Jüri Reinvere

The Empire of May

2010

Composing “The Empire of May”, Jüri Reinvere was inspired – like many a Romantic back in their day (Schumann, Keats) – by the first month of summer that in Europe’s south, for the most part, is tender and ripe.

“The Empire of May” is also one of those compositions wherein space, the nature of specific spaces and the polyphony of spaces play an exceptional role. Every instrument was positioned in a separate room: kantele and the soloists are placed right at the listener’s ear, the cello is in the adjacent room, and the flute much farther away.

The main themes of “The Empire of May” are contrasting and, seemingly, incompatible: the state, deceit, guilt, Russia, and a May landscape on the island of Saaremaa, complete with a nightingale. For many years in the spring, Reinvere was wont to spend a few weeks in May on Saaremaa – alone, amidst the awakening nature. The poem is a discussion about the state and its members as well as a portrayal of the eternal return of spring.

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“The Empire of May” (2010) all belong in the cycle of compositions that set to music the composer’s own verses which, in an indirect way, also refer to a certain English Romantic writer - “Frost at Midnight” to Coleridge, “Norilsk, the Daffodils” to Wordsworth. And in the case of „The Empire of May”, that writer is John Keats.

Keats’s Early-Romantic odes are renowned for the author’s perfect mastery of the English language and the pronounced grandness of images. It is in a similar way that Reinvere handles English in his own texts, creating a polyphony of images entwined with musical inter-textuality.

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Reinvere is both a composer and, for the past ten years, a poet. He often incorporates texts into his compositions. He has composed music in several styles simultaneously, making use of Experimental Modernism and High Modernism as well as Neue Schönheit and Neo-Expressionism. Each of these styles exists independently and manifests its own development within Reinvere’s oeuvre.

Jüri Reinvere (+1971) graduated with Master’s degree from Helsinki’s Sibelius Academy in 2004. Prior to that, he studied at the Tallinn Music High School, the Chopin Academy in Warsaw and Helsinki University. He has lived in six European countries; he speaks freely the languages of each of them and feels at home in their cultures.

Since 2005, Reinvere resides in Berlin, Germany. He considers himself an Estonian composer who belongs to the Finnish school and relies on the old Mid-European tradition.

Reinvere’s grandest opus thus far, the opera “Puhastus” (“Purge”), was premiered in April 2012 at the Finnish National Opera in Helsinki. Based on Sofi Oksanen’s highly popular novel of the same name, Reinvere’s opera received a very warm welcome.

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THE EMPIRE OF MAY

The exultancy of quiet, quiet rain
lit the lights upright,
and with a sudden qualm – the fair-haired trees
foaming down the precipice of May
heaved up, stirring still:
only a sheer, barely discernible drop
sliding in their shroud of shimmer
summoned the will to live.

Later, the loathing of lutes:
starry-eyed birds with the night in their mind
resound the murk, eat the light and in their deceit
their bewailing exists not, yet
the misery is sweet:
Guilt is the Death.
The white downfall - a silt of torture which treasures the truth,
- its freight, like the nightgown of Catherine the Great
capricious and elephantine -
- lightweight and heavyweight
and in its dispersion into the birth of the sun
reverbs the black, beats the dark and in its retreat
the eternal will never be outright:
a glittering triad of forays into the repose,
a funeral flock of morays, abating the fearless age
“look deeper”, she says, “look deeper into me...!”
- The state is a dream
made of hopes, blood and desire.
When she sways in her bed - side to side,
this whirlpool of spring, devouring each gaseous rag,
abyss, magma of her fire; the mirror and the attire,
the bitterness of chimes, redness of wines and ahead of midnight -

attest to the empire – of May:
the commonwealth of perils, wet, wet from wiles
and the wilted black, wrapping every moment into infinity
the first time

a resented, conralled acquiescence
elegantly tickling the snow’s tone
with a cry by a contrite nightingale.

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