

Roope Mäenpää – a versatile talent

Mäenpää likes working with a variety of aesthetics. This wide-ranging approach is reflected in exciting blends and works with assorted stylistic accents.



Photo: Ville Hautakangas

The background of a cellist and the presence of musicianship can be felt in Mäenpää's three string quartets, of which *Chasing the Thrill* (2021) 📺 is the latest. Behind the work, there is the story of a treasure, hidden in the Rocky Mountains in the United States by **Forrest Fenn**, a cancer patient. The enormous treasure hunt ended up partly with tragic consequences. *Chasing the Thrill* is a dense, 10-minute piece, where the suspense is created between a silent sense of expectation and impetuous drama. It was composed for the Tampere-based TEMA quartet Mäenpää has been working closely with. Similar important partners for Mäenpää are the Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra, one of Finland's top orchestras, and the Tampere Raw, an active contemporary music group.

Musical fairy tales for young audiences

The musical tales *Hipinääsi ja apinahiisi* (2020) and *Hyönteissinfonia* (The Insect Symphony, 2021) reach out to young listeners, and the idiom in both tends towards tonal. In both works, there is also a narrator alongside the symphony orchestra.

Hipinääsi ja apinahiisi is based on **Ville Hytönen's** book, which Mäenpää discovered already during his studies. At the time, he suggested to the Tampere Philharmonic a work based on the book. To Mäenpää's surprise, the orchestra reached out years after and placed a commission.

Thanks to its success, the orchestra commissioned immediately a new work from Mäenpää. The *Insect Symphony* created thereafter expands the narrator's role into a dialogue between adult and child and intensifies the understanding of nature and insects. There are also lovely illustrations to be included in the performance. "Insects are a small but important subject, and the approach here is the collapse of insects and the reduction of pollen. At the same time, the work is a symphony, with the orchestral climax and all", says Mäenpää.

Kimmo Korhonen

"The performance of the orchestral work *Luovus* 📺 in the beginning of November 2023 in Ottawa was a great experience, my debut abroad as a composer. **John Storgårds** is the Principal Guest Conductor of the National Arts Centre Orchestra, and he suggested the work. It is a fantastic, technically skilled orchestra, and everything went well already at the first rehearsal."

This is how **Roope Mäenpää** (born in 1990) described the performance of his large-scale work *Luovus* (2022), characterized by him as a "yoik symphony". What is special about the work is the yoik part, composed for **Niillas Holmberg**, a Sámi multi-artist. The Sámi are the only European population group by the status of indigenous people, and according to Mäenpää, it is important that the performer of the yoik part is a Sámi. Mäenpää has a long common history with Holmberg dating back 15 years when they created folk-inspired music together. After that, Mäenpää's musical interests have expanded and focused on art music, which he studied in his home town in Tampere under the guidance of **Jouni Kaipainen**, **Hannu Pohjannoro** and **Paa-vo Korpijaakko** among others.

A wide-ranging composer

Although the focus of Mäenpää's work is today in art music, he thinks his wide-ranging background is important. It is reflected in *Luovus's* amalgamation of yoik representing the Sámi culture and the orchestral part representing western music, where the orchestral part has been adjusted to a softer direction as per the yoik's tonal starting points.

"I like to work with many different aesthetics. The perspective of musicianship, opened up

through my own instrument cello, has also been important for the composing work."

The broad perspective is also reflected in Mäenpää's oeuvre in which pieces are consciously created from different starting points, including different stylistic emphases. *Jamais vu* (2020) represents the core of his art music. It is a work commissioned by the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, dense in its dramaturgy and rich in its sound. The first performance, however, took an unexpected turn in February 2021.

"The 10-minute piece composed for a large orchestra was already finished when the FRSO informed that due to COVID-19 restrictions the size has to be reduced: ten parts needed to be removed, however not from the strings. It felt awful but was also very educational, as I had to think what was really essential. All in all, it was great that the work could be performed in the first place, although it was streamed without audience. And now, there are two versions available for orchestras of different sizes."

The same thing, performance streamed without audience, happened in February 2021 in Tampere to another large-scale work, *Käsiin* (2020). It is a delicate concerto for kantele, Finland's national instrument, of which the modern concert kantele was developed in the 20th century.

"It was great to dive into the world of kantele", says Mäenpää. "I felt that I was on foreign soil, and it was exciting to combine traditions."

