

Sven-David Sandström

Professor of Composition

A prolific composer and gifted teacher, Sven-David Sandström has mentored and inspired numerous young composers and performers at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music over the past decade. He retires from the faculty leaving a legacy of powerfully expressive music and utmost commitment to his students; his significant influence on the department and school will be felt for years to come.

Born in 1942 in Motala, Sweden, Sandström studied art history and musicology at the University of Stockholm from 1963 to 1967. Following this, he studied composition with Ingvar Lidholm at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm and did advanced study with György Ligeti and Per Nørgård. From 1985 to 1995, Sandström himself was a professor of composition at the Royal College of Music and was prorector at the college through 1998. His tenure at Indiana University began in 1999.

The opening paragraph from Sandström's 2001 *Statement of Artistic and Pedagogical Vision* says a great deal about the man:

On the most basic level, music is the expression of feelings. As a composer I want to convey a vision of the artistic life through emotions. I want to move people, not necessarily by conveying only pleasant feelings, but also by challenging the audience. Today, as well as throughout most of my career, I work with a wide variety of modes of expression to achieve this goal: excessive beauty, naïve music, modernist techniques, and most lately, techniques that draw upon all my previous experiences as a composer. In my music, stylistic diversity serves a higher end. I can be naïve as well as complex, if the mood of expression or the dramatic unfolding of a piece so demands.

Over the past 40 years, Sandström has composed nearly 200 musical works, with pieces in virtually all genres of the Western art music tradition. An early breakthrough came with *Through and Through*, a large, dense work in the central European tradition, premiered in 1972 by the Swedish Radio Orchestra under Herbert Blomstedt and performed by the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra in 1974. This work provoked substantial international interest in his music and resulted in a number of commissions, including *Utmost*, composed for the BBC Symphony and Pierre Boulez.

Never content to rest on his laurels, Sven-David Sandström has let his music and artistic philosophy evolve over time. His early works dealt with form and parameter organization using serial principles, and his music was rather severe, like much music of the time. He ultimately found this approach "not particularly joyful or artistically interesting." The 1980s saw a distinct turning point in his compositions, when he found

ways to combine some of the organizational methods from his earlier style with a less modernist tonal language, resulting in more accessible music with foreground structures that he considers more interesting, and even beautiful. His controversial *Requiem* (1982) was a seminal work. Twelve years later he composed his powerful and frequently performed *High Mass*. This renewal of creative energies led to further works, including the solo concertos for cello (1988) and piano (1990). Also in this period, Sandström embarked on collaborations with the Kroumata percussion ensemble and with the late choreographer and dancer Per Jonsson.

In works like *Requiem*, *High Mass*, and many subsequent works, Sandström is shown to be a composer drawn to vocal music and large scale forms. He has composed many works for choir, both a cappella and with orchestra. *High Mass* was performed at IU in 2001 and his opera *Jeppé* was given its U.S. premiere here in 2003. Other significant works from his time at IU include *Magnificat* (2005), several motets, *Christmas Oratorio* (2005), the passion oratorio *The Word* (2004), and his latest opera, *Batseba*, premiered in December 2008 at the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm. In July 2009, the Oregon Bach Festival will give the premiere of his evening-length *Messiah*, based on the text of Handel's revered work—a joint commission with Helmuth Rilling's International Bach Academy in Stuttgart.

While teaching at IU, Sven-David Sandström has served as an exemplary model of the artist-teacher. His cheerful, optimistic outlook and energetic approach to life and work (one and the same, perhaps?) were infectious and inspiring to all of us. We wish him continued success with future endeavors and hope to see him and his wife, Ann-Marie, again back in Bloomington from time to time.

~David Dzubay