

This work has a little peculiar genesis. It all started when Lauri Sallinen asked me to write a new work for his debut concert at Helsinki Music Centre. I had already had very pleasant collaborations with him on my solo clarinet piece TWIRL and my clarinet concerto FUME. Lauri's stunning premiere of FUME at the Ung Nordisk Musik Festival with Avanti! Orchestra in September 2010 has been one of the greatest moments of my composer career so far. Needless to say, I was immediately excited about the idea of writing a new chamber music work for his debut concert.

Lauri suggested me to write a duo for clarinet and bandoneón, that thrilling relative of accordion. I had already heard Lauri and Henrik Sandås playing together as a duo for a couple of times, and these two gentlemen really do amazing job with their instruments. The duo of clarinet and bandoneón sparked an interest in me, but as late as in February of 2012 I asked Lauri for the opportunity to include a string quartet to the line-up. This was because for some reason I had developed an obsession that the work's title had to be "Clair". And that it should have strings in it. Luckily enough, this was ok for Lauri (as there already were plans to have a string quartet in some other works in his concert program), so the duo piece grew into a sextet.

After that, things started to rupture in miraculous directions – and in this case, you can point that blaming finger at the composer. My original intention was to compose a ten-minute work. What we will hear tonight is around that duration, but the end result is something completely different from what I had originally thought. During the hectic and furious compositional process, the musical material somehow began to live its own life, and the piece began to swell over the curves in form and content. Somehow my own internal filters weren't in the best possible shape so the piece grew and grew further. It was hard to put a stop on it and the ideas about the whole work kept changing. Still, I want to follow my own instinct and not force myself to fight it, but the schedule was starting to get really tight.

Something had to be finished and soon, so at a very late stage (probably in late April of 2012), I suggested to Lauri that I rework some of the materials into a separate entity, a sort of "intro" for the actual work that would be finished later. Clair sketches is not a prelude to a bigger work, but an entity in its own right, with some of the materials I had outlined during the spring.

As a result, the work was renamed to Clair sketches, while the actual Clair was still waiting for its turn to take the final shape and form. In time, these two works will become sister works, which may be performed separately. Performing both works at the same concert would hardly make much sense, as they share such many similar characters and materials.

Anyway, this is how Clair sketches came into this world. I would like to warmly thank Lauri for the commission and the Alfred Kordelin Foundation for their support towards this commission.

– Markku Klami, work commentary for the premiere performance, May 2012