

Oct. 9 - 10, 2015

Einojuhani Rautavaara

Finnish composer

born: October 9, 1928, Helsinki

Symphony No. 1

Andante

Poetico

Allegro

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| These are the first performances of this work on the Classics series; duration 27 minutes |
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Einojuhani Rautavaara is a graduate of the University of Helsinki and the Sibelius Academy, with additional study in Vienna and at New York's Juilliard School of Music. Here in the States he also studied at the Tanglewood Music Center with Roger Sessions and Aaron Copland. He was appointed Rector at the Käpylä Music Institute in Helsinki and later became a tenured professor of composition at the Sibelius Academy.

Rautavaara's catalog includes a wide array of genres, from chamber music to opera, with a variety of symphonies and concertos. As a whole his output is almost a textbook case of Post-Modernism (use of earlier styles), having traversed several stylistic periods throughout his long career including Neo-Classicism, Serialism and Neo-Romanticism. However, most of his works comprise a variety of traditional elements with sincere references to mysticism. He often looks back Thomas Mann in describing compositions as "having a sort of metaphysical mind of their own."

Einojuhani Rautavaara scored his first symphony in 1955. For its time, the romantic nature of the piece was very unusual. In fact, most of the big world of serious music was tuning up (some say 'tuning down') for the wild and woolly avant garde. Rautavaara initially cast the work in four movements. But the spirit of the time caused him enough doubt that he rewrote the piece with just two movements, but he remained diffident. Finally, in 2003, he picked up his pen again and completed the journey in the current three movement form.

A power accent in the timpani launches *Symphony No. 1* into a flood of resonant timbers from a fountain of lush strings. The evolving first theme bears poetic urgency, blending gently into Rautavaara's very wide palette of orchestral color. One senses the symphonic narrative is akin to an untitled tone poem (Rautavaara often noted that emotive or picturesque images lingered behind the scenes of his scores). The long development unwinds like a Nordic rune, with meanings slowly revealed, until the lingering final cues are heard in symbolic strokes from the timpani.

Marked *Poetico*, the second movement begins with shimmering strings and a heartfelt plea in the horn. Like an evocative film score, the tonal landscape slowly unfolds with sustained, mystic nuance - perhaps an evocation of the morning light over the ice-chilled lakes in the Finnish tundra.

For deft contrast, to round out the symphony Rautavaara offers a buoyant final *Allegro*. Listeners are quick to note the influence from Russian masters, Sergey Prokofiev and Dimitri Shostakovich - buffoonery to the max. Rascal woodwinds and dervish brass are up to mischief, with impish bantering in the bassoon and tuba over irreverent drum snares. To this the composer adds a measure of vodka swagger in the strings. With an impromptu flourish in the percussion, it all ends too soon.

Jaakko Kuusisto

Finnish composer, violinist, conductor
born: January 17, 1974, Helsinki, Finland

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, Op. 28

Agitato

Meno mosso, Lento

Molto allegro

These are the first performances of this work on the Classics series; duration 28 minutes

Jaakko Kuusisto pursued his formal training on the violin with Géza Szilvay and Tuomas Haapanen at the Sibelius Academy, with advanced studies at at Indiana University under Miriam Fried and Paul Biss. His primary composition teachers were Eero Hämeenniemi and David Dzubay.

As a performer, Mr. Kuusisto received the top award in several competitions, including the Kuopio, Sibelius, Indianapolis and Carl Nielsen competitions. In 1997 he was also a finalist in the Queen Elisabeth competition in Brussels. His appearances as a soloist and chamber musician have taken him across Europe and the Far East, with diverse performances in the United States.

Among Mr. Kuusisto's original compositions are *Between Seasons*, recorded by the Helsinki Strings for the Finlandia label, and his children's opera *The Canine Kalevala*. About the *Violin Concerto*, the composer writes:

"The first plans to compose a violin concerto began in about the year 2000. At that time I became acquainted with several Finnish concertos in quick succession, such as those by Uljas Pulkkis and Einojuhani Rautavaara, which would form an important part of my repertoire as a violin soloist. Also, Kalevi Aho's *Third Symphony* - for violin and orchestra - helped to kindle my interest in writing a large-scale work for my own use. But the other commissions that I had at the time took precedence over this project until, some years later, my friend and colleague Elina Vähälä suggested that I should compose a concerto for her. Moreover, the idea of writing for another violinist started to seem to be preferable and, as Elina and I were collaborating on numerous other projects as well, it was apparent to me that this was the right moment to go ahead. Support from the Arts Promotion Centre Finland and Finnish Composers' Copyright Society (Teosto) set the ball rolling.

"The process of writing the work was, however, preceded by an unusually long period of deliberation concerning various structural solutions that the work would require - above all the question of instrumental forces. My original plan included a number of instruments that are not typical of a symphony orchestra - also electric instruments. This was connected in part to my original conception of the work's musical language, in which there would be strong emphasis on rhythm. In the end, only certain elements of this concept remained, in the last movement, and thus the special instruments proved to be unnecessary. At this point my familiarity with the soloist also affected the way the work was formulated; I wanted to emphasize the violin's best aspects and a kind of traditional concerto conception.

"Formally the work proceeds to a large extent like its predecessors in the genre: the first movement (*Agitato*) is in sonata form, the slow second movement (*Meno mosso, Lento*) is more solemn, and the finale (*Molto allegro*) possesses an unstoppable energy. The solo cadenza, however, represents a break with tradition, as I have located it at the beginning of the work. The solo violin presents and develops the basic thematic material until, at the climax, it is interrupted by the orchestra. After a brief orchestral interlude we hear the main theme in its true form.

"Work on the *Violin Concerto* began with sketches for the first movement at my summer house at Taipalsaari in the southeast of Finland in the summer of 2011, and the piece was completed in Lahti in March 2012. It goes without saying that the concerto is dedicated to Elina." (translation by Andrew Barnett)

Jean Sibelius

Finnish composer

born: December 8, 1865, Hämeenlinna; died: September 20, 1957, Järvenpää

Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 39

Andante, ma non troppo; Allegro energico

Andante (ma non troppo lento)

Scherzo: Allegro

Finale (Quasi una Fantasia): Andante; Allegro molto

First performed on the BPO Classics series on February 12, 1937, conducted by Lajos Shuk; most recently performed on February 17, 2008, conducted by Michael Morgan; duration 40 minutes

In his youth, Sibelius attended the Finnish Normal School, which was the first genuine Finnish-speaking school in Russia-controlled Finland. It was there he first became acquainted with classical Finnish literature, including the **Kalevala**, a mythological epic tale of Finland. The tome provided Sibelius with a lifetime of inspiration, and in one sense or another is reflected throughout his catalog.

Sibelius initially intended to become a violinist, but under the encouragement and guidance of Martin Wegelius he began to compose a variety of chamber music. The experience revealed his true calling. He was yet in his mid-20s when he left Finland to continue formal study in Berlin and Vienna, where his teachers included Robert Fuchs and Karl Goldmark.

As he approached maturity, in the best sense of the term, Jean Sibelius became a musical patriot. His national devotion can be seen most directly in his idealized tone poem *Finlandia*, and uplifting entries like *Karelia*, *En Saga* and *Pohjola's Daughter*.

Although Sibelius provided no picturesque titles to any of his seven symphonies, we know from his correspondence with friends and colleagues that *Symphony No. 1* of 1899 was scored with a pen guided by the muse of Finland.

Like a thread of morning light, a solitary clarinet opens the first movement, chanting over a souvenir of darkness in the murmuring timpani. This fragment then begins to spin and weave into an intricate musical allegory. In a moment cathedral-styled brass and timpani offer a great blush of color, followed by harmonic sculptures and a gleaming panorama of tuneful intrigue.

Before completing this score Sibelius had heard Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique Symphony* in Helsinki. Audiences often detect a direct influence here in each of the last three movements and especially in the second movement *Andante, ma non troppo lento*. The themes, the harmonic undertow, the rhythmic pointing and much of the orchestration bear a kinship to the nuance of the great Russian master. But 'kinship' does not imply imitation. Sibelius was simply tipping his hat in admiration.

Joyful and playful, the third movement *Scherzo* takes to the air with flair to spare. And there is yet another 'tip of the hat' - this time to scherzo-master Felix Mendelssohn (**Midsummer Night's Dream**). Doubtless, it is no accident that Sibelius builds in a little 'dreamy' and plaintive interlude right in the middle of all the fun.

The last movement opens with the strings in a full-bodied and passionate retrace of the clarinet chant which opened the symphony. From that point on the work continues as a fantasy in tone - consistent with the composer's style cue (*Quasi una Fantasia*) - winding its way via *Pathétique* inflections to an expansive close.

program notes by Edward Yadzinski