

## Overview of Portfolio Submission

Much like the composers discussed in my dissertation, my own compositional output during the years 2012-2015, coinciding with my D.Phil candidacy at Oxford, reflects an ongoing relationship with the Baltic region, where I was born. This personal, or musical, narrative encompasses a conscious decision to return to the region in 2010, after receiving my M.M. degree from the Juilliard School, to inversely find my “core” there, rather than abroad where I had spent the vast majority of my life; lasting collaborations with Estonian ensembles and musicians that have expanded since commencing my degree at Oxford; involvement in the political and social discourse of Estonia through the medium of controversial works like *289* and *Nostra Culpa*, to be discussed shortly; and a lingering presence in the nation’s cultural life through academic roles, such as temporarily taking over the Head of Composition role at the Estonian Academy of Music & Theatre in the autumn of 2013, and commissions for large-scale projects such as my upcoming ballet for the nation’s gesture to Japan marking the seventieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima.

The earliest composition in the portfolio, *String Quartet*, is also its most widely performed and arguably most critically successful. It has been performed by the Cavaleri Quartet, who premiered it at Oxford in early 2013, the Ligeti, Piatti, and Villiers Quartets in the UK, Quartetto Prometeo in Italy, and PUBLIQuartet in the United States, who debuted the work at the DiMenna Center in New York and will present the piece at Carnegie Hall in April 2015 in conjunction with a CD release on the Concert Artists Guild label. The piece, written over the course of two weeks during my stay in the United States, references my own past experience as a violinist and violist performing chamber music. It is also the most absolute piece, with the least concrete relation to the Baltic region. *Nostra Culpa*, composed directly after the *String Quartet*, is predicated on a very specific Baltic issue: the financial crisis in 2009, its after-effects in the Baltic nations, and issues of identity that I describe in the conclusion (Section 6) of my dissertation. The piece has generated more than its share of controversy. The addendum presents only a selection of local, regional, and world media; its after-effects in Estonian musical society are still keenly felt

and the piece has since gone on to be performed in Latvia and Hungary besides its premiere in Estonia with the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra.

*Nostra Culpa* marked my first collaboration with Tallinn-based, American librettist, journalist, and writer Scott Diel. 289, a commission by the Estonian National Male Choir is the second. Asked to write a piece for the choir's appearance at the National Song Festival Grounds in Tallinn, Estonia, Diel proposed another issue of substantial currency: the Estonian-Russian border treaty, which, in the autumn of 2013, had been introduced to the Estonian Parliament with the hope of ratifying the Stalin-era border with Russia. The text is the verbatim League of Nations document and the setting incorporates the former border, negotiated between the nascent Estonian state and the Soviet Union, in 1920, even in the whistled line, which rotated the east-west border horizontally. The work generated its own share of controversy in Estonia, appearing during the negotiation process between the Russian and Estonian states, directly after "Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Marko Mihkelson...called on people to refrain from mythologizing Estonian-Russian border treaties."<sup>1</sup>

*Manifesto*, originally written in the summer of 2013 but heavily revised and almost completely reimaged in early 2014, was commissioned by the London Philharmonic and subsequently performed by the Minnesota Orchestra in January 2015. The piece rejects direct programmatic influences but uses a folk melody as its basis throughout its almost-ten minute duration. Unlike the possibility of direct national basis in Tubin's *Fifth Symphony*, the source of the folk material is purposely abstracted. The remaining two compositions that make up the portfolio are for reduced instrumentation but are exclusively a product of the experimentation into structure (particularly, anti-climax and formlessness) and extended techniques in the preceding works. *The winter desert of my silences*, commissioned by the Sound and Music Next Wave program for a premiere at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and the 25<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Estonian Public Broadcasting "ERR News." *Financial Opera Team Takes on Diplomacy and Demarcation*. <http://news.err.ee/v/Culture/cf7cef4d-a706-4d03-ac19-efe3834413a8> (2 April 2014)

anniversary CD release with NMC Records, was the result of a continuing collaboration with tuba soloist Oren Marshall. The score, intended to retain a level of abstraction corresponding to the soloist's background in improvisation, nevertheless tries to portray a pictorial aesthetic, a concrete "winter desert of my silences." In this sense, the piece follows directly from music I wrote during my Fulbright grant in Estonia, particularly the percussion trio *Silence.scape* and my second commission for the ensemble Resonabilis, titled *I awoke and there were no walls to shield me from the moonlight*.<sup>2</sup>

The third and latest collaboration with Scott Diel moved away from issues of Estonian political relevance into Goethe and *lied*; his translation of *Der Erlkönig*, alternating German and English stanzas, lent itself to a highly unusual setting inspired by past vocal collaborations with Estonian singer Iris Oja (the voice in *Nostra Culpa*), this time, written for the male voice. My first composition for voice and piano, *Erlkönig*'s primary concerns are the contemporary genre of *lied* writing and reconciling that with Schubert's material. The work is based obsessively on the gestures, inflections, and pitch (and harmonic) material of Schubert's setting of the Goethe text, but seeks to avoid pastiche and outright historicization of the Schubert *Erlkönig*. Though it is the shortest work in the portfolio, I believe that *Erlkönig* is a representation of my musical language in its most crystalline form.

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<sup>2</sup> This is the same ensemble that commissioned Tulve's *North Wind, South Wind*. My first composition for Resonabilis appears on the ensemble's second CD alongside Tulve's work.