

# Seven questions for Jonas Valfridsson

*On 27 August you began your residency with the Jönköping Sinfonietta for the 2023/24 season and it opened with the first part of their commissioned work **Árit** (The Year) with tenor Rickard Söderberg as soloist. The four parts of the song cycle will be performed one at a time throughout the season and finally in their entirety on 26 May next year. Could you tell us a little about the work?*

Rickard has written the texts and I have been given ample freedom to edit them. In this way, you might say that the music has influenced the text just as much as the text has formed the music. On the surface, it is a visionary text of nature romanticism with allusions to Norse mythology, but I set it to music more from the perspective of the narrator – the inevitable transformations in the course of the seasons and the acceptance of that cycle.

***Árit** is inspired by “a time when mankind was totally at the mercy of nature”. Nature has an important role in a number of your orchestral works to be performed during the coming season, e.g., **A Fragmented Memory**, **My Overgrown Little Treehouse** and the monumental **John Bauer Suite 1918**. You depict a nature that can not only be extraordinarily beautiful but also harsh, treacherous and a bit frightening. How can this ambivalence to nature be observed in your music?*

I think it began when I became irritated at the “nature-is-good” spirit prevalent during the 2010s. Anything that was “natural” was considered better than what was “artificial”, whether it be foodstuffs, pharmaceutical products or emotional expression. Oh my God, I thought, do you know what is *natural*? To die from a simple infection, to freeze to death, to drown in a flood... I am not that kind of nature romanticist, but rather have the greatest respect for civilization being at a disadvantage when it comes to the forces of nature. I try to give form to this, over and above the idyllic and beautiful sides of nature.

***The painter John Bauer fell victim to these forces of nature when he and his entire family perished in a terrible storm. The John Bauer Suite 1918** 🎧, for choir and orchestra, will be performed on 21 March in Jönköping. You composed the work in 2018 to observe the tragic passing, 100 years earlier. All this developed into not only a suite but also into a triptych, together with **The John Bauer Overture** 🎧 and the bassoon concertino **The Swan Maiden**. What is it in John Bauer’s paintings that is so inspiring?*

The early 20<sup>th</sup> century has always fascinated me, and it was the music from that period which aroused my keen interest in composition. I wanted to start out with a similar kind of expression, harmonies, formal structures, but to find another angle of approach from someone who is active 100 years later in history.



Jonas Valfridsson

***Do you always have a source of inspiration before you start composing to trigger your creativity? Or do you begin directly with the music?***

It is increasingly so that I just get started, as I often have a clear picture of how things are to be. Since the first thought that crosses your mind is often the most obvious and banal, I always try to take the time to step back from and be critical of my artistic decisions, and ask myself what an alternative course of action could be.

***October will see the premiere of **Varför älska vi att sjunka** (Why Do We Love to Sink) composed on commission from the Gävle Symphony Orchestra on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of author Stig Dagerman’s birth. It is a 30-minute work for narrator and orchestra – a melodrama. Can you tell us something about the work and how you set about composing it?***

Referring to what I said before, I really took my time to do some research about this and get to the bottom of what I wanted to do. Actor and producer **Mattias Knavé** has been a great help to me, and the closest we came to what we wanted to create was musical theatre in the spirit of Brecht and Weill: the older type of *Sprechgesang*, a fluid transition between music and theatre. Somewhere in that area I found a way to approach Dagerman’s texts.

***During the last few years, you have worked quite a lot with music that is close to musical drama; **Árit**, mentioned above, **Why Do We Love to Sink** and the short opera **När knoppar brister** (When Buds Break), part of the Short Stories Project of the Royal Swedish Opera. Is musical drama a format that you enjoy working with?***

I see that I have a talent for it, that it is easy for me and that the results are good. It is not anything that I have particularly longed or striven for, but I notice that I find it enormously enjoyable to collaborate with others in the artistic field. It is perhaps a matter of me becoming more mature, that I more easily understand other artistic intentions and don’t just run my own race.

***Speaking of music drama, your next commission is a ballet aimed at the younger audiences. Can you say something about the project?***

I can’t say so much about it as it is not yet official. But it is nothing less than a dream come true; the great ballets from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were the reason that I wanted to become a composer. It is going to be magical.

Kristina Fryklöf