

philharmonia orchestra

Esa-Pekka Salonen on 2010/11 season

Esa-Pekka Salonen – Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor, Philharmonia Orchestra

We have two main projects next season: a concert version of *Tristan and Isolde*, with a video by Bill Viola that is one of the greatest music videos ever produced. Bill Viola is one of the pioneering video artists and he's perhaps the best known, most important video artist in the world today. His language is perfect for Wagner because he's very interested in the idea of going beyond time, operating with the ideas of stretching time to a point where time loses its importance and its normal function, and in Wagner of course this works perfectly. Some of the images are hauntingly beautiful, and once you've seen them one time you never forget them. It's that powerful.

Tristan is a piece that since my teens I always wanted to somehow get involved in; and it so happened that I had to wait for several decades until the right moment was there, but then it really became one of the greatest experiences of my artistic life, ever. And I'm extremely happy to be able to bring it to London, and very excited about it as well. *Tristan* is the kind of score that you always want to come back to. It's like a special drug that you cannot live without.

The *City of Dreams* experience was extremely positive, and in many ways it succeeded beyond our expectations even. What was very clear was that the audiences really liked the idea of going beyond the normal sort of presentation of concert series, and going really deep into the context as well. So right after *City of Dreams* we started to think about the next possible subject, and I thought that Bartók would be perfect.

Why Bartók? There are many many reasons. He's of course a great composer, one of the absolutely central composers of the last century. But also he's kind of a shadowy figure. We don't know that much about him, and we don't know that much about his sort of socio-historic context. And somehow also Bartók's music still has this kind of, I wouldn't say scary reputation, but kind of awkward reputation that sometimes people think that Bartók is difficult to listen to, apart from the very best known works and so on and so forth. But I completely disagree with this. I think that Bartók is one of the composers whose music speaks very directly. And yes he was a very sort of theoretically minded composer, but at the same time he operated with folk music material and really sort of simple and straightforward ideas. And I'm really fascinated by this balance and juxtaposition of the folk material on one hand, and the almost scientific mind on the other hand. And the results are, not only are they completely original, but they are also deeply, deeply moving and affecting works.

We are going to play the best known Bartók masterpieces that are really part of the core repertoire and are frequently performed. But also we're going to play music that for whatever reason is less frequently performed, such as the *Cantata Profana* for instance, and *Kossuth* which is a very early piece, very much Richard Strauss influenced but still seminal pure Bartók somewhere below-surface. And we are going to combine these works with composers who were great influences in Bartók's artistic life such as Kodály, Stravinsky, Debussy. And the idea is to put this music not only into context but also to give the Philharmonia and myself an opportunity to get really deep inside this material and an opportunity to really understand what this music is all about, by not only playing the most important orchestral works in these concerts, but also playing the string quartets and the *Mikrokosmos* and all these very seminal pieces that so influenced not only other composers but also all music lovers around the world, and since their early childhood quite often. I mean there are so many of us who started playing these *Mikrokosmos* pieces, at the age of seven, eight, nine whatever. And from there then to the most complex, most profound statements such as the last string quartets of Bartók's - No.5, No.6, Music for Strings, *Concerto for Orchestra*, all these masterpieces. I think it's going to be an absolutely fascinating journey.