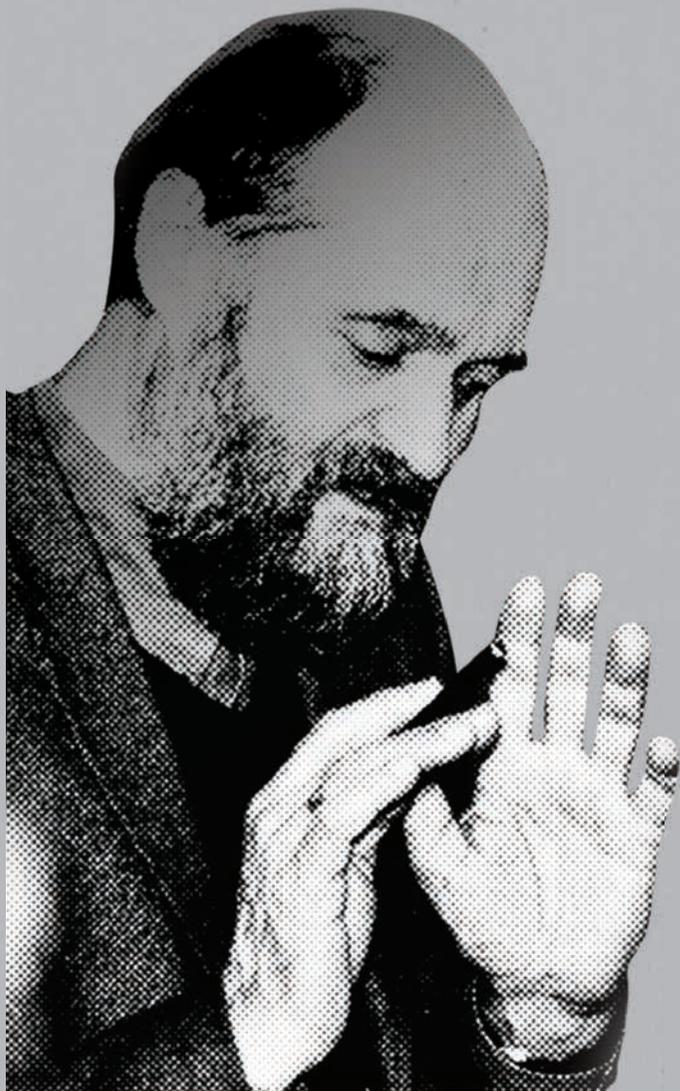


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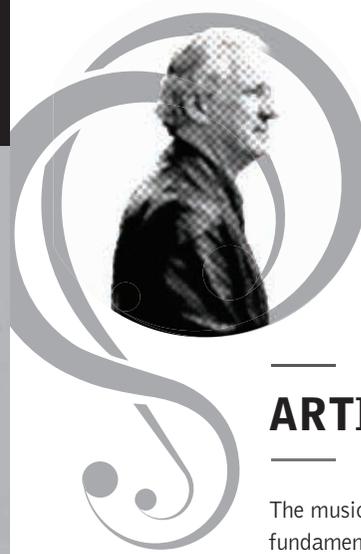
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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

The music of Arvo Pärt is achingly near to one's very soul, yet at the same time fundamentally illusive, and like faith itself, just beyond our comprehension. Often referred to as a "spiritualist," Pärt and his music are comparable to J.S. Bach in that they both make no stylistic distinction between the sacred and the secular. Each is contained in the other.

Pärt forces us to think about time, time on this earth, eternity, all modes of time. He has an uncanny knack for building tension excruciatingly slowly but inexorably to the point where the listener can stand it no more. He intuits just what that point is, and as if by magic, the music resolves and moves on.

His music has a universality that speaks to people of all faiths, or no faith, touching on all the spiritual yearnings of human experience. His recent works have taken on a lyricism not found in his earlier works. We've asked James Rolfe and Riho Maimets to write new works on this theme of spiritual yearning both sacred and secular, each taking an approach quite different from Pärt and yet surprisingly complementary.

The string orchestra is a particularly expressive instrument, itself capable of plumbing fully the depths of human emotion from agony to ecstasy. It is no accident that today's program incorporates string orchestra throughout.

Lawrence Cherney

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ABOUT SOUNDSTREAMS

Soundstreams An International Centre for New Directions in Music

Led by Artistic Director Lawrence Cherney and Executive Director Chris Lorway, Soundstreams is a Toronto-based music presenter that commissions, develops, and showcases the work of contemporary Canadian composers and their international counterparts.

These innovative collaborations are performed by the finest artists from Canada and around the world, and are presented in an annual concert series, our monthly Salon 21 series at The Gardiner Museum, in national and international tours, and through a variety of education and outreach activities. To mark our 30th anniversary season in 2012/13, Soundstreams launched SoundMakers, an innovative website and iPad app that invites music lovers to explore Soundstreams' commissioned works, create new works of their own, and share them with the online community.

Over the past three decades, Soundstreams commissions have added more than 150 works to the musical repertoire worldwide, reflecting a diverse variety of genres and cultural traditions. Soundstreams has also presented a number of festivals and conferences such as the Northern Encounters Festival, University Voices, Toronto Fanfare Project, and the Cool Drummings percussion festival and conference, as well award-winning operas including Thomson Highway and Melissa Hui's Cree opera *Pimootewin: The Journey* and R. Murray Schafer's site-specific opera *The Children's Crusade*.



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THE MUSIC OF ARVO PÄRT

Tõnu Kaljuste, conductor
Shannon Mercer, soprano
Geoffrey Sirett, baritone
Choir 21
Virtuoso String Orchestra

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Tuesday, October 1, 2013 at 8:00 pm
Koerner Hall, TELUS Centre for Performance and Learning, 273 Bloor St. West

PROGRAM

Arvo Pärt (b. 1935, Estonia)	<i>L'Abbé Agathon</i> (2004/2005) Canadian Premiere Shannon Mercer, Virtuoso String Orchestra
James Rolfe (b. 1961, Canada)	<i>Open Road*</i> (2013) World Premiere Shannon Mercer, Geoffrey Sirett, Choir 21, Virtuoso String Orchestra

INTERMISSION

Riho Esko Maimets (b. 1988, Canada)	<i>Ave Maria*</i> (2013) World Premiere Choir 21, Virtuoso String Orchestra
Arvo Pärt (b. 1935, Estonia)	<i>Adam's Lament</i> (2009) Canadian Premiere Choir 21, Virtuoso String Orchestra

*Commissioned by Soundstreams

ENSEMBLES

Choir 21

Soprano

Michele DeBoer
Teri Dunn
Gisele Kulak
Meghan Moore
Emily Wall

Alto

Diane English
Valeria Kondrashov
Alison Roy
Christina Stelmacovich
Loralie Vancourt

Tenor

Charles Davidson
Robert Kinar
Mitchell Pady
Bud Roach
Michael Sawarna

Bass

Bryan Martin
Paul Oros
John Pepper
Graham Robinson
David Yung

Virtuoso String Orchestra

Violin I

Benjamin Bowman
Etsuko Kimura
Bridget Hunt
Amanda Goodburn
Shane Kim

Violin II

Stephen Sitarski
Peter Seminovs
Angelique Toews
Sydney Chun

Viola

Teng Li
Doug Perry
Diane Leung
David Samuel*

Cello

David Hetherington
Roberta Janzen
Maurizio Baccante*
Mary-Katherine Finch*

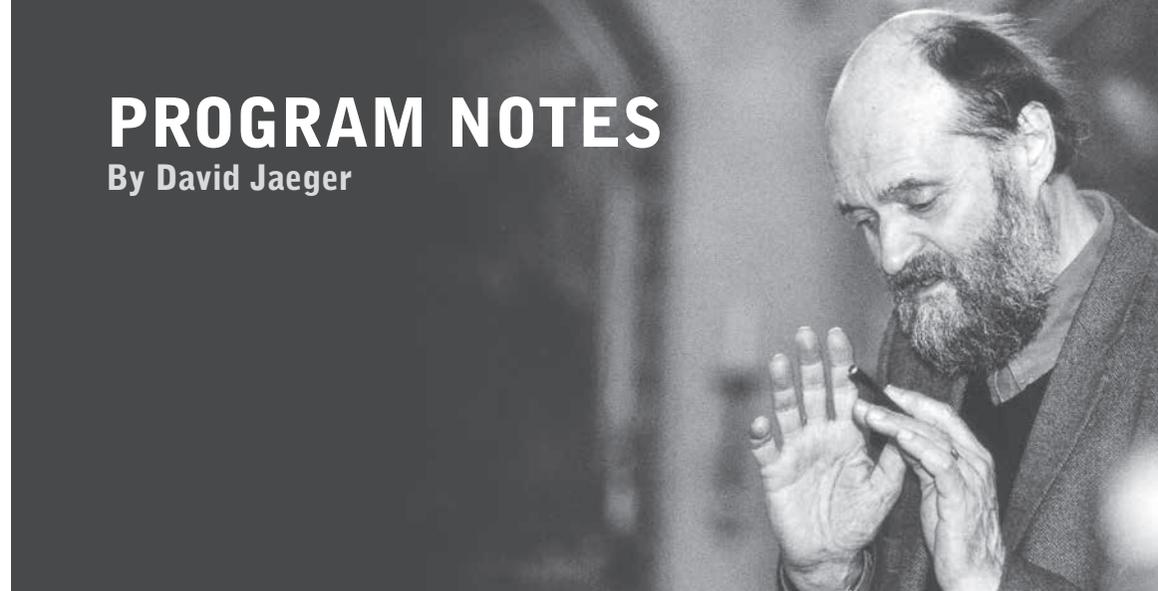
Bass

Edward Tait
Theodore Chan

* *L'Abbé Agathon* only

PROGRAM NOTES

By David Jaeger



Soundstreams first brought the music of Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) to audiences in 1993. That earlier concert of music by the world famous Estonian composer included the Canadian premiere of his *Berlin Mass*, in a rare setting for solo voices and organ. Since then, Soundstreams audiences have heard a great variety of Pärt's minimalistic music and tonight's presentation of two of his most recent compositions expands that legacy. In an interview in Toronto in the 1980's Pärt shared his personal definition of minimalism as the process by which his music is reduced to the

“SOUNDSTREAMS AUDIENCES HAVE HEARD A GREAT VARIETY OF PÄRT'S MINIMALISTIC MUSIC.”

number One. In his view, that One is the Divine Creator. In *Adam's Lament* (2009) he sees the Biblical Adam as a unifying symbol. Pärt said, “Our ancestor Adam foresaw the human tragedy that was to come and experienced it as his own guilty responsibility, the result of his sinful act.

He suffered all the cataclysms of humanity into the depths of depression, inconsolable in his agony.” *Adam's Lament* is based on a Russian text by the ascetic monk and poet, St. Silouan of Athos (1866–1938). Pärt's fascination with Silouan is such that his setting of this text is faithful to its every nuance. The music reflects a range of devotional writing that's by turns dramatic, passionate, humble and submissive.

In *L'Abbé Agathon* (2004), Pärt created a text inspired by a legend from 4th century Christian monasticism. The story tells of the meeting between the hermit Agathon, on his way to market, and a leper, who asks to be taken along. As they walk, Agathon is tested several times by the leper. Not until after he has passed these tests does the leper reveal himself as an angel sent by God, who blesses Agathon. Pärt's composition sets the French text syllabically, in a simple and direct style.

In the concert tonight, soprano Shannon Mercer is the storyteller. The slowly pulsing chords of the accompaniment depict, among other things the steps of the abbot's and the leper's journey. Finally, at the moment of the angel's revelation, Pärt gives the soprano an ecstatic melody.

James Rolfe's *Open Road* is a contrasting “road piece.” The life-affirming poet Walt Whitman is

no ascetic, and is a favourite source of texts for Rolfe. He says that, "I respond very keenly to Whitman's personal vision, a fusion of the spiritual and the physical, and his strongly rhythmic language, written with the cadences of the King James Bible in his ear." Soundstreams commissioned two of Rolfe's previous Whitman settings, *Come lovely and Soothing Death* for multiple choirs (2000) and *Six Songs for Soprano & String Quartet* (2001).

Riho Maimets is a celebrated young Canadian-Estonian composer who has created a deeply-felt choral composition honouring his mother. He says, "The fact that it will be performed in one of Toronto's best concert halls, by one of Canada's best choirs, and conducted by Estonia's most legendary choral conductor makes this one of the most ideal opportunities to pay tribute to my mother."

We also welcome Tõnu Kaljuste in his sixth appearance with Soundstreams. One of the

world's great choral conductors, he is a favourite of both singers and audiences. He's also known as a great champion of contemporary Estonian composers, and more recently the work of R. Murray Schafer.

**"THE LIFE-AFFIRMING
POET WALT WHITMAN
IS NO ASCETIC, AND IS A
FAVOURITE SOURCE OF
TEXTS FOR ROLFE."**

David Jaeger is a composer, producer and broadcaster based in Toronto. He was the creator & Executive Producer of the long-running CBC Radio Two contemporary music series, Two New Hours.

LEARN MORE ABOUT TONIGHT'S FEATURED COMPOSER

JAMES ROLFE ON SoundMakers



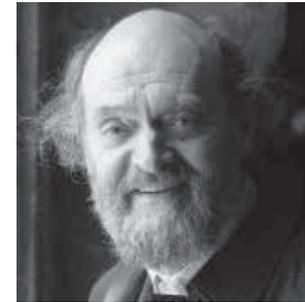
- Read his bio and program notes
- Stream his seven works commissioned by Soundstreams
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COMPOSER BIOGRAPHIES



Riho
Esko Maimets



Arvo
Pärt



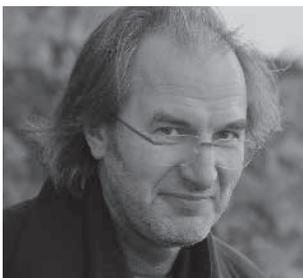
James
Rolfe

The music of Riho Esko Maimets (b. 1988) has been described as "enchantingly beautiful" and having a "unique emotional and communicative impact" (highSCORE Festival 2011, Italy). With a growing number of international commissions, Riho is enjoying increasing exposure both at home in Canada and abroad. In the last year alone, Riho's music has received over 50 performances in 7 countries. Upcoming highlights include works for the Estonian National Male Choir, the Estonian Radio Children's Choir and a work for a 600-voice massed children's choir, to be performed in the summer of 2014 in Tartu, Estonia. He is currently studying at the Curtis Institute of Music with David Ludwig and Richard Danielpour.

Born in Paide, Estonia, Pärt studied at the Tallinn Conservatoire, worked as a recording engineer at the national radio station, wrote music for the stage, and received numerous commissions for film scores. In 1980 he emigrated to Berlin, where he still lives. His first orchestral work *Nekroloog (Necrology)* (1960) was the first Estonian work to employ serial technique. He continued with serialism through to the mid-1960s, but ultimately moved on to experiment with collage techniques. At the very beginning of the 1970s, he wrote a few compositions in the spirit of early European polyphony, like his *Symphony No. 3* (1971). Thereafter he turned to self-imposed silence, but re-emerged in 1976 after a radical transformation. The technique he invented, and to which he has remained loyal, he calls "tintinnabuli" (from the Latin, little bells).

Toronto composer James Rolfe has been commissioned and performed in Canada, the USA, Europe, and New Zealand by soloists, ensembles, orchestras, choirs, theatres and opera companies. Mr. Rolfe's operas include *Beatrice Chancy* (1998, performed in Toronto, Dartmouth, and Edmonton) and *Inês* (2009, nominated for a Dora Award), both produced by The Queen of Puddings Music Theatre Company. Tapestry New Opera Works co-produced *Elijah's Kite* in 2005 with the Manhattan School of Music. The Canadian Opera Company premiered *Swoon* in 2006, and has since commissioned a new opera. Other current projects include works for Toronto's Tarragon Theatre (with writer André Alexis), Coleman Lemieux Dance (with choreographer James Kudelka), Canadian Art Song Project, Continuum, and TorQ Percussion Quartet, as well as Victoria's Aventa Ensemble.

GUEST ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES



Tõnu
Kaljuste,
conductor

Tõnu Kaljuste founded the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (1981), the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra (1993), the Nargen Opera project theatre (2004) and the Nargen Festival (2006). He has been a regular Grammy nominee and the winner of several prizes for recordings. Since 2010, Tõnu Kaljuste has worked as a professor at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and as the Head of its Conducting Department. He has worked with many orchestras and choirs all over the world. During the 1990's, he was the principal conductor of the Swedish Radio Choir and the Netherlands Chamber Choir. Since 2001 he has worked internationally as a freelance conductor. Kaljuste has dedicated a major part of his work to the music of Estonian composers (Heino Eller, Tõnu Kõrvits, Arvo Pärt, Veljo Tormis, and Erkki-Sven Tüür), whose compositions he has recorded for the ECM Record label.



Shannon
Mercer,
soprano

Her voice has been described as luminous and her acting feisty; Shannon Mercer is an artist of uncommon musical artistry who enthusiastically embraces repertoire ranging from early to contemporary music. She performs throughout North America and Europe while also sustaining an active recording presence, capturing some rarely performed works. Upcoming appearances feature concerts in Toronto, Philadelphia, Kansas, Edmonton, Seattle, Quebec City, Vancouver, and Calgary, among others. Shannon's discography includes two new recordings of Bach's St. John Passion, the JUNO-Award winning *Gloria: Vivaldi's Angels*, *Vivaldi – The Return of the Angels*, *Salsa Baroque*, *O Viva Rosa*, *Bach and the Liturgical Year*, *Wales ~ The Land of Song*, and others.



Geoffery
Sirett,
baritone

Baritone Geoffrey Sirett's current season includes *La Serva Padrona* and *The Brothers Grimm* for the COC School Tour, *Stankar* in *Stifellio* for VOICEBOX:Opera in Concert and he will be also be heard with the Talisker Players of Toronto, Grand Philharmonic Choir and Ottawa Choral Society. Past seasons have included *Zoroastro* in Orlando for VOICEBOX:Opera in Concert, *Messiah* with the Amadeus Choir and *From the House of Mirth* with Coleman-Lemieux Compagnie. Winner of the Jim and Charlotte Norcop Song Prize, the Ottawa native holds degrees from U of T and UWO; further credits include the Aspen Opera Theater, the Buffalo, Kingston and Chautauqua symphonies and a CD of English Art Songs.

TEXTS

L'Abbé Agathon

English text from the book *The Desert Christian* by Benedicta Ward (edited by Monk Panteleimon of Hermitage of the Holy Cross, Wayne, WV)

L'abbé Agathon, se rendant un jour dans la ville pour vendre de menus objets, trouva le long de la route un lépreux qui lui demanda: «Où vas-tu?» L'abbé Agathon lui dit: «A la ville vendre des objets.» Le lépreux lui dit: «Par charité, porte-moi là-bas.» L'ayant pris, le vieillard le porta à la ville. L'autre lui dit alors: «Dépose-moi à l'endroit où tu vends tes objets.» Et l'abbé Agathon fit ainsi. Quand il eut vendu un objet, le lépreux lui demanda: «Combien l'as-tu vendu?» «Tant.» «Achète-moi un gâteau.» Il l'acheta. Quand il eut vendu un autre objet, l'autre lui dit: «Et celui-ci, combien l'as-tu vendu?» «Tant.» «Achète-moi telle chose.» Le vieillard l'acheta encore. Quand il eut vendu tous ses objets et qu'il voulut partir, le lépreux lui dit: «Tu t'en vas?» «Oui.» «Je t'en prie, par charité, reporte-moi à l'endroit où tu m'as trouvé.» L'abbé Agathon prit le lépreux et le reporta à cet endroit. Celui-ci lui dit alors: «Béni es-tu, Agathon, par le Seigneur du ciel et de la terre.» Agathon leva les yeux mais il ne vit plus personne, car le lépreux était un ange du Seigneur venu le mettre à l'épreuve.

Going to town one day to sell some small articles, Abba Agathon met a cripple on the roadside, paralysed in his legs, who asked him where he was going. Abba Agathon replied, "To town to sell some things." The other said, "Do me the favor of carrying me there." So he carried him to the town. The cripple said, "Put me down where you sell your wares." He did so. When he had sold an article, the cripple asked, "What did you sell it for?" and he told him the price. The other said, "Buy me a cake," and he bought it. When Abba Agathon had sold a second article, the sick man asked, "How much did you sell it for?" And he told him the price of it. Then the other said, "Buy me this," and he bought it. When Agathon, having sold all his wares, wanted to go, he said to him, "Are you going back?" and he replied, "Yes." Then said he, "Do me the favour of carrying me back to the place where you found me." Once more picking him up, he carried him back to that place. Then the cripple said, "Agathon, you are filled with divine blessings, in heaven and on earth." Raising his eyes, Agathon saw no man; it was an angel of the Lord, come to try him.

Song of the Open Road

By Walt Whitman edited by James Rolfe

AFOOT and light-hearted, I take to the open road,
Healthy, free, the world before me,
The long brown path before me, leading wherever I choose.

Henceforth I ask not good-fortune--I myself am good fortune;
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Strong and content, I travel the open road.

You air that serves me with breath to speak!
You light that wraps me and all things in delicate equable showers!
You paths worn in the irregular hollows by the roadsides!
You flagg'd walks of the cities! you strong curbs at the edges!

You ferries! you planks and posts of wharves! you timber-lined sides! you distant ships!
You rows of houses! you window-pierc'd façades! you roofs!
You porches and entrances! you copings and iron guards!
You windows whose transparent shells might expose so much!

The earth expanding right hand and left hand,
The picture alive, every part in its best light,
I think whatever I shall meet on the road I shall like, and whoever beholds me shall like me;
I think whoever I see must be happy.

From this hour, freedom!
From this hour I ordain myself loos'd of limits and imaginary lines,
Going where I list, my own master, total and absolute,
Pausing, searching, receiving, contemplating, divesting myself of the holds that would hold me.

I inhale great draughts of space;
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.
I am larger, better than I thought;
I did not know I held so much goodness.
All seems beautiful to me;
I can repeat over to men and women, You have done such good to me, I would do the same to you.

Whoever denies me, it shall not trouble me;
Whoever accepts me, he or she shall be blessed, and shall bless me.
Now if a thousand perfect men were to appear, it would not amaze me;
Now if a thousand beautiful forms of women appear'd, it would not astonish me.

Allons! after the GREAT COMPANIONS! and to belong to them!
Committers of crimes, committers of many beautiful virtues,
Enjoyers of calms of seas, and storms of seas,
Sailors of many a ship, walkers of many a mile of land,
Trusters of men and women, observers of cities, solitary toilers,
Pausers and contemplators of tufts, blossoms, shells of the shore,
Dancers at wedding-dances, kissers of brides, tender helpers of children, bearers of children,
Journeyers with their bearded and well-grain'd manhood,
Journeyers with their womanhood, ample, unsurpass'd, content,
Old age, flowing free with the delicious near-by freedom of death.

Allons! the road is before us!
Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book on the shelf unopen'd!
Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain unearn'd!
Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the teacher!
Let the preacher preach in his pulpit! let the lawyer plead in the court, and the judge
expound the law.
Mon enfant! I give you my hand!
I give you my love, more precious than money,
I give you myself, before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?

Ave Maria

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.
Benedicta tu in mulieribus,
et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Iesus.
Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,
ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among women,
and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners,
now and in the hour of our death. Amen.

Adam's Lament

Saint Silouan, translated by Rosemary Edmonds

Adam, father of all mankind, in paradise knew the sweetness of the love of God; and so when for his sin he was driven forth from the garden of Eden, and was widowed of the love of God, he suffered grievously and lamented with a mighty moan. And the whole desert rang with his lamentations. His soul was racked as he thought: «I have grieved my beloved Lord.»

He sorrowed less after paradise and the beauty thereof—he sorrowed that he was bereft of the love of God, which insatiably, at every instant, draws the soul to Him.

In the same way the soul which has known God through the Holy Spirit but has afterwards lost grace experiences the torment that Adam suffered. There is an aching and a deep regret in the soul that has grieved the beloved Lord.

Adam pined on earth, and wept bitterly, and the earth was not pleasing to him.
He was heartsick for God, and this was his cry:

«My soul wearies for the Lord, and I seek Him in tears. How should I not seek Him? When I was with him my soul was glad and at rest, and the enemy could not come nigh me. But now the spirit of evil has gained power over me, harassing and oppressing my soul, so that I weary for the Lord even unto death, and my spirit strains to God, and there is nought on earth can make me glad. Nor can my soul take comfort in any thing, but longs once more to see the Lord, that her hunger may be appeased. I cannot forget Him for a single moment, and my soul languishes after Him, and from the multitude of my afflictions I lift up my voice and cry: "Have mercy upon me, O God. Have mercy on Thy fallen creature."»

Thus did Adam lament, and tears streamed down his face on to his beard, on to the ground beneath his feet, and the whole desert heard the sound of his moaning. The beasts and the birds were hushed in grief; while Adam wept because peace and love were lost to all men on account of his sin.

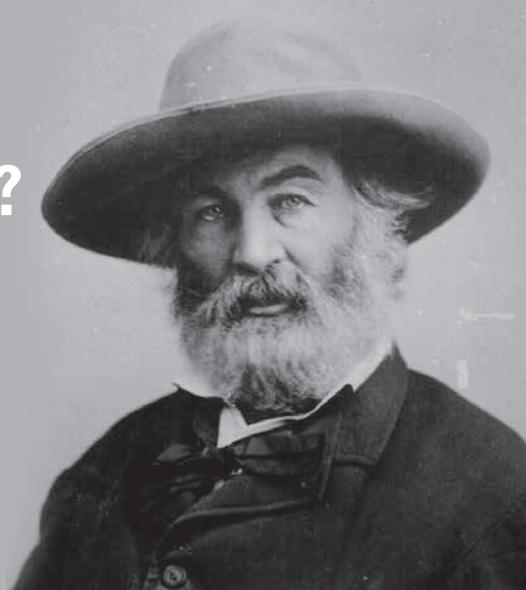
Adam knew great grief when he was banished from paradise, but when he saw his son Abel slain by Cain his brother, Adam's grief was even heavier. His soul was heavy, and he lamented and thought: «Peoples and nations will descend from me, and multiply, and suffering will be their lot, and they will live in enmity and seek to slay one another.»

And his sorrow stretched wide as the sea, and only the soul that has come to know the Lord and the magnitude of His love for us can understand.

I, too, have lost grace and call with Adam: «Be merciful unto me, O Lord! Bestow on me the spirit of humility and love.»

WHAT'S WITH WALT WHITMAN?

By James Rolfe



I guess I like working with Walt Whitman. My new work *Open Road* is our fifth collaboration. Soundstreams has commissioned *Six Songs* (2001) and *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd* (2007). And before that came *Four Songs* (1989) and *Come Lovely and Soothing Death* (2000).

What is it about Whitman that makes beautiful music? First, his verse is hot stuff. You'll not find him at arm's length, coolly observing. No, he's up to his elbows, embroiled in words, walking arm in arm with the characters that throng his poems. And how dearly he loves his people, be they ordinary folk, or heroes like Lincoln in *When Lilacs*, or a heroic everyman, like Whitman's doppelgänger who animates *Open Road*.

His warmth is a gift to a composer working in a hot medium like vocal music. Some of Whitman's best work dates from a time when he regularly attended opera productions in New York. He wrote in his verse and his diary of how singing moved him deeply, his eloquent words bearing witness to the transcendent power of the singing voice.

But his eloquence, bulging with long lines and purple passages, can be challenging to set and to sing. The quick fix is cutting swaths of verse, which I've done; but Whitman's acute rhythmic instincts also help a great deal. He delivers long and gorgeous lines with remarkable lightness,

always moving forwards with syncopations and unexpected cadences, echoing the best parts of the King James Bible.

And like the Bible, Whitman paints a big picture, an uncompromising and very personal vision. He fuses the spiritual with the physical, celebrating the best and most loving parts of ourselves. He remained absolutely fearless about transgressing contemporary morals in his frankly sexual passages, no matter how often they landed him in hot water. Whitman trusted unconditionally and even recklessly that our better natures would prevail. Yet his trust was sorely tested. He lived much of his life in chronic pain and ill-health, ending his days as a paralyzed invalid.

Yet he transcends his frailty by reinventing himself as the protagonist of *Open Road*, a 19th-century Adam before his fall from grace: life-embracing, open-hearted, embarking on an epic journey, rejoicing in the earthly paradise and the ideal people he finds around him. The essential relationships in the poem—those between man and woman, between the individual and the collective, and between our dual masculine and feminine natures—are enacted by the male and female soloists, as well as the soloists and the ensemble. These forces, with their rich compositional possibilities, connect back to the oratorio tradition, one beloved in English Canada since Whitman's days.



COMPOSER Q&A RIHO ESKO MAIMETS

Lawrence has been following the work of Riho since attending a performance of his Karen Kieser Prize-winning composition, *squall*, in 2011. He was immediately struck by the young composer and knew that he wanted to support and encourage his talent. *Ave Maria* is Riho's first commission from Soundstreams. We chatted with Riho, who is beginning a new year at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia, via email about his career path, inspirations and the advice he received from Arvo Pärt himself.

What led you to become a composer?

I grew up in a musical household and many of my earliest memories involve music. At the age of five, I started piano lessons and then violin when I was six. Both of these lasted until grade 11 or so. In hindsight it is clear that I was not meant to be a performer. I had a strong dislike for performing as a soloist and I was not very interested in interpreting the music. I was always more fascinated with the history of the piece I was playing, the composer's life, his oeuvre, style, etc. Thinking back, it seems that piano and violin lessons were the first steps on a path that was meant to lead to composing.

I began composing in high school. My earliest compositions were short solo piano works, followed by some chamber music, including a piano trio which was performed by the Gryphon Trio in 2006. In April 2006 Helena Tolve, a

composer from Estonia, came to Toronto for a concert of Baltic music and stayed at our house. I showed her some of my compositions and she then invited me to study with her in Estonia. At the time I had decided that I would study economics and pursue music as a hobby. However, I quickly accepted her invitation, applied and was accepted to the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

What inspires your work?

It was in the midst of my studies in Estonia that I realized that the vast majority of my favourite music is sacred. I still feel that sacred music sheds light on something extremely beautiful and eternal. It's very difficult to put into words. Once I came to this realization I knew that I would need to spend a great deal of time exploring this.

You have now lived and studied in Canada, Estonia and the U.S. How has each place shaped your process and work?

I spent four years studying composition in Estonia (Bachelor's degree – Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre [EAMT]), two years in Canada (Master's degree – University of Toronto) and am currently studying in Philadelphia at the Curtis Institute of Music. Living in Estonia placed me in the midst of my heritage. It brought an abstract past (conveyed to me through the memories of my grandparents)

into the living present. While I did take school seriously, I also realized that the most important aspect of my education would take place outside of school. A few months after school started, my friends and I founded a choir called Noored Eesti Häälled (NEH), which means “Young Estonian Voices.” We focused mainly on performing music by the choir’s members. We held concerts all over Estonia and it was through NEH that I learned to write choral music. Later on, we expanded our repertoire to include early music and traditional Estonian music.

By beginning my post-secondary education in Estonia, I was inadvertently becoming a member of the young generation of Estonian musicians. My bachelor’s degree included several subjects on Estonian music, including the theory and analysis of Estonian folk music (runo song), the performance of Estonian folk music (taught by Veljo Tormis) and the history of Estonian music. The latter, taught by one of my most memorable pedagogues (a woman named Tiia Järg), was much more than just a dry, academic approach to music history. Tiia Järg took us on excursions to cemeteries, to the grave sites of past generations of Estonian musicians. She described in great detail the trials and tribulations of our musical nation under the oppression of occupying regimes, from Imperial Russia to the especially brutal Nazi and Soviet occupations. By living and studying in Estonia I was unintentionally repairing the many links that were severed when my grandparents and great-grandparents were forced to flee their beloved homeland. Thinking back, this was deeply therapeutic and has formed my musical psyche perhaps more than anything else.

My academic education at EAMT also included several subjects on early music. The Estonian music scene strikes me as having quite a large focus on early music. There are frequent and well-attended concerts of early music in the great churches of Old Tallinn throughout the year, performed by local and international collectives. I was able to attend several concerts of the music of Tallis, Orlando di Lasso, Perotin, Josquin, Palestrina, etc. These concerts were so

cathartic, that, for me, they represent the very pinnacle of musical experience.

My decision to return to Toronto to do a Master’s degree in composition was perhaps one of the best decisions in my life. This is, in no small part, thanks to Christos Hatzis, whose eclectic musical and personal background, in combination with a warm and charismatic personality helped me undergo an aesthetic liberation. It was while studying in Toronto that I whole-heartedly embraced simplicity, repetition, minimalism and tonality. It was also during my time in Toronto that I began to receive many exciting opportunities that gave me the confidence to pursue composition. These include the Ensemble Contemporain de Montréal’s bi-annual cross-Canada tour featuring four young composers, working with exciting groups such as the TorQ Percussion Quartet, receiving awards and prizes including the Karen Kieser Prize in Canadian Music and the Tecumseh Sherman Rogers Graduating Award. In Toronto I began to receive regular commissions and started to feel more and more like a professional composer. These years also gave me the confidence to strive to new heights and believe that it is indeed possible to pursue the life of a composer. When I told Christos that it was my intention to continue my studies in the U.S. he immediately told me to apply to the Curtis Institute.

The Curtis Institute of Music has been described as one of the best places in the world to study music. It is a tiny school with an acceptance rate of 3.2%, making it America’s most exclusive post-secondary institution. Situated in Philadelphia, it is an extremely intense, exciting, and at times an overwhelming place. One former student described studying at Curtis as being analogous to swimming in a pool of gold. While Curtis is an unbelievably demanding school, it is also an incredibly nurturing and inspiring environment and its motto is “learn by doing.” All Curtis students are treated as young professionals and are provided with countless opportunities to realize their own potential in their field. Curtis provides us with all the tools necessary to achieve our dreams, and I have, on more than

one occasion, heard it being described as one of, if not the, best music schools in the world.

My experience of American life and culture is very much linked to my experience at Curtis. Spending every day with such talented young people is inspiring and humbling. The composition department at Curtis provides us with countless opportunities to write music that gets performed, often more than just once. One of the main features of the Curtis composition department is the opportunity to write an orchestral piece every year, which gets performed. This is in addition to a multitude of opportunities to compose chamber, vocal and solo works.

You met Arvo Pärt while you were studying in Tallinn. What is the best advice he gave you?

I met Arvo Pärt in the summer of 2011. We spent several hours together in the countryside, where he lives, and talked about life and music. This was one of the most profound experiences in my life. Over the past two years I have found

myself often reflecting back on this meeting with Arvo Pärt and on things that he told me.

He told me to be grateful for criticism and that compliments can be dangerous. He also told me that sometimes it is possible to love people only from afar.

What are some the advantages or challenges in writing for a choir?

My experience with choral music has taught me that more often than not, the simplest solution is the best. Finding out what is the simplest solution is often very difficult.

LIGHTNING ROUND

Favourite city: Tallinn

Worst airport: Tie between Heathrow and JFK

Guilty pleasure song: Thriller by Michael Jackson

Best concert hall: St. Nicholas’ Church in Tallinn

Favourite restaurant: Aed, in Tallinn

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