

A large, abstract, colorful rock-like shape is centered in the upper half of the image. It has a rough, textured surface with various colors including red, blue, green, and yellow. A cloud of fine, multi-colored dust or particles is suspended around the rock, creating a sense of movement and depth against the black background.

SALONEN CELLO CONCERTO YO-YO MA
LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC | ESA-PEKKA SALONEN



SALONEN
CELLO CONCERTO

I	13:26
II	8:43
III	12:56

YO-YO MA CELLO
LOS ANGELES PHILHARMONIC
ESA-PEKKA SALONEN CONDUCTOR



ESA-PEKKA SALONEN CELLO CONCERTO (2017)

Some of the ideas for my Cello Concerto can be traced back at least three decades, but the actual material for the piece was mostly developed in the summer of 2015, when I decided to spend a few months researching new kinds of textures without a concrete plan for how to use them. I decided to use some phrases from my 2010 solo cello work *knock, breathe, shine* in the second and third movements, as I always felt that the music of the solo piece was almost orchestral in its scope and character, and would function well within an orchestral environment.

I have never – not even during the quite dogmatic and rigid modernist days of my youth – felt that the very idea of writing a solo concerto would in itself be burdened with some kind of dusty bourgeois tradition. A concerto is simply an orchestral work where one or several instruments have a more prominent role than the others. A concerto does not suggest a formal design the same way a symphony does. I also happen to like the concept of a virtuoso operating at the very limits of what is physically (and sometimes mentally) possible. In Nietzsche's words: "You have made danger your

vocation; there is nothing contemptible in that." (No programme note feels complete without a quotation from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.)

I have learnt, however, that virtuosity doesn't limit itself to the mechanics of playing an instrument. A true virtuoso can also capture the beauty and expression in the quietest moments, to fill near-stasis with life through a musician's imagination and ability to communicate. In my other life as a performer I witness that almost every day: how musicians can create meaning from a single note. The composer-me is humbled by it, but also deeply grateful. After all, all those symbols on paper mean nothing until somebody gives them life.

It has been a very great pleasure and honour to write a concerto for one of the most unique life-givers and communicators of our time, Yo-Yo Ma. It has

been inspiring to know that his technique knows no limits. Perhaps more important: nor does his imagination.

**After all,
all those symbols
on paper mean nothing
until somebody
gives them life.**

The first movement opens with what in my sketchbook had the title "Chaos to line." Chaos here must be understood metaphorically, as a stylized version of the idea. I like the concept of a simple thought emerging from a complex landscape. Almost like consciousness developing from clouds of dust.



I imagined the solo cello
line as a trajectory of a
moving object in space
being followed and
emulated by other lines/
instruments/moving
objects.

This leads to the second semi-cosmological metaphor: a comet. I imagined the solo cello line as a trajectory of a moving object in space being followed and emulated by other lines/instruments/moving objects. A bit like a comet's tail. In musical terms it could be described as a canon but not quite, as the imitation is not always literal or precise. The gestus remains, however, almost identical every time. Sometimes the imitating cloud flies above the cello, sometimes in the very same register. It thins out to two lines and finally to one.

There are faster, more playful episodes alternating with the cloud, and finally the movement gains enough speed for the balance to tilt towards fast music. At the end a variation of the cloud returns.

The second movement is very simple in form, more complex in texture. It

starts with a wedge-formed cloud [>] and ends with another [<], if one can imagine such a thing. The slow cello arches are looped to create harmony from single lines. Sometimes the loops are dispersed in space. The middle section is a playful duet between the solo cello and the alto flute.

The third movement starts with a slow, brooding cello solo under the residue of the second wedge-cloud. The expression quickly becomes more extroverted through a series of accelerandi. A rhythmic mantra starts to develop in the congas and bongos. It will appear often later in the course of the movement, mostly in the timpani. This music is often dance-like; sometimes gesticulating wildly, perhaps from the sheer joy of no longer having anything to do with clouds and processes.

An acrobatic solo episode leads to a fast tutti section where I imagined

the orchestra as some kind of gigantic lung, expanding and contracting first slowly, but accelerating to a point of mild hyperventilation which leads back to the dance-like material. Quixotic solo cello episodes lead to a joyful coda based on the "lung" music, but now with a solo cello line. Finally the kinetic energy burns itself out gently, the rapid movement slows down and the cello line climbs slowly up to a stratospherically high B-flat, two centimeters to the left of the highest note of the piano.

Esa-Pekka Salonen

**Sometimes the
imitating cloud flies
above the cello,
sometimes in the very
same register.
It thins out to two lines
and finally to one.**



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Assistant Engineer: Sergey Parfenov
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