

## **LOTTA WENNAKOSKI**

**Finnish composer (b. 1970)**

***Hava* (Estimated length: 10 minutes)**

Lotta Wennäkoski's recent works explore physical phenomena, such as buoyancy and fluidity, communicating textures and sensations through the medium of sound rather than verbal description. In an interview, Wennäkoski stated, "My music does not concretely describe anything; it is more about topics and moods."

Wennäkoski is not yet well known in the United States, but over the past 20+ years, she has become a significant Finnish musical export. In 2003, her colleague and countryman Esa-Pekka Salonen commissioned *Sakara* for Orchestra; since then, Wennäkoski has composed works for a number of music festivals and ensembles. *Flounce*, her most high profile composition to date, premiered at the final night of the BBC Proms in 2017.

In a 2017 interview, Wennäkoski described her music as "navigating in an area between exciting timbral qualities and more conventional gestures like melodic fragments. A feeling of air, space and clarity are important, and I also hope my music is always somewhat emotional."

When she was 19, Wennäkoski spent a year in Budapest studying violin at the Béla Bartók Conservatory. Her immersion in Hungarian language and culture influenced her 2007 piece *Hava*, the Hungarian word for "snow." "When I was thinking about *Hava*," said Wennäkoski, "I was especially playing with the idea that music could really deal with ... a subject in the same way that a novel deals with its theme: from different angles, always in new light, using its own language. The simple starting point for *Hava* is falling or descending; of course, sometimes you have to get up first to fall." For Wennäkoski, "hava" also suggested the Finnish words "rustling" or "alert." We can hear these associations in the swirling motion of the first sections, which evoke the image of snow caught in a whirlwind. Wennäkoski shifts from the breathless, agitated opening to a series of slower interludes, in which the forward motion becomes almost static, and several different solo instruments create ethereal atmospheres.

## **KALEVI AHO**

**Finnish composer (b. 1949)**

***Seifi: Concerto for Solo Percussion and Orchestra* (Estimated length: 36 minutes)**

"The title of this Concerto, *Sieidi*, is Sámi – a language spoken in the northern region of Finland, Sweden and Norway known as Lapland," Kalevi Aho explained in his notes for the premiere. "It denotes an ancient cult place such as an unusually shaped rock; sometimes also a special rock face or even a whole mountain fell ... The djembe and darabuka drumming at the beginning and end is by nature shamanistic, and the listener could well imagine it taking place at the foot of precisely one such 'sieidi.'"

In an interview with percussionist Colin Currie, Aho described the great diversity of sound opportunities inherent in writing for percussion. "The percussion world is exceptionally rich and gives such opportunity towards a very many-sided and rich musical expression," said Aho, "from the most silent and lyrical nuances to wild rhythmical drive and musical explosiveness."

Throughout *Sieidi*, Aho uses the orchestral palate judiciously, juxtaposing sounds with silences. This episodic music ranges from restrained interludes to the hair-raising intensity of the full orchestra. In these *tutti* sections, the orchestra seems to call upon the primal power of the ancient *sieidi* to bear witness.

*Sieidi*'s single movement encompasses several distinctly different sections: fast vs. slow, propulsively rhythmic vs. static lyricism. "For the soloist it is extremely demanding, because he is constantly having to switch from one technique to another," wrote Aho. "Djembe and darabuka playing with the hands differs radically from that of tom-tom or drumstick technique, and from that of pitched percussion instruments such as the marimba and vibraphone.

"Normally in a percussion concerto, the soloist has to play surrounded by a huge battery of instruments, often behind the orchestra. In *Sieidi* he uses only nine instruments, and is in front of the orchestra throughout. The instruments are in a row at the front of the platform, starting with the djembe on the far right (as viewed by the audience) and ending with the tam-tam on the far left. The soloist plays only one instrument at a time. The Concerto begins with a djembe solo, which is followed after a bridge passage by the darabuka. The soloist then proceeds from the hand-beaten instruments to membranophones played with drumsticks: the five tom-toms and the snare drum. These are followed by the wooden percussion: the five-octave marimba, the woodblocks and the temple blocks. Finally, the soloist arrives at the metal percussion: the vibraphone and tam-tam on the left-hand side at the front of the platform. A tam-tam cadenza marks a turning point; from then onwards the soloist works back across the platform in the reverse order, ending with the djembe with which he began. This way the listener can also keep a visual track of the Concerto's progress ..."

## **JEAN SIBELIUS**

**Finnish composer (1865–1957)**

**Symphony No. 5 in E-flat Major, Op. 82 (Estimated length: 31 minutes)**

"These symphonies of mine are more confessions of faith than are my other works," wrote Jean Sibelius in 1918, while revising his Symphony No. 5 for the third time. Always his own harshest critic, Sibelius struggled to realize his original musical conception of the Symphony over a period of six difficult years.

Sibelius' attempts to write a version of the Fifth Symphony that withstood his implacable self-criticism were hampered by personal problems and global upheaval. In the years 1910-14, Sibelius struggled with the desire to be perceived by the world as a "modern" composer, but at the same time he rejected the prevailing styles established by Debussy, Mahler, and Richard Strauss. Composing, frequently difficult for Sibelius even under the best of circumstances, was made even harder by his poor health and his alcoholism.

From 1914-18, the chaos and brutality of WWI engulfed Europe. In 1917 Finland also found itself at war with Russia after declaring its independence. An invasion of Russian soldiers into his town forced Sibelius and his family to flee to Helsinki in 1918. Later that year, Sibelius

returned home and resumed his life and work, including the third revision of the Fifth Symphony, which he described as “practically composed anew.”

The reworked symphony condenses the original four movements into three – Sibelius combined the first and second movements – and features a new finale. The Tempo molto moderato is textbook Sibelius, featuring brief, fragmentary ideas that surface somewhat enigmatically from the depths of the orchestra. A short melody in the horns later coalesces into a fully developed theme. At times the instruments seem to murmur to themselves; as the music progresses, the strings and brasses declaim bold proclamations.

In the Andante mosso, pizzicato strings and staccato flutes state the primary melody, while a group of woodwinds and horns sound a counter-theme of long sustained notes. These shimmering notes become a backdrop for several variations on the staccato main theme.

On April 21, 1915, Sibelius wrote in his diary, “Today at ten to eleven I saw 16 swans. One of my greatest experiences. Lord God, that beauty!” The opening of the finale captures this rustle of wings with tremolo strings accompanying an expansive melody, also in the strings. Sibelius juxtaposed this breathless music with a majestic “swan theme” sounded first by the horns. As the symphony concludes, the swan theme grows into an exultant shout of triumph.