

ANIARA HBL review

## Hufvudstadsbladet

[https://klockrike.fi/Site/Data/208/Files/Screen%20Shot%202019-09-19%20at%2016\\_50\\_28.png](https://klockrike.fi/Site/Data/208/Files/Screen%20Shot%202019-09-19%20at%2016_50_28.png)

(main newspaper in Swedish in Finland)

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Culture

*[Picture | Caption]*

*The American choir The Crossing plays a key part in Klockriketeatern's biggest production to date which premiered in Philadelphia, USA, in June.*

### A topchoir is in town

Klockriketeatern's performance featuring Grammy-winning choir The Crossing is definitely worth experiencing.

### Musical theatre

#### Aniara – fragments of time and space

*[list of cast and crew]*

Nobel laureate **Harry Martinson's** (1904-1978) Aniara can be viewed as the epos of its generation, which gained instant renown upon being published in 1956. The 103 songs about cosmos undoubtedly have timeless qualities, which is underlined by the fact that they still today are compulsory reading for first year students majoring in literature. One can also, as director and librettist **Dan Henriksson** does, view Martinson as a visionary ahead of his time, when he in the 1950s writes about a machine, the Mima, that possesses developed artificial intelligence. Talk about science fiction.

Yet it is hard not to think that Aniara as text must have resonated particularly well in the context of the 1950s, the cold war creating an overbearing threat of nuclear war and the arms race between two superpowers. To be clear, the text was written before Lajka and **Jurij Gagarin** had been sent into space and before **John F Kennedy**, as an immediate consequence to those events, had declared that man would land on the moon before the end of the 1960s.

That Martinson jotted down the first 29 songs as through some kind of divine notification (actually he dictated them to his wife) has most probably only added to the mythical shimmer that surrounds the epos today.

There is something slightly disturbing with the cult surrounding Martinson's persona that drags the production (but not the piece itself) down and which became visible during the pre-show presentation before the Finnish premiere on Tuesday. As Klockriketeatern's whole existence is connected to Martinson, it is however understandable that his memory is cherished.

### Performance in movement

Without a captioning device it is not easy to follow the text, despite well articulated English from actors **Carl Alm** and **Matti Raita**. As a listener one instead drifts away into a state of mind where one accepts the story by how it is acted out rather than how it is told, through how it is sung rather than how it is recited. The atmosphere, music and movement become more important than any

separate words, sentences or fragments of text. The performance is never static, something is always moving, like the stars in the sky.

Before the show I reflect on whether it actually was worth the investment to bring a choir from the USA to perform Anira in Finland. During the first half hour I also think about whether it hadn't made more sense to stage Swede **Karl-Birger Blomdahl's** Aniraopera from 1959.

Blomdahl's opera was written in timely tough modernistic fashion – a style nowadays seldom heard – with moments borrowed from other styles, like jazz. The opera was a success that the Royal opera performed 128 times, including three shows in Helsinki in 1964, although it has scarcely been touched since the end of the 1980s.

### **Captivating choir**

American composer **Robert Maggio's** (b. 1964) music feels polite and conventional in comparison to Blomdahl's, an impression made stronger not only by the more polite American esthetics but also by the acousto-sensory experience created by the fact that part of the orchestra has been placed behind a screen.

However, the further we get into the performance, the more obvious the qualities of the piece become. Within the chosen free tonality and spiritedly eclectic esthetics Maggio shows yet new sides to his musical expression. He reveals himself to be a chameleon of genres that is able to in one moment write for a big gospel choir and in the very next moment explore the stillness of **Arvo Pärt** or the primitivism found within Beijing Opera (together with effectful dance by **Antti Silvennoinen**). The band conducted by **Donald Nally** is small with only four members, but is diversely employed and able to accomplish a lot with small means.

Everybody on stage have their parts to play and they all do it well, but single most impressive is the multiple Grammy-winning choir The Crossing, which sings as well as acts. Initially the quite subdued volume of the choir surprises, but it is the way this choir sings: No single note is ever needlessly pressed out, never do they sing exaggeratingly voluminously. The voice quality is always top class and everything is done with warmth and great precision, both when it comes to rhythm as well as singing in tune. When multiple of the choir's members let go in extensive solos it becomes clear that The Crossing consists of sixteen skilled soloists that captivate with their presence.

Toward the end the sounds are already so advanced that the bitonal chordstacks create close to a cosmic sound, as a work such as this one should.

The visual elements of this piece are also amongst the most impressive I have seen in any musical theatre production. Through use of a few kinetic lights in the ceiling and some well placed beamers the audiences attention is kept. Most impressive is the drone footage projected on the floor which gives the viewer a birds-eye perspective.

Anira is the biggest production Klockriketeatern has ever done and is without doubt an artistic success. After the World premiere in Philadelphia in the USA in June, the performance was shown at a choir festival in the Netherlands in July. The performances in Helsinki are already sold out, but those who have a ticket can consider themselves fortunate.

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**Wilhelm Kvist**

029 080 1294

wilhelm.kvist@hbl.fi

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*(translation C.Alm 09/19)*