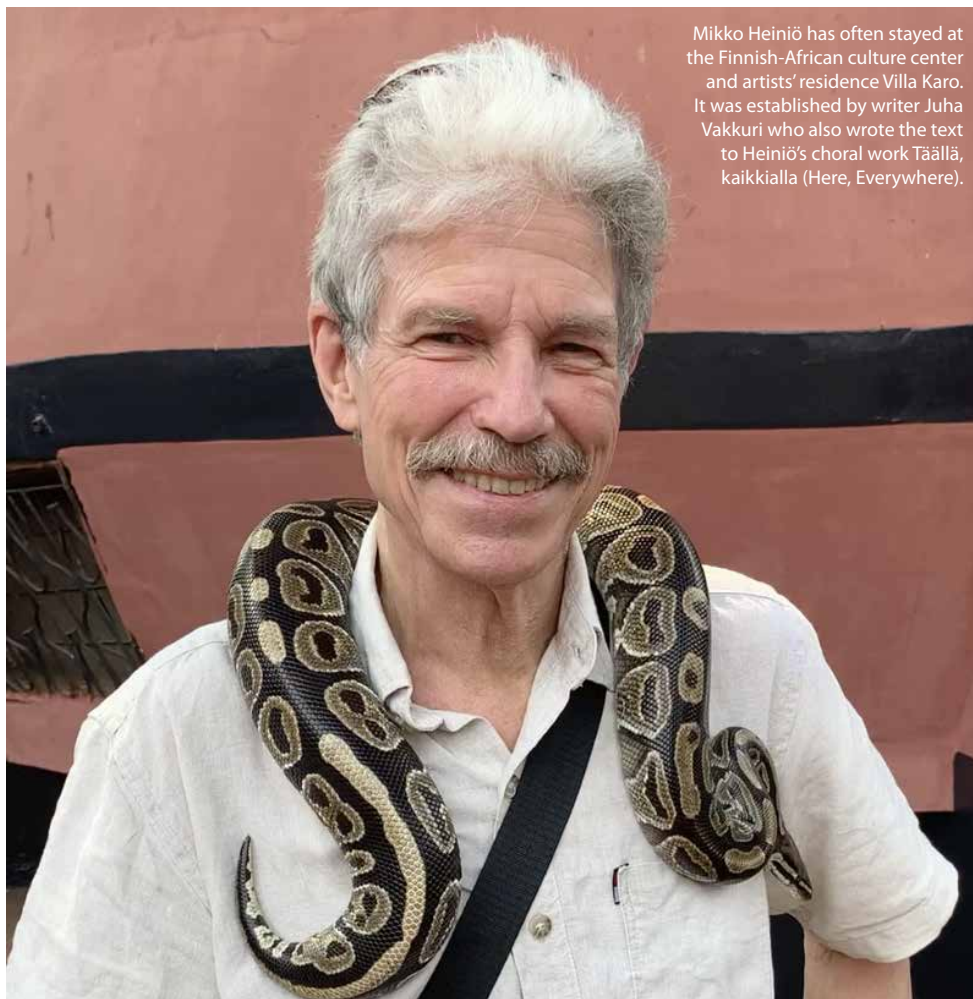
2. How do you feel about composing for different kinds of performers: orchestras, choirs and individual musicians; is there any you feel especially close to?

Timbres and harmony mean a lot to me, so I like composing for orchestra and choir. Most exciting of all is opera, where you can create real-life characters and their dramas on the stage. My special interest in literature has led me to compose lots of vocal music.

I've been happy to write for the handful of musicians who have repeatedly commissioned music from me. Such as Patrik Kleemola the guitarist, Tommi Hakala the baritone, and the choral conductors Matti Hyökki and Teemu Honkanen.

3. You often score works for unusual line-ups, an example being the piece for guitar and chamber choir to be premiered in October 2023. What inspired you to write for this combination?

An unusual line-up is a challenge and always brings out something new – new to me, that is. I've composed quite a lot of chamber music, but never two works for the same combination. This also applies to my concertos and symphonies.



Mikko Heiniö has often stayed at the Finnish-African culture center and artists' residence Villa Karo. It was established by writer Juha Vakkuri who also wrote the text to Heiniö's choral work *Täällä, kaikkialla* (Here, Everywhere).

Photo: Ritta Heiniö

I wanted to see how a guitar could act as a genuine soloist and not just accompanying a choir. Maybe a guitar is also better able to stand out from a choir than from an orchestra. I've given the choir very instrumental treatment, and I haven't assigned the text such a big role as in my choral works proper.

4. In May, the Turku Philharmonic is giving a concert of chamber music by you in honour of your

75th birthday. Which of the works on the programme would you particularly single out?

The *Canzona* for string trio (2006), the *Guitar Sonata* (2019), *Treno della notte* for clarinet, cello and piano (2000), the new work for guitar and piano (2023) and the piano quartet "*Puun ääni*" (The Voice of the Tree, 2006) are all one of a kind. For practical reasons, there's no vocal music. Poetry does nevertheless slip into the concert in that *Canzona* is a paraphrase of a poem by Lassi Nummi and the *Piano Quartet* a paraphrase of poems about trees by Eira Stenberg.

5. How would you summarise the highlights of your long career?

Oh the operas, and I don't just mean the performances but the lengthy processes behind them. But all the other occasions on which brilliant musicians rehearse and perform works and claim they actually enjoy doing so are highlights, too. One such recent occasion was the performance of *Koraaleja* (Chorales).

6. Chorales was premiered at the Katedraali festival of church music in Turku on 11 February by Eija Kankaanranta (kantele), Antti Tikkanen



Mikko Heiniö with Key Ensemble and Teemu Honkanen

NEW ALBUMS

(violin and leader), Kristian Lindroos (baritone) and the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra. Can you tell us a bit about it – how it came to encompass a number of works?

I had started writing a concerto lasting just under half an hour for kantele, violin and string orchestra on the initiative of Kankaanranta and Tikkanen. Then the Sibelius Fund of the Society of Finnish Composers announced a grant for a work lasting 45 minutes, and the two wanted to apply for it. I reckoned I couldn't make the concerto so long without adding something more. I wanted to include a baritone. In the end, we didn't get the Sibelius Fund grant but we were lucky to get other funding. By that time, I'd already finished the first and third movements of the concerto, and I incorporated them as such in the new, bigger format. I also used the second movement, slightly revised, which is a duet for kantele and violin, and I wrote a few other smaller numbers for the soloists. The most substantial addition was, however, a completely new work: three settings of poems by Lassi Nummi, and for these I scored in a baritone. The songs are not performed one after the other, but in between the other movements, and they echo the wise voice, the agnostic and cultural Christian voice of my old friend Lassi Nummi.

7. Looking back, with your present experience of life, what would you say to the young Mikko Heiniö?

It's advisable to get networking with performing artists when you're still young, to try to find musicians who'll play your works on their own initiative. Your fate is entirely in the hands of others unless you also happen to be a famous conductor or soloist.

Whereas on the one hand you have to put as much into composing as you can, on the other you need to do other things as well, not putting all your eggs in one basket. Rachmaninov asked himself: "Have I been chasing three hares without catching a single one?" It's me who should be asking that rather than him, because in addition to composing, I've spent a lot of time on an academic career and committee work. Things have just come along, without my stopping to choose at each crossroads. Possibly my best decision was resigning from my tenured professorship in good time before I reached retiring age. Because I could never have managed the opera commissions in the summer vacations alone.

A good reminder is also that there's no point thinking of a large production unless you can be sure it's going to be performed. The main thing about a commission is not the fee but the commissioner's commitment and full intention to get the work staged. A composer has to be ready to face up to perpetual set-backs, and to a time when you're *der Welt abhanden gekommen*. There's no point becoming a composer unless the work itself is sufficient reward, even without outward acclaim or kudos.

Henna Salmela

KALEVI AHO

Violin Concerto No. 2, Cello Concerto No. 2
Kymi Sinfonietta/Olari Elts, sol. Elina Vähälä, vl,
Jonathan Roozeman, vlc
BIS-2466

Sonatas Nos. 1 & 2 for Accordion

Mateusz Stankiewicz
UMFC CD 178

Sonata No. 2 for Accordion 'Black Birds'

Ida Lovli Hidle
LAWO-LWC 1247

5 Mythical Images for oboe (or soprano saxophone)

Adrian Tully, s.sax
MDG 603 2262-2 ("Reflections")

MIKKO HEINIÖ

Täällä, kaikkialla (Here, Everywhere) for male choir

Polytech Choir/Saara Aittakumpu
PK4AVA ("Unetar")

THOMAS JENNEFELT

Sieben Liebeslieder

Helena van Heel, Mz, Naomi Tamura, pf
Etcetera Records KTC 1765

TOMMI KÄRKKÄINEN

Tener Tempestas (Guitar Concerto)

Helsinki Sinfonietta/Erkki Lasonpalo, sol. Janne Malinen, gtr
Pifink JIVCD-240 ("Concertos - Cum tribus")

KAI NIEMINEN

Pre-Inter-Post for organ

Marko Kupari
Pifink JIVCD-253 ("Nordic Organ Music")

Sonata from Shadows

Johanna Kärkkäinen, fl, Olli Hirvanen, gtr
Pifink JIVCD-234 ("A due - Finnish music and poetry")

PEHR HENRIK NORDGREN

Streams, Cello Concerto No. 5, Chamber Symphony

Jyväskylän Sinfonia/Ville Matvejeff, sol. Tuomas Ylinen, vlc
Alba ABCD 521 ("Streams")

SVEN-DAVID SANDSTRÖM

Five Pieces for Piano and Orchestra

Gothenburg SO/Ryan Bancroft,
sol. Peter Friis Johansson, pf
BIS-2576 ("Piano Concertos")

MARTIN SKAFTE

24 Preludes for Piano

Jonas Olsson, pf
Toccata Classics TOCC 0640

WILHELM STENHAMMAR

String Quartets Nos 1 – 6

Stenhammar Quartet
BIS-2709 ("The String Quartets")

VELJO TORMIS

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Pärismaalase lauluke, Laevas lauldakse,
Sinikka laul, Raua needmine, Incantatio
maris aestuosi, Lauliku lapsepöli,
Kuulmata kuskil kumiseb kodu
VHK Keelpilliorkester & soloists/Rasmus Puur
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TUOMAS TURRIAGO

Somber

ROOPE MÄENPÄÄ

Kolloidi

CECILIA DAMSTRÖM

Epitaph

Ville Hautakangas, pf
Alba ABCD-519 ("12 premieres,
Contemporary Finnish piano music")

LOTTA WENNÄKOSKI

Harp Concerto "Sigla", Flounce, Sedecim

Finnish RSO/Nicholas Collon,
sol. Sivan Magen, hp
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