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Estonian National Symphony Orchestra in Berwaldhallen. Photo Hans Wolf

FESTIVAL WITH YOUNG PEOPLE, OPERA, AND HAMMARSKJÖLD

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This year's Baltic Sea Festival, held for nine days in late summer in Stockholm and focusing on music and the environment, was true to form with Esa-Pekka Salonen at the helm. Not only that: the thematic threads were unusually well intertwined. And following a few years' absence, the Mariinsky Theatre of St Petersburg reestablished contact with the festival and gave two guest performances at the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm.

Apart from that, Berwaldhallen was the heart of the festival. No fewer than five major symphony orchestras played. The most interesting part is the evolving cooperation transcending the boundaries of traditional municipal or national orchestras among musicians in the countries around the Baltic Sea.

The members of the Baltic Youth Philharmonic are from the Nordic and Baltic countries, Russia, Poland, and Germany. The orchestra was founded three years ago under the baton of Kristjan Järvi in conjunction with a festival on the island of Usedom and consists of highly qualified musicians in their twenties. The festival gave them the opportunity to perform a program encompassing several short works by composers from the entire region that the musicians come from. Their passion, dedication and skilled musicianship were striking. Järvi, who you might say inherited his involvement in the Baltic Sea Festival from his father Neeme, made a point of impressing the enthusiastic audience with folk music-inspired, minimalist, and even rock-influenced pieces by Eduard Tubin, Wojciech Kilar, and Imants Kalnins. But it has to be said that Järvi's intense and not always stable interpretations of music by

Stenhammar, Nielsen, and Sibelius were sometimes questionable. (It is worth mentioning that one of the best interpretations of Stenhammar's second symphony on CD is courtesy of his brother Paavo).

I, Culture Orchestra gave its debut performance during the festival. The name refers to the individual musician as part of the whole. The orchestra was founded by the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Warsaw when Poland assumed the Presidency of the European Union. The musicians, who seem to be on the same level of proficiency as the Baltic Youth Philharmonic, are from Poland and six former Soviet Republics in the "Eastern Partnership" in central and southeastern Europe. Under Pavel Kotla's conducting, the various sections of the orchestra asserted their identities with astonishing clarity, although the dynamic level sometimes suggested that the orchestra had rehearsed in a larger venue than Berwaldhallen. The program conveyed a good picture of the futurism, distinctive national characters, and rising waves of traditionalism and repression in Europe during the interwar period from Prokofiev via Szymanowski – with Peter Jablonski as the brilliant piano soloist in the fourth symphony – to Shostakovitch (fifth symphony). The names of both orchestras may indicate that English is also becoming the lingua franca in east Europe.

The Swedish National Youth Orchestra, founded last year by the Lilla Akademien magnet music school in Stockholm, also performed at last year's Baltic Sea Festival. In many ways it presented the biggest surprise of all the orchestras, because it is made up of young people at the pre-professional music training level. Venerable Estonian composer Arvo Pärt was practically euphoric following rehearsals of his early third symphony, his stylistic transformation of the early 1970s. The orchestra also played a new piece by Tobias Broström, an imaginative and well-sounding, albeit not entirely concentrated, concerto with violin and marimba solos, and ended with an unusually fresh rendition of Rachmaninov's second symphony. Conductor Tõnu Kaljuste demonstrated that he is as deft with orchestras as he is with choirs. Ironically, at roughly the same time, the Swedish newspaper Svenska Dagbladet reported that young people interested in classical music are being turned away from Swedish schools, because their sole focus is rock music.

People who were young students in 1961 remember the death of Dag Hammarskjöld from a special perspective, because many hopes were tied to him among university students in particular. Catharina Backman, born in 1961, and the slightly older composer Jan Sandström had written two short pieces for a special Hammarskjöld concert. Backman's piece for solo baritone – beautifully sung by Carl Ackerfeldt – is based on a meditation from Hammarskjöld's book *Markings* [Vägmärken], the relatively well-known and much-debated meditation Summoned to carry it. The hallmarks of the piece were the declamation in the solo part, the underlying unease in the instruments, and the meditative whole. Sandström lets his lyrics in *Fjärran* [Distance] sung by the exquisite soprano Elin Rombo materialize with timeless purity. Both soloists then carried off Lars-Erik Larsson's *Disguised god*, which, after a somewhat heavy opening, gained impressive stature with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Swedish Radio Choir, and conductor Peter Dijkstra. Krister Henriksson acting as narrator highlighted the sense of wonder and mystique in the lyrics by Hjalmar Gullberg, who was one of Hammarskjöld's colleagues in the Swedish Academy.

Jan Eliasson, former Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs and President of the United Nations General Assembly, and Lena Lid Falkman, the only person to have written a Swedish doctoral thesis about Hammarskjöld, discussed Hammarskjöld before the concert. Eliasson is

inclined to downplay the element of mystique and abstraction in Hammarskjöld since reading Markings in the original. He had first read the English translation by W. H. Auden, which Eliasson believes is a failure. Listeners were given a picture of a Secretary-General who was utterly rooted in reality and did a great deal to change the UN's methods and establish an efficient organization, which may have been one reason for the criticism he received.

Mysticism abounded at the Royal Swedish Opera during the Mariinsky Theatre's guest performance of Rodion Shchedrin's *The Enchanted Wanderer*, especially as Ivan's journey of atonement begins. But when worldly and erotic conflicts entered the plot, the temperature rose under the direction of Valery Gergiev and with a powerful Sergey Aleksashkin as the protagonist. But without question, the second guest performance was the superior piece: Leoš Janáček's unwaveringly captivating *The Makropoulos Case*, once known as *Testamentet* [The will] at the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm, starring Elisabeth Söderström. The role of the woman with eternal life was now sung by Ekaterina Popova with great authority. At short notice, conductor Mikhail Tatarnikov took over the task of conveying the singular Czech melodiousness and acerbity of the piece.

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