

Esa-Pekka Salonen on This Program

When something really powerful is created based on my music, it teaches me something new about my own work and my own goals. A creator can control lots of things, but you cannot manage what happens when the work is being performed; the sound wave hits the interface that is the ears of the listener. Perhaps the most important aspect of all creation is the way it has been received, and its mechanism of how the internal narrative is being received, and that is something I know little or nothing about. Unfortunately, I can't go and build electrodes into the brain of everyone hearing my music in a concert — though the thought is tempting — but I can experience works based on my compositions.

Foreign Bodies has been performed in New York only once, by the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 2003, soon after it was written. I thought it would be nice to play with the New York Philharmonic, an orchestra that performs my music incredibly well, that has a natural ability to cope with it. *Foreign Bodies* has been used in a number of choreographies over the years, including in Stuttgart, by Wayne McGregor in fact, and in Los Angeles, by Jacques Heim. I was very pleased when Tal Rosner said he would be interested in creating a semi-live video to the piece. For a composer, it is always great when one's music is being performed, but there is extra excitement to have it reframed, repositioned, to have it applied to another discipline — especially when it interacts with creations by people who really understand it. When I see what Tal has made, or how Wayne understands the dynamic of my piece, I learn a lot about what it communicates, and sometimes I discover that it has been communicating something I honestly didn't know was there. That is almost the best gift a creator can receive: a whole new narrative, interpretation, world based on something that you made, thanks to somebody else's talent, skill, intellect, intuition that builds this other structure on top of it. That's absolutely fascinating and also, in the best-case scenario, incredibly exciting.



I thought it would be fun to introduce a next-generation Nordic composer in this Philharmonic concert as well. Daniel Bjarnason's Violin Concerto is a recent piece by one of the leading Northern European composers. Almost all new Icelandic music has some kind of strong connection to nature, and therefore also to the body. Daniel makes the soloist (and the orchestra) whistle and asks the violinist to perform things that are way outside the normal concern of an instrumentalist. I led the European premiere in London and subsequently toured it with Pekka Kuusisto, and it was a great success everywhere. I am happy to report that Pekka is not afraid of anything, and that he is one of the greatest whistlers I have ever heard in my life, apart from his gifts on violin. This is a piece that has a lot of substance, and it is very entertaining, in the best sense of the word, so I thought it would be perfect for this concert.

The third act is a ballet with two of my pieces that had not originally been composed for dance. *Nyx* has been performed in New York several times by different orchestras, most recently by the New York Philharmonic three years ago, but it's been repurposed for a very exciting work by Wayne McGregor. When Wayne made choreography for *Foreign Bodies* in Stuttgart, I thought that this person really understands my musical language and is able to create something that's in a constant dialogue with what I do but doesn't imitate it. The matching of movements to music is not literal, where every gesture has an equivalent musical gesture. Wayne creates a dialogue, sometimes it's a parallel universe, but it never loses its connection to the musical material. But while it might position itself in different ways in the course of the piece, the connection is always there, palpable and very strong. I was very happy to learn that this work was possible to do in New York, as the Boston Ballet has added it to their repertoire — this is a lucky coincidence.



From top: Video artist Tal Rosner, choreographer Wayne McGregor's *Obsidian Tear* at Boston Ballet, violinist Pekka Kuusisto

Notes on the Program

By James M. Keller, Program Annotator, The Leni and Peter May Chair

Foreign Bodies

Esa-Pekka Salonen

Live video installation by Tal Rosner

Esa-Pekka Salonen is now completing a three-year appointment as The Marie-Josée Kravis Composer-in-Residence at the New York Philharmonic, which began with the 2015–16 season. Widely acknowledged for his work on the podium, he has served as principal conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra (1984–1995) and music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic (1992–2009), where he is now conductor laureate.

Salonen’s activity as a composer never came to a standstill as his conducting career advanced — although for several years in the 1990s it slowed down — and he managed to preserve a distinctive compositional voice. He cited the need to clear his schedule for composing as central to his decision to step down from directing the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 2009.

He has also been principal conductor and artistic advisor of the Philharmonia Orchestra in London since 2006, held the “creative chair” at the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra in the 2014–15 season, is currently artist-in-association at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet, and is co-founder and artistic director of the Baltic Sea Festival, which is now in its 15th year.

Salonen studied horn, conducting, and composition at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki during the 1970s — his composition teacher was the eminent Einojuhani Rautavaara — and pursued advanced composition study in Italy with Niccolò Castiglioni and Franco Donatoni. If early in his career he was “a conducting composer,” that changed in 1983 when his last-minute substitution to conduct Mahler’s Third Symphony with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London catapulted him into the major league

at the podium and transformed him into “a composing conductor.”

Retrospectives of Salonen’s work have been presented at Helsinki’s Musica Nova (2003), at the Stockholm International Composer Festival (2004), and in Los Angeles and Cologne (2005). In 2006 he was named Musician of the Year by *Musical America*, and in 2010 he was elected a foreign honorary fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His Violin Concerto earned him the 2012 Grawemeyer Award for Music Composition, with that organization citing it as “such an exciting piece that from the first measure it grips you and doesn’t let you go.” His work with the Philharmonia Orchestra has included the groundbreaking *Re-Rite* and *Universe of Sound* installations as well as development of the interactive iPad application *The Orchestra*, each of which has pro-

IN SHORT

Born: June 30, 1958, in Helsinki, Finland

Resides: in London, England

Work composed: 2001, on commission from the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra; revised, 2002

World premiere: August 12, 2001, at the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival in Kiel, Germany, by the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Jukka-Pekka Saraste (the work’s dedicatee), conductor

New York Philharmonic premiere: this performance, which marks the World Premiere of video aspects by Tal Rosner (born June 9, 1978, in Jerusalem, Israel)

Estimated duration: ca. 20 minutes

vided novel perspectives on selected masterworks by enabling users to experience the sensations of stepping inside the orchestra.

Salonen has written that *Foreign Bodies* reflects the synthesis of his thinking and creative process during a yearlong sabbatical from conducting in 2000, although the score was revised in 2002. He wrote:

Foreign Bodies is scored for a very large orchestra For fairly obvious reasons, my thinking tends to be orchestral even when writing music for another medium, which makes it very natural to expand ideas in an orchestral context. I'm endlessly fascinated by the complexities of texture, balance, timbre, and instrumental gesture;

In the Composer's Words

Esa-Pekka Salonen provides this listening guide to *Foreign Bodies*, which consists of three movements, performed without breaks:

The first movement ["Body Language"] is essentially a study of mechanical motion. The music is often machine-like in its relentless movement. These machines are not watchmaker's precision instruments but huge and extremely massive things that consume enormous amounts of energy. In the process of "Body Language" the machines sometimes become other machines through gradual transformation. Sometimes the motion changes suddenly and drastically, but mostly the new machines start growing inside the old one unnoticeably, not unlike a virus or another foreign body within a host organism. The first movement ends peacefully, however: a hymn-like theme is heard under gently pulsating strings.

The second movement, "Language," is based on a choral song I wrote to a poem by the Swedish poet Ann Jäderlund, "Deep Within the Chamber":

Rosy pink eye flower
Shoulder skin gentle flower
Gentle eye shoulder skin
The sun enters oh a flower

Yellow pink in islands skin
Red in mouth yellow gentle
Eye red shoulder skin
Deep within the chamber flower

(Translation by Ann Jäderlund)

The words are well hidden in the music, but always present. In this movement I ask double-bass players and cellists to de-tune their instruments (scordatura) in order to produce unusual natural harmonics.

The third movement, "Dance," is precisely what the title suggests: a monotonous, shamanistic dance. Even this short movement contains a virus: the persistent triplet figures in the horns cause the entire rhythm to collapse, and the music shifts to a lower gear rather dramatically. At the end I bring back the Ritornello-theme from the first movement.



therefore the category “Kapellmeister-musik” has no pejorative meaning to me.

As the title *Foreign Bodies* suggests (it actually suggests lots of things), the music is very physical in expression, almost like an imaginary *scène de ballet*. The title also refers to the fact that I am less concerned about the purely cerebral aspects of music and more interested in the physical reality of the music, i.e., the sound itself, than before. Also, more than two decades of conducting have helped me to think in a simpler, more direct way than before.

Instrumentation: three flutes (one doubling bass flute and one doubling piccolo) and piccolo (doubling alto flute), three oboes and English horn, three clarinets (one doubling E-flat clarinet) and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, six horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, marimba, maracas, four temple blocks, two wood blocks, mark tree, vibraphone, guiro, four tom-toms, three tam-tams, six log drums, small gong, crotales, tubular bells, Thai gongs, bass drum, orchestra bells, claves, hi-hat, sizzle cymbal, two harps, piano (doubling celeste), five-string electric bass guitar, and strings, plus live video installation.

Sculpting Music

Video artist Tal Rosner, who often “sculpts” his works through the manipulation of digital images and photographs, is immersed in exploring the intersection of music and visuals. He has carried out collaborations involving the music of Conlon Nancarrow (for the Barbican Festival), Debussy and Stravinsky (with pianists Katia and Marielle Labèque), Thomas Adès (for *In Seven Days* and *Polaris*), and Esa-Pekka Salonen (with violinist Jennifer Koh), as well as new video interpretations of Steve Reich’s *Tehillim* (for the Barbican Centre) and Olga Neuwirth’s *Disenchanted Island* (for the Centre Pompidou). In 2008 he was awarded the British Academy of Film and Television Arts’ award for Best Title Sequence for the British television series *Skins*. Other projects have included the film and animation element for the ballet *The Most Incredible Thing* (music by the Pet Shop Boys, directed by Javier de Frutos), and a video interpretation of Britten’s Four Sea Interludes from *Peter Grimes*.

In this new interpretation of *Foreign Bodies*, Rosner manipulates live-feed images of both the players and conductor on stage and animates textural shifts and instrumental gestures, creating a performance that is, in effect, a closed circuit — where the flow of sound and projected images are inherently intertwined. Rosner described the process:



It is a hyper-synched video interpretation of the orchestral piece, drawing inspiration from action paintings and expressionist abstractions. The elemental yet simple approach is rooted in Salonen’s own reading of his composition, prioritizing the “the physical reality of the music, i.e. the sound itself,” and celebrating the wild, rhythmic variety in the piece.

Violinist Jennifer Koh and Tal Rosner’s visual interpretations for Esa-Pekka Salonen’s Lachen verlernt, in 2009

Obsidian Tear

A ballet set to Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Lachen verlernt* and *Nyx* Choreography by Wayne McGregor

Wayne McGregor, resident choreographer of The Royal Ballet, in London, describes himself as a fan of the composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen. "That's how it starts," he said in a video produced by The Royal Ballet as he was devising the World Premiere of *Obsidian Tear* in 2016. "You find something that really inspires you, wants to get you into the studio and make something." He had previously created a ballet using Salonen's score *Foreign Bodies*, encountered earlier in this concert with Tal Rosner's video interpretation; McGregor's ballet version was introduced in 2010 by Stuttgart Ballet, under the title *Yantra*. He said:

I've always had a lot of Esa-Pekka's music on my iPod. Often I work in the studio with music that's not the music that I'm working with on the piece. I like music to charge the atmosphere and the environment, to give dancers kinesthetic clues, which I find really useful in developing a work. This piece I had heard at the premiere in Paris, and I couldn't believe the dance in [Esa-Pekka's] body when he was conducting, channeling his own music in a pure choreographic way, and also the power of the music itself. It was totally overwhelming. So I asked him straightaway if I could choreograph this music, if he could save it for me.

The work McGregor had heard was Salonen's *Nyx*, which uses an expansive orchestra with particularly exposed concertante parts for solo clarinet and the horn section. Salonen wrote about this piece:

Rather than utilizing the principle of continuous variation of material, as is the case

mostly in my recent music, ... its themes and ideas essentially keep their properties throughout the piece while the environment surrounding them keeps changing constantly. Mere whispers grow into roars; an intimate line of the solo clarinet becomes a slowly breathing broad melody of *tutti* strings at the end of the 18-minute

IN SHORT

Musical works composed and premiered:

Lachen verlernt, composed 2002 on commission from the La Jolla Chamber Music Society's SummerFest La Jolla, with the support of Joan and Irwin Jacobs; premiered August 10, 2002, at SummerFest La Jolla in San Diego, Cho-Liang Lin, soloist. *Nyx*, composed 2010, on commission from Radio France, the Barbican Centre, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Carnegie Hall, and the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE; premiered February 19, 2011, at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, by the Orchestre philharmonique de Radio France, with the composer conducting

Ballet choreographed and premiered:

2016, for The Royal Ballet, in a co-production with the Boston Ballet, with choreography by Wayne McGregor (born March 12, 1970, in Stockport, United Kingdom); premiered May 28, 2016, at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London; Boston Ballet premiere, November 3, 2017, at the Boston Opera House

New York Philharmonic premieres and

most recent performances: *Lachen verlernt*, this performance marks the premiere. *Nyx*, premiered, March 19, 2015, Alan Gilbert, conductor; most recently performed May 1, 2015, in Cologne, Germany, Alan Gilbert, conductor

Estimated duration: ca. 27 minutes

The Physicality of Music

“Always when I write, especially for orchestra, I have this physicality as a very important element in the creation process,” says Esa-Pekka Salonen. He adds:

I am fascinated by the ways in which instruments are extensions of the musicians’ bodies — and minds, of course, as well. If you ask any musician about the violin or the clarinet or the French horn or whatever, how they relate to that lifeless piece of material, it really is like part of their neural network. It becomes part of their personality. From this to actual dance is a very short step because, in fact, the body is the instrument, and the instrument is not the extension of the body but the body itself is the instrument.

Wayne McGregor, choreographer of **Obsidian Tear**, responds:

Esa-Pekka was talking about music being an extension of the body. When you hear it, it sits in your body in various spaces. The opening [of **Nyx**], you feel like it’s in the back of your neck, and it’s just slightly caressing your neck, there’s a latent expectation about what’s going to emerge and evolve. At other points it hits you in your gut, it sits in your stomach and it stays there relentlessly, and other times it flows up through the ribcage and is quite diaphanous out through the body. These are really physical images to work with, the body coming in and out of focus. I like to think of it as a body, that music.



Members of Boston Ballet performing *Obsidian Tear*, in 2017

arch of *Nyx*. I set myself a particular challenge ... to write complex counterpoint for almost one hundred musicians playing *tutti* at full throttle without losing clarity of the different layers and lines — something that Strauss and Mahler so perfectly mastered. I have always enjoyed the unrivaled dynamic range of a large symphony orchestra, but *Nyx* seems to take a somewhat new direction from my earlier orchestral music: there are many very delicate and light textures, chiaroscuro instead of details bathing in clear direct sunlight. I guess this is symptomatic of growing older as we realize there are no simple truths, no pure blacks and whites, but an endless variety of half shades.

Salonen happily consented to the *Obsidian Tear* project McGregor proposed, having found the earlier *Yantra* ballet a “very powerful experience,” adding:

Here is this language which is not identical with mine, obviously, but there is such a dialogue in counterpoint, and the dialogue created this kind of energy. There was such electrical power and physical expression and emotional power at the same time.

As the title character of *Nyx* is a female figure of Greek mythology, McGregor felt that a female aura was already present throughout the work. “So,” he said, “I didn’t need any women in my piece; it’s all men.” *Nyx*, however, would not provide the entire score for *Obsidian Tear*. McGregor decided to pair this work for large orchestra with a piece from a more intimate side of Salonen’s oeuvre — *Lachen verlernt*, composed for unaccompanied violin. (By coincidence, a film version of *Lachen verlernt* was created in 2009 by Tal Rosner.) The title *Lachen verlernt* (*Laughing*

In the Composer’s Words

Lachen verlernt is essentially a chaconne, which in this case means that there is a harmonic progression that repeats itself several times. The harmony remains the same throughout the whole piece; only the surface, the top layer of the music changes.

Lachen verlernt starts with a lyrical, expressive melody (the same melody has an important role in my orchestral work *Insomnia*, which I was writing at the same time, in the summer of 2002). Gradually the music becomes faster and more frenzied until it develops an almost frantic character, as if the imaginary narrator had reached a state of utter despair.

A very short Coda closes this mini-drama peacefully.

— Esa-Pekka Salonen

Unlearned) is a quotation from the ninth movement of Schoenberg’s *Pierrot Lunaire*, “Gebet an Pierrot” (“Prayer to Pierrot”). Salonen explains:

The narrator declares that she has unlearned the skill of laughing and begs Pierrot, the “Horse-doctor to the soul,” to give it back to her. I felt that this is a very moving metaphor of a performer: a serious clown trying to help the audience to connect with emotions they have lost, or believe they have lost.

Lachen verlernt occupies nearly the first third of the ballet before it segues into *Nyx*.

The title *Obsidian Tear* invites contemplation. McGregor said:

“Obsidian” came about because I was trying to think of the blackest black. I love the way in which obsidian takes one form, volcanic molten lava, and crystallizes into something so strong that you can make scalpels out of it.

But what about “Tear”? How is it even pronounced? Is it “tear” (tare), as in pulling apart or perhaps rushing? Or is it “tear” (teer), as in weeping? “It’s both,” says McGregor:

It’s deliberately ambiguous, and it speaks to what Esa-Pekka has written in this score. It goes from this incredible power and violence, and in a flash becomes extremely tender, seething, tearful. It’s tearing through space.

Instrumentation: *Lachen verlernt* employs

solo violin only. *Nyx* calls for three flutes (one doubling piccolo) and piccolo, three oboes and English horn, three clarinets (one doubling E-flat clarinet) plus bass clarinet, three bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, vibraphone, orchestra bells, tam-tam, tom-toms, bass drum, bongos, wood block, tubular bells, sizzle cymbal, low-tuned gongs, harp, celeste, and strings.

Nyx is performed by arrangement with G. Schirmer, Inc., publisher and copyright owner.

In the Composer’s Words

Nyx is a shadowy figure in Greek mythology. At the very beginning of everything there’s a big mass of dark stuff called Chaos, out of which comes Gaia or Ge, the Earth, who gives birth (spontaneously!) to Uranus, the starry heaven, and Pontus, the sea. Nyx (also sometimes known as Nox) is supposed to have been another child of Gaia, along with Erebus. The union of Nyx and Erebus produces Day.

Another version says that Cronos (as Time) was there from the beginning. Chaos came from Time. Nyx was present as a sort of membrane surrounding Chaos, which had Phanes (Light) at its centre. The union of Nyx with Phanes produced Heaven and Earth.

She is an extremely nebulous figure altogether; we have no sense of her character or personality. It is this very quality that has long fascinated me and made me decide to name my orchestral piece after her. I’m not trying to describe this mythical goddess in any precise way musically. However, the almost constant flickering and rapid changing of textures and moods as well as a certain elusive character of many musical gestures may well be related to the subject.

— Esa-Pekka Salonen



Details of a Greek vase, ca. 500 B.C., depicting Nyx as a charioteer cloaked in dark mist