

Helvi Leiviskä
(1902–1982)

TRIO
for violin, violoncello & piano

(1924)

Helvi Leiviskä

Finnish composer Helvi Leiviskä (1902–1982) created a broad-based output of orchestral works, solo songs and chamber music. Her style could be described as moderate modernism, deriving influences from multiple sources such as late Romanticism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Existentialism and Neo-Classicism. Leiviskä's output is characterised by philosophical and religious themes, images of nature and narrative structures. Many of her works focus on human existential angst and spiritual searching and growth.

Leiviskä was born in Helsinki and lived there for most of her life, but her family roots were in Northern Ostrobothnia. Her childhood home was firmly grounded in Protestant Christianity and revivalist movements but also in the arts and spiritual sciences. It was most probably this background that motivated Leiviskä's conception of musical composition as a contest for the mind and a facet of spiritual life.

Leiviskä completed her formal musical studies at the Helsinki Music Institute, which today is the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. Her composition teacher was Erkki Melartin, Rector of the Music Institute, who like Leiviskä was a mystically oriented composer with a Christian and theosophical bent. Her piano teachers included Ingeborg Hymander, one of the most prominent piano teachers in the history of Finnish music. Leiviskä occupies a unique role in the history of the Helsinki Music Institute, as she was the first composition student ever to have a symphony performed at a student proficiency demonstration: in 1923, Melartin conducted an orchestra of the Music Institute's students in a performance of the second movement from Leiviskä's unnumbered Symphony. Leiviskä graduated from the Music Institute in 1927 and went on to study composition privately with several teachers, including Czech composer Arthur Willner in Vienna.

Leiviskä wrote five symphonies. The aforementioned unnumbered one was followed by Symphonies nos. 1 to 3 (1947, 1954 and 1964/1971) and the *Sinfonia brevis* (1962/1972). She wrote several other orchestral works as well, such as *Kansantanssisarja* [Folk dance suite] (1929/1954/1972), which was frequently performed in its day; Suite no. 1 for small orchestra (1933); Suite no. 2 on themes from the film *Juha* (1936/1938); and Intermezzos nos. 1 and 2 (1943, 1945). She wrote two cantatas for choir and orchestra setting Nationalist-Symbolist poems from the collection *Helkavirsiä* [Whitsongs] by national poet Eino Leino: *Pimeän peikko* [Dread in the Dark] for mixed choir and orchestra (1942) and *Mennyt manner* [The Lost Continent] for vocal soloists, mixed choir and orchestra (1957).

For her own instrument, the piano, Leiviskä wrote her Piano Concerto in D minor (1935/1976) and a number of solo works and pedagogical pieces. The piano is included in all of her chamber music works, the most frequently performed of which are the Piano Quartet (1926/1935), the Piano Trio (1924) and the Sonata for violin and piano (1945). Leiviskä wrote solo songs with both piano and orchestra. She further wrote choral music, melodramas, music for cinema and stage, spiritual songs and community songs for organisations and associations.

Leiviskä's orchestral and chamber music was performed on a relatively regular basis in concert and on the radio in her lifetime. Her three composition concerts (1935, 1945 and 1948) were broadcast in full or in part. Leiviskä held elected positions in several spiritual, feminist and arts organisations and associations, where her music was performed at events and for which she wrote occasional music or anthems. These included the literary association Nuoren Voiman Liitto [Young Force Union], the theosophical Rose Cross Society, the Helsinki Women's Orchestra and Zonta International along with other feminist organisations. She was also actively involved in organisations in the field of music, such as the Finnish Composers'

leen Erkki Melartinille, joka niin ikään oli teosofinen taiteilija, seuraavasti: ”On hyvä tottua kuolemanajatukseen. Minusta ihminen on kaikkein onnellisin silloin, kun hän alinomaa muistaa sen, mutta edellyttäen, että tuo tietoisuus ei saa masentaa, ei poistaa elämähalua ja -iloa, vaan kannustaa [– –].”¹ Kuoleamalla on Leiviskän sävellysestetiikassa sama merkitys kuin mikä sillä on eksistentiaalisti-kirjailija Virginia Woolfin romaaneissa tai eksistentiaalisti-filosofi Martin Heideggerin teoriassa:

Piano Trio (1924)

Helvi Leiviskä’s Piano Trio is a powerful, youthful work that impresses with its directness of expression, its affective potential and its profound sonority. Leiviskä wrote the work while studying at the Helsinki Music Institute (1919 to 1927), completing it in 1924. It was premiered at a student concert of the Institute at the Swedish Normal Lyceum in Helsinki on the composer’s 22nd birthday (25 May 1924). The performers were Leo Funtek on piano, Eino Raitio on violin and Ossian Fohström on cello. The work is also mentioned on her graduation certificate (1927) as one of her proficiency demonstrations.

Surprisingly, the work only has two movements, though it lasts about 30 minutes. The extensive second movement in fact includes features both of a slow middle movement and of a brisk finale. The alternation and layering of the various materials create the impression of a psychological drama, with conflicts, wounds and attempts at consolation. This impression is further strengthened by the shadow-like recurrence of motifs from the first movement, the withdrawal after the culmination and the subsiding into silence at the end.

The first movement (*Allegro con fuoco*) begins with a strong and sombre ‘quest theme’ performed in unison on all three instruments. The theme exhibits the dotted, question-like rhythm typical of Leiviskä. The descending semitone motifs hark

vasta myöntämällä oman kuolemansa tosiasian ihminen voi kokea olemassaolon ihmeellisyyden kaikessa voimaperäisyydessään ja kirkkaudessaan.

Leiviskän pianotriosta on olemassa yksi kaupallinen äänite levyllä *Finnish Violin Music: Leiviskä – Melartin – Raitio* (Alba Records, 2017).

Susanna Välimäki

back to the ‘difficult steps’ of Baroque style, reflecting suffering and pain (*passi duriusculi*).

The lugubrious main subject is close in mood to some of Leiviskä’s colleagues across Finland’s eastern border, mirroring the humanist pathos of Dimitri Shostakovich or the severe tempests of Galina Ustvolskaya. The subject escalates to hysterical shivers, followed by a void – a pause of one whole measure (m. 19). Later, the subject evolves into an almost obsessive mantra.

The second subject (m. 54) is austere, compelling and hymn-like. The expansive piano arpeggios and long string notes evoke a sense of the transitory and fragile nature of life, and the meditative mood is not dissimilar to that found with many of the (neo-)mystical composers of the 21st century, such as Valentin Silvestrov or Sofia Gubaidulina. The extensive development section (mm. 101–271) includes persistent fragments of subjects, a visionary chorale and whole-tone scales that were introduced in the transition. Between the development and the recapitulation, there is another one-measure pause (m. 271). Conventionally regarded as a symbol for death, the pause arrests the narrative for a moment, like the screen suddenly going black in a film and the picture – here, the main subject – then reappearing. The second subject is here transformed into a trembling mass of anxiety, with tremolos and fortissimo chords, plus

¹ Helvi Leiviskän kirje Erkki Melartinille 19.6.1924, Erkki Melartinin henkilöarkisto, Kansalliskirjasto.

TRIO

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I

HELVI LEIVISKÄ

Allegro con fuoco

Violino

Violoncello

Piano

mf

mf

mf

7

cresc.

ff

tr

cresc.

gva

ff

ff

14

tr

cresc.

tr

tr

tr

ff

ff

ff

G.P.

G.P.

20 **1**

Musical notation for the first system, measures 20-25. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics: *f*.

Musical notation for the second system, measures 20-25. Bass clef. Dynamics: *f*.

1

Musical notation for the third system, measures 20-25. Treble clef. Dynamics: *f*.

Musical notation for the fourth system, measures 20-25. Bass clef. Dynamics: *f*.

26

Musical notation for the fifth system, measures 26-31. Treble clef.

Musical notation for the sixth system, measures 26-31. Bass clef.

Musical notation for the seventh system, measures 26-31. Treble clef.

Musical notation for the eighth system, measures 26-31. Bass clef.

32 **2**

Musical notation for the ninth system, measures 32-37. Treble clef. Dynamics: *mp*, *cresc. poco a poco*.

Musical notation for the tenth system, measures 32-37. Bass clef. Dynamics: *mf*.

2

Musical notation for the eleventh system, measures 32-37. Treble clef. Dynamics: *mp*.

Musical notation for the twelfth system, measures 32-37. Bass clef. Dynamics: *mp*.

37

cresc.

41

ff

3

3

3

45

dim. poco a poco

dim. poco a poco

dim. poco a poco

rallentando

50

rallentando

54

4

mf

mf

4

p

4

59

5

5

5

II

Largo
con sord.
pp

Violino

Violoncello

Largo
pp
con *ped.*

Piano

5

10

15

pp
con sord.
pp

20

p
pp
p

24

1 Pochissimo più mobile (Tempo II)

p *cresc. poco a poco*

1 Pochissimo più mobile (Tempo II)

28

mp

p

32

accel.

mf

accel.

cresc.

36

rall.

f

rall.

dim.

40 **2** Tempo I

Musical score for measures 40-42. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line starts with a whole note G4, followed by a half note G4, and a dotted half note G4. The piano accompaniment features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* and *8va*. A large watermark is visible across the page.

43 *And. III*

Musical score for measures 43-45. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a whole note G4, followed by a half note G4, and a dotted half note G4. The piano accompaniment features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp* and *8va*. A large watermark is visible across the page.

46

Musical score for measures 46-48. The system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has a whole note G4, followed by a half note G4, and a dotted half note G4. The piano accompaniment features a melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *pp*. A large watermark is visible across the page.