



ONDINE

**HEINO ELLER**

**SYMPHONIC POEMS**

**NIGHT CALLS**

**WHITE NIGHT**

**TWILIGHT**

**DAWN**

**ESTONIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

**OLARI ELTS**



Heino Eller with his wife Anna in 1927

# HEINO ELLER (1887–1970)

- |    |   |       |
|----|---|-------|
| 1  | <b>Night Calls</b> (Öö hüüded) (1920–21)              | 17:39 |
|    | <b>White Night</b> (Valge öö), Symphonic Suite (1939) | 28:56 |
| 2  | I. White Night (Valge öö)                             | 2:29  |
| 3  | II. In Dance Rhythm (Tantsurütmis)                    | 2:55  |
| 4  | III. Reminiscences (Meenutused)                       | 4:33  |
| 5  | IV. Camp Fire (Lõkketuli)                             | 3:20  |
| 6  | V. Fisherman's Song (Kalurilaul)                      | 7:29  |
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| 8  | VII. White Night (Valge öö)                           | 2:51  |
| 9  | <b>Twilight</b> (Videvik) (1917)                      | 5:09  |
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ESTONIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA  
OLARI ELTS, conductor

**Heino Eller** (1887–1970) is one of the founders of Estonian professional musical culture. Eller's legacy is twofold – in his prolific instrumental compositions he forged an elaborate style that successfully combined both modern and national elements, and as a prominent professor of composition during half a century he influenced generations of Estonian composers, amongst them Eduard Tubin (1905–1982), Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) and Lepo Sumera (1950–2000). Eller's best known composition, *Kodumaine viis* ('Homeland tune') in arrangement for string orchestra, rose to prominence during the 1950s and 1960s as the chief vehicle for expressing national feelings and identity under Soviet occupation. The work remains to this day an instrumental equivalent of a national anthem, in its importance bearing comparison to Jean Sibelius's *Finlandia*.

In the independent Estonia of the 1920s and 1930s Eller was considered the leading modernist of the country, and his music was extolled for its novelty and technical prowess. In 1925 the founding father of modern musicology, prof. Guido Adler from the Vienna University attested to Eller's music being the continuation of Grieg's 'Northern style' and a successful synthesis of impressionism and expressionism. Adler qualified Eller as the 'Estonian Sibelius' and attested to his music being in high European standards.<sup>1</sup> In Soviet Estonia, during the harsh Stalinist cultural repressions of the late 1940s and early 1950s (widely known as the 'Zhdanovchina') Eller suffered extreme critique being labelled as the 'leading formalist' of the country and eventually was forced to write and read aloud in radio broadcast a letter of repentance renouncing his own music. However, by the 1960s he was uniformly lauded as the patriarch of Estonian music. Eller's heyday was in the 1980s, when in preparation for the centenary celebrations several books were published, music scores were printed at the Soviet State publishing houses 'Muzyka' and 'Sovetskii kompozitor', and much of his legacy was performed and recorded. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Arro, Elmar. *Erinnerungen an Heino Eller's Aufenthalt in Wien 1925*. Manuscript in Estonian Museum of Theatre and Music, M39:1/108.

in the newly independent Estonian republic since the 1990s, Eller's reputation has been in eclipse, and his rich musical legacy has not yet been printed or recorded in its entirety. Heino Eller's archive is housed in the Estonian Theatre and Music Museum, which also holds the author's rights for most of the works.

Heino Eller's oeuvre divides neatly into three periods according to the geography of his life. Early period in St. Peterburg/Petrograd (1907–1920), middle period in Tartu (1920–1940) and late period in Tallinn (1940–1970). Eller was born and had his early education in Tartu, second-largest town in Estonia, which in the latter part of 19th century was the centre for the Estonian national awakening movement. He studied the violin as a youngster and in the first years of 20th century was actively involved in the emerging Estonian professional concert life there, playing in the first Estonian symphony orchestra and string quartet. In 1907 he entered the St. Petersburg Conservatoire to study violin, but within a year had to abandon his dream – similarly to Sibelius, Eller had started to learn the violin too late and due to insufficient technique strained his hand. In 1908 he started to study law at the St. Petersburg University, where he stayed for four years. Having nearly completed the whole jurisprudence course he re-entered the Conservatoire to study composition in 1912, and graduated in 1920. Having returned to his home town, Eller taught music theory and composition there until the Soviet occupation in 1940. In the last thirty years of his life he was a professor of composition in the Tallinn Conservatoire, now Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

In the context of Estonian music, where there is a strong choral tradition celebrated in the National Song Festivals since 1869, it is notable that Eller was an exclusively instrumental composer. In summary, his output includes 3 symphonies, a dozen other

symphonic works, works for string orchestra, 6 string quartets, around 30 works for the violin, and around 200 titles for the piano. Whilst the first surviving compositions from 1909 were unambitious miniatures for the piano, by 1918 Eller had his symphonic picture **Twilight** ('Videvik') premiered in what was by then Petrograd; and in the same year he finished the piano score of his most popular symphonic poem **Dawn** ('Koit').

Upon his return to Tartu, in the early 1920s the circumstances proved to be very favorable for Eller – he was able to conduct his own works with the town orchestra regularly. This led to the composition of half a dozen symphonic scores, first of which was the symphonic poem **Night Calls** ('Öö hüüded'). The work was premiered in Tartu 8th of April 1921, with the author conducting the 'Vanemuine' orchestra. This was the first concert of Eller's works in Estonia (the programme also included **Twilight** and Prelude for cello and orchestra), and the reviewer in the German language 'Dorpaten Nachrichten' praised the young composer's talent: „Really, this is an artist from the grace of god .../... also Eller has to bear his flag abroad, for the adornment and glory of his homeland.”<sup>2</sup>

According to Eller, the idea for **Night Calls** stems from a storm he witnessed one night at Sestroretsk, a seaside resort north-west of St. Petersburg, where he had played in a summer orchestra during the war. In a later handwritten excerpt Eller, however, claims the work rather to be influenced by Mussorgski's *Night on bald mountain*.<sup>3</sup> A vivid and subjective description of the work is given in 1930 by Eller's friend Emil Ruber in a letter to the composer:

I must say, that here you have done a masterwork, because the more one listens to it, the deeper impression it makes. The whole work captivates you right away with

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<sup>2</sup> printed in: Humal, M, ed. *Heino Eller oma aja peeglis*, Tallinn, "Eesti Raamat", 1987, p. 163-4.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 247. This, however, is likely a draft for a reply to the harshest communist critic of Eller's work Seraphim Milovski, who in an elaborate attack on Eller in 1950 wrote amongst much else that 'the formalist symphonic poem *Night Calls* firmly reflects the influences of the French impressionism'. Though now seen as a casual remark, it was then rather a direct indictment of belonging to the aesthetic (and by default, ideological) opposite to the Socialist Realism. A connection to Russian classics could, on the other hand, be a universal redeemer.

its restlessness, which does not bid well, as if something horrible is coming. And so it is, soon you feel that something horrendous has broken loose, that some sort of mighty forces of nature have decided to destroy the world in a devilish fashion.<sup>4</sup>

The *Night Calls*, written in a fully fledged sonata form, opens with an enigmatic introduction (*Allegro-poco sostenendo*) which juxtaposes flashing motifs from the strings and woodwind with ominous signals from the brass. The principal theme (*Allegro*, 1:25) employs low-register string tremolo for its murky character, and is notable for being one of the very few non-melodic themes in Eller's oeuvre. A rather more upbeat transition section (2:56), leads to an elfish dance by the oboe (3:15), and to the yearning melody of the second theme (3:34), firstly by oboe, then violins (4:33). These melodic arches are followed in each case with a serene, meditative theme, acting as a closing section of the exposition (*Più lento*, 4:17; *Tranquillo*, 5:40). The true dramatic force of the work unfolds in the development section, which comprises of four distinct episodes. The first (*Allegro*, 6:19), has a relentless rhythmic energy that collapses into a tragic outcry (6:59), and the second (*A tempo*, 7:18) is based on a pulsating syncopation. The third (*Tempo rigoroso*, 8:05) presents a dance-like movement with a melody made of chromatic sighing motifs, and the last, fourth episode (*Risolto*, 8:48) launches with fiery fanfares and reaches a fever pitch, resembling the roaring of waves. The recapitulation (*Allegro primo*, 9:33) repeats in a traditional manner both the transition (*A tempo*, 10:34) and the second subject (*Meno mosso*, 11:23). The dream-like, closing section of the recapitulation (*Più lento*, 12:07) is followed by a substantial coda (*Più mosso*, 13:06). Through rhythmic build-up and chromatic saturation, the tragic culmination of the work is reached (*Molto largo e con passione*, 14:06), to which the long epilogue (*Tempo I*, 15:49) offers a soothing consolation.

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<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 86.

**The Symphonic suite *White Night*** is one of the most significant works in Eller's oeuvre, according to the pre-eminent Eller scholar Mart Humal it is „full of luminous, poetically serene sense of nature and is very pure in style, a real quintessence of Ellerman style.“ The abandonment of the earlier modernist leanings, and a move towards a more national tonal language had been apparent in the 1930s, especially in the First Symphony (1934–36). In *White Night*, the composer rids himself from all the formal constraints and requirements of a large-scale structure, resulting in an uninhibited flow of five Ellerman miniatures, merely framed by the poetic melody of the translucent *White Night* episode, presented by English horn.

However, a more elaborate analysis could perhaps define the work as being in a concentric arch form that revolves around the fourth, central movement *Camp Fire (Allegro molto)*. This tour de force of colourful, virtuoso orchestration (reminiscent of Eller's large symphonic scores from the 1920s, such as *Night Calls*, *Symphonic Legend* and *Phantoms*), moves in ceaseless whirl towards the blistering blaze of the final chord. The third and fifth movements form an inner, song-based arch, mirroring human emotions and yearnings – the *Reminiscences* in lyrical way, *Fisherman's Song*, with its gently undulating theme, in an epic tone. The second and sixth movement form an outer, processional arch: *In Dance Rhythm* is a stylization of an Estonian folk dance Labajalg, itself a derivation from the German waltz, whilst *In March Rhythm* is rustic and straightforward.

*White Night* was premiered October 13th, 1939 in 'Estonia' Concert hall by the State Broadcast Orchestra (precursor of the ENSO), with the newly appointed chief conductor Olav Roots, also one of Eller's composition students from Tartu. It was also performed in



Tallinn on September 15th, 1944, merely a week before the Soviet troops reoccupied the town. Roots had the original score of *White Night* with him when he escaped to Sweden these days,<sup>5</sup> one copy had been sent to Moscow in 1941, and another was lost in the bombing of Tallinn in March 1944. Thus, Eller thought for years that the work is lost forever, until Eduard Tubin discovered it in the archives of the Swedish Radio in Stockholm, and had it sent back to Tallinn. *White Night* was reintroduced to the Estonian audience at Eller's seventy-fifth anniversary concert in 1962 by Neeme Järvi, and a recording was also published by the Melodiya.<sup>6</sup>

The *Twilight* and *Dawn*, Eller's first symphonic scores, have proven to be his most popular and accessible works, sometimes performed as a pair.<sup>7</sup> The charming but unpretentious *Twilight*, with a somewhat Wagnerian middle section (*Più mosso*, 1:57), carries the seeds of Eller's hallmark bittersweet lyricism and delicate modal harmonies, that manifest in full bloom in the *Dawn*. Both works can be perceived as Eller's homage to Estonian nature, and thus having a patriotic leaning, added the fact that they were written during the actual dawn of statehood for Estonians. In a radio interview in 1946, the composer, talking about *Dawn*, says this: „I have bound all my love towards the nature into this work. This love harks back to boyhood, when I often wondered on the floodplains of the river Emajõgi. And to this day it has stayed in me, and is in fact the essence of all my works.”<sup>8</sup>

The *Dawn* is built of eight contrasting sections. The hauntingly beautiful oboe solo, the defining feature of *Dawn*, starts the work in a calmly meditative mood. In the second section (1:15) the violins build a broad, emotionally sweeping phrase that leads into an excited flurry of figurations on a luscious major ninth-chord (1:54). Abruptly, the music stops, and

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<sup>5</sup> Roots (1910–1974) became in 1952 the first chief conductor of the newly founded Colombia Symphony Orchestra in Bogotá.

<sup>6</sup> The state-owned major record company of the Soviet Union, established in 1964.

<sup>7</sup> Because of its lesser proportions and smaller orchestration (double woodwinds plus horn, timpani and harp only the „Twilight“ is referred to as a „symphonic picture“ rather than symphonic poem. However, Eller himself often alternated between „picture“ and „poem“, even when talking about the „Dawn“.

<sup>8</sup> printed in: Humal, M, ed. *Heino Eller oma aja peeglis*, Tallinn, „Eesti Raamat“, 1987, p. 214-15.

two pastoral episodes are followed. The first is an impressionistic dialogue between flutes and clarinets (*Un poco più mosso*, 2:09), the second with an improvisational bassoon solo (*Più sostenuto, a piacere*, 2:38) that seems to be heralding the imminent sunrise. A hasty *Animato* (3:12) then leads into the fifth section (*Tempo I*, 3:27), a recapitulation of the second one, but this time leading to the majestic culmination in the sixth section (*Maestoso*, 4:28). The dramatic tension fades away into the motionless still of seventh section (5:53), a transition to the coda (*Tempo I*, 6:31). This penultimate section is strikingly described by Mart Humal as the real culmination of the work, where “the hitherto effective linear conception of development is replaced by a pantheistic idea of eternal return.”<sup>9</sup> This could very well be the key to all the works presented on this album.

**Sten Lassmann**

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<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 31.

The **Estonian National Symphony Orchestra** (ENSO; known in Estonian as Eesti Riiklik Sümfooniaorkester or ERSO) is the longest continually operating professional orchestra of its kind in the country. The orchestra's history dates back to 1926 and, like that of many other world orchestras, is connected to the birth of national broadcasting. Since 2010, it has been led by principal conductor and artistic director Neeme Järvi, while Paavo Järvi has been its artistic advisor since 2002, and Olari Elts its principal guest conductor since 2007. The orchestra's previous principal conductors include Olav Roots (1939–44), Paul Karp (1944–50), Roman Matsov (1950–63), Neeme Järvi (1963–79), Peeter Lilje (1980–90), Leo Krämer (1991–93), Arvo Volmer (1993–2001) and Nikolai Alexeev (2001–10).

The orchestra performs with renowned conductors and soloists from around the world, including Estonian musicians of the highest calibre. Its recordings demonstrate a quality recognized by many prestigious music magazines, having won several prizes, including a Grammy Award. In addition to broadcast performances on Estonian Public Broadcasting, ENSO has also been aired on the Mezzo television channel. The orchestra's home venue is the Estonia Concert Hall in Tallinn, but it has also undertaken more than fifty concert tours, most notably tours of Italy in 2003, the USA in 2009, 2013, and 2018, and China in 2016. In addition, ENSO has regularly given concerts in European and Scandinavian countries, appearing at many prestigious festivals including Köln, New York, Verona, Genoa, Munich, and Stockholm. With a repertoire ranging from the Baroque period to the present, the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra has also given premiere performances of symphonic works by several Estonian composers, including Arvo Pärt, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Eduard Tubin, Eino Tamberg, Jaan Rääts, Lepo Sumera, Tõnu Kõrvits and Helena Tulve.

Celebrating the centenary of the Republic of Estonia will lead the premier orchestra of Estonia on a tour to Hong Kong, Germany and Georgia in addition to the United States. In February 2018, shortly before the centenary of the Republic of Estonia, maestro

Neeme Järvi was invited to the Konzerthaus Berlin to conduct Estonia's first oratorio – Jonah's Mission by Rudolf Tobias – together with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra.

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**Olari Elts'** passion for distinctive programming rich with invention has earned him much praise on the international music scene.

Olari Elts' international career sees him throughout all continents, performing with such orchestras as the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Wiener Symphoniker, Rotterdam Philharmonic, BBC Symphony, City of Birmingham Symphony, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra, the Norwegian, Danish, Finnish and Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestras, NDR Sinfonieorchester Hamburg, SWR Radio- Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart, Munich Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre National de France, Orchestre de Lyon, Orchestre National du Capitol de Toulouse, Orquesta Sinfónica do Porto Casa da Música, the Seattle and Cincinnati Symphonies and the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Ottawa. In the Far East, he works with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra and Malaysian Philharmonic. In Australia and New Zealand, he conducts the symphony orchestras in Melbourne, Perth, Hobart and Adelaide as well as the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. Soloists with whom he collaborates include Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, Gautier and Renaud Capuçon, Brett Dean, Isabelle Faust, Alban Gerhardt, Martin Grubinger, Martin Helmchen, Stephen Hough, Felix Kleiser, Kari Kriikku, Sally Matthews, Karita Mattila, Baiba Skride and Antoine Tamastit.

Winner of the International Sibelius Conductors' Competition in Helsinki in 2000, Olari Elts is Artistic Advisor of the Kymi Sinfonietta. He served as Chief Conductor of the Latvian National Symphony. He has been Principal Guest Conductor of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra as well as the Orchestre de Bretagne and most recently the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra. Born in Tallinn in 1971, Olari Elts is founder of his contemporary music ensemble, NYJD Ensemble.

Through a broad range of repertoire he combines a strong commitment to vocal and choral as well as contemporary music, with close associations to his fellow Estonians, Arvo Pärt and Erkki-Sven Tüür.

[www.olarielts.com](http://www.olarielts.com)

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Executive Producer: Reijo Kiilunen  
Recording Producer: Seppo Siirala  
Sound Engineer: Siim Mäesalu (Night Calls); Enno Mäemets & Tanel Klesment  
(White Night, Twilight, Dawn)  
Assistant Sound Engineer: Algis Pauljukaitis  
Final Mix and Mastering: Enno Mäemets, Editroom Oy, Helsinki

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*Heino Eller's oeuvre is typified by strict logic, a cultivated sense of style, subtle and masterly orchestration, and a markedly personal style of composition. These qualities position him firmly alongside the great Nordic composers. [...] Heino Eller was much more than anything I can express in words. It was largely due to him that music in Estonia was able to achieve a cultural and professional dignity. – ARVO PÄRT*

# HEINO ELLER (1887–1970)

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|-----|---|-------|
| 1   | <b>NIGHT CALLS</b> (ÖÖHÜÜDED) (1920)                  | 17:39 |
| 2–8 | <b>WHITE NIGHT</b> (VALGE ÖÖ), SYMPHONIC SUITE (1939) | 28:56 |
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**ESTONIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**  
**OLARI ELTS**, CONDUCTOR



[59:26] • English notes enclosed

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