

Fermata

The Turku symphony was delighted but not surprised that they had been chosen for the world premiere. After all they were the world's leading interpreters of 20th century orchestral work by little known Baltic composers. So it was natural that Professor Karjalainen should contact them first when he discovered a full set of parts for Vilja Maki's *Symphonia Serena* (*Tyyneys*), known only from a 1930s story of Sibelius breaking into tears on reading the score and remarking that it made him despair even more of his projected eighth symphony. In spite of Sibelius' reaction, the work had never been performed, probably because of hostility to a Finnish-Estonian communist female composer in an era of nationalism. After her early death, run over by a tram in Petersburg -- not that she would ever use that name for Leningrad -- in 1937, racing drunkenly to the Finland station in a maudlin fit of homesickness, she was forgotten as a composer, known only from a few anecdotes.

The parts arrived, hastily transcribed from the manuscript found at the bottom of a trunk in an abandoned granary, with guesses in brackets at the few places where mice had expressed opinions about an oboe part or a tempo marking. Each musician took their part home for a week. They knew the style well enough that when they met later the result would be coherent and artistically appropriate, needing only issues of balance and emphasis to be settled together.

They began. After three bars maestro Anderssons put down his baton. Had they all started at the same place? He took each player through their part. Individually they made sense though together they made none. The viola part was particularly unusual and striking. Anderssons asked the violas to play mezzo-forte and everyone else pianissimo, in fact with mutes on the

other strings and the brass. The effect was wonderful: for eight bars, and then it was horrible. The next phrase was tamed by playing every two bars in an alternating 5 and 3 beat pattern, though they were written in 4/4. After that a series of tricks, involving un-notated glissandos, the exchange of B-flat and A clarinets, and the insertion of many accidentals, made it work, sometimes more than just work.

The slow movement remained a problem. The lower parts just did not fit with the upper ones. Anderssons removed the cellos, double basses, and bassoons, and rehearsed everyone else without them. After a few bars he began to sob uncontrollably. The orchestra was startled: he was normally so stony, and they had not thought it was so awful as to provoke such despair. Anderssons explained. He had the whole score before him and could feel those lower voices in his head. As long as they were not actually played, they added an unspeakably moving colour to the ensemble.

The players of the silent lower voices themselves suggested the solution. In that movement they would put down their instruments and come to the front of the stage, scores in hand. There they would play the notes in their imagination, fingering imaginary instruments and making the faces that would accompany their efforts to get tempo, intonation, and expression right. Sometimes they would hum or grunt a note, but nothing that approached singing. After all, the register was much too low. Meanwhile, the rest of the orchestra played in the regular way on their regular instruments, as if ignoring their colleagues in front of them.

There was another puzzle, right at the end. The slow movement was, unusually, placed last. And after its last measure the score ended with a capital letter F. In red, underlined and circled. Fortissimo, obviously, but it was not beneath any note. The contra-bassoonist suggested that it was attached to the final fermata, the period of silence before the audience

knows that the work is not just pausing but has really ended. They tried thinking of it as a loud and weighty silence. The bass section at the front of the stage was essential to this. It worked.

The night of the performance. They were not worried. They knew it was good. From the beginning the audience was silent, partly out of reverence for the neglected Vilja Maki, whose story was detailed in the program notes, and partly from fascination with the unusual colours and textures Anderssons was extracting from the orchestra. No coughs, no rustlings, no whispers. The slow movement at the end was particularly powerful. People smiled slyly at one another as they blinked away tears. The final silence was overwhelming, and then at first not applause but a loud sigh, an exhalation, a gathering of all the breath the audience had been holding for minutes. The orchestra went home satisfied; the audience went home drained and somehow changed; the critics went home wondering if they could produce copy that could possibly do it justice.

The next morning Anderssons got an email from Karjalainen, telegraphic as his communications always were. "Hold performance. Wait. Real score on way." In the afternoon a big package arrived from Helsinki. More orchestral parts, and a note. He was so sorry for the confusion. By mistake he had sent the work of a hopeless composition student, that happened to be on his desk at the same time. But he was sure that they had been in no doubt, not least because of the emphatic grade of **Fail** that was the only comment he thought it necessary to write on the score.