

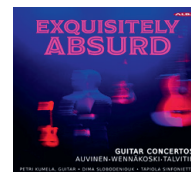


Kalevi Aho at 75

Kalevi Aho, one of Finland's most celebrated contemporary composers, will be 75 on 9 March 2024, and there will be numerous concerts to mark the event. The Saimaa Sinfonietta has commissioned him to write his *18th symphony*, to be premiered in Mikkeli on 8 February with **Erkki Lasonpalo** conducting. The Oulu Symphony Orchestra under **Jessica Cottis** will be premiering Aho's new *Double Concerto* with **Christel Lee** (violin) and **Jonathan Roozeman** (cello) as the soloists on 25 April, and the programmes for many other orchestras and festivals will include works by Aho. October 2023 saw the publication of a biography by **Hannu Lahtonen** giving a detailed account (in Finnish) of Kalevi Aho's life and work, career and performances in Finland and abroad.

Exciting new guitar concertos on CD

Guitar concertos by three front-line Finnish composers have been released by Alba Records on a disc titled *Exquisitely Absurd*. **Antti Auvinen's** *Andalusian Panzerwagen Jazz* represents his typical maximalist-anarchist style combining various styles and ideas, while the approach of **Lotta Wennäkoski** in *Susurrus* is both humorous and outright lyrical. The orchestration of **Riikka Talvitie's** *Without Irony* is from time to time unashamedly brilliant, but it is not without a touch of intimate mystery (See: Repertoire tips). The Tapiola Sinfonietta is conducted on this CD by **Dima Slobodeniouk** and the soloist is one of Finland's most versatile classical guitarists, **Petri Kumela**.



Ilkka Kuusisto's opera music on stage

Ilkka Kuusisto (b. 1933) reached 90 this year. The emphasis in his broad and diverse output is on vocal music, and he is one of the most prolific and most-performed Finnish composers of opera. Among the many that have flowed from his pen is *The Moomin Opera*. His birthday year was celebrated in November, when the Sibelius Academy Opera staged a varied cross-section of his popular vocal works.

Developments at Fennica Gehrman

Jennah Vainio has been appointed Fennica Gehrman's new Publishing Manager from 1 December. Vainio is a composer who has held varied posts on the Finnish music scene. She has been a music advisor at Teosto, the Finnish Composers' Copyright Society, and Artistic Director of the Tampere Biennale music festival. She was also a founding member of the Uusinta publishing company.

Henna Salmela is the Director of Administration, in charge of administration, financing and promotion at Fennica Gehrman.



Photo: Henrik Halvarsson

Revival of The Promise in Stockholm

Mats Larsson Gothe's and **Susanne Marko's** *The Promise* (*Löftet*) is being staged once again by the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm. This opera, based on real events, had its world premiere on the International Holocaust Remembrance Day 2022. It is about Ava, who is separated from her husband Teo in a concentration camp, and her struggle to find him again after the war is over. The production can be seen at the Royal Opera from 23 February to 4 April 2024, with **Hannah Husáhr**, **Agnes Auer** and **Jens Persson Hertzmann** in the leading roles.

NORDIC HIGHLIGHTS 4/2023

NEWSLETTER FROM GEHRMANS MUSIKFÖRLAG & FENNICA GEHRMAN

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Cover photos: Marie Samuelsson (Mats Bäcker); Roope Mäenpää (Ville Hautakangas)

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ISSN 2000-2750 (Online)

Damström's busy spring

The Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra will premiere **Cecilia Damström's** *Extinctions* on 26 January under **Chloé Dufresne**. They will also give two performances of her ICE conducted by **Nicholas Collon** in February. Her accordion concerto *Permafrost* will have its world premiere on 16 February during the Kokkola Winter Accordion Festival with the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra and **Sonja Vertainen** as soloist. 12 April will see the Finnish premiere of *Wasteland* at the Tampere Biennale, with **Olari Elts** leading the Tampere Philharmonic.



Cecilia Damström

Photo: Ville Järnkall



Daniel Börtz

Matthew Peterson

Albert Schnelzer

Peterson, Schnelzer and Börtz awarded

Matthew Peterson and Albert Schnelzer won this year's art music prizes when the Swedish MPA Awards were presented on 10 November. In his a cappella choral work *An Inner Sky* to texts by E. E. Cummings, "Peterson depicts nature and heaven by rich sonorities and nuances, violent outbursts and sudden strokes of fancy. Schnelzer's oratorio *SALT* for soprano, baritone, choir and orchestra is about the sea and migration. Here current issues are described with an accessible and timeless tone language, and this almost

self-explanatory music has all the makings of a truly modern classic", wrote the jury.

Daniel Börtz was awarded the Royal Swedish Academy of Music's Composer Prize 2023 "for an outstanding achievement as a composer with a unique tone language that offers strong feelings as well as existential issues, always coupled to the contemporary scene. In sinfonias and solo concertos, in chamber music and vocal works and in his epoch-making operas, Börtz combines modernism and tradition in a sonorous world of expression and beauty."



Mats Jansson

Diabelli Variations 2024

Pianist Mats Jansson has commissioned new variations from 18 Swedish composers over Anton Diabelli's Waltz from 1819. It is the same theme that Beethoven used in his 33 Variations Op. 120, and that 50 more Austrian composers wrote variations on in 1824. 200 years have now elapsed since these were published, and Jansson thought it was time for reflections for our time. The edition 'Diabelli 2024 – 23 Variations for Piano on Anton Diabelli's Waltz' is due to be released in January 2024. All variations will be performed at a concert at the De Geer Hall in Norrköping on 3 April.

Matthew Whittall commissions

Matthew Whittall has two big orchestral commissions in the pipeline. One of them, from the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle), is for a piece for organ and orchestra to be premiered by the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra at the Helsinki Music Centre on 22 May 2024. The soloist in this concert conducted by Nicholas Collon will be Susanne Kujala. The Tapiola Sinfonietta and the Vaasa City Orchestra have asked Whittall to write an *Oboe Concerto*. Anni Haapaniemi is to be the soloist. Matthew Whittall will be 50 years old in January 2025.



Matthew Whittall

Solitary Poems

The *Solitary Poems* project was a creative response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Soprano saxophonist Anders Paulsson attracted 30 international composers to write pieces for him, in order to keep them all growing artistically during the time when all concerts and touring came to a standstill. Some pieces turned out to be extremely virtuosic while others are more contemplative and lyrical. 23 of them have now been presented on an album released by BIS Records (See: New albums). Five of the *Solitary Poems* have been published by Gehrman; Fredrik Högberg's *Orphan Elephant*, Ann-Sofi Söderqvist's *Solitude*, Marie Samuelsson's *Piece to Anders from Marie*, Jörgen Dafgård's *Iridescence* and Thomas Lindahl's *Night Owl*.



Lotta Wennäkoski found her awarded CD in a record shop in London

Wennäkoski boom continues

Lotta Wennäkoski has received a lot of attention recently. Her CD including three works: *Flounce*, *Sedecim* and the harp concerto *Sigla* won the British Gramophone Award for the best release in the contemporary category in October. On the Ondine disc the Finnish RSO was conducted by Nicholas Collon.

The world premiere of Wennäkoski's violin concerto *Prosoidia* by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and violinist Ilya Gringolts on 3 November won great acclaim, and two weeks later the BBC SO performed her *Verdigris* in Warsaw, Poland. Chamber music by Wennäkoski has also been heard: the Avanti! Quartet performed her two string quartets (*Pige* and *Flickereth*) at a concert in Helsinki on 2 December, and at the same time the Avanti! Chamber Orchestra released a new disc including five works by her: *Zeng*, *Verdigris*, *Päärme II*, *Hele* and *I stället för vingar*.