

ONDINE

JURIS KARLSONS

Oremus

Sacred Choral Works

Latvian Radio Choir

Sinfonietta Riga

Sigvards Kļava



JURIS KARLSONS (b. 1948)

- | | | |
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SINFONIETTA RIGA (2–5)

Vestards Šimkus, piano (6)

Solos: Agnese Pauniņa, soprano (1, 7); Agate Pooka, soprano (2–5);
Ieva Ezeriete, soprano (6); Pēteris Vaickovskis, baritone (2–5)

LATVIAN RADIO CHOIR

SIGVARDŠ KLAVA, conductor

Juris Karlsons' (b. 1948) name has always been highly respected in Latvian music circles by other composers as well as performers. His personality and musical oeuvre embody an aura of professional wisdom and masculine romanticism. It conjures an atmosphere of conciseness, lacking verbosity; everything is well thought out, contemplated and based on immense erudition combined with maturity and serious life experience. Karlsons enjoys order, and professional finesse in composition is important to him. He calls himself an old romantic and considers Sergei Rachmaninov the alpha and omega of music.

Karlsons' music is dynamic and full of contrasts. Among his work we can find apt parodies (such as the *Country Suite* with a rooster march, a cat waltz, a goose gavotte, etc.), enthusiastic games and energetic rhythms as well as inward contemplation and religious revelation, which has in recent years gained the upper hand in his music. Yet no matter how diverse and full of vivid colour, his work is always commanded by the aura of a master and professor.

Karlsons communicates very clear concepts regarding his compositions, but he speaks with restraint about their content. "Music is a philosophy," he says. "It has always been important for me that a composition not only contain technical skill but also be a special expression of my thoughts. Because I cannot express in words what I say in music." Latvian music professionals have commented about Karlsons: "Difficult to interpret. With a secret."

Juris Karlsons was born in Riga and until the 8th grade studied at the Riga Choreography School in the same ballet class as world-famous dancer Mikhail Baryshnikov. It is probably not a coincidence that the Latvian National Opera has already produced four widely acclaimed and awarded ballets with music by Karlsons. He graduated from the composition department of the Latvian State Conservatory in 1972 and soon began teaching there. While still a student, he was invited to become a sound engineer at Latvijas Radio (Latvian Radio), which he has called a phenomenal learning opportunity, almost like earning a second music-academy degree. He



Juris Karlsons

served as the head sound engineer at the Daile Theatre in Riga for eight years, and this experience of working in theatre has influenced his creative thought, which manifests itself in the perfectly constructed drama in his compositions, in which Karlsons himself acts as the musical director.

While performing his obligatory military service in the Soviet armed forces, Karlsons played drums and percussion in the army orchestra for a year, thus becoming familiar with the orchestra from the inside. Likewise, as a composer he enjoys sharp, vivid accents in the percussion group. In terms of instrumentation, he has few equals in Latvian music, and it is no surprise that for many years he taught the course on instrumentation at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. Karlsons is skilled at "moving the levers" of a symphonic orchestra and is a virtuoso at painting with its sounds and highlighting unexpected timbres. He was a longtime rector of the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music and has also chaired the composition department at the academy.

Karlsons' world of sound is characterised by the breadth of his style and symphonic thought. He is one of the main composers of symphonies in Latvian music, but this characterisation does not apply only to his symphonies. A purposeful flow of thought and intonation, a musical maturity and a mission of the message are traits that permeate all of his compositions. But a Haydn-like humour can also suddenly appear in his music, because Karlsons is known for his unparalleled sense of humour. In this sense, both he and his music can sometimes resemble the theatre: full of contrasts and unpredictable. "Inspiration?", he says. "No, it's nothing other than regular, systematic work. Being a composer is hard work. Only in American films does one see composers walking along the sea and writing symphonies. In fact,

writing music is like a great Confession. It's a very rocky and bloody road to oneself. Writing a composition with a big idea requires strength and a spiritual call to do so. Even if it's a short piece."

Karlsons has written extensively for choir – mixed choir as well as women's, men's and boys' choir. He has written songs and poems, *a cappella* and with accompaniment as well as pieces for choir and individual instruments (his *Symphony Concerto* for 30-voice choir and tom-tom is unusual and impressive). Karlsons' more recent choral works tend to strive towards spiritual heights and revelation of the spiritual path, both based on the Scripture.

Oremus (2018) was premiered by the Latvian Radio Choir at the St. Mary the Virgin Church in New York City as part of Lincoln Center's White Light Festival. Conductor Sigvards Kļava comments: "When speaking of Karlsons' *Oremus*, I have the feeling that the composer is currently experiencing an important stage in his creative life. It seems that he is heading towards distinct heights and giving those heights a particular sound space. I can feel that, while composing this piece, Karlsons has thought of the Latvian Radio Choir as his creative friend, imagining colours and possibilities that are specific to this choir. The music seems to open up slowly but steadily; it is music with a distinct tendency for light and lucidity..."

Karlsons himself says: "By studying the Holy Scripture and opening one's soul to music, one can understand the essence of Divine Revelation even more deeply. As Pope John Paul II wrote: 'Our prayer will approximate a symphony – it will be a prayer of thanks, of praise and, finally, of beseeching.' The choir part of *Oremus* contains texts from 'Dei Verbum', the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution. The composition is dedicated to the Latvian Radio Choir and its conductor Sigvards Kļava."

At the foundation of the **Adoratio**, symphony for choir and orchestra (2010), is a prayer story based on sacred texts (litany prayers, Psalm 22 and the Second Book of Chronicles from the Old Testament) about the false paths of men and nations and

their requests for God's help; in the conclusion, the search for answers is found deeper, in man himself. Karlsons has called it "a work of credo, faith and great courage."

Adorations are prayers at the symbolic tomb of Christ from Good Friday until Easter morning. Here the choir sings in both the "common" voice and that of God, embodying the singular (I) and plural (we). The symphony begins with a ritualistic meeting of the people at the tomb of Christ and several phases of prayer: from genuine humility and bewilderment to a true cry of despair. After the impressive rumbles of the tom-toms, God responds with a warning: "If you do not turn away from your evil deeds..." In the dramatic finale, three exclamations of "Eleison!" ring out and the sinful and confused soul finds peace in the horn fanfares of the Vatican (Pope), which are followed by a clear Easter morning.

In *Adoratio*, the composer's intention to find the answer within himself over the course of the symphony is not expressed in loud words; instead, it is whispered through the composition's light and peaceful ending in the orchestra. Karlsons has elevated the drama-to-enlightenment message of the *Adoratio* to the plane of philosophical generalisation; thus each listener can find something in these prayers that addresses him or her individually. In fact, these prayers cover the whole story of man's thorny quest to himself.

Le lagrime dell'anima (2013) for piano and choir, with lyrics by the composer himself, is a subtle gem in Karlsons' oeuvre. In nominating this work for the award for best composition of the year, the jury of the Latvian Great Music Award stated: "By imparting a divine dimension to the dialogue between piano and choral voices, in which the piano keys sing and the human voices shimmer and glisten, Karlsons has created an aesthetically incredibly beautiful, contemplative, spiritually introverted turn towards God in which we hear the tears of the soul. This is Karlsons' new composition, *Le lagrime dell'anima*."

Karlsons found the couplet in the lyrics within himself. It is addressed to God: "Tears of the soul vanish in the glitter of stars. Are You there where my heart is gazing?" Regarding its rendition in music, he says: "Here are just seven simple notes born on a beautiful summer evening while you're watching the sunset. Slowly the stars come out – first one, then another. You wait for the next one. Like the stars, seven sounds are gradually born under the pianist's fingers, somewhere in the stillness they appear as the sounds of a choir, and, as they travel along a shared path of development, they interlace to form a melodic line."

First composed 2011, the second version of *Ora pro nobis* was written in 2019 on the initiative of conductor Sigvards Klava. It is a tribute to the Virgin Mary in which the composer has purposefully elaborated upon a Latin hymn set to the voices of a choir with a rhythmically multi-layered pulsation as well as asceticism expressed through female voices and an immersion into the sonorous fabric of the choral sound, concluding as a bright affirmation of the Virgin Mary's all-embracing power of mercy.

Lauma Malnace

(Translation: Amanda Zaeska)

"A great musical power."
– Washington Post

*"This chorus's expertise in music pushes voices to extremes,
from ethereal high tones to uncannily sustained bass drones."*
– The New York Times

"One of the world's greatest choirs."
– The Advertiser

The **Latvian Radio Choir** is a unique, award-winning ensemble of professional singers that offers its audiences an extraordinary variety of repertoire ranging from early music to the most sophisticated scores of contemporary compositions.

The choir has recorded the Grammy Award-winning album *Adam's Lament* (ECM) composed by Arvo Pärt and conducted by Tõnu Kaljuste. It is a repeat winner of the Great Music Award of Latvia (the highest national award for professional achievement in music) and has received the Latvian Cabinet of Ministers Award. The choir's recording of Sergei Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil* was praised by Gramophone as the best recording of February 2013 and ranked among the 25 best albums of the year by the American radio station NPR.

The Latvian Radio Choir has performed at many of the world's most renowned concert halls: Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw (the Netherlands), Elbphilharmonie (Germany), Théâtre des Champs-Élysées and Cité de la Musique-Philharmonie de Paris (France), Lincoln Center, Kennedy Center, Duke University Chapel and the Walt Disney Concert Hall (USA), Konzerthaus Berlin (Germany), the Library of Congress (USA), Queen Elizabeth Hall (UK) and the Dresden Frauenkirche (Germany).

It is also a regular performer at leading musical events, such as BBC Proms (UK), the Salzburg (Austria) and Lucerne (Switzerland) festivals, the Festival of Radio France





Occitanie Montpellier (France), the Baltic Sea Festival (Sweden), Printemps des arts de Monte-Carlo (Monaco), Klangspuren Festival (Austria), the White Light Festival (USA), Klangvokal Dortmund (Germany), Musikfest Erzgebirge (Germany), OzAsia Festival (Australia) and Soundstreams (Canada).

Often serving as a creative lab, the choir encourages composers to write new music that challenges the capabilities of the human voice. During the past 20 years, the ensemble has evolved into an unprecedented form of a choir where every singer has an individual mission and provides their unique contribution to the group's unique, defining blend of timbral qualities.

The choir regularly releases new recordings with Ondine, Hyperion Records, Deutsche Grammophon, ECM, BIS and Naïve, collaborating with outstanding guest conductors like Heinz Holliger, Riccardo Muti, Riccardo Chailly, Gustavo Dudamel, Lars Ulrik Mortensen, Esa-Pekka Salonen and Peter Phillips. It has also partnered with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, Ensemble Intercontemporain, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Camerata Salzburg and Concerto Copenhagen.

The Latvian Radio Choir was founded in 1940 by the legendary Latvian conductor Teodors Kalniņš, who led the ensemble until his passing in 1962. Following the artistic direction by Edgars Račevskis (1963–86) and Juris Kļaviņš (1987–92), the choir has had two conductors ever since 1992 – artistic director and principal conductor Sigvards Kļava and conductor Kaspars Putniņš.

www.radiokoris.lv

Since the foundation of the orchestra in 2006, Normunds Šnē is the Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of **Sinfonietta Rīga**. The chamber orchestra regularly enjoys collaborating with guest conductors – a number of various programmes have been staged in cooperation with Paavo and Kristjan Järvi, Heinz Holliger, John Storgårds, Christoph Poppen, Juha Kangas, Tõnu Kaljuste and Ariel Zuckermann.

Brilliant soloists have performed together with Sinfonietta Rīga: Monica Groop, Inga Kalna and Olga Pasichnyk (Pasicznik); as well as pianists Kristian Bezuidenhout, Diana Ketler and Alexander Toradze, the most prominent Latvian organist Iveta Apkalna, violinists Kolja Blacher, Pekka Kuusisto, Isabelle Faust, Thomas Gould, Alina Pogostkina, Baiba Skride, Augustin Dumay and Alexander Janiczek, violist Maxim Rysanov, cellist Sol Gabetta, trombone soloist Christian Lindberg, jazz drummer Peter Erskine, accordionist Ksenija Sidorova, flutist Patrick Gallois, clarinetist Emil Jonason and the experts of the early music Andrew Lawrence-King and Enrico Onofri. The orchestra is working together with the Latvian Radio Choir and its conductor Sigvards Kļava. Together, they have annually staged several musical programmes including the first performances of Latvian sacred music.

Sinfonietta Rīga has toured Paris, the Herkulesaal in Munich and the Lincoln Center New York; the orchestra has performed at the Alte Oper in Frankfurt, The Laeiszhalle in Hamburg and at the Philharmonic Halls in Kiev and St Petersburg.

The contribution of the Chamber Orchestra Sinfonietta Rīga to the recording of the album *Adam's Lament* by Estonian composer Arvo Pärt has won them a Grammy Award; but the rest of their recorded albums have been released by the devoted partners of Sinfonietta Rīga: Wergo, Ondine, Edition Records and Challenge Records. Three times the orchestra has been awarded the highest prize of its country for achievement in culture and music – The Grand Music Award.

www.sinfoniettariga.lv

Sigvards Kļava is one of the most outstanding Latvian conductors, also a professor of conducting and producer, music director of the Latvian Radio Choir since 1992. As a result of Sigvards Kļava's steady efforts, the Latvian Radio Choir has become an internationally recognized, vocally distinctive collective, where each singer possesses a creative individuality. Under Sigvards' guidance, the choir has recorded a number of choral works by little known or completely forgotten composers of the past, as well as formed a friendly collaboration with a number of notable Latvian composers. Sigvards Kļava is a professor at the Jāzeps Vītols Latvian Academy of Music. Kļava is a multiple winner of the Latvian Grand Music Award. He has performed at the Concertgebouw and Muziekgebouw of Amsterdam, Berliner Konzerthaus and Philharmonie, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris, Berwaldhallen in Stockholm, Dresdner Frauenkirche as well as in the New York Lincoln Centre.

SUNG TEXTS

1 **Oremus...** (2018)

Adnuntiamus vobis vitam aeternam,
quae erat apud Patrem et apparuit
nobis.

Quod vidimus et audivimus
adnuntiamus vobis,
ut et vos societatem habeatis
nobiscum,
et societas nostra sit cum Patre et
cum Filio eius Iesu Christo.

Announcing to you the eternal life,
which was with the Father and was
revealed to us.

What we have seen and heard we
are declaring to you,
to you who are in connection with us,
and as we are in connection with the
Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

Ubi enim venit plenitudo temporis,
Verbum caro factum est et habitavit
in nobis plenum gratiae et veritatis.

Adnuntiamus vobis vitam aeternam,
quae erat apud Patrem et apparuit
nobis.

Quod vidimus et audivimus
adnuntiamus vobis,
ut et vos societatem habeatis
nobiscum,
et societas nostra sit cum Patre et
cum Filio eius Iesu Christo.

Ubi enim venit plenitudo temporis,
Verbum caro factum est et habitavit
in nobis plenum gratiae et veritatis.

Cum oramus, illum alloquimur.
cum oramus, illum audimus,
cum divina legimus oracula.
Amen.
Oremus...

- 2 **Adoratio** (2010)
Christe, audi nos.
Christe, exaudi nos.

At the appointed time,
Word was made flesh and dwelt
among us, filled with grace and truth.

Announcing to you the eternal life,
which was with the Father and was
revealed to us.

What we have seen and heard we
are declaring to you,
to you who are in connection with us,
and as we are in connection with the
Father and his Son, Jesus Christ.

At the appointed time,
Word was made flesh and dwelt
among us, filled with grace and truth.

When we pray, we speak to him.
When we pray, we listen to him.
When we read the divine prophecies.
Amen.
Let us pray...

- O Christ, hear us.
O Christ, answer us.

3

Kyrie, eleison.
Christe, eleison.

Christe, audi nos.
Christe, exaudi nos.

Kyrie Christe eleison.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi.
Agnus Dei, miserere nobis, miserere
Domine!

Pater de caelis, Deus, miserere nobis.
Spiritus Sanctus, Deus, miserere
nobis.

Fili, Redemptor mundi, Deus, miserere
nobis.
Sancta Trinitas, unus Deus, miserere
nobis.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi.
Agnus Dei, miserere nobis.

Deus meus, clamo per diem,
et non exaudis,
et nocte, et non est requies mihi.

O Lord, have mercy on us.
O Christ, have mercy on us.

O Christ, hear us.
O Christ, answer us.

O Lord, Christ, have mercy on us.

The Lamb of God, who takes away
the sins of the world.
O Lamb of God, have mercy on us, O
Lord!

O Father of the heavens, God, have
mercy on us.
O Holy Spirit, God, have mercy on us.

O Son, the Redeemer of the world,
God, have mercy on us.
O Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy
on us.

The Lamb of God, who takes away
the sins of the world.
O Lamb of God, have mercy on us.

My God, I cry out to you during the
day,
and you are not answering,
and during the night, there is no rest
for me.

4

Propitius esto, exaudi nos, Domine!

Humiliatus autem populus meus,
super quos invocatum est nomen
meum,
deprecatus me fuerit
et exquisierit faciem meam
et egerit paenitentiam a suis
pessimis,
ego exaudiam de caelo
et propitius ero peccatis eorum
et sanabo terram eorum.
Propitius ero peccatis eorum.

Do forgive and answer us, O Lord!

If my people will humble themselves,
upon whom my name has been
called,
pray to me
and seek my face
and turn and repent from their evil
deeds,
then I will answer from the heavens
and I will forgive their sins
and heal their land.
I will forgive their sins.

5

Eleison!

O Have mercy on us!

6 **Le lagrime dell'anima...** (2013)

Le lagrime dell'anima
si sciolgono nello splendore delle
stele.

Tears of the soul
vanish in the glitter of stars.

Sei proprio tu là,
dove guarda il mio cuore?
(Text: Juris Karlsons)

Are You there
where my heart is gazing?

7 **Ora pro nobis** (2019)

Virgo sacrata,
dignare me laudare te.
Da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos.
Sancta genetrix,
speciosa facta est
et suavis delicis tuis.
Ora pro nobis.

Ab initio et ante secula sum,
et usque ad futurum seculum non
desinam.
Et in habitatione sancta coram
ministravi.

Ave, Maria, gratia plena, Dominus
tecum,
benedicta tu in mulieribus,
et benedictus fructus ventri tui Iesu.

Sancta Maria mater Dei,
ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.

Ave, Maria, gratia plena,
Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis...
Amen.

O Sacred Virgin,
let my praise you.
Give me strength against your
enemies.
O Holy Mother,
beautiful you are,
gracious and sweet you are.
O pray for us.

From the beginning and before
everything,
and to the future ages without end.
In the holy dwelling place, I have
ministered.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is
with thee,
blessed are you among women
and blessed is the fruit of your womb,
Jesus.

Holy Mary, Mother of God,
O pray for us sinners,
now and in the hour of our death.

Hail Mary, full of grace,
O Holy Mary, pray for us...
Amen.

Recordings: October, 2014 (Le lagrime dell'anima); November, 2018 (Oremus);
March, 2019 (Ora pro nobis); May, 2019 (Adoratio), St. John's Church
(Sv. Jāņa baznīca), Riga, Latvia
Executive producers: Dace Bula and Reijo Kiilunen
Recording engineer: Agnese Streļča
Editing & Mixing: Agnese Streļča and Sigvards Kļava, SIG.MA Studio, Riga, Latvia
Final Mix and CD Mastering: Enno Mäemets, Editroom Oy, Helsinki

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Booklet Editor: Joel Valkila
Cover: Shutterstock
Photos: Daina Geidmane

SIGVARDS KĻAVA

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JURIS KARLSONS (b. 1948)

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LATVIAN RADIO CHOIR
SINFONIETTA RIGA*
SIGVARD KLAVA, conductor



[65:30] • English notes and sung text enclosed

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