Erkki-Sven Tüür composed Zeitraum in 1992. The score calls for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, two trombones and tuba, timpani, bass drum, tam-tam, tamburo, tom-toms, cymbals, bells, marimba, xylophone, and strings. Performance time is approximately fifteen minutes.

Estonia, once a relatively sleepy Soviet Republic, is now called “E-stonia.” Grandmothers carry laptops to the park, The New York Times recently noted; drivers pay for parking using their cell phones, and about 70 per cent of the country’s 1.3 million residents file their taxes online. Skype, the suddenly hot, two-year-old company that allows free calls over the internet, in based in Tallinn, the capital city of some 400,000 residents. Wi-Fi is nearly ubiquitous there. Tallinn has become a major tourist destination—easyJet, which is based there, connects to seventy-two European airports. Under foreign rule for most of its history, Estonia, which joined the European Union in 2004, is now very much its own country.

Ever since the eighteenth century, Estonia has had a lively music scene. A theater was built in Tallinn in 1809 and operas were regularly performed there. Many touring musicians—including Clara Schumann and Franz Liszt—performed in nearby Tartu, on their way to or from Saint Petersburg. A year after Estonia declared its independence in 1918, conservatories were founded in Tartu and Tallinn. For the first time, a new generation of composers received their training without leaving home, principally Eduard Tubin, a major symphonist whose international fame owes much to the efforts of conductor Neeme Järvi (he conducted Tubin’s Fourth Symphony here in 1987). Arvo Pärt, whose extraordinarily pure, consonant, and contemplative music has recently found a sympathetic audience, is Estonia's most famous composer today, although he has lived in Berlin since 1981.

Erkki-Sven Tüür, who was born on the Estonian island of Hiiumaa, first made his name as composer, flutist, keyboard player, and singer in the popular, ground-breaking, Estonian rock group, In Spe, which he founded in 1979. As a child, he had not only liked listening to music by Mozart and Beethoven on the radio, but he also was enthralled with hearing Frank Zappa, Yes, and Genesis. The Tallinn premiere of Pärt's landmark Tabula rasa had a huge impact on him. Tüür also was influenced by the American minimalists, especially John Adams’s Shaker Loops. Beginning in 1989, he taught composition at the Tallinn Conservatory, where he had studied, before devoted himself to writing music full-time. Tüür's first success abroad was with Insula deserta, which was performed in Finland in 1989.

Erkki-Sven Tüür on Zeitraum

In writing Zeitraum, I was attracted by the relations between two quite diverse conceptions of musical time. One extreme is to focus on only one almost imperceptibly changing sound or sound mass (with a harmonic texture at times brighter, at time dimmer). This is the “fixed,” unilinear time as opposed to the time that “flies”—quick, kaleidoscopic movement inserted in or using the “motionless” time as a background. I was interested in the tension between these to time conceptions, and in the third entity born of their relationship.
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