

Ladybug

For Solo Guitar

Duration: ca. 2'

About two years ago, in May of 2014, Finnish guitar player Petri Kumela shared his fantastically curious and original initiative with me. Petri had, by then, garnered a collection of about 20 short compositions for solo guitar from various composers. Each piece is only two minutes in duration and each one of them is inspired by a small animal, hence the charming title of "Small Creatures" given to the series as a whole. However, when Petri approached me, I was fully immersed in the composition of "Bel Canto", an opera I wrote for the Lyric Opera of Chicago, so it was impossible for me to put aside some time for this project. A little over two years later, after completing my first symphony, I finally found a few weeks in between commissions to write this piece. At first glance, it might seem that a two-minute piece for solo instrument would not be much of a challenge; nothing further from the truth. A piece of that length needs to be extremely clear and concise, and mostly runs on a single main motif. There is not much room for development so one can't spend too much time presenting the materials; one must therefore have a very clear picture of the arch of the whole piece before writing down the first note. The main difficulty for me was that I had never written a piece for guitar, so I had to learn how to write for the instrument by reading manuals, watching videos and seeking advice. Petri kindly offered to coach me during the process, something that I really appreciated.

As it is obvious from the title, I am sure that, by now, you already know which "small creature" inspired me to write this work. Coincidentally, Finland suffered a mass migration of ladybugs this past summer, so the piece couldn't be timelier. The appearance of this tiny insect is usually seen as a good omen and I wanted to transmit the surge of excitement that one usually experiences when one is privileged to serve as a landing site for this beautiful creature. A chord in fortissimo opens the piece and leads to a motto perpetuo that serves as a golden thread throughout it. A melody emerges, alternating between the mid and the low registers of the instrument until we reach a middle section which consists of a chord sequence in rasgueado (a playing technique characteristic of the guitar that makes the whole instrument resonate fully). After reaching the climax, we then return to the initial motif and melody, and conclude in an ascending gesture that culminates on a high natural harmonic. Our minuscule visitor has left us leaving a shimmering glow behind.

It brings me great joy to add this miniature to Petri's imaginative and ever-increasing collection.