

Music review: What an outstanding Finnish premiere!

The concert may in some ways have been presented as the Philharmonic Orchestra's introduction to the Sibelius year – with the first symphony on the programme – but it was an entirely different piece which appeared as the concert's main number on Wednesday.

The Swedish Rolf Martinsson's (born 1956) brand-new song suite *Ich denke Dein...* offered unusually expressive and full music, actually fruity and bombastic. Even though many composers have previously attempted to follow in Richard Strauss's very large footsteps, post-Straussian expression has seldom been this strong.

During the first song, *Liebes-Lied*, I wondered how far it would carry and when complete saturation would be reached. What's interesting about Martinsson is how, already in the transition to the second song, he demonstrated a contrasting expression. *Blaue Hortensie* began with a short spoken part and then suddenly psychologically intricate works, such as Berg's and Schönberg's operas are close at hand; if not as objects of direct comparison, then possibly as aesthetic examples. The song ended with a fabulous final chord of incredibly wide range, full without being stifling.

Nonetheless, it was musical sensations à la Broadway which the Malmö professor holds dearest to his heart and pranksters, such as Gershwin and Bernstein who were lying in wait. At least in Finland, one can only be amazed at how Martinsson had both the guts and the skill to write like this. Two of the songs were composed to texts by Goethe and two to texts by Rilke (when did these two last appear on the musical stage?). It is the fourth and next to last song, *Mondnacht* to von Eichendorff's text, which clearly appealed most to me. Martinsson accurately captured the exciting relationship between soprano soloist and orchestra, and the duo with solo cellist Tomas Nuñez-Garcés was most certainly one of the highlights.

Martinsson's songs stand and fall with the soloist, who in this case has a hauntingly beautiful voice. The Swedish soprano Lisa Larsson has become somewhat of a stalwart friend in Martinsson's court and will be performing many of the composer's works this season. She sang melodically and focused, her language was beautiful and her voice carried above the orchestra throughout the entire performance. These songs were performed for the very first time in Zurich just a few weeks ago and are already booked for performances in the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, Gothenburg, Milan and London, just to name a few. The song suite is an unusually successful commission of the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and the Philharmonia Orchestra.