



ONDINE

# HEINO ELLER

VIOLIN CONCERTO  
FANTASY  
SYMPHONIC LEGEND  
SYMPHONY NO. 2

BAIBA SKRIDE

ESTONIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

OLARI ELTS



Heino Eller

# HEINO ELLER (1887–1970)

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|---|---|-------|
| 1 | <b>Violin Concerto in B minor</b> (1933–34/1937/1964)                             | 23:16 |
| 2 | <b>Symphonic Legend</b> (Sümfooniline legend) (1923/1938)*                        | 23:54 |
| 3 | <b>Fantasy</b> (Fantaasia) <b>in G minor for violin and orchestra</b> (1916/1964) | 6:18  |
| 4 | <b>Symphony No. 2</b> (unfinished): I. Andante. Allegro molto (1947)              | 13:44 |

\*World premiere recording

BAIBA SKRIDE, violin

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') 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, 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.

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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.

Heino Eller's oeuvre divides neatly into three periods according to the geography of his life. Early period in St. Petersburg/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 center 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 first symphonic picture *Twilight* ('Videvik') premiered in what was by then Petrograd; and in the same year he finished the piano score of his first and 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 a steady stream of symphonic scores – *Dawn* (orchestrated 1920), symphonic poem *Calls of night*

(‘Öö hüüded’; 1920–21), *Symphonic Scherzo* (1921), *Symphonic Legend* (1922–23) and symphonic poem *Phantoms* (‘Viirastused’; 1923–24). In the first half of 1920s there were altogether around sixty performances of Eller’s symphonic works in Tartu and the capital Tallinn.<sup>2</sup>

The **Symphonic Legend** is Eller’s largest score prior to the First Symphony (1936), and was premiered on June 21st 1923 in Tartu. The local press reacted positively: ‘The effective instrumentation fully serves the musical idea and expression. Here ends the apprenticeship and starts mastery!’<sup>3</sup> Eller revised the work for performance in 1938 and being famously reticent about his music, he then said it is based on a ‘mythological, fantastic subject’.<sup>4</sup> The work is in a cyclic form where a dreamy *Moderato mistico* introduction – Eller’s vague reference to ‘a mystic lake’ – reoccurs as coda (23:26), framing ten contrasting, loosely connected sections. The pastoral-lyrical first section (*Piu animato*, 2:16) is followed by a brilliant exotic dance of the second section (*Allegro giocoso*, 5:19). The chromatic and brooding third section (*Lento doloroso*, 6:52) evokes Wagnerian and Scriabin-esque soundscapes. The placidly ruminating fourth section (*Tranquillo*, 9:19) opens with an oboe solo interlaced with flute and solo cello, followed by a broad, almost Hollywoodian melody in the violins. Fifth section (*Sostenuto*, 12:30) starts with an exquisite violin solo and leads to an agitated reminiscence of the third section (13:53). The sixth section (*Allegro giocoso*, 14:40) is a brief recapitulation of the second one, and seventh one (*Presto*, 15:21) is an energetic and grotesque, somewhat Ravelian waltz. The brief eighth section (*Giojoso*, 17:09) is a fierce, galloping pursuit that leads to a glorious Hollywoodian culmination in the ninth section (*Marziale*, 17:53). This outwardly expression is sharply contrasted by the tragic tone of the tenth section (*Molto adagio, espressivo*, 20:15), where the work’s true philosophical, existential nature is fully revealed.

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<sup>2</sup> Jürisson, Johannes. *Heino Elleri tulek eesti muusikasse*, Sirp ja Vasar, 8 märts 1979.

<sup>3</sup> von Andraee, H. *Heino Elleri helitööde kontsert autori juhatusel*, ‘Postimees’, 23.6.1923.

Printed in: Humal, Mart. ed. *Heino Eller oma aja peeglis*, Tallinn, ‘Eesti Raamat’, 1987. (HEOAP)

<sup>4</sup> ‘Muusikaleht’, 1938, no. 3, pp. 67-68; printed in HEOAP, p. 198.

A work with a wealth of musical material and masterly orchestration, *Symphonic Legend* was next performed only in 2014 by Olari Elts with the ENSO, and the current recording is the first.

Eller's **Violin Concerto**, the first in its genre in Estonian music, has a complicated genesis. First written in 1933–34 and then revised 1937, it was scheduled to be performed by Evald Turgan in a broadcasted studio concert in Tallinn on 11 June 1940 with the State Broadcast Symphony orchestra (now ENSO) and Olav Roots conducting. For reasons unknown, the work was withdrawn, and the first performance took place only in 12 March 1965 in *Estonia* concert hall in Tallinn with Vladimir Alumäe as soloist and Neeme Järvi conducting. The archive recording of this premiere, sound engineered by Arvo Pärt, then working at the Radio, was released in 2007.<sup>5</sup> In the 1980s the concerto was performed several times and recorded<sup>6</sup> by the legendary violin virtuoso Viktor Pikaizen, and the much acclaimed Peeter Lilje, chief conductor of the National Symphony orchestra 1980–90. The final version of the work from 1965, which is represented in both of these recordings, omits over 200 bars from the coda. In this recording most the omitted material is reinstated for the sake of structural balance.

The brief, assertive opening statement from the orchestra is followed by a cadenza where the soloist starts by stating the thematic kernel of the work, *B-A-F#*. The exposition displays a rich array of thematic material – the austere, narrative main theme (*Allegro*; violin 1:18, orchestra 2:06) is counterbalanced by two subsidiary themes of lyrical nature (*Moderato assai*, 3:29; *Sostenuto espressivo*, 5:47). The necessary virtuoso element is added by the 'bravura theme' (*Più allegro*, 4:49) and the delightful dance-like closing section (*Tempo I*, 7:01). The development section (*Più mosso*, 7:50) keeps to the emotional make-up of the main theme. The dramatic build-up is here achieved on a sub-dominant organ point (*Molto largo*, 11:11) allowing for an effective last moment shift to dominant just two bars before the recapitulation (*Tempo I*, 11:57), where all the themes reoccur in the initial order with only

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<sup>5</sup> CD *Erilised hetked kontserdisaalis*, Eesti Raadio, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> CD Heino Eller, *Symphonic Poems, Violin Concerto B minor*, Antes, 1999.

the 'bravura theme' being excluded. After an extensive solo cadenza (16:05) the humorous pastoral dance of the coda (*Allegro vivo*, 18:31) gives a necessary relief to the otherwise prevailing earnest nature of the music. The virtuoso excitement reaches fever pitch in the final *Vivo* (21:43) and draws the work to an exhilarated close.

**Fantasy for Violin and Orchestra** was written in 1916 for violin and piano and orchestrated in 1964; there is also a version for violin and organ by Hugo Lepnurm. Fantasy is one of the earliest compositions that bears the hallmarks Eller's individual style, and its sensitive lyricism and charming simplicity give the work an enduring appeal.

Though Heino Eller professed his youthful adoration of Sibelius's symphonies, he turned to the genre relatively late in his career. Whilst Eller perhaps found that other, more liberal musical forms such as piano preludes or symphonic poems allow for a more uninhibited search for aesthetic novelties, his student at the Tartu Higher School of Music, Eduard Tubin, proved otherwise. Tubin wrote altogether 10 symphonies, a contribution to the genre that is considered equal to that of Shostakovich, Sibelius and Nielsen, and from early on showed a remarkable skill in combining a folk-music inspired epic national tone with a masterly and original orchestration. Tubin wrote his first symphony between 1931–34, and Eller's followed in 1934–36. The cross-fertilisation of technical and aesthetic ideas between Tubin and Eller is apparent in their music of the 1930s, but in the long run it is evident that the large-scale dramatically charged structure of a symphony was not the ideal mould for Eller's creative character.

Heino Eller only wrote three symphonies; the first was premiered soon after Eller's 50th birthday in 1937 and the third (written 1955–61) played at a festive concert marking his 75th jubilee in 1962. Both are demanding three-movement works, and the **Second Symphony** was probably planned in similar proportions. However, due to the ideological repression and persecution that started in Soviet Union with the Zhdanov decree in February

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<sup>7</sup> Humal, Mart. *Mõistatuslik sümfoonia* ['Enigmatic symphony'], Teater.Muusika. Kino, 2013, No. 3.

1948, the work was abandoned, and only the first movement (written 1947–48) remains.<sup>7</sup> The severe and at times tragic nature of the music was incompatible with the reinforced demands of the official Soviet cultural ideology of Socialist Realism, that valued optimistic and simple music with ideologically correct programmatic content. Subsequently the Symphony was not performed publicly until as recently as September 1, 2012, when Tõnu Kaljuste performed all of Eller's symphonies in one evening with the ENSO. There exists an archival recording of the work by Kirill Raudsepp and ENSO, done at the Estonian Radio in 1979; however, this is not publicly available. In 1984 Peeter Lilje recorded the Second Symphony with ENSO and this was published by the official Soviet state record company Melodiya.<sup>8</sup>

The laconic *Andante* introduction sets the scene for the *Allegro molto* main theme (2:28), where the energetic dotted rhythms are somewhat reminiscent of Shostakovich. The first subsidiary theme, at first a canon between flute and oboe (*L'istesso tempo*, 3:42), reaches a tragic expression rare in Eller's music (*Poco largamente*, 4:29). After the affectionately lyrical second subsidiary theme (*a tempo*, 5:10), the dramatic tension of the exposition is discharged in the pastoral, reflective closing section (*Poco animando*, 5:59). The short and martial development section (*Allegro molto*, 6:38) leads relentlessly to the formally identical recapitulation (8:09). The extensive coda (*Allegro molto*, 11:47) acts as a second, more extensive development section, that leads to a feverishly resolute ending.

On the whole, the Second Symphony is a concise and effective composition that avoids the overloaded scoring and formal complexity of the First and Third Symphonies, and with its laconic expression, motoric energy and tragic depth opens up new facets in Eller's oeuvre.

**Sten Lassmann**

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<sup>8</sup> LP Хейно Эллэр - Симфоническая музыка [‘Heino Eller – Symphonic music’], Melodiya, 1984, 0-21569-70.





## Arvo Pärt on his teacher Heino Eller

It is with profound gratitude that I think of my composition teacher Heino Eller and of the time I spent studying with him. It is difficult to say just what impressed me more, his way of teaching or his charismatic personality. Over the decades, Heino Eller's generosity, nobility of spirit and work have merged in my mind to create an overall picture that has continued to influence me up to the present day. Through him, a personality of a different generation, we came into contact with the pre-revolutionary aristocracy and its cultural heritage. Soviet ideology was incapable of dimming his insight into human and cultural values.

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. One might even say that over the years, Heino Eller's *Kodumaine Viis* has gained similarly symbolic status for Estonia as Sibelius' *Finlandia* for Finland.

Now that I am approximately the age my teacher was at the time, I have discovered a pronouncement I never heard from Eller in his lessons: 'Finding a single suitable note is far more difficult than bringing a mass of notes to paper.' Although he never conveyed this message to me in so many words, he appears nonetheless to have succeeded in rooting a similarly tormenting search for the 'single suitable note' in my soul.

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. He came from elevated social circles and his parents wanted him to enjoy an adequate cultural education, so they had him study law. It was only later that he moved to Petersburg to study violin and composition. Travelling was a great joy to him and he travelled frequently. He had an insatiable interest in new currents in the arts, particularly if he could see in them a relationship to folk tradition. Yet he was also familiar with the music of Schoenberg and his school. Through him we were exposed to an incredible amount of music that he brought back from Western Europe. I believe he was at that time the only composer in Estonia who

knew his way so thoroughly around the new music from the West. He was a good and gentle person, and as a teacher he always allowed his pupils room to develop in their own way. As a result, his pupils became very different kinds of musicians.

(Enzo Restagno: Arvo Pärt in Conversation. Dalkey Archive Press, 2012)

**Baiba Skride's** natural approach to her music-making has endeared her to some of today's most important conductors and orchestras worldwide. She is consistently invited for her refreshing interpretations, her sensitivity and delight in the music. The list of prestigious orchestras with whom she has worked include the Berliner Philharmoniker, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Münchner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Orchestre de Paris, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, Gothenburg Symphony. In North America she performs with the New York Philharmonic as well as Boston, Chicago, Baltimore, Houston and Toronto Symphony Orchestras. Further afield she works with NHK Symphony Orchestra, Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra. Notable conductors she collaborates with include Marin Alsop, Christoph Eschenbach, Ed Gardner, Susanna Mälkki, Andris Nelsons, Andres Orozco-Estrada, Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Vasily Petrenko, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Tugan Sokhiev, John Storgårds and Simone Young.

Contemporary music has become central to Baiba Skride's music making. In Spring 2019 Skride presents the world premiere of Sebastian Currier's violin concerto, a co-commission by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Gewandhausorchester Leipzig. Skride continues to champion Sofia Gubaidulina's Triple concerto for violin, cello and bayan and celebrates the piece's Spanish premiere with the Orquesta Sinfónica de Galicia, following on from the successful premieres in the last seasons.

Baiba Skride is a sought-after chamber musician internationally. Her chamber music partners include Alban Gerhardt, Brett Dean, Harriet Krijgh, Daniel Müller-Schott, Sol Gabetta, Bertrand Chamayou, Xavier de Maistre and her sister Lauma Skride. Invitations also take her Skride Quartet with Lauma Skride, Harriet Krijgh and Lise Berthaud to Tanglewood Music Festival, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Vienna's Musikverein, Philharmonie Essen, Schubertiade Hohenems, Wigmore Hall London, Louvre Paris, Muziekgebouw Eindhoven, amongst others.

Skride was born into a musical Latvian family in Riga where she began her studies, transferring in 1995 to the Conservatory of Music and Theatre in Rostock. In 2001 she won

the 1st prize of the Queen Elisabeth Competition. Baiba Skride plays the Yfrah Neaman Stradivarius kindly loaned to her by the Neaman family through the Beare's International Violin Society.

[baiba-skride.com](http://baiba-skride.com)



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.

[www.erso.ee](http://www.erso.ee)

**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 Capitole 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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