



## Symphonic Poem *Traumgesicht*, Op. 70 by Erkki Melartin

Principally, **Erkki Melartin** (1875–1937) thought of himself as a composer, although he also was a professional conductor, a professor of music theory and composition, and from 1911 on he also worked as the director of the Helsinki Conservatory – later the Sibelius Academy – for 25 years. In Melartin’s large oeuvre, e.g. his symphonies and the opera *Aino* were significant works when considering their artistic importance. However, they were left in oblivion after the composer’s death and during the post-war Modernism.

Since Melartin’s large-scale works were left unpublished during the composer’s lifetime – apart from Symphony No. 6 –, there has been an unnecessarily high threshold for bringing up or getting acquainted with them. In order to promote their performing, and to help them become a living part of the music culture in Finland, the Erkki Melartin Society launched an editing and clean-copying project for Melartin’s symphonies in 2006. Besides the works of Jean Sibelius, the public of today should be given a possibility of hearing the more lyrical symphonic music of Melartin, which has been more influenced by the Finnish folk songs, the Finnish scenery, and the idyll of summer.

Melartin saw himself mainly as a symphonic composer. Between 1903 and 1925, he composed six symphonies which mainly lean on Austro-German symphonic tradition. Back then, their premieres became substantial, patriotic events, and these works were performed also abroad, e.g. in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Riga, Moscow and Berlin. In addition to six symphonies, Melartin also composed three symphonic poems: *Siikajoki* (Op. 28) in 1903, *Traumgesicht* (Op. 70) in 1910 and *Patria* (Op. 72) in 1911.

An interesting observation is that even a hundred years ago, Russian pianist and conductor **Alexander Ziloti**, an advocate of new music in St. Petersburg, and the Finnish music critic **Evert Katila**, found symphonic poems more characteristic of Melartin’s personality and artistic endeavors than symphonies. Later, also Finnish music historian, professor **Erkki Salmenhaara** found it interesting that Melartin did not more determinedly seek his way into the tradition of symphonic poem. Considering the lyrical nature of Melartin’s music, one may be astonished that he did not favor this genre more than he did.

Melartin was working on *Traumgesicht* particularly in August 1910. One month before, Ziloti had written to him, telling that the concert series of new music in St. Petersburg did under no circumstances have space for his third symphony. However, a smaller piece would fit in well. Already in the end of the next month, Melartin announced that he had finished a new symphonic poem, which he had named "A Vision of the Night". "During the last day, I have worked for 17 hours, so you can understand that neither the head nor the hand – not to mention my sleep – are in the right order", he wrote to a friend. A day later, another friend received a letter in which the composition process of this work was described more in detail: "I have been working like a lunatic. The other night I finished *Traumgesicht* after doing 15 hours of work during that day. Ziloti quite speeded up my working, since he constantly telegraphed me and wrote letters. When I told him what I had put in, he requested for the beginning of the work, and, after that he only wanted *täglich mehr, täglich mehr*. He is tremendously fond of my work. This is an extremely difficult piece, and this kind of orchestral writing is something that nobody has ever tried before here in Finland."

On December 24th, 1910, Melartin conducted his work in Ziloti's concert series in the hall of St. Petersburg's Aristocrat Club. *Traumgesicht* had a favorable reception, and it was regarded both atmospheric and beautiful. In Helsinki, it was premiered in March 1911, and in Vyborg, a month later with the title "*A Vision of the Night, a Symphonic Poem*", and finally in Riga in March 1912 as *Traumgesicht, eine Symphonische Dichtung*. The composer conducted all these performances himself.

After these concerts, there was a long pause, until conductor **Georg Schnéevoigt** took the composition into the program of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in the spring season of 1932. Melartin had given it a new title: *Symphonische Musik*. As the autograph material contains no indication that the work would have been revised for this presentation, there must have been other reasons for the change of the title. *Traumgesicht* has symphonic features, and on the basis of its symphonic nature, Melartin may for example have wished to designate the title according to the neo-classicist spirit of the day.

The engraving and editing of *Traumgesicht* has shed interesting, previously completely unknown light on the genesis of the work. On the basis of the preserved drafts, it has been concluded that the symphonic poem is based on the incidental music Melartin wrote for **Gabriele d'Annunzio's** play *Spring Morning's Dream* (Un sogno d'una mattina primavera, EM111) in 1905. According to a letter Melartin sent to his father in 1905, the Finnish Theater had requested him to compose the overture and intermezzo for the play.

"Spring Morning's Dream was amazing, it was like a riddle. [-] Melartin had composed miraculously wonderful music for this play – the song of birds, the hum of flowers, the sweetness of spring nature, and the mental fantasy of the maniac were all perfectly described", the music student **Alma Silventoinen**, who later married composer **Toivo Kuula**, wrote about the premiere of the play in her diary in 1905.

It can be seen that Melartin composed *Traumgesicht* on the basis of the earlier incidental music that he had composed to Spring Morning's Dream. This can be perceived by looking at the relatively extensive existing score fragment. The fragment lacks the beginning, but on top of page 21, the composer has written the entry "Un sogno d'una mattina di pri-

mavera (2)". On page 47 in the same fragment, one can see the entry "Fine 27.10.05 Hfors", with Hfors being short for the Swedish name of Helsinki. In this score Melartin has made markings, sketchings and additions in pencil, which all seem to be related to the later *Traumgesicht*. The exploitation and, in practice, a new organization of the material of the incidental music are indications of the fact that the composition process was fast: in fact, the work was finished in only a month.

Musically, *Traumgesicht* refers to **Richard Strauss'** and **Claude Debussy's** orchestral writing. In its lyricism it represents a nuanced modernism and is very virtuosic, which is exceptional for both Melartin and other Finnish orchestral composers at that time. In addition, *Traumgesicht* is reminiscent of **Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov's** orchestral style, and it is also influenced by early **Alexander Scriabin**. From 1908 to 1911, Melartin served as conductor of the Vyborg Orchestra, and he visited St. Petersburg quite often at the time. Therefore, it may be assumed that he had the opportunity of hearing Scriabin's music and take part in related discussions.

In any case, Melartin's "Image of the Night" or "Night-Vision" from the year 1910 is in its modernistic appearance quite different from other Finnish works of the era, thus opening a new insight into its composer's image. At a very early stage for Finland, Melartin welcomed impressionist stimuli, which can, apart from *Traumgesicht*, be seen in e.g. the 1908 piano suite *Der traurige Garten* (Op. 52).

This edition is based on the hand-written copy located in the Sibelius Academy Library (SibA Mel 12:75). It's not written by Melartin himself. The location of the autograph score is unknown. The copy and drafts can be found digitized at the following website [www.doria.fi/handle/10024/61386](http://www.doria.fi/handle/10024/61386). The work's original orchestral parts are located in the Orchestral Library of the Sibelius Academy.

In 2006 and 2008, The Finnish Cultural Foundation gave the Erkki Melartin Society a considerable grant for the engraving and editing of the composer's symphonies; the idea to do the same with *Traumgesicht* was born as its side project. Thanks to the Foundation's support, Melartin's symphonies No. 3, 4 and 5, have all been edited. The scores of these works can be browsed on the society's website <http://erkkimelartin.fi>. The orchestral materials are available from the publisher Fennica Gehrman ([www.fennicagehrman.fi](http://www.fennicagehrman.fi)). Melartin's autographs and drafts can be found for example at the digital asset management system Doria at [www.doria.fi](http://www.doria.fi).

Editor and Melartin Society Board Member **Jani Kyllönen** has been responsible for the engraving and editing of both the symphonies and *Traumgesicht*. The project has been led by society chair, Melartin researcher, Dr. **Tuire Ranta-Meyer**. For more information on the project, visit the society's website <http://erkkimelartin.fi> or contact by e-mailing the chair [tuire.ranta-meyer@metropolia.fi](mailto:tuire.ranta-meyer@metropolia.fi).

Helsinki, February 27<sup>th</sup> 2013

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