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LINDBERG & AHO CLARINET CONCERTOS

JULIAN BLISS
BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

TAAVI ORAMO
BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Clarinet Concerto *Magnus Lindberg*

01	Part I	05.19
02	Part II	04.36
03	Part III	02.37
04	Part IV	07.39
05	Cadenza	02.52
06	Part V	04.16

Clarinet Concerto *Kalevi Aho*

07	i. Tempestoso	08.48
08	ii. Cadenza. Tranquillo	02.47
09	iii. Vivace con brio	06.32
10	iv. Adagio mesto	07.58
11	v. Epilogo. Misterioso	07.34
	Total	1.00.58

JULIAN BLISS clarinet

BBC SCOTTISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

TAAVI ORAMO conductor

www.signumrecords.com

In my opinion, the Lindberg and Aho clarinet concertos are two of the greatest of the 21st century. These works demand everything from the performer—one moment navigating passages of extreme virtuosity and precision, the next exploring the most beautiful and breath-taking writing. They require total commitment; there's no holding back, making them both thrilling to perform.

Recording these concertos with the incredible BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and the brilliant Taavi Oramo was an absolute privilege. My deepest thanks to every member of the orchestra for their unwavering dedication and exceptional musicianship throughout the sessions.

I wanted to record these concertos to explore a different aspect of my playing. The music is in stark contrast to the Schumann album I released previously, offering different challenges and interpretations, along with a distinct technical demand.

I'm also immensely grateful to Nick Parker and Mike Hatch—one of my favourite producer and engineer duos. Having worked with them on most of my recordings, it was a joy to collaborate once again and bring this project to life together. I hope you enjoy listening to this recording as much as we enjoyed making it!

Julian Bliss

Finnish examples of the clarinet concerto genre began with Bernhard Henrik Crusell (1775-1838), a clarinetist who wrote three concertos as well as some chamber works featuring his instrument. More than one hundred and fifty years passed before the next example, but in recent decades clarinet concertos by Finnish composers have proliferated, several of which have been written for their compatriot Kari Kriikku. One must mention in passing the possible influence of Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto, arguably one of the greatest 20th-century concertos for any instrument, but in fact there is little sign of this, whereas the influence of the astonishingly virtuosic Kari Kriikku is palpable.

Magnus Lindberg was born in 1958 in Helsinki, where he studied composition with Einojuhani Rautavaara and Paavo Heininen at the Sibelius Academy. In the early 1980's he travelled to Paris for further studies with Vinko Globokar and Gérard Grisey, while also attending Franco Donatoni's classes in Siena. The founding of the informal Ears Open Society, including among its members Finnish composers Lindberg, Eero Hämeeniemi, Jouni Kaipainen, Kaija Saariaho and Esa-Pekka Salonen, dates from 1977. The aim of this group was to stimulate a greater awareness of mainstream modernism at the expense of perceived Finnish provincialism. In the 1980's Lindberg passed through a period in which he combined experimentalism, complexity and primitivism. In 1982 he co-founded (with several other young composers) an ensemble named Toimii - Finnish for "It works" - in which he played the piano, percussion and accordion. Lindberg has occupied the position of composer-in-residence with two prestigious orchestras - the New York Philharmonic from 2009 to 2012 and the London Philharmonic from 2014 to 2017. In his list of compositions orchestral works feature prominently, among them large-scale pieces which he wrote before he was twenty years of age. Subsequently he has been awarded international prizes for several of his mature works.

He composed his Clarinet Concerto, one of about ten concertos in his works list, in 2001-2. Apropos his compositional technique in general, Lindberg has said "only the extremes are interesting", but he qualifies this with - "when I push an

element to an extreme I feel an urge to withdraw somewhere else." In other words, equilibrium is probably even more important to him. Thus opposition or conflict leads to synthesis. However, this principle is much less prevalent in the Clarinet Concerto, one of his most lyrical and accessible works. Lindberg has known Kari Kriikku since the late 1970's when they were both students at the Sibelius Academy of Music. They were also colleagues in Toimii. After Lindberg composed his Clarinet Quintet for Kriikku in 1992, Kriikku suggested a piece for clarinet and orchestra in which the orchestra would be able to play loudly while the soloist could still be clearly heard. Lindberg worked on the concerto during a summer holiday on an island in the Gulf of Finland. As Kriikku happened to be staying nearby, the composer's page-by-page progress was delivered to him by boat.

The work is structured in five sections played without a break. At the plaintive opening for unaccompanied clarinet Lindberg presents a surprisingly naïve motto theme which duly recurs as a unifying element throughout the work. With the shimmering entry of the orchestra the mood becomes more animated, even agitated. Although throughout the piece there are sections of calm, a restless spirit is never far away. Lindberg has described the orchestra as his favourite instrument and, with his several decades of experience in writing for this medium, he marshals his resources with relish and consistent invention. At times he creates luxuriant textures which would not be out of place in Messiaen or Gershwin. His orchestration includes two cors anglais, bass clarinet, piano, celesta and harp, while the enormous percussion section accommodates bongos, Thai gong, marimba, bell tree and different types of cymbal. Though there is wide range of these percussion instruments, their contribution is usually subtle rather than conspicuous. Many contemporary composers who engage a large percussion section show similar restraint. Lindberg's writing for the brass sections is liberated and colourful, with one particular sequence of ascending chords assuming increasing importance. The solo clarinet part is freakishly demanding, not least in the fourth section, which culminates in a cadenza. With Lindberg's absolute approval Julian Bliss plays his own original cadenza in this recording. Heralded

by piercing, extraordinarily high notes, Bliss's cadenza is initially reflective before increasing in animation and intensity. Towards the end of the piece a big, noisy *rallentando* gives way to manic activity. After the soloist rises above the tutti with the final assertive statement of the motto theme (- one manifestation of Kriikku's idea that the orchestra would "be able to play loudly while the soloist could still be clearly heard"), followed by a broadening of the tempo, the piece fades away to a *pianissimo*. Against the last resplendent C major chord the clarinet adheres to a foreign note. This concerto is an amalgamation of contemporary techniques – the soloist's part includes multiphonics (the simultaneous playing of more than one note) among other unorthodox sounds – with a totally accessible style. The degree of melodic warmth is far from typical of Lindberg's music in general. Full of exultant energy, seductive textures and *joie de vivre*, the work has proved extremely popular wherever it has been played since its premiere. That premiere (14th September 2002, Finlandia Hall, Helsinki) was given by Kari Kriikku with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra under Jukka-Pekka Saraste.

The Finnish composer Kalevi Aho was born in Forssa in the south of the country. Unusually, the ten-year-old Kalevi's first attraction to music was through his discovery of a mandolin in his home. In learning to play the instrument his progress was so remarkable that his teacher encouraged him towards violin studies, in which he advanced even more rapidly. From 1968 he attended the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, studying composition with Einojuhani Rautavaara, before furthering his studies for a year with Boris Blacher in Berlin. Aho's extensive composition list includes nearly twenty symphonies, more than forty concertos for almost every instrument and including several double or triple concertos, five operas, five string quartets and more than a dozen quintets for diverse combinations. Piano music, vocal and organ works also feature, as well as about twenty "solos" for nearly every instrument. When the Swedish clarinetist Martin Fröst received a grant from the Borletti-Buitoni Trust, he decided to use the award to commission a piece. Consequently the Borletti-Buitoni Trust commissioned Aho to write a concerto, which he completed in the autumn of 2005. Martin Fröst

was the soloist in the premiere given in London in April of the following year, with Osmo Vänskä conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Relating to his concertos for numerous different instruments, Aho has said: "There are the same kinds of challenges for every instrument. You have to know the instrument very well, and then you have to find its soul." In collaboration with the composer, Martin Fröst spoke about the clarinet's extended contemporary techniques. "The clarinet is a really flexible instrument ... it doesn't have limits ... you are really free to develop new sounds and sound-techniques."

In common with Lindberg's concerto, Aho's has five movements, played without a break. The first movement, marked *Tempestoso*, is incisive and declamatory, its initial bars creating the most vivid impact imaginable. In Aho's own words: "very dramatic and powerful, but the first movement also contains a beautiful, slow middle section." This markedly contrasting passage is reflective and withdrawn, as though recovering from the shock of the opening. Then, of the second movement (*Tranquillo*) Aho writes: "a virtuoso cadenza which is dominated by the mysterious tremolos of the clarinet" [rapid oscillations between two notes]. The central movement - *Vivace con brio* - the composer describes as "the most virtuosic movement for both the orchestra and for the soloist.... this rhythmically capricious movement is also quite difficult for the conductor." This alludes to the changing time signature in almost every bar. Continuing, Aho has commented: "After a big culmination comes the slow, melancholy and songful fourth movement - *Adagio, mesto*." (After the beginning, much of this movement is relatively static and other-wordly.) "The Epilogue of the concerto is slow, too; the atmosphere ... is unreal and mysterious. The solo part at the end consists largely of the broken, multiphonic sounds of the clarinet ... fades away into silence." Among the orchestral forces required in Aho's Clarinet Concerto are piccolo, E flat clarinet and bass clarinet (but no standard clarinet), contrabassoon, euphonium, harp and a large percussion section including anvil, gong, vibraphone and xylophone.

Julian Bliss *Clarinet*

In recital and chamber music Bliss has played at most of the world's leading festivals and halls, including Australian Festival of Chamber Music, Gstaad, New York's Lincoln Center, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Verbier, and London's Wigmore Hall. As a soloist, he has appeared with a wide range of international orchestras, including the Auckland Philharmonia, BBC Symphony, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, London Philharmonic, Chamber Orchestra of Paris, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Singapore Symphony Orchestra, Sao Paulo Symphony and the Queensland Symphony.

Excellent reviews, Record-of-the-Week spots and media attention flow from his recording output. In 2024, releases on Signum Records included music by Clara and Robert Schumann and the world premiere recording of John Mackey's concerto 'Divine Mischief' with the Baylor University Wind Ensemble. Other albums include Brahms Clarinet Sonatas with James Baillieu (piano), Mozart and Weber Quintets with the Carducci String Quartet; Schubert's Shepherd on the Rock with Ailish Tynan (soprano) and Christopher Glynn (piano); Steve Reich's New York Counterpoint; Mozart and Nielsen's Clarinet Concertos with the Royal Northern Sinfonia.

With the launch of Bliss Music in 2020, Julian's arrangements of a selection of pieces for clarinet and piano have been made available as sheet music. These include Rachmaninoff's Cello Sonata Op. 19, the third movement of which has been set as a Grade 6 piece on the new London College of Music clarinet syllabus.



Taavi Oramo *Conductor*

Taavi Oramo enjoys a reputation for his forward-thinking approach to music-making. Previously Artist-in-Residence with Tapiola Sinfonietta, and Artistic Director of VocalEspoo since 2020, he specialises in cultivating programmes which have an innate dramatic or thematic structure and is equally at home in mainstream repertoire as he is in conducting cutting-edge contemporary works.

Conducting engagements to date include Hong Kong Philharmonic, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, the Hallé, Trondheim Symfoniorkester, Orquestra Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música, Bilkent Symphony Orchestra, Orchestras of the Royal Swedish Opera, Opéra de Rouen and Scottish Opera, Klangforum Wien, and Dala and Västerås sinfoniettas. Oramo has also worked with Latvian National Symphony Orchestra, Transylvania State Philharmonic Orchestra, Norrköping Symphony Orchestra, Munich Chamber Orchestra and BIT20 Ensemble. In his native Finland, he has conducted the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Turku Philharmonic Orchestra, Tampere Philharmonic, Lahti Symphony, Orchestra of the Finnish National Opera, Avanti! Chamber Orchestra and Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra, among others.

Oramo studied conducting at the Panula Academy under Jorma Panula and at the Sibelius Academy under Atso Almila and Hannu Lintu. His conducting career was launched with two short-notice jump-ins with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Tapiola Sinfonietta. He is a founding member, former executive director and Chairman of the Board at Eloa Culture Company, which produces multidisciplinary chamber music events.



BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra

As Scotland's national broadcasting orchestra, the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra has been performing for audiences across Scotland, the UK and internationally since 1935. The orchestra's live performances are regularly broadcast on BBC Radio 3, Radio Scotland and Sounds, as well as BBC Television and iPlayer.

Opening eyes and ears with ambitious repertoire beyond any benchmark, the BBC SSO is Scotland's leading champion of new music. Across nine decades, it has commissioned orchestral music by the most original voices of its time and hosts its annual Tectonics Festival of new and experimental music each spring alongside its Creative Partner Ilan Volkov.

With Associate Artist Lucy Drever, the orchestra runs projects that inspire creativity and connection with families, schools and communities across Scotland. Through a close association with the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, the orchestra mentors the next generation of conductors, composers and instrumentalists. The orchestra also supports young musical talent in BBC Radio Scotland's Young Classical Musician of the Year competition.

Ryan Wigglesworth began his tenure as Chief Conductor in September 2022. One of the foremost composer-conductors of his generation, he has directed a wide range of repertoire with the BBC SSO including the ballets of Stravinsky, major works of Elgar, and UK premieres by György Kurtág and Hans Abrahamsen. Regularly performing at the BBC Proms and Edinburgh International Festival, the orchestra is a recipient of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award and four Gramophone Awards.



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BBC
Scottish
Symphony
Orchestra

First Violins

Ania Safonova (guest leader)
Kana Kawashima
Greg Lawson
Marciana Buta
Elita Poulter
Amy Cardigan
Mireia Ferrer Yabar
Emily Ward
Gent Koço
Wen Wang
Feargus Hetherington
Catherine James

Second Violins

Lise Aferiat *
Jamie Campbell †
Liza Johnson ‡
Brigid Leman
Ana do Vale
Ben Norris
Julia Norton
Janis Walton
Barbara Downie
Alex Gascoine
Serina Whitmarsh

Violas

Kimi Makino ¥
Morag Robertson ‡
Rik Evans
Martin Wiggins
Liam Brolly
Emma Connell Smith
David McCreadie
Yvette Rosie

Cellos

Rudi De Groote *
Nicholas Byrne ‡
Sarah Oliver
Gill De Groote
Anne Brincourt
Naomi Pavri
Feargus Egan

Double Basses

Gyunam Kim *
Genna Spinks ‡
Jeremy Ward
Paul Speirs
Daniel Griffin

Flutes

Brontë Hudnott †
Luke Russell †

Oboes

Stella McCracken *
Alexandra Hilton †
Kirstie Logan

Clarinets

Yann Ghiro *
Adam Lee †
Jenny Stephenson

Bassoons

Lawrence O'Donnell ¥
Peter Wesley †

Horns

Francisco Gomez-Ruiz ¥
Hector Salgueiro
Nicole Linning ¥
Stephanie Jones
Anyia Flanagan

Trumpets

Mark O'Keeffe *
Mark Addison
Hedley Benson †

Trombones

Davur Juul Magnussen ¥
Tom Scaife
Symone Hutchison

Bass Trombone

Alexander Kelly †

Baritone Horn

Duncan Wilson

Tuba

Andrew Duncan *

Timpani

Gordon Rigby *

Percussion

Joe Richards ¥
Martin Willis

Harp

Helen Thomson

Piano/Celeste

Andrew Forbes

* *section principal*

† *principal*

‡ *string sub-principal*

¥ *guest principal*

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