

## Disembodied Sounds: Timbral Symbolism in Kaija Saariaho's *Oi Kuu*

Timbre has undeniably played an essential role in the compositional structure and expressive content of Kaija Saariaho's works throughout her career. While Saariaho has often employed electronics or amplification to achieve her unique timbral transformations, from the 1990s Saariaho has increasingly relied on purely acoustic effects. Often, she calls for "extended" instrumental techniques that allow for the production of timbres not normally associated with the instruments being performed and that permit a much broader timbral palette.

Far from diminishing the symbolic potential that timbre holds in Saariaho's electro-acoustic music, her reliance on purely acoustic sonic sources could possibly increase the potency of listeners' experience of timbre. As the expected range of possible sounds is limited by listeners' prior experiences with the instruments involved, deviations from these expectations become more remarkable and meaningful. Thus, the presence of the instruments themselves, and the *relationship* between the timbres actually produced in performance and the audience's expectations, can contribute to the symbolic meaning that arises in a performance.

To explore the potential symbolism of timbre in Saariaho's purely acoustic works, this lecture-recital will examine *Oi Kuu* ("*For a Moon*") (1990), a duo for cello and bass clarinet. The work makes extensive use of extended techniques for both instrumentalists, to the extent that a sort of sonic disembodiment could occur in which listeners might have difficulty connecting the experienced sounds to their material source. Thus, this presentation will suggest a reading of the work in which these disembodied sounds become symbols for the spiritual or otherworldly, drawing upon multidisciplinary studies on listeners' experience of timbre and situating them within existing commentaries on the representation of spirituality in Saariaho's works. The

presentation will be aided by performed examples throughout and will conclude with a complete performance of the work.