

## **Cantus Arcticus, Op. 61**

### **Einojuhani Rautavaara (b. 1928 – Helsinki)**

- 1 Suo (Marshlands)
- 2 Melankolia (Melancholy)
- 3 Joutsenet muuttavat (Migrating swans)

At the age of seventeen Einojuhani Rautavaara began a diverse musical journey into an international career that will be celebrated on his eightieth birthday in October 2008. Between 1948 and 1958 he studied piano and composition at Helsinki University before discovering new techniques and styles at the Sibelius Academy, Juilliard School of Music, Vienna, Switzerland and Cologne. In 1954 *Requiem in Our Time*, dedicated to the memory of his mother, was awarded the US Thor Johnson Prize giving him the platform required to further his career.

Rautavaara's early style was influenced by Neo-Classicism before his transition to modernism during the 1960's. Having explored every facet of serialism he created his own technique of weaving twelve tone rows into a Neo-Romantic style before he joined the post-modernists. During the 1960's he became absorbed with the concerto and its conflict between two musical forces. The *Piano Concerto* (1969) quickly followed the *Cello Concerto* (1968) before several concerti were produced for a variety of solo instruments. During 1972 he completed a less conventional but most popular concerto. *Cantus Arcticus* (Op.61), commissioned by the University of Oulu in Northern Finland for a degree ceremony, is a mystic tapestry for birds and orchestra. Originally intended for chorus and orchestra Rautavaara replaced the vocal parts with a mechanical tape of northern birdsong, which he recorded on a trip to the Arctic Circle. The composer reveals his fascination with conflict and demonstrates his ability to mesmerise an audience with captivating birdsong interwoven with contrasting orchestral textures.

*Cantus Arcticus* was dedicated to Urho Kekkonen (1900-1986) the Prime Minister and President of Finland between 1950-1982. Kekkonen was a journalist before entering politics and during his presidency established numerous relationships with the cultural elite of Finland and Europe.

Rautavaara, like his predecessor Jean Sibelius, was inspired by the Northern Finnish landscape. The music opens with two solo flutes before the marshland birds interact with imitating woodwind and muted brass. The strings add a broad melody as the landscape transforms from winter to spring. The brief middle movement features the eerie song of the shore lark in contrast with expressive strings. Finally the migrating swans fly into a mist of high-pitched violins before swooping against repetitive woodwind. The tension increases as majestic horns and strings accompany the swans across the icy, towering landscape until they disappear on the horizon.

In 2004 Rautavaara suffered a serious heart attack but recovered in time for the premiere of his *Book of Visions*. His numerous awards and honours reveal that this intellectual Finnish composer and highly respected teacher has remained inspired by his own words, "It is my belief that music is great if, at some moment, the listener catches a glimpse of eternity through the window of time'.

Other recent works include: -  
Harp Concerto (2000)  
Rasputin - Opera in three acts (2001-2003)  
Manhattan Trilogy (2004)  
Lost Landscapes (2006)