

Magnus Lindberg



Magnus Lindberg photo © Philip Gatward

An introduction to Lindberg's music by Risto Nieminen

Magnus Lindberg wrote his first orchestral score at the age of 17, before taking any lessons in composition. He was curious and not afraid of going his own way. He constructed music with post-Webern serial procedures, as if he was trying to explore the limits of a certain way of making music. Theoretical, extremely complex structures were then defying, and often exceeding, the skills of the human performer.

Yet at the same time Lindberg used to take his music theory lessons early on Saturday mornings, playing the classical repertoire arranged for piano duet with his teacher. Knowing what had been done by the masters before him seemed to urge him to test the boundaries. As his composition teacher Paavo Heininen put it, "if a composer cannot say that he has done something that has not been done before, he cannot say he has done anything at all".

In 1985 came *Kraft*, a study in rhythm and sound. It was the young Lindberg's *Rite of Spring*. The basic structure and processes were calculated using an elaborate software program, but the focus was already different. Now it looked like Lindberg was challenging the possibilities of musical sound, using scrapyards objects trouvés as instruments along with traditional classical sounds. Music burst out with raw, unrefined noise and primitive energy, as in the performances of punk bands that he had heard in Berlin clubs. "Only the extreme is interesting" he declared.

"The orchestra is my favourite instrument" stated Lindberg, confirming something that is clear already by looking at his worklist. *Aura* from 1994 is another revealing piece of the jigsaw puzzle that is, one day, to reveal the full picture of Magnus Lindberg, the composer. Spiritual heir of Sibelius, Lindberg the iconoclast shows that he, too, is able and willing to embrace symphonic thinking.

Technically the music of Magnus Lindberg is based on a solid construction of harmony and rhythm. He often deploys a chaconne technique, where the musical narrative is built over a repeated harmonic sequence. Despite this the music does not sound theoretical, due to the juicy soundworld, teeming with life. There is a clear sense of dramaturgy as if the musical characters were protagonists in an abstract drama.

In his most recent works, especially in the concertos for clarinet (2002) and violin (2006), he has also introduced a clear melodic aspect which was not such a primary concern in his earlier output. After some 30 years of composition and 80 works one observes that Magnus Lindberg is still heading, with a characteristic curiosity, towards unknown territories, and yet remaining true to where he started.

Instead of constructing post-modern collages of other composers' music, his works are a reflection of a versatile personality which distils music history out of an abundance of sonic information. A true composer's statement in music.

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(Editor of Magnus Lindberg (*Les Cahiers de l'IRCAM*, 1993), Artistic Director of IRCAM (1991-96), Director of Helsinki Festival (1991-))