



Director's word

Marikki Hakola: ABOUT THE FILM LUONNOTAR

On the starting points

The planning of the film Luonnotar began in spring 2006, when I heard Jean Sibelius' symphony poem Luonnotar in London, interpreted by my sister, soprano Riikka Hakola, and by conductor Leif Segerstam. Together with Riikka, we had already for a long time looked for some composition that we could realize together, each with our own instrument – Riikka by singing and me by visualizing the composition on the expressive language of the film. While listening, I immediately realized that this was the work we had been looking for!

On the composition

The powerful character of Sibelius' symphonic poem made me feel very humble as I was thinking of the wild journey that was taking shape as a project ahead of me. The composition is intense, intimate. At times it yanks the listener into very dramatic rises and wide views with its downright hypnotic and conjuring rumble.

It is amazing how many extreme emotions, space and also musical close-ups are contained within such a short moment, those less than ten minutes which this symphonic poem ultimately only lasts.

On the story

The music rolls with primal force to the consciousness of the listener, offering a unique auditive landscape for the story told by the soprano. As Riikka has aptly put it, the singer can in this composition as if jump to ride the wave driven by many thousands of years of storytelling, and join as the next link in the chain of generations of storytellers.

The story and the text set fascinating challenges for the cinematic expression. They essentially defined the visual character and practical realization of the film. The story was about the mythological event that describes the birth of the world. How to visualize this kind of event, with such extreme dimensions and meanings?

The starting point of the composition is the first song of Kalevala, the story about how the world was born from the primal egg. Sibelius modified the text of Elias Lönnrot quite brazenly to fit his music. The Kalevalan poetic rhythm was mostly removed, and the text was shortened and compressed into almost minimalistic form with free rhythm.

On the female image

In the text version of Sibelius, an interesting viewpoint on the Kalevalan female image and feminine godhood is emphasized. Ilmatar helps the mythical primal bird Sotka to give birth to the primal egg. The egg falls apart and from the splintered pieces, the world and celestial objects originate.

The story of the film indeed describes "the time before the beginning." The elements of the story give the cinematic narration an opportunity to play with the traditional Kalevalan female image and the goddesses of mythology.

In the film, the essence of femalehood is probed from the Daughter of the Ether via the Mother of Waters, to the mythical Sotka Bird that gives birth to the World Egg, and finally to the imaginary "master mind" that is behind everything – the ancient, powerful, everlasting Wise-Woman of the North.

All the female characters of the story are involved in the mythical conception of the world. On the other hand, one might think that the female figures represent one and the same character, the one who gives birth to the world.

Turns in the scriptwriting

The development of the script took an interesting turn when I by chance, while studying the origins myth of Kalevala, ran into a 1908 study by a theosophist Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, where she compares the stories of Kalevala and Indian mythology. According to Blavatsky, the story of Ilmatar and Sotka Bird is almost identical with the story of Saraswati and the Swan. Saraswati is a Hindu goddess of learning, art, music and wisdom.

The esoteric thoughts of Blavatsky were nonetheless ignored, because while working on the subject my own thoughts and plans on the cinematic interpretation were quickly proceeding to an opposite direction. But I could not help wondering whether Lönnrot might have possibly become acquainted between the old and new Kalevala with ancient Indian literature, such as the Vedas. In the latter edition from the year 1849, the myth depicting the birth of the world has essentially changed from the first edition and resembles the Saraswati legend considerably lot. On the other hand, the Homeric story of Leda and the Swan is also very close to Lönnrot's solution.

On the "Sibelius and Luonnotar" documentary

The contemplation on the original roots of the stories on the background of Kalevala led to a thought about television documentary which would provide information on the birth stages of Sibelius' composition, but also seek answers for the question on what lies in the background of the origins myth of Kalevala.

I began to produce the documentary simultaneously with the fictional *Luonnotar* film. The documentary interviews Anna-Leena Siikala, an academician and the emeritus professor of folklore, Timo Virtanen, a musical researcher and Sibelius expert, and Jouni Hyvönen, an expert on Lönnrot and folk poetry, whom I all thank for rewarding and interesting co-operation.

For documentary we recorded also interviews and conversations with soprano Riikka Hakola and conductor Leif Segerstam, as they were preparing for the audio recording of the music and concert in Bratislava in December 2006.

Towards naturalism – hand in hand with symbolism

The first song of Kalevala offers an opportunity to contemplate, from the starting points of cultural anthropology, folkloristic science and science philosophy, on how humans have since the dawn of time sought to understand various natural phenomena and to explain and illustrate these phenomena in different ways.

The roots of the Kalevalan myth depicting the birth of the world have also originally been explanations like this, whether those roots may lie in Vedic Hindu culture or Eurasian, Persian folk traditions. One may reasonably presume that these explanations, cloaked in the forms of stories, have traveled through migrations of peoples also to the northern folklore. My own interest has focused precisely on these explanations of phenomena, and what those explanations in themselves are rhetorically describing.

Many sorts of beliefs are also still present in the discussion about modern natural science. The world of science seeks to model, illustrate and test in many various ways the natural phenomena, but all phenomena cannot be explained – at least not yet. For example, even climate warming and its reasons, such a decisively important natural phenomenon that influences all living things, is still under a contradictory political controversy.

The results of studies cannot be or will not be recognized, even though others seek to illustrate them as powerfully as possible. Scientists seek to resort to symbolism and rhetoric to illustrate their findings. The rhetorical methods of natural science and politics however seem to clearly contradict each other, because political decisions to stop the climate warming have not been reached.

The rhetoric of modern popularizers of science does not much from the way that folk-healers in ancient times illustrated different natural phenomena. The basis of knowledge in modern sciences is of course very different and heavily dependent of the research results, but the methods of communication concerning the phenomena are still interestingly similar.

From the viewpoint of semiotics, the meanings of different signs change as times pass and according to the way they are used. Natural phenomena have been, as the art of storytelling has developed, the most central sources of symbolism. These symbols have also been used to describe psychological emotional states.

The way we interpret the world may not necessarily tell us much about the world. But it will tell us much about whom we are, where we come from and what we intend to do. The interpretations of nature are important because they describe human action and intentions in relation to nature.

I have thought especially much about natural sciences alongside with this project, and of the way natural scientists illustrate phenomena that are often very difficult to explain. And simultaneously I have thought about the mythological tales that describe nature. After realizing that in the interpretative sense, these two are largely one and the same thing, I found the solution and the starting point for the aesthetical cinematic realization of *Luonnotar*.

On the aesthetics of film *Luonnotar*

There are two different, intermingling creation tales simultaneously proceeding in the story of film *Luonnotar*: the Kalevalan mythology describing the birth of the world and the viewpoint of naturalistic science on the birth of the Earth and life.

The landscape realized through 3D animation forms a kind of virtual stage. The imagery refers to human nature experiences and the interpretation of those experiences. It paints forth a spectrum of wild forces of nature, constantly transforming expressive scenery where the mythical characters travel, telling their story that has been sung for thousands of years to new generations.

The natural imagery of the film has been built through digitally created nature simulations. The intention of these nature simulations is however not literally imitate nature. The animations are not snapshots of nature. Their intention is not to depict nature in a realistic manner. The intention of animation pictures is to refer to different thoughts and notions about natural phenomena. The images are reflections of human experiences and interpretations.

In a corresponding manner, the tonal language of Sibelius does not depict or imitate nature, even though that sort of interpretation has often been made about Sibelius' compositions. The tonal language of Sibelius describes his own thoughts, emotions and interpretations about his living environment and nature.

In *Luonnotar*, the interface between reality and illusion is emphasized. The intention of film's nature imagery is not to refer to natura but to our thoughts and experiences about it. The combination of actors shot in blue-screen studio and virtual space has been realized with highly stylized theatrical means, and the actions of characters have for example been emphasized with the kind of lighting, that would not have been possible in real nature. The stylized solutions of Kabuki theater are more characteristic for the *Luonnotar* than realism.

The actors who play in the film, real human beings, are paradoxically closer to natura than the digitally modeled virtual space that surrounds them. This in spite of the fact that just those role characters played by actors, living humans, are fictional. The role characters refer to mythological figures. This paradox took the cinematic interpretation of the work to the direction where the creatures of the story define their environment as much as the environment defines them.

Luonnotar combines different art forms, and the conventions of music, dance, theater, cinema, and visual art cross within its aesthetics. The interesting thing is not the assimilation and harmony of different varieties of art, but rather the dialogue that grows between different elements that have been attached together. Luonnotar speaks with its interfaces.

On the making of the film and about the makers

The making of the film started with the recording of the music in December 2006 in Bratislava, Slovakia. Conductor Leif Segerstam entered the project and musical realization without prejudices and made a fine contribution, for which I am grateful. Epa Tamminen is responsible for the recording of music and the planning of the film soundtrack, and I thank him for all my heart for his patience, discussions and enormous support.

In the realization of Sotka figure, I was greatly pleased to continue with dancer, choreographer Nina Hyvärinen the co-operation that had already started in the film *Enchanted Child*. Nina's commitment was wonderful. She also helped to find the movement language of Daughter of the Ether and Wise-woman, figures whom Riikka played.

The film has been realized by combining character figures shot in the studio with virtual stages realized through the means of 3D animation. Raimo Uunila, whose sharp eye and pictorial vision I can be grateful for, is responsible for studio shootings. Shootings took place in Magnusborg Studios, Porvoo, Finland in the summer 2007. After that started the editing process of the shooten raw materials. Editing was finished on March 2008.

The virtual stagings contain primal visions of many kinds of natural forces, space scenery, storming ocean, iceberg, sand storm, natural gas explosion, volcanic and unstable ground etc. The realization of animation has been a very demanding productional phase, because the animated image is in continuous organic movement and state of transformation. Animation process started on June 2008 and was finished on June 2010.

I thank animator Katriina Ilmaranta for her gigantic work for the designing and realization of animation. I also thank 2nd animator Tanja Bastamow for compositing animation layers.

Finnish production culture is today less and less involved in art films, and even less so in musical films. I am grateful that sponsors have believed in this production in spite of its marginal variety-type. I thank the financiers of the film Luonnotar for their support of the production; The Finnish Cultural Foundation, Yle Teema and Yle Co-Productions, The Finnish Film Foundation, The Finnish Performing Music Promotion Centre, the AV-section of The Foundation for the Promotion of Finnish Music, The Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture, the copyright holders Sibelius and The Arts Council of Finland.

My warm thanks for the economic manager Jaana Hertell-Amokrane, my important partner in getting the production onwards. Jaana has with her fine professional skills kept the management under good care and thus made possible for me to concentrate on artistic realization.

Finally I would like to thank my dear sister Riikka, whose wonderful musical interpretation as a soprano and charismatic appearance as an actress are the carrying forces of the film and among its most important elements. Riikka has also helped decisively, as an internationally performing opera singer, in many productional matters, contacts and among other things, in the arrangements associated with the musical recording. She has traveled together with me through the multiple turns of the production, for which I am truly grateful.

If one should ask me now, after the film Luonnotar has been completed and after the long working process – I would like to think that in the beginning, there was no emptiness, no maiden, not the word, nor egg. Not even the big bang. One must set the question otherwise. In the beginning of what? What was there in the beginning of such times when humans developed the ability to communicate, tell stories and transfer information and emotions from mothers to daughters, from fathers to sons, from one generation to another?

Yes – in the beginning there was of course the song!

November 28th, 2010, in Porvoo

