ON MUSIC AND BEYOND

CHANGING SPACES OF MUSIC

MUSIC IN THE POST-NORMAL TIMES

MUSIC AND POLITICS
Time to rebuild

Although the pandemic and its impacts are far from over as the end of 2021 approaches, our gaze is firmly fixed on the future. It is time to rebuild, in music as in all other things.

As many things have changed and many more are in a state of flux, it is important to stop and take stock of what we have learned in these extraordinary circumstances. How can we best prepare for future upheavals? What are the values that govern our work and our choices as we build a better future for the music sector?

In the months and years of recovery to come, decision-makers in Finland and elsewhere will have to decide the best way in which to spend their depleted budget resources. This involves taking a long, hard look at the fundamental values of society: what are we prepared to give up, and what is not negotiable? In the case of music, much depends on the industry itself to ensure that the future is on a sustainable footing – ecologically, socially and economically. We need new solutions and the willingness to embrace them.

Equality and non-discrimination in the music sector will only be achieved when we all make a joint commitment to them.

In the post-pandemic reality, many things will have changed, but certain basics remain the same. Music is not created in isolation from the world around it; it always reflects its environment in one way or another. For professional musicians, it is still the case that music is not just a vocation – it is also an occupation and a source of livelihood. What has also not changed is that music continues to yield meaningful, mind-blowing experiences for performers and listeners alike.

In the first theme package in this issue, we ask experts what megatrends they believe will have the strongest impact on the field of music. We also ponder the prospects for continuing to make a living in music in the post-pandemic future.

The second theme package takes a look at the virtual and physical spaces in which concerts are being produced and listened to in the 2020s. What are the new demands faced and opportunities found by concert organisers? In the future, venues and concert organisers must find answers to a multitude of questions related not only to technology but also to accessibility and ecological sustainability.

Our third theme package focuses on the multiple relations between music, politics and social activism. The question of how much or how little of an impact music can or should have on injustices in society is an opinion divider. Nevertheless, it is important for us to be aware of the potential of music as a force for change and of the political dimensions and power structures in the debate around music.

In the course of the year, composers, music makers and musicians have again shared their views about their work and their music on the FMQ website. Our fourth package consists of highlights from these columns and interviews, offering us a glimpse of the very core of the art form that we all love: the place where the music is created. © Translation: Jaakko Mäntyjärvi
CONTENTS

3 Editorial
by Anu Ahola

6 MUSIC IN THE POST-NORMAL TIMES

8 Paying the piper, part 2
by Merja Hottinen

12 How composers earn their crust in Finland by Pasi Lyytikäinen

14 Threats and opportunities – How ecological reconstruction and digitalisation are shaping the future of the music industry by Riikka Hiltunen

18 CHANGING SPACES OF MUSIC

20 Virtual spaces for music by Wif Stenger

24 How venues will cope depends on how they can adapt by Annamaija Saarela

26 Concert venues for the future by Santeri Kaipiainen

28 MUSIC AND POLITICS

30 Relieving anxiety, questioning current practices – How can social activism manifest in contemporary music? by Auli Särkiö-Pitkänen

34 Making music for justice in exile by Riikka Hiltunen

36 Mental images and audiovisual influencing – Music in political campaigns by Sini Mononen

38 ON MUSIC AND BEYOND

40 What jok is by Anna Näkkäläjärvi-Länsman

42 Advocating for the human touch by Kalevi Aho

44 Sakari Oramo takes responsibility for music – now as a professor by Kare Eskola

48 Elifantree’s global rhythm adventure by Wif Stenger

50 As the canon turns – reflections on the centenary of Joonas Kokkonen by Pekka Hako

52 Recordings of the year

56 Performances of the year

66 Notable numbers
What trends will have the biggest impact on the field of music? What are the prospects for continuing to make a living in music in the post-pandemic future?
The music industry has been in a global state of flux for quite some time, first with the crisis and gradual recovery of the recording industry and more recently with the break in live music performances caused by the coronavirus pandemic. These were reflected in shifts in the income structure of musicians, composers and music makers. Up until the pandemic, live music was the backbone of the livelihood of many a musician and music maker and an enabler of artistic growth, supplemented by other sources of income. Now that backbone has shown signs of eroding, and a universal search for new prospects is going on.

To be fair, the current uncertainty is nothing new in an industry that has always depended on economic cycles and that has always made some people rich and other people poor. Most just try to earn a decent living. Although some in this field are still able to find salaried vacancies or be awarded grants, many have a portfolio of multiple income sources. Category boundaries become blurred, as artistic creativity is increasingly merged with an entrepreneurial approach and passion becomes part of a livelihood. (Read also composer Pasi Lyytikäinen’s column on income streams of musicians, music makers and composers these days, and how are they distributed among various artists and groups? What are the prospects for continuing to make a living in music in the post-pandemic future?)

The statistical averages also conceal the income structure in the field, and this has been explored in Finnish studies specifically concerning the livelihood of artists. It would seem that over the past decade the number of low-income artists has increased while the number of high-income artists has decreased. In the study Taiteilijan asema [Status of the artist] (2014), based on income data from 2010, it was noted that one in five of all musicians earned less than EUR 21,000 per year, while two in five earned more than EUR 40,000. By contrast, in the report Taiteen ja kulttuurin barometri 2019 [Arts and culture barometer] the tables had turned: about two in five artists in the field of music who responded had an annual income of less than EUR 20,000, while fewer than one in five reported an income of more than EUR 40,000.

Wages and fees form the core of income

There are huge differences in the income structure of musicians, artists, music makers and composers according to their genre, age, status and gender, but the common thread for all of them is that they get their income from multiple sources. The Artist Revenue Stream project in the USA, which ended in 2014, identified no fewer than 42 income sources, and that figure can certainly not have decreased since then. The work is fragmented, widespread and occasional. However, research shows that all these trickles do add up to wages that, on average, are reasonably good.

In Finland, artists’ wages have been studied and compiled into statistics for instance by the Centre for Cultural Policy Research (Cupore) and Statistics Finland. In the Statistics Finland occupational category “Musicians, singers and composers”, the average income grew slowly but steadily in the pre-coronavirus years, and in 2019 the average monthly pay in the private sector in this category was EUR 3,087, corresponding to an annual income of about EUR 37,000. This figure was slightly higher in the local government sector. However, only a small part of any musician’s work ends up in official statistics – usually the most secure and regular part of it – because statistics only consider monthly salaries and thus do not recognise the huge volume of freelance work, “entrepreneur-light” activities and part-time work in the field of music.

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Where do these trickles of income come from? According to the “Arts and culture barometer 2019”, the most common types of income for Finnish artists in the field of music are wages from employment relationships and fees from gigs and commissions. The barometer also identifies several other income sources typical for the arts, such as expert consultation fees, grants, entrepreneur income and copyright royalties, the latter being received by about two out of three artists in the field of music. (Read more about the Finnish arts funding system in Kare Eskola’s article Balance, stability and freedom at fmq.fi.)

Unequal distribution of income

The income differences are great, and many international studies on the earnings of musicians show similar findings. The report Artists and Other Cultural Workers in the USA noted that the highest hourly fee earned by musicians was seven times greater than the lowest. The study Making Music Work in Australia specifically points to the very small number of high earners who skew the statistics. In all of the studies referred to above, it was found that very few gained their income solely from artistic work, although the percentage of part-time work varied.

People in different genres, in different sectors and of different genders may have wildly differing incomes. Data from ten years ago in the “Status of the artist” study referred to above indicated that classical musicians in Finland...
now as live music performances are in crisis, but so far it is a significant income source for only a handful of musicians. In Australia, for instance, a study found that digital music sales only generated income for 20% of the respondents, and even then the sums were not huge. By contrast, in a study conducted by the research company Midia one year ago it was found that independent artists are a group for whom streaming revenue is genuinely significant: these artists distribute their music with no middlemen, and streaming revenue is their principal income source. Accounting for 28% of all their income. According to a recent streaming income report by IPO, many music creators in the UK feel that they should be earning more from their streaming revenue. The fairness of streaming revenue distribution has lately been challenged often, up to and including a parlia-

mentary inquiry in the UK. There are likewise great expectations for the fan economy. Fan microcommunities have already been tapped into on the Asian music market, but in the West crowdfunding or community funding has not yet properly found its place in the grand scheme of things.

Plurality makes us strong but also vulnerable

A broad and fragmented income palette may lend security in a time of crisis but can also generate problems in systems in our society that have an inbuilt assumption of employment on a monthly salary. In Finland, the corona-
virus crisis has sharply highlighted the problems that free-
lancers experience with unemployment benefit and social security, many of them having now fallen outside the usual safety nets. Statistics Finland showed an increase of about 50% in the number of unemployed musicians on the previous year, and according to the “Arts and culture barometer 2020”, nearly one in four artists in the field of music have been out of work for a total of six months or more. For artists, however, this is not the be-all and end-all of their work. Unlike many other fields, artistic work requires front-loaded investments, such as skills maintenance or rehearsing for a concert; although this time can be consid-
ered working hours, it is not self-evidently compensable as a vocation on the other. This dualism also emerges in the outlook of music professionals in Finland, and several surveys in the field have reflected a fear for the future of their careers. In a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education and Culture in spring 2021, 94% of music profes-
sionals reported that their livelihood had declined and 67% have considered a change of career since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. While this is slightly less than the corresponding figures in surveys in many other coun-
ttries, we should note that the Finnish survey did not differ-
ently see both as a career like any other and as a calling or a “life-
time passion”. For many researchers now talk about the “liveliness” of artists, not “employment”. According to researcher DONNA WESTON, “liveliness” is not only a financial concept but also encompasses the meaningful-
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Business, work, passion, livelihood...

Public debate on the arts during the coronavirus pandemic has featured the juxtaposition of artistic pursuits as a profession and a livelihood on the one hand and as a passion and a vocation on the other. This dualism also emerges in the “Arts and culture barometer” surveys in Finland: art is seen both as a career like any other and as a calling or a “life choice that is unavoidable”. These images affect what poten-
tial society is willing to dedicate to this work and how prac-
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Moreover, being an artist has come to be seen as a profession established in society much like that of a doctor or a lawyer, as the authors of the Cupore “Arts and culture barometer 2019” noted: it is expertise of the sort “that soci-
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What is the outlook?

Like many previous studies, the “Arts and culture barom-
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I began my composition studies at the Sibelius Academy in the late 1990s. I was told that in Finland, an art music composer’s income would be made up primarily of three sources: grants, commission work, and special projects. These revenue sources could then be supplemented by teaching or consultancy work when needed.

But the reality soon started to look very different. The use of a particular multiplier system. This change marked the starting point for impending changes in composers’ livelihoods in Finland.

Another factor affecting the sector’s living wages was the growing number of composers, a trend that started to emerge around that same time. While the Society of Finnish Composers had around 110 members in the mid-1990s, its membership had grown to 235 by 2021. This expansion has been necessary for me in order to cope with the many specific issues around the funding of my work.

In addition to my work as a composer, I have kept my options open to other professions in close proximity. I have taught composition, played the flute, done research, conducted orchestras, provided many different consultancy services, worked as a music journalist and directed a festival. I also worked as an office assistant at the Society of Finnish Composers throughout my university years. In all of these roles, my training as a composer has given me a considerable advantage.

My versatile work profile is partially due to my temperament but also to my circumstances. As a parent, I have never had the luxury of putting all my career eggs in one basket. When first entering the workforce, I soon realised that almost none of my income sources included retirement or leave benefits, not to mention any security in the event of illness or unemployment. Fortunately, this has become slightly less of an issue throughout the 2000s, but in the current pandemic situation, for example, many Finnish artists who unexpectedly became unemployed still fall right through all the government safety nets.

When I look at what my colleagues do for work, however, my own career set-up does not look so different from the rest. We may each have our own area of emphasis, but nearly every one of my professional colleagues undertakes work outside of composing at times. The reason behind this is not always simply financial constraints, but it is also a reflection on the loneliness of working as a composer, and our desire to connect to communities around us. Likewise, many feel it is practically our responsibility to share our accumulated expertise with our professional sector, for instance through different expert or public trust positions.

Composers’ income prospects in the future

Grant subsidy will remain a significant source of income for composers into the future as well. It is the only way to secure a long-term, professional career allowing for serious in-depth composing. In recent years, there have been many discussions on various platforms about the future of our grant structure. These include a suggestion to replace the tax-free status of the current scheme and establishing a new artist funding system where recipients would either work on a payroll or as self-employed artists. In order to achieve this new model while maintaining the effectiveness of the current model, however, a significant boost to the existing art funding pool is required. So far, there are no indicators whatsoever from the government that a boost like this would be forthcoming.

We want to take a realistic look at the future of full-time composers’ income, the only sector where significant growth is predicted is funding from private foundations, as well as negotiating commission fees to better match composers’ training and workload. In addition, composers’ income could be increased through direct private funding, such as crowdfunding. Art music exporting efforts and funding need to be strengthened as well. Any significant increases in art music composers’ royalties will only continue to occur outside of Finland in the future.

Composers’ livelihoods, recognising the intrinsic value of art, equality and future composer endeavours are all interlinked. It is important to assess how we as a sector could even better take into account the range of different composer profiles and artistic tendencies. This requires an open communication about composers’ livelihoods, public funding guidelines and the ever-growing diversity of artistic values.
THREATS AND OPPORTUNITIES

How ecological reconstruction and digitalisation are shaping the future of the music industry

BY Riikka Hiltunen

The megatrends shaping the future of the world affect the music industry in many ways, the most obvious of these being the pervasiveness of technology. Experts interviewed by FMQ view technological advancements basically as positive, but unless the industry proves itself capable of adapting to the ongoing changes, the greatest threat to the music industry may be the industry itself.

Increasingly fragmented income

Jari Muikku, Executive Director of the Finnish Music Publishers Association and PhD in musicology, takes a keen interest in phenomena and changes in the industry and shares them with Finnish readers in his blogs. He considers that technological advancement is the megatrend that will continue to have the greatest direct impact on the music industry in the near future.

The digital revolution is scarcely a new thing in the music business, but it is also not the only major global trend that will continue to have an impact on the industry in the future. Sitra, the Finnish “future fund”, has made a list of the world’s principal megatrends; those affecting the music industry the most are “Ecological reconstruction is a matter of urgency”, “Technology is becoming embedded in everything” and “The economy is seeking direction”.

The various megatrends must also be considered in relation to each other, namely by analysing the tensions emerging between them and what the impacts of those tensions might be.

Increasingly fragmented income
Transitioning to the platform economy and digitalisation are keeping the earnings structure in the industry in a constant state of flux. “Income is increasingly derived from more and more sources in smaller and smaller trickles. We find ourselves needing more variations on the fan economy. Asia is the most advanced in this respect; a significant percentage of musicians’ income there comes from their fan base. Understanding the big picture and optimising it for each particular operator will be a huge challenge. The next few years will be incredibly dynamic.”

Muikku notes that medium-level artists in particular will face increasingly dire circumstances. “The royalties imbalance will become worse. With the digital platform economy, the nature of the beast is that in order to make a living there, you have to have an enormous volume of work generating royalties or a sufficient number of big hits.”

Futurist Perttu Pölönen, who is also very familiar with the music business, points first and foremost to the changes happening in the earnings structure and work circumstances in the industry.

“The music and art reach parts of us that nothing else can reach.” - Perttu Pölönen

Muikku points out that all trends also generate counter-trends. “Countertrends tend to be value-based. We may see reactions on a ‘back to nature’ basis, emphasising biodynamic music, as it were, and genuine human experiences.”

A good example of such a counter trend is the renaissance of vinyl discs, their sales having been on a steady upward trajectory worldwide for several years now. (See the article at fmg.fi on Helsingin Leypuristamo, a Finnish vinyl disc manufacturing shop that will begin operations in 2022.)

“Natural” and “genuine” can also be identified as trends in musical content.

The megatrends’ megatrend

Muikku identifies a wider ongoing paradigm shift in creativity. “Multisensory content is a strong, growing trend. The content will not necessarily change as much as the nature of the content.”

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“Working life in general is becoming increasingly frag- mented. The gulf between high-pay and low-pay jobs is growing, and odd-jobbing and micro-entrepreneurship are becoming more common. Having said that, operators in the music business may actually have an advantage in this trend, as many of them already have the skills and attitude of an entrepreneur.” (See also the article by Merja Hottinen, pp 8-11.)

That is, unless artificial intelligence robs musicians of their jobs.

“Some day down the line, I may show my grandchildren a dusty old iPhone and tell them that it used to give access to a massive amount of music. People might say, ‘What do they’ll be like, did only people make music back then?’ In the future, creative content may be created, distributed and managed by computers and algorithms.”

Actually, AI writing music is not a new thing. Composer David Cope has been using algorithms for decades, and in 2019 Warner Music Group signed a recording deal with Esedel, which is an algorithm. Virtual artists already have a fan base, and algorithms can also be used to identify and anticipate artists’ success – that is, to replace traditional A&R work.

On the other hand, cultural shifts also impact thinking and creativity. The megatrend cards devised by Sitra point out that with less time available for horedom and long-term thinking, creativity will decline.

Pölönen considers grass-roots music education to be vital for influencing the future. “Music and art reach parts of us that nothing else can reach. Children and adolescents need to be able to have leisure pastimes like this.”

Muikku identifies a wider ongoing paradigm shift in creativity. “Traditionally, creativity is seen as the province of the artist, but in the future it will become a mainstream feature in the music business in general. People are expected to be creative not just in art but also in business and, say, finance. The content will not necessarily change as much as the ways in which the content is used to do business.”

Another emerging trend is continuous content editing and collaborations between artists and fans. “Some top artists have abandoned the concept of a finished end product altogether. There is no definitive version of Kanye West’s Donda (2021), for example, because it is constantly being modified, and fans are able to influence the content,” says Muikku.

Sitra prioritises the megatrend “Ecological reconstruction is a matter of urgency” and considers that all other megatrends must be viewed in relation to this one. “There are tensions between megatrends: for example, the growing demand for energy resulting from digitalisation represents a major challenge for attaining climate goals. Links between trends may also be found within the music business.”

Efforts have been made recently to dispel the illusion that it is somehow more environmentally friendly to distribute and consume music digitally than physically. Muikku notes that the debate on ecological responsibility is still hampered by the fact that it largely focuses on live music.

“Music streaming services consume enormous amounts of energy. For example, when you skip through tracks, you initiate a new start sequence for each track. This is a not insignificant point.”

Potential future travel restrictions will have a direct impact on touring. Muikku believes that remote performances will in some way remain a fixture on the music scene and that more and new kinds of live/virtual hybrid performances will be seen in the future.

Pölönen believes that environmental consciousness will also influence content. “People will be creating a lot of art and music on these topics. Musicians have the potential to unite people in support of environmental efforts.”

An attitude shift is essential

Muikku has been engaged as a consultant by companies in the music industry and says that in many cases the most difficult thing is to get the operators to change their attitudes and their way of doing things. Running fast just to stay in one place is no longer an option in the music business. “An elephant cannot be eaten in one sitting; it must be cut up into manageable pieces. First we have to identify which way we are going, then analyse the possibilities available in that direction, and then devise a road map with milestones describing how we will proceed in that direction.”

Muikku also stresses that the point is not to be able to find one single way of correctly doing things at once. “Both-and, not either-or. You have to be able to adopt multiple approaches.”

For more on music and megatrends, read the FMQ Special Feature 4/2021, due to be published in December at fmg.fi.
CHANGING SPACES OF MUSIC

What are the demands faced and opportunities found by concert organisers in the post-pandemic reality? And what are the spaces and circumstances in which we will be experiencing concerts in the future?
As the pandemic fades in Finland and live gigs resume, what have we learned from the abrupt leap into the virtual space? And where do we go from here? Is live streaming here to stay - or just the first step?

The pandemic forced concerts quickly into the virtual space. Artists, producers and venues have scrambled to maintain ties with audiences and recoup some losses during a financial collapse. From simple living-room streams via mobile phones to high-tech spectacles featuring virtual reality (VR), augmented reality (AR) and cross reality (XR), there have been plenty of experiments.

Music-driven virtual travel

So as the technology leaps ahead, where could this go in the future?

Perhaps a Japanese or Argentinian fan might visit Helsinki to attend a gig by their favourite Finnish band at the legendary Tavastia rock club. Before the show, they might meet up with the band at a dive bar around the corner, then pop into the old-school record store next to the club. During the show, they’d be in front of the stage, feeling the jostling of fans and the thumping bass, close enough to watch the band members’ eye contact and guitar techniques. Afterwards, maybe a quick visit to the graffiti-scrawled backstage before a midnight sauna and swim on Helsinki’s shoreline? This could all be from a sofa or virtual reality (VR) studio in Osaka or Buenos Aires - perhaps with a Finnish drink in hand.

Imagine similar visits to the Savonlinna Opera Festival in a fifteenth-century castle, a fiddle extravaganza at the Kaustinen Folk Festival, a We Jazz event on a Helsinki island or a Sámi joiker on Lapland’s fells.

Finnish music professionals agree that streamed events are here to stay even after the pandemic has subsided - but that it must offer something more satisfying for fans and more financially sustainable for musicians, producers and venues. So could a gig be part of a virtual travel package involving a meet-and-greet and a chance to explore the city?

1.4m fans on Senate Square in Helsinki

In a first step, Helsinki tourism officials teamed up with one of the country’s biggest booking agencies, Fullsteam, and local XR studio Zoan to arrange the biggest music event in the country last year: a May Day concert starring hip hop duo JVG performing virtually at the city’s Senate Square.

The event attracted international attention and 1.4 million viewers, some of them represented by playable avatars that the performers could see reacting during the show, though the level of interaction was rudimentary.

Fullsteam managing director Tuomo Tähtinen says the experience laid the groundwork for another major international event in May, when metal band Nightwish performed two concerts at an imaginary steampunk-style tavern, The Islander’s Arms.

“This was our first globally marketed ticketed event and also our first streaming production of this scale,” explains Tähtinen. “So on one hand it was an exploration of what’s possible for virtual concerts from the production and business perspectives. We’re also trying to keep busy and produce memorable live experiences amid this crisis that’s been tearing the sector apart and preventing artists from doing what they love.”

Audio releases are not enough

The Koko Jazz Club venues in Helsinki and Iisalmi streamed more than 50 live shows during spring and summer 2021. Each 45-minute set has been available on demand for a week for about the price of a beer, or a higher “supporter’s fee.”

The club’s artistic director, Timo Hirvonen, says the venues have put a lot of effort into the quality of these streaming experiences but admits it’s still tough to attract audiences.

“We’re creating a library of art documents that will be valuable in the future as well,” he says. “But people have had to look at screens so much during the pandemic that it seems like they’re now waiting for actual live events, no matter how good the streaming product is.”

Will streaming be with us for a while, though? “Definitely,” says Hirvonen. “This is a valuable process that we’ve learned, and we’ll use it as part of our live offerings and for documentation. Bands are moving in a direction where audio releases are not enough, so live video recording is the future.”

Live streaming gives fans a chance to see concerts they otherwise couldn’t, or to relive ones that they did attend. But it’s impossible to recreate a genuine live experience virtually with current technology, says Tähtinen.

“WE’RE CREATING A LIBRARY OF ART DOCUMENTS THAT WILL BE VALUABLE IN THE FUTURE AS WELL”
– TIMO HIRVONEN
“It’s better to create something that can’t be achieved in a normal live setting, whether it’s more intimate access to the artist or a completely unique setting that’s literally out of this world,” he says. Can streaming shows ever be a credible alternative to the real thing, or will they always be a bit frustrating?

“In my opinion they’re separate things,” says Helsinki-based musician, songwriter, journalist and radio DJ Markus Nordenstreng. “The problem is that live streaming is produced predominantly by live music professionals with the same mindset that they have towards live events. Live streaming could become a really cool new product between record and live events. But it’ll take a lot more R&D [research and development] and conceptualising to make it interesting enough for the paying public.”

The biggest issue right now is that professional live streaming is really expensive production-wise, so it’s very easy to lose money rather than make money – especially when there’s R&D and new tech involved,” he says. “Most artists have just used live streaming as a way to keep up with their old audiences, rather than find new ones or even think about revenue.”

Pennies for performers

Nordenstreng is part of the SKAALA project, which involves the Finnish Ministry of Culture, Institute of Occupational Health and Musicians’ Union.

“The project is aimed at finding new paths for live music to prosper again. In addition to virtual gigging, the Musicians’ Union has been concerned with live venues closing in recent years, even before Covid,” he explains. In April 2020 Finnish composers’ copright society Toosto created a new license specifically for live streaming. “This has enabled at least some revenue to end up in the pockets of songwriters. But obviously it hasn’t come close to compensating for the Covid losses,” says Nordenstreng. He points out that some major artists have been able to make money in the past year by bundling unique merchandising or tour ticket sales along with virtual events.

“Hybrid live streaming with unique content hasn’t really been offered to the public, though. For example, I’m surprised that hotels haven’t begun to offer unique musical content that could interest a new clientele.”

“As to other new forms of virtual performance, “financially speaking there are very few success stories so far,” says Nordenstreng. As he sees it, future directions must be audience-driven and based on R&D, rather than just trying to compensate for industry losses. “Now the only ones who are making serious money are the production companies, service providers and platforms, rather than the musicians or songwriters.”

In technology, he sees some interesting baby steps being taken.

“Personally I’m more interested in AR elements than VR, which in live streaming terms often looks like cheap video games without the ‘wow’ factor. And many VR elements don’t really match well with organic music by live musicians, as opposed to electronic music. But immersive audio as well as AR could be amazing with organic live music and it would definitely interest broader audiences.”

From gramophones to immersive sound

Nordenstreng sees a parallel with the history of recordings in the last century, which were originally an effort to simulate the live music experience at home. “Obviously they became something totally different by the 50s when studio tech started developing. One of the main reasons why companies such as RCA or Philips invested in making commercial recordings was to sell hardware like gramophones and turntables,” he points out.

Today’s new home tech offers vast potential for enjoying live music.

“More and more consumers are building home cinemas in their living rooms, so it would be interesting to combine live streaming with immersive audio such as Dolby Atmos surround sound or Sony 360 Reality Audio. This would enhance the experience for the audience and enable them to move virtually to the same acoustic location as the performer. Immersive audio has been used a lot in gaming, but not much in the music industry yet. I’m sure this is where we’re heading.”

“Certainly online concerts will play a part in the future of live music,” says Fullsteam’s Tähtinen. “I don’t think that for most companies it will constitute a significant part of the business in the near future, though. I think at the moment everyone is primarily eager to get their engines up and running again. Time will tell how artists and companies will incorporate streaming concerts into their plans.”

Read also Amanda Kauranne’s article When concerts moved into private spaces at finnr.it

“Time will tell how artists and companies will incorporate streaming concerts into their plans” – Tuomo Tähtinen

One big challenge is how to keep people online during their free time, now that many people have had to work from home. The idea of spending your free time watching your laptop or iPad isn’t necessarily very appealing. But since most people have smart TVs these days, it makes sense to bring live-streaming content to this world,” he says.

“Live streaming could become a really cool new product between recordings and live events. But it’ll take a lot more research and development and conceptualising to make it interesting enough for the paying public.” – Markus Nordenstreng

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Today’s new home tech offers vast potential for enjoying live music.
How venues will cope depends on how they can adapt

BY Annamaija Saarela

Annamaija Saarela, curator and CEO of G Livelab Tampere, analyses future prospects for music venues.

The coronavirus pandemic dealt the performing arts a crushing blow, as events were curtailed in multiple ways. Restrictions on public gatherings brought performances to a halt in March 2020, and at the time of writing the entire performing arts sector in Finland is still in limbo.

My own venue, G Livelab Tampere, has survived these exceptional times with relatively little damage. We were able to resume gigs in mid-May, and throughout the pandemic we have only been completely closed to the public when all restaurants were shut down, for a period of about four months. Even then, we were able to present streamed and televised events.

We have been able to scale our operations with an agile response according to current regulations at any given time and to develop new business operations in the meantime, depending on the pandemic situation, we have been putting anything from pure streaming to hybrid events and near-normal concerts with seated audiences. In February 2021 we were probably the only club in Finland with ticketed performances, using a hybrid model with a tiny audience on site and all performances streamed on our platform. The stream was available for viewing for a fee. Our streaming expertise has been in much demand for hybrid corporate events, meetings and other expert gatherings.

G Livelab Tampere is a non-profit limited liability company whose purpose is to operate a performing arts unit. Instead of maximising profits, we seek to run a healthy business where artists are guaranteed reasonable fees and diversity is ensured. In normal circumstances, we receive practically no public funding, we cover our costs with box office and restaurant revenue. This is a common earnings profile among Finnish clubs, of whose budgets only about two per cent on average comes from public funding.

The year of the coronavirus has demonstrated that the operating potential of the performing arts in Finland rests on structures that are really quite fragile. Freelancers in the events and arts fields were hit particularly hard, and many have fallen through every safety net that society provides. This came as a considerable surprise to a country that prides itself on its welfare state. There has been much political debate recently in Finland concerning what we should learn from these times so that such a catastrophe could never happen again. We may only hope that this debate will lead to permanent changes to arts support systems and the social security of freelance artists.

The impacts of the coronavirus crisis on venues have not been very much discussed in public, since the spotlight has largely been on freelancers and festivals, many of the latter having already cancelled themselves for the second year running. For venues, recovery mainly depends on whether the company has had a buffer for a rainy day and whether it has the potential to generate new business alongside its diminished box office revenue.

Public debate from the perspective of audiences has also been in surprisingly short supply in Finland, the focus being on loss of income by artists and on official regulations that foster inequality. However, since this business is targeted at the paying general public, and since the events industry is wholly dependent on the needs of audiences, it is high time that we took a look at the future outlook of prospective audience members too.

G Livelab Tampere conducted an extensive visitor survey in February 2021, aimed at our existing customers. The findings were comforting for venues: the majority of our audience felt music to be so vital to their well-being that they were willing to attend concerts even in the middle of the pandemic. They felt safe in a small venue such as ours, and our highly efficient safety arrangements further alleviated their fears. Customers’ confidence in our operations translated directly into business results: tickets sell well, and there have been very few no-shows.

I am fairly sure that the pandemic will have a permanent impact on consumer behaviour. The importance of premium experiences will increase at the expense of mass events. The overall experience will increase in significance: people want to enjoy performances with their friends, not the performers and avoiding large crowds. What is more, customers are willing to pay premium prices for the privilege.

Ecology and sustainability will continue to grow in importance, and domestic travel will remain unusually popular for some time to come. This may be good news for a number of minor cultural attractions and events.

For more on changing spaces of music, read the FNO Special Feature 2/2021 Changing spaces of music – from acoustic and live to virtual and hybrid at fno.fi.

ECOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY WILL CONTINUE TO GROW IN IMPORTANCE, AND DOMESTIC TRAVEL WILL REMAIN UNUSUALLY POPULAR FOR SOME TIME TO COME

Digital services and platforms, such as hybrid concerts, are here to stay and will attract a regular audience base. People will gradually accept the need to pay for digital content. For venues whose pre-Covid business depended largely on conferences and meetings, making the digital leap may be a prerequisite for survival. It is important to train personnel for delivering and marketing streamed events.

From the perspective of operators and artists in the arts industry, the importance of international networks will grow as event organisers migrate from one-off events towards residencies with longer-term working opportunities for artists from abroad, in the interests of sustainability. Equality and inclusivity will also increase in importance, leading to increased cooperation with artists from a variety of backgrounds and from special needs groups.

The pandemic has hit many people hard, particularly those who have lost loved ones to the disease and those whose income, and thereby their professional identity, has come under serious threat. Yet we have learned a lot from this episode. The events industry has come together like never before. I am still moved by how wonderful, impactful and solidarity-driven the demonstration arranged by the events industry in Helsinki in early June was – more than a thousand people simply standing still, all of them safely distanced (see p. 60).

The resilience of our industry has been weighed in the balance and found to be sound. We will pull through this, but it will require us to accept that the change is permanent and to respond to that change. Also, the events industry must continue to lobby for its interests in a broad-based and systematic way.

Translation: Jukka Mattjärvi
CONCERT VENUES FOR THE FUTURE

BY Santeri Kaipiainen

There are currently multiple changes going on in society at large that will eventually be reflected in new needs for concert halls and other spaces for music in Finland. Santeri Kaipiainen writes about certain particularly interesting examples from around the country.

Quarries and ravines, repurposed industrial facilities and world-class auditoriums: music occupies an incredibly diverse range of spaces in Finland. If music communities manage to be quick and agile in responding to changes on the playing field of music, then concert venues should strive for this kind of anti-fragility as well.

Carbon sink and beehives

Tampere Hall – home to the largest concert hall in the Nordic countries – is responding to the challenge of combating climate change. The building achieved carbon neutral status for its first carbon-neutral classical music festival, Tampere Chamber Music. From what we’ve seen, the classical music people are more advanced in this respect than people in pop and rock music.”

Another ecological impact, albeit a minor one, is provided by the Tampere Hall roof garden. “It has provided some of the herbs, salads and vegetables used in our restaurants, but the main contribution is in the beehives that we’ve kept up there for the past two summers. The bees have pollinated the deciduous trees in the Kaleva district,” Nevalainen reveals.

Before the coronavirus pandemic, Tampere Hall had about 1,000 events per year, with a combined visitor count of about 600,000. “Businesses will be back as soon as possible. We can see that people are getting tired of virtual events, and we already have a lot of demand for hybrid events. Audiences are yearning for live music, but even so, I don’t believe that streamed events and concerts will go away, at least not completely.”

Nevalainen explains that Tampere Hall made a quick leap into the world of remote events. “I feel that we are agile in exploring new things, whether it be environmental sustainability, hybrid events or a green-screen studio. In technology, we are seeing developments in augmented reality and virtual reality to enrich concert experiences, but it remains to be seen how soon and to what extent these will be deployed. A good example of leveraging technology came with the concert given by the Tampere Philharmonic outdoors in Sorsapuisto park in 2019. We used Soundscapes technology to create an ambiance very much like a concert hall in the park.”

Virtual acoustics are here already

The more acoustic music migrates out of concert halls, the more important the role of sound design in amplification becomes. In Helsinki, for instance, chamber orchestras and concert series have discovered former industrial premises such as Suvilahdi or Konepaja, where the acoustics as they stand are not always so good for music.

The dance work Transit by the Tero Saarinen company was given its first performance in Finland at the Helsinki Festival, in the Sea Cable Hall at the city’s Cable Factory, in August 2021. Its sound designer is Tuomas Norvio, who has also designed the sound environment for the new premises of the TSC in the same wing of the Cable Factory. The TSC Studio is equipped with 22 speakers and two calibration systems that enable an immersive listening experience.

“I got the opportunity to realise a dream about what could be done with sound design in a dance studio. The space is 170 square metres and is principally designed for dance rehearsals, but it’s also good that it has stage acoustics, because it can act as a ‘real life test’,” says Norvio. In recent years, his projects have included the exhibition Egypt of Glory at the Amos Rex art museum and the immersive and interactive installation Laila at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet.

“Now, finally, we are getting into immersiveness with sound design. It’s a big thing that Apple is introducing the Dolby Atmos format [a technology aiming to produce an increasingly realistic audio illusion], and it’s not limited to films. Systems where we can design and program immersive sound are now approximating real-world acoustics and enable an orchestra to be amplified so that it still sounds realistic. On the downside, this is expensive stuff, and the placement of elements in a concert hall may cause aesthetic issues.”

Norvio feels that sound has come to be taken more seriously in the 2000s, particularly when operating with amplified sound.

“These include not just the emissions from the production itself but also emissions from the vehicles used by audience members, and meals. Compensation may involve things like planting tree saplings at our carbon sink in the woodlands of Lempäälä,” says Mika Nevalainen, Business Director at Tampere Hall. Nevalainen notes that conference and meeting organisers have been very much on the ball in compensating for emissions from their events.

“Some concert organisers are fully on board, as witness our first carbon-neutral classical music festival, Tampere Chamber Music. From what we’ve seen, the classical music people are more advanced in this respect than people in pop and rock music.”

Virtual acoustics are different. “In order to be able to create an immersive sound with technology, you have to damp the live sound as much as possible and balance it against the virtual sound,” says Tuomas Norvio, who has designed the sound environment for the Tampere Philharmonic’s new premises.

“Venues are better equipped, and technical devices have become smaller. Internet-based systems make it easy to move sound around in multiple channels. This is a huge step for the listener, quality-wise,” says Norvio.

He also points out that the spatial needs of natural and virtual acoustics are different. “In order to be able to create an immersive sound with technology, you have to damp the natural acoustics of the space. Many venues now have portraitable panels with which the acoustics can be modified, and now that orchestras have had to perform via streaming, they have made huge advancements in mixing. It’s no longer a case of designing a space with a single acoustic and having everyone to cope with that as best they can.”

Read an extended version of this article at fmq.fi

Translation: Jiaxue Mangjia

ChANGING SPACES OF MUSIC...
What is the role of music in political campaigns? Should or could a modern-day musician and composer make political statements? Do they have a responsibility to do so? In the following pages, we focus on the multiple relations between music, politics and social activism.
RELIEVING ANXIETY, QUESTIONING CURRENT PRACTICES

HOW CAN SOCIAL ACTIVISM MANIFEST IN CONTEMPORARY MUSIC?

BY Auli Särkiö-Pitkänen

The relationship of art to society has always been complex. What is the role of music in a world of increasing crises and polarisation? How can art participate in social debate, and does it have a responsibility to do so? We asked three contemporary composers for their views.

A COMPOSITION ACQUIRES MEANINGS FROM ITS ENVIRONMENT

It is an oft-repeated truism that music as such cannot express anything beyond the music itself. This is not to say that music cannot prompt extramusical associations in listeners. Antti Auvinen considers it not only inevitable but also desirable for the titles of his works to prompt a variety of interpretations in listeners.

Auvinen considers it a good thing for composers to provide background on their works for audiences. His music is typically breathtakingly complex and crammed with physically powerful structures that enfold the listener in a tight embrace. Last autumn the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra released a recording of his orchestral works Junker Twist, Himmel Punk and Turbo Aria, in respect of which the composer has mentioned extreme right-wing ideologies, religious narrow-mindedness and refugees crossing the Mediterranean respectively. For instance, the compulsively twitching orchestral racket in Junker Twist invites the listener to imagine what is happening inside the head of a “stay-at-home national socialist”.

“It is a good thing if a composer uses the space given to him to say something meaningful,” says Auvinen. “If I, as a composer, say something that is blindingly obvious, such as that all people should have the same rights, then someone else can be empowered by that. But the societal significance of art is a broad and complex issue.”

Auvinen notes that he begins his work with impressions that often have to do with current events. He also feels that as a composer he has the ability to translate into music societal situations that are difficult to express in words. Turbo Aria (2017) is a good example of the convoluted path from an idea to a completed work. The composition gradually fills up with potential meanings to which listeners can and must assign differing interpretations.

Auvinen was fascinated by the idea of a piece for soprano and orchestra where the singer was not present in person. He began to make samples of recordings made by Finnish star sopranos of the past on 78s and to process their voices into an imaginative electronic soundscape to be incorporated into an orchestral work.

“We were on a family holiday in Italy when I and my youngest child saw a gramophone on the beach. There was rubbish floating in the sea, some of it gradually sinking. The ghost soprano voices gradually acquired an entire network of meanings: the Mediterranean, drowning people, rubbish in the sea, the voice of a child, children in water.

“A strong sense of injustice may have a considerable impact on the composition process,” says Auvinen. “Disbelief, frustration, being aware of just how limited your potential for influencing anything actually is.”

The number one consideration for a composer is what a piece sounds like.

“If the music is feasible, intriguing, witty, then it does what it is supposed to,” Auvinen summarises. “But of course art is always political in a broader sense. For me, that means being in constant dialogue with what you are doing and evaluating it critically.”
TOWARDS AN ABSENCE OF HIERARCHY

Although the pandemic has put a damper on studies, Matilda Seppälä is graduating as a composer from the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki. At the time of the interview, she was working on an orchestral work for the Tampere Philharmonic, among other things. She is of a generation for whom art is very much an ambiguous thing, with multiple issues calling for resolution.

“About three years ago, I experienced the mother of all value conflicts,” says Seppälä. She found it difficult to do things important for her in the context of the culture of classical music. Seppälä brought tortured mind maps to her composition classes with Veli-Matti Puumala but then found peer support while an exchange student in Berlin.

How does one write concert music in this day and age?

Seppälä has written for traditional ensembles and has enjoyed success in international composition competitions, but she has also made use of things such as a study on the electrical conductivity of skin, which revealed “what sweating sounds like”. She was a member of the planning trio for the Ung Nordisk Musik festival of contemporary music in Tampere last autumn, where the theme was ecology.

How does Seppälä feel about the societal aspect of music? It is a difficult issue, and she has a lot to say. First, being societally active and being societally relevant are two different things. Second, discussions about the societal nature of music often confuse the practices of institutions and the content of art with each other. Third, no individual can exist separate from the world around them, and in that sense all art is societal.

But art being inevitably related to the world does not, to her mind, make artists special people. “We all have potential for exerting influence in society. Being an artist does not encumber you with any more social responsibility than anyone else,” she notes.

Seppälä has noticed a generational difference in the course of her studies. Previous generations of composers have not necessarily had to go through the thought processes that are commonplace for young people today. For young composers, it is important that their work reflects the value base.

Although Seppälä considers that art never exists in a vacuum, she does not feel that provoking debate or achieving change is the principal reason for creating art in the first place, at least not without seriously questioning what its true potential for influence is.

“You can be an activist much more effectively in other ways than by creating art,” she points out. The debate on which topics should be subjects for art quickly gets bogged down in details. This is one reason why the debate about art and society is complicated. Seppälä does not want to belittle the power for change that an artistic experience may have on the individual level. But:

term activism to mean art created in the context of activism or activism making use of the means of art.

Seppälä mentions the word “utopia” several times. An attitude envisioning a utopia and questioning the current operating culture may be a more feasible approach to changing things in the world of music than shouting angrily from the wings. Seppälä is fascinated by the absence of hierarchy. She is most at home when writing music for and with musicians as equal partners.

In the orchestral world, she is bemused by how powerful the hierarchy is both within an ensemble and in the operating culture in general.

“A orchestra is like a finely tuned machine that runs all year round, and both musicians and composers must adapt to it regardless of how they themselves feel about music,” Seppälä explains.

Orchestras are full of curious and highly versatile musicians. Seppälä finds it frustrating that the symphony orchestra, as an instrument, has practically not evolved at all in the past hundred years. She is completing a master’s thesis on experimental instrument-building and is interested in the relationship between instrument and body.

“What would an instrument sound like if you needed five people, five different bodies to produce a sound?”

“CREATING ART IS A FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEED, AND YOU CANNOT RESTRICT THE ROLE OF ART TO SIMPLY BEING A CATALYST FOR SOCIOETAL CHANGE” – MATILDA SEPPÄLÄ

“Let’s imagine that all of a sudden people create a hundred thousand artworks about climate change in Finland and the world, and nobody feels that provoking debate or achieving change is the principal reason for creating art in the first place, at least not without seriously questioning what its true potential for influence is.

“You can be an activist much more effectively in other ways than by creating art,” she points out. The debate on which topics should be subjects for art quickly gets bogged down in details. This is one reason why the debate about art and society is complicated. Seppälä does not want to belittle the power for change that an artistic experience may have on the individual level. But:

In another opera project, he partnered with the Helsinki Chamber Choir and the VocalEspoo festival. Planned to be produced in autumn 2022, it is an extensive opera for choir and electronics about uprisings.

“I’ve written several monologue operas, and it seemed somehow easier to go from one character to a crowd than to a group of characters,” says Hofmann. “A choir is a hugely inspiring instrument for me. I’m interested in crowd dynamics and solidarity across boundaries. And in what comes after a revolution.”

Plans include an opera about reality TV celebrity Jade Goody with soprano Annika Fuhrmann, who also premiered his previous opera, Maailmantapaja [World killer] (2018).

Hofmann once hit a dead end trying towrite contemporary instrumental music consistent with the mainstream. He began to write a lot of text and to search for a means of expressing it as directly as possible. The result was a series of vocal acrobatics for women’s voices and brutally raw emotion.

“I’ve discovered my own thing, and that’s valuable. This is how I can express myself. Now I’m trying to add some lyricism and new ways of using the voice.” Hofmann is also increasingly interested in drama for his upcoming operas.

In addition to his extensive vocal works, he has written solo songs. He is working on a kAPRA cycle for ANU KOMI. There is text involved in everything he does, and thus his works are firmly connected to the world.

“Are they socially conscious? Am I causing or influencing change? It seems like hubris to think so. My music throws the world in your face. It shows stuff that happens and criticizes it. I vent my frustration through art, because there’s no other way.” #Translator: Jaakko Marttinen
In 2013 musician Ramy Essam was banned from performing in his home country of Egypt, and in late 2014 he arrived in Helsinki to work in a Safe Haven residence. In this interview, Essam talks about musical activism, exile and his own music, which is a fascinating mix of hard rock, hip hop and Egyptian melodies. “People in the Nordic countries have a really big space for freedom of expression that they don’t use enough,” says Essam.

Rock artist RAMY ESSAM is struggling with the same challenges as many other musicians. The pandemic put a stop to playing gigs and complicated his professional life in general. He has had to keep changing his plans as the situation unravels, and to direct his energies into studio work instead of touring. He is currently working on a new album, due for release later this year, with Swedish producer JOHAN CARLBERG.

The new album has a theme that few musicians can personally relate to: the works on his recording talk about life in exile.

**Programmed to be a fighter**

In 2011, when Ramy Essam was in his early twenties, he performed his piece Irhal (Leave) in Tahrir Square. Hundreds of thousands of protesters joined in his song. Not long afterwards, Egypt’s leader Hosni Mubarak resigned. Essam rose to great popularity in his home country and attracted increasing international attention, and Time Out magazine placed Irhal at number three in its listing of songs that changed history.

Ramy Essam knew early on that the road he had chosen was not an easy one. Soon after the events at the square, he was arrested and tortured. The political situation in post-Mubarak Egypt has remained unstable. In 2013 Essam was banned from performing in his home country, and in late 2014 he arrived in Helsinki to work in a safe residence provided by the Artists at Risk project. Today the musician divides his time between Finland and Sweden.

Fear has never stopped Essam from using his music to give people hope and a belief in a brighter future. “I’m a fighter – I was born like that. It’s like in my software somehow. This is me anyways, ever since my childhood. And the revolution proved my belief in the power of music. I never considered the ‘stop’ option at all.”

In 2018 Essam released a piece titled Balānī in a bid to encourage conversation about Egypt’s political situation. In a matter of days the music video attracted millions of views. The song’s lyricist Galal El-Behairy, web designer Mustafa Gamal and video director Shady Harashi were arrested in Egypt. Habash died in captivity in spring 2020 but El-Behairy continues to write from his prison cell. In addition to Essam’s compositions and the poetry of El-Behairy, the new album includes lyrics from other Egyptian writers as well.

“There are also texts by dead poets who are safe because they are beyond arrest, and texts by authors who remain anonymous because they live in Egypt.”

Music and message 100% hand in hand

Message and exile are two themes that cannot be ignored when interveviewing Essam or writing about him, but he also enjoys talking about his music, which is a fascinating mix of hard rock, hip hop and the Egyptian melodies that Essam hears in his head non-stop. The new album will also have a stronger presence of electronic and industrial sounds.

Like so many others, Essam counts his older brother as a great influence on his music tastes. In Egypt, Western popular music was not readily available even by the 2000s. When Essam first heard Linkin Park’s debut album Hybrid Theory (2000) via his brother, the experience was mind-blowing. “When I listened to CHESTER screaming - wow, I just lost my mind. I didn’t even know that you could scream in a song like that. I just went crazy.”

Essam’s other important musical role models include Nirvana, Rage Against the Machine and System of a Down, as well as the Algerian singer Bachir Taha, who died in 2018 and whose music successfully combined rock and North African music. For the first few years, Essam played guitar just for fun, but when he was twenty, three years before the revolution, he found a new significance for his music.

“I had political conversations with my older brother and read [AMGAD EL-QAHRWAGI’S] poems. That was a real start to where I am now. It helped me to change, to open my eyes and even to control my anger.”

Music and politics

Music and message 100% hand in hand: “People in the Nordic countries have a really big space for freedom of expression that they don’t use enough.” - RAMY ESSAM

Today, music and message go 100% hand in hand in Essam’s life. He considers himself privileged to be able to address important issues through his music.

“Music is my first love. I’m a musician and an artist, and I never want to stop feeling and talking about everything I feel as a human being. But I’m lucky to be an artist and able to convert these feelings to music.”

Essam would like to see more musical activism around him.

“People in the Nordic countries have a really big space for freedom of expression that they don’t use enough. People take things for granted, but you may wake up one day and suddenly everything’s gone. I wish that every artist would contribute at least one per cent of their art to saying something.”

Freedom to create and to grow musically

At first, the geographical distance to Egypt felt totally liberating for Essam.

“I became so much better as an artist. I got time to study and learn, to develop my art as well as access to great studios and collaborations with high-level producers and musicians. The artist who I am now compared to who I was six years ago – the difference is huge at all levels.”

As the Balānī case proves, however, this freedom is not absolute. “I’m not totally free from their harm, but I’m not in jail either.”

Essam has toured Europe and North America, and collaborated with notable musicians such as PJ Harvey. He has played gigs at rock and folk music festivals, and at performance venues ranging from intimate clubs to main stages. “But my main audience is in countries I can’t go to.”

At first, Essam found it challenging to perform in front of an audience where perhaps only five per cent would understand Arabic. However, this reality has prompted him to develop and adapt his performance and story-telling style to enable his audiences to experience his songs better. His music-making remains uncompromised, although it has not been an easy road.

“Being a political artist doesn’t sell so easily. It’s never the hot music or hot topic. But I’m not willing to change that for any reason. Sorrow and hope are with me all the time. They keep me going.” - *Variations*, Hanna-Mari Latham
When the US President Donald Trump blasted out the 1978 Village People hit YMCA at his 2020 presidential election rallies to rev up the crowds, there were many who prickled up their ears. What does the iconic 1970s disco band and its gay anthem have in common with the macho patriarch Trump?

Partially inspired by the Finnish visual artist Touko Laaksonen’s gay porn pseudonym Tom of Finland, the Village People are a group widely known for their camp approach. When young men gather at a religious organisation in the hit song YMCA, the reference is not so much to do with Christianity. Instead, the piece can be heard as a symbol for the queer “congregation”, a community where members of a minority can meet each other and celebrate their existence.

Trump’s campaign, however, appeared to be deaf to this widely established meaning of the piece. The song’s opening lyrics – “Young man, there’s no need to feel down / I said, hold your head a little higher” – was no longer attached to rallying around a sexual minority but to the political message of a candidate who has been known to hold hostile views towards the LGBTQ+ community.

Trump’s choice to use Village People’s YMCA as a part of his campaign is an example of how the political context of music can alter its already established message. At the same time, it illustrates how cultural symbols can be “hijacked” to serve a purpose that is virtually the opposite to the original context.

A Finnish example of political music that has received numerous new interpretations within new political contexts is the Finlandia hymn by Jean Sibelius (read more in the extended version of the article at fmq.fi).

Previously composed and already established pieces of music, however, represent just one of the many ways in which political parties seek to build their profiles through music. New works composed specifically for campaigns are a whole different chapter.

One such song was Suomi kuntoon [Let’s put Finland back on track], which was commissioned by Finland’s Centre Party for their 2015 parliamentary election campaign. The words were written by Jukka Louhivouri, the melody composed by production company Miracle Sound, and the song was performed by Karolílna Kotala. The work has since then provided inspiration for parodies such as visual artist Marta Tuomaala’s media art work FinnCycling: Soumi-Perkele! (2016/2017). The politics of Finland’s then government, led by the Centre Party’s Jyrki Siipila, is reflected in Tuomaala’s work through a critical and inclusive indoor cycling lesson.

Another classic in this genre is the well-known composer and producer Mari Kolehmainen’s pop song Vuoden vuoden kuuliaisuus [Six years’ allegiance]. The piece was composed for the 2012 presidential campaign for the National Coalition Party’s Sauli Niinistö, and it bears a close aesthetic resemblance to an AOR (Adult Oriented Rock) tune. Journalist Vesa Sihvo wrote in the Helsinki Sanomat newspaper about the piece’s conflicted background: instead of voting for the right-wing Niinistö, the song lyricist Sana Mustonen was said to have voted for the Left Alliance’s candidate Paavo Ahinmaki on the first round of the election and the Greens’ Peeka Hännistö on the second.

In terms of music associated with political campaigns, it is not unheard of for songwriters to compose music for a candidate that they would personally never vote for. Partly for this reason, some music makers wish to remain anonymous and thus separate their work life from their political views.

Audiovisual politics

Political parties, too, are involved in profile-building in their own way, through the music and sound worlds they disseminate through the internet. For example, the National Coalition Party’s “Podcast for exceptional times” has adapted an aesthetic that mimics news bulletins with an opening image that resembles a TV test pattern, and with its fast-paced digital sound world. The Centre Party, on the other hand, seek to strengthen their image as a down-to-earth party by choosing the acoustic guitar as the preferred instrument for their own podcast.

According to a music creator who has anonymously composed social media and TV commercial music for Left Alliance and Green League candidates, the first thing to consider when building an audiovisual profile for a candidate is their personality. The choice of music can thus reflect a candidate’s gender or age, for example, as well as carefully considering their target supporter base.

In addition to a clearly identifiable theme music section at the beginning of each video, a candidate’s social media account can include several jingles that are composed to reflect different moods, depending on whether the campaign video is focusing on a threatening, hopeful or neutral aspect of current affairs or everyday life. While some extreme right candidates’ audiovisual campaigns have sought to use music to build action or horror-film imagery with nearly dystopian undertones, many candidates favour music that avoids stirring strong feelings. In this regard, today’s political music, which is designed for audiovisual platforms, is sometimes the polar opposite of traditional political music such as protest songs, which actively seek to produce strong reactions from listeners.

Composing for audiovisual campaigns is in many ways similar to composing for drama productions or current affairs programmes. Music and soundscapes that have been custom-made for campaigns often use effects that are familiar from the film industry in order to highlight the candidate’s character, political climate and current reality – in other words, the general state of discourse, participation, society and day-to-day politics.

All things considered, the role of music in political campaigns adds up to much more than just rallying around the cause or simply attracting attention. Music, in all different forms, is included in political parties’ and candidates’ image-building and communication agendas, which can be used in multiple ways to influence voters. 

*Translation: Hania Mari Latham*
In 2021 again many composers, musicians and music makers told us inspiring stories about their music and their work.
WHAT JOIK IS
BY Anna Nikkilä/Larsman (Jarmoikto)

It is “me time”. I walk uphill. The air is brisk, fresh. A car passes in the distance. Up the fell as I go, the sounds of cars no longer reach me. A babbling brook, a whispering wind, a bit of a drizzle. I reach the summit of the neighbouring fell, which commands quite a broad view. Some marks of the human hand can be seen, grooves in the shape of the earth. Yet most of what I see may still contain something untouched. I sit down on a large rock. I scan the horizon. And then it comes, again, music from out of nowhere. No words, no obvious rhythm, just joik with no beginning and no end.

Joik is an emotion, a state of mind, a mode of expression. Joik is a language unto itself. It is at once a musical expression and a complex form of music. While joik is the music of the Sámi people, it is also a device for memory and communication. When we joik, we do not joik about something, we joik the thing itself. Joik is a comprehensive description of whatever it is the joiker is perceiving. Each subject of joik has its own melody, varied subtly by the joiker in accordance with the aesthetics of joik. It is a musical portrait of a person, a place, an animal, and so on.

In today’s world, joik embraces modern life and its phenomena, even abstract concepts. The same joik may be manifested in multiple ways. It is all down to what the joiker wishes to express in joik.

Since childhood, my musicianship has been defined by my Sámi identity. I am a musician and I am a Sámi, but joik is something that comes naturally to me, and I do not consider myself a joiker. Nevertheless, joik is the music that is nearest to me. My joik language is my own. It is my own idiom that has evolved in the course of my life. Sometimes listening to someone else’s joik is a powerful, spiritual experience. A joiker transports the listener to another place and makes the entire body resonate with the sensation of the subject of the joik. At the same time, one can objectively appreciate their vocal quality and their command of joik expression. Joik language does not reveal everything to everyone. Joik embodies the values and essence of the Sámi culture. No outsider can ever fully understand it.

For me, the past few years have been an exciting journey into the past. It all started when I gained access to a body of archival recordings that allowed me to build an image of an ancient musical culture that today no longer exists in such an extensive form. What was significant was that the material I studied had been collected in the 1960s and 1970s by researchers and grandparents came from. This put a personal slant on the research and yielded a new dimension to my self.

Archival recordings have taught me more about the world of the joik. But how have I been influenced by Western music education, which I have had since I was a child? Can competence in that area help me better perceive the nuances of joik, and does my visual mind help me memorise and recall joik melodies using music notation? Or am I too foursquare and black-and-white in trying to impose scales, rhythms, logic and definitions upon all this? Why cannot I just let joik be, instead of mixing it up and inventing new things and blending it with instrumental music? Because it is my music and my identity.

My joik language is my means of expressing myself and reflecting on my environment. Joik comes in many guises, and I have been obliged to accept that my joik language is mixed up with all sorts of things. The main thing, however, is that my joik language is for expressing my feelings on my own terms. It has been important for me to explore stylistic features through the archives, but on the other hand there is an enjoyment in artistic freedom, drawing on the elements in the archival recordings that inspire me at any given moment and I can say that there are a lot of these elements to be found. Every time I listen to a historical recording, I find new things to marvel at and to take on board.

My joik language is so blended in with all the kinds of music I have heard from around the world that it feels only natural to combine it with instrumental music. Having studied and tried out various joiks, I have found that a feature of joik is often referred to by joikers – the essence of freedom – has become more prominent in my own music-making. When included in an art form created with other musicians in a band, joik must make concessions and compromises. There must be a consensus about how we are making music. Some of the features of joik may become eroded in the process, and the resulting music is quite far from what previous generations would recognise as joik. Hopefully, though, there is something in the core of this genre of Sámi music that will remain unaltered in the process of assimilation that in today’s world understandably impacts all cultures of the world.

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ADVOCATING FOR THE HUMAN TOUCH

BY Kalevi Aho

It is not easy to talk about one’s own music. For myself, this is because my works always meaningfully embody something of my personal philosophy.

I began to create music as a child because it was a means of dealing with powerful emotions. My compositions were like musical diary pages. At that time, each work stemmed from an extramusical element, which is often the case even today. As an example, my First Symphony (1969) was inspired by a poem by my daughter Matilda was born in October 1976. From 1985–1986 onwards I have been writing in duodecimal notation. A prominent conductor once expressed to me an interest in getting to know my symphonies thoroughly and conducting them, but then added: “It probably won’t happen until the composer is dead.” In other words, never — because if a composer’s works do not prompt interest in his lifetime, they are not likely to do so thereafter. Since 2000, I have been focusing on concertos and have written 35 of them for 26 instruments. Nearly all of them were prompted by instrumentalists. My first ventures into this genre were quite successful, and players of other instruments approached me with requests for music for their instruments. Writing concertos has been very gratifying, because I have had the opportunity to get to know various instruments intimately, and the resulting works have been extremely diverse, because instruments differ so greatly from one another.

I still write using pencil and paper, even though I did once learn the rudiments of both Finale and Sibelius. There are even more advanced composing software suites, but I have avoided those on principle. I like being able to write music by hand, in my own hand; it makes every single note seem significant somehow. I see myself as a craftsman, writing by hand being a tool for maintaining my inner ear and my mental flexibility.

With my earliest orchestral works, I first wrote out a short score on four staves and then expanded that into an orchestral score. With my Fourth Symphony (1972–1973), the short score grew up to 20 staves in places, and from my Fifth Symphony (1975–1976) onwards I have been writing in full score from start to finish. After that highly complex and laboriously created symphony and the chamber opera Arion (The Key) (1977–1978), I have never felt the need to go back in to tweak things, except perhaps for dynamic or agogical changes, typically made in the first rehearsals.

Because I begin at the beginning and in most cases write music without making any preparatory sketches or going back to correct myself, the work process itself is quite highly controlled. On the one hand, I have to be excited by the work in progress, but on the other hand, I must keep it at a certain distance and observe it objectively in order to achieve a feasible form. Indeed, it is a somewhat two-level process. My thoughts must be absolutely clear when I am working, and the only stimulant I permit myself is coffee.

The style of my works is substantially affected by what I am trying to say in each particular case.

Some of my works are overtly programmatic. I recall the writing of my Twelfth Symphony ("Luosto Symphony") in 2002–2003 being a highly demanding project. It was to be premiered outdoors, at Luosto Fell, by a large symphony orchestra at the foot of the fell, a chamber orchestra up the slope above the audience, and ten “fell musicians” doted around the audience. Because I knew that the majority of the audience would be coming from Sodankylä and elsewhere in Lapland and had had no contact with contemporary classical music, finding an appropriate musical idiom was a conundrum. My solution was to provide the movements with Lapland-inspired headings. This gave the audience a sufficient means for identifying with the music, and the premiere turned out to be one of my greatest successes.

The northern aspect is also present in my Theremin Concerto, “Eight Seasons” (2011), premiered at a concert of the Lapland Chamber Orchestra. Its movements depict the eight distinct seasons in Lapland. Some of my works, such as the opera Hävitettiläisöitä (Insect Life) (1985–1987), stem from current societal and political circumstances, while others have their origins in my private life. As an example of the latter, my Triple Concerto for violin, cello, piano and strings (2018) emerged from the lullaby that I wrote on the day my granddaughter Matilda was born in October 2017.

There are only a few cases where I have employed motif and theme tables to organise the material for a composition. The most complex example of this is my Piano Concerto no. 1 (1988–1989), which is based on the gradual changing of musical material from the freely conceived motif technique of the first movement to a 16-tone row in the second and third movements (derived from cyclic numbers in the duodecimal system). This is replaced in the finale by a new 30-tone cyclic row in the duodecimal system, which evolves into a sequence encoding the first 100 decimals of the number π (pi), also in the duodecimal system.

While it is fun to generate number systems as schemes on which to base compositions, it does carry the risk of rendering the musical idiom dry and automated. Because of this, I have not continued to pursue this approach.

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I have written 17 symphonies to date. These and my five operas may be regarded as interim accounts of my career, as it were. The symphonies represent the idealist side of my personality, because in realistic terms it does not make very much sense to write such things today. While symphonies still enjoy pride of place in concert programmes, orchestras generally do not like to replace the great Classical-Romantic repertoire with an extensive contemporary work. The classical symphonic canon is quite rigid and not easily deviated from. A prominent conductor once expressed to me an interest in getting to know my symphonies thoroughly and conducting them, but then added: “It probably won’t happen until the composer is dead.” In other words, never — because if a composer’s works do not prompt interest in his lifetime, they are not likely to do so thereafter.

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With my works and with the way I write, I have tried to give the human touch in our increasingly cold and technological world. •

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SAKARI ORAMO TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR MUSIC - NOW AS A PROFESSOR

Sakari Oramo is one of Finland’s international star conductors and is known for his extended engagements with orchestras and his sense of responsibility. During the year of the coronavirus, his orchestras in London and Stockholm suspended their operations almost completely, but his new job as Professor of Orchestral Training and Orchestra Conducting with the world-famous conducting class of the Sibelius Academy has kept him busy. Here, he is responsible not only for his orchestras in London and Stockholm but also for our standard of orchestral playing, which has recently become a cause for concern.

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- SAKARI ORAMO

I reach Sakari Oramo via a video link at his villa in Kokkola, but he has not fully retreated from musical metropolises to remote work. Only the day before, he conducted a cornutypical gig with the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra.

“I don’t even remember which guest conductor it was who couldn’t make it this time, but I happened to be available and was happy to pitch in, as I know the orchestra well.”

The concert was streamed, and 20 people were allowed in the audience. Oramo notes that these tickets were snapped up immediately. “Fortunately people are still hungry for music!”

Oramo admits to having been distressed in early 2020 when concerts were cancelled first by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and then by the BBC Symphony Orchestra, and suddenly there was no more commuting around the world. “The continuing uncertainty was nerve-racking. But now I’ve adapted, and last-minute changes no longer change the way I work or drive up my stress levels,” he says.

“THE ORCHESTRAL CONDUCTING TRAINING HAS BEEN GOING WELL. THE YOUNG PEOPLE GRADUATING FROM THAT CLASS ARE IMMEDIATELY ABLE TO LAUNCH AN INTERNATIONAL CAREER OR TO FIND WORK IN FINLAND. BUT IT WAS CLEAR FROM THE FIRST THAT I WANTED TO RAISE OUR SIGHTS.”

By this, Oramo meant reducing the size of the conducting class even further, so that he would be able to give individual feedback. This will allow strengths in the students’ personalities to flourish while helping them improve on their weaknesses. The principal legacy of Jorma Panula, the legendary founder of the conducting class, is that each student gets plenty of podium time with a dedicated rehearsal orchestra, and Oramo notes that the importance of this has only increased.

“But the musicians in that orchestra have to be paid, and now that we are facing budget cuts, I’ve sought to engage in collaboration with professional orchestras,” says Oramo. After having worked on technique, interaction skills and score reading in a classroom setting, students can be ready to test their competence in front of a professional orchestra.

Demanding and motivating professorship

Oramo’s work did change in January 2020, however, as he took up the chair of Orchestral Training and Orchestra Conducting at the Sibelius Academy of Uniarts Helsinki, and now he is responsible for the most famous music class in the country. The professorship demands his constant attention, particularly in late spring with preparations for the next academic year and the running of entrance examinations. The coronavirus pandemic has made the work very different from what Oramo was expecting, but he has never had any doubt about his policy or his motivation.

“The orchestral conducting training has been going well. The young people graduating from that class are immediately able to launch an international career or to find work in Finland. But it was clear from the first that I wanted to raise our sights.”

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In January 2021 the conducting students prepared a concert of their own for the concert series of the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra, and there have been brief periods working with the Helsinki Philharmonic and the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. Oramo says that the concept has proved useful.

“The rehearsal orchestra will play exactly like you conduct them, but a professional orchestra is a machine with a settled routine of its own. Then a student can be like, why won’t they play what I’m showing them?”

This is where Oramo can provide support. “Students have to discover in themselves what they want to achieve, but a teacher can help them understand how to get there.”

Individual and group tuition suitably balanced

On the other hand, Oramo has also increased the time used for individual tuition in the orchestra conducting class.

“When I ask a student to conduct a couple of measures with no instrumental players present, we can address fine details in their technique. There’s no time for that sort of thing in working with an orchestra when the music just flows.”

It is easier to address weaknesses when peer pressure is absent, although Oramo also stresses that the conducting students can learn a lot from each other, as long as the teacher keeps the interaction constructive.

“I want a student to gain self-confidence in my class, not lose it.”

Oramo has never had any pedagogical studies in the previous minor teaching tasks, through closely observing the competence and behaviour of students. And when he describes the rewards of a pedagogical presence, I can feel the warmth of his smile radiating across the video connection.
“I’ve conducted Schumann’s First Symphony a lot, but when I see how students discover the music afresh and also come up against its challenges, it’s like reliving the early days of my career,” he says. “I don’t see teaching as a means of maintaining a fresh approach for myself, but that’s what happens.”

More ambition and working life skills for orchestral training

Challenges at the basic level of education can only be addressed by Oramo through authoritative opinions, but at the Sibelius Academy he can influence competence in orchestral playing in practice. Here, too, his approach is clear:

“Orchestral training has been running steadily and has developed into a sort of calling card for the Sibelius Academy.” Oramo explains. “And when the university administration invites our symphony orchestra to perform at all sorts of events, the pedagogical function tends to get sidelined.”

Oramo identifies causes and potential solutions for this at the basic level of music education.

“We’ve ended up in a situation where there’s just not enough ambition for musical competence. I’m not harking back to the pedagogical style of olden times, because the results attained then were due to the efforts of enthusiastic individual teachers just like today. But do we even allow teachers to be ambitious today? Or is the system just geared towards doing the bare minimum to pass examinations, teachers to be ambitious today? Or is the system just geared towards doing the bare minimum to pass examinations, and instead of propelling students towards a professional level of competence?”

Long and important engagements with orchestras

From this summer, Oramo will have more time to devote to being a professor, as his tenure as Chief Conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic comes to an end after 13 years. Long engagements with orchestras are typical for Oramo, but he also knows when it is time to go. The grand Sibelius cycle planned for the end of the spring season in Stockholm felt like the right occasion to bow out.

“I almost left Stockholm when I started in London, but then I realised that the [Stockholm] orchestra was much too important for me. I’ve found a sense of harmony and community there that’s rare in the music world these days,” says Oramo. “But now that I’m starting a new and very time-consuming job, it was time to say goodbye.”

He is not about to take up a position with another orchestra, but he will resume his duties as Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra once it gets going again after the pandemic.

“So there’s a Proms concert there on 11 September, for instance, and I’ll have to plan around that date, but everything is possible, since we have no idea yet what the audience rules will be like.”

A generation of decision-makers with no contact with classical music

Both actions and words indicate that Oramo is dedicated to long-term work in the service of classical music, and the pandemic has only served to crystallise his motivation. “I grew up in a musical bubble, and when I was a student in the 1970s, I believed that the importance of classical music would become steadily more indisputable,” Oramo recalls. “But it was a rude awakening to discover that the coronavirus pandemic has plunged the arts into dire straits, as decision-makers seem incapable of understanding how important this industry is in terms of both financial impact and employment.”

Oramo surmises that the reason for this is that the present generation of decision-makers has grown up without any direct contact with classical music and that its appreciation has therefore eroded, gradually and imperceptibly.

Musing on this, Oramo arrives at the same solution as for the improvement of teaching for conductors and orchestra musicians: ambition.

“Society today is more advanced in many ways than in the 1970s, but the desire always to do things better that existed back then has disappeared, as many people are now just struggling to survive from one day to the next,” Oramo proposes. “The Finnish dream, as compared to the American dream, is that it is genuinely possible to reach the top from humble beginnings, for instance in classical music. The flipside of this is that everything degrades into mediocrity if we lack the ambition, the drive to do better.”

Translation: Jaakko Mäntyjärvi
Genre-bending trio Elifantree keeps challenging itself - this time creating music with eight drummers in as many countries.

In what sounds like a fantasy in these pandemic times, singer Anni Elif Ekegocglu and fellow multi-instrumentalist Pauli Lyytinen of Elifantree spent the entire autumn of 2018 travelling through eight countries to create the band’s sixth album. They recorded improvisations with eight drummers, including the group’s own Olavi Louhivuori. He played on two tracks, lending his seat to colleagues for most of the other tracks.

“We really had to live in the moment and be as present as we could and come up with the concept on the spot each time,” says Lyytinen. “That’s how it’s always been with Anni and Pauli. We trust each other’s ideas, and things will emerge as long as we keep our minds open and stay open to different ideas - no matter how wild or crazy.”

The centrepiece of the album, Solace, also exploits an extraordinary acoustic space: an old water tower in Alsace, France. The album’s longest piece at nearly 11 minutes, it conjures an atmospheric soundscape that suggests tinkling keys and bottles in a vast, echoey space. Anni Elif draws on her classical background for a majordral sound, suggesting a melancholy queen pacing the halls of a vast, draughty castle.

The title, Hachi, meaning “eight” in Japanese, refers to the number of countries and collaborators involved. “Kasi” (slang for eight in Finnish) is also the name of Lyttinen’s summer cottage in Eastern Finland, where the Finnish tracks were recorded, including one called Kasi.

Revolving drummers - but no Spinal Tap

In late 2015, Rönkkö was replaced by Louhivuori, who already had an established international jazz career.

Working with so many outside drummers might set off alarm bells about Louhivuori’s status – was this a way of auditioning for a new drummer? Is the band on its way to an endless Spinal Tap-like succession of drummers? Lyttinen quashes any doubts about Louhivuori’s future with the group.

“Olavi is definitely our drummer! We were without a drummer for a short while in 2015 after Tatu left. At that point, we had an idea of working with various different drummers and applied for a grant to realise this vision. We started to work regularly with Olavi before we got the answer and decided to still make this project happen as planned,” he explains.

Louhivuori describes the Hachi project as “very inspiring”. “It’s also been great motivator, since all of the other drummers on the album are really amazing and I have long admired their approaches to the instrument. So now they have contributed something completely unique to the band, which gives me a great push and the possibility of learning from all of them,” he says.

Improptu studios on two continents

On the road was another long-time member of the team: sound engineer Joonas Särkkänen, who built a mini-studio from scratch in each space. “Joonas played a big role in this project. He brought many good ideas during the journey and provided fresh angles,” says Anni Elif.

Anni Elif’s wide-ranging, emotive vocals have always been the most distinctive aspect of the Elifantree sound. On this album, though, her voice keeps a lower profile. Less than a third of the tracks feature lyrics, mostly in English and one in her native Swedish.

“For some tunes more subtle vocals, or none, were suitable, as on the Japan tracks or on the pulsating Clockwork from Switzerland,” she suggests, citing a gamelan-inspired track featuring Swiss musician Julian Bartoos on various pots and percussion.

Local and geographic flavours

In Copenhagen, the duo recorded in a former church with Diers, who also used a broad range of percussion items including pottery, bells and foot rattles.

“We were inspired by each meeting, space and culture,” says Lyttinen. “We adapted our way of playing to each drummer and each space. For instance, there was no escape from the 14-second reverb in Tomba Emmanuelle” – a mausoleum in Oslo designed by Norwegian artist Emanuvel Vigeland. There, the duo improvised with Norwegian percussionist Terje Rundergott, known for crafting his own instruments from natural elements including ice.

In the dimly lit, reverberating chamber, Isungset played rocks and other self-made percussion while Lyttinen seemingly tapped into Norway’s ethereal “fjord jazz” on saxophone and Anni Elif sang and played the kemençe. These improvisations led to Mausoleum I and II, the latter an eight-and-a-half-minute epic that closes the album. Isungset conjures an atmospheric soundscape that suggests tinkling keys and bottles in a vast, echoey space. Anni Elif draws on her classical background for a majordral sound, suggesting a melancholy queen pacing the halls of a vast, draughty castle.

Read an extended version of this article at fmq.fi.
Joonas Kokkonen began his life in a small town in the 1920s and went on to become one of Finland’s best celebrated and internationally most successful composers. Today, his music is rarely performed in public view at some later date. Could there be a better opportunity for a composer to network and rub shoulders with key players on the music scene worldwide – conductors, festival directors, musicians and music journalists? It was not until the huge success of his music that he wrote. Joonas Kokkonen is an illustrative case study in how the canon changes and moves on, some times completely reversing itself. Kokkonen was a product of the opinion that it simply buttressed the body of opinion that wanted to build up a new, post-Sibelius national institution. With hindsight, we may acknowledge that these critics were right. Kokkonen gravitated to the centre of Finnish music, and for nearly three decades all the power and influence on the Finnish music scene came to be vested in one man. The positive aspect of this was that he was able to build a solid foundation for Finnish music and to improve it vastly. To a level that later generations tend to take for granted, whether in music education or in the provision of permanent government grants to symphony orchestras. Kokkonen was tireless in making the rounds at various government agencies and in buttonholing high-ranking ministry officials. It seemed as if everyone needed Kokkonen’s help for something. His pronouncements were viewed with the gravitas usually reserved for divine prophecies carved into stone. He was, unwittingly, made into an oracle to whom everyone listened whether he had something to say or not.

Everyone knew about Joonas Kokkonen. But how many knew his music? It was not until the huge success of his opera Viimeiset hiusausker (The Last Temptations) in the mid-1970s that his music came to the awareness of the public at large, but it did so impressively.

The question is, how can such an accomplished and influential person be almost completely forgotten within a couple of decades of his death? Perhaps the ageing and dying away of his network of supporters and opinion leaders by the 2000s had something to do with it? After all, that network was not built around his music per se.

Then what? Ah yes, his music. My personal favourites among Joonas Kokkonen’s musical legacy are The Last Temptations, Symphony no. 4, Music for strings, “...durch einen Spiegel” (metamorphoses for 12 strings and harpsichord) and Five Bagatelles for piano.

Perhaps now would be the time for younger generations of decision-makers in the music sector began to drift into, or latch onto, Kokkonen’s orbit. As an Academician, Kokkonen was an obvious choice to elect as chairman for this, that and the other. Some were resentful of his appointment, being of the opinion that it simply buttressed the body of opinion that wanted to build up a new, post-Sibelius national institution. With hindsight, we may acknowledge that these critics were right. Kokkonen gravitated to the centre of Finnish music, and for nearly three decades all the power and influence on the Finnish music scene came to be vested in one man. The positive aspect of this was that he was able to build a solid foundation for Finnish music and to improve it vastly. To a level that later generations tend to take for granted, whether in music education or in the provision of permanent government grants to symphony orchestras. Kokkonen was tireless in making the rounds at various government agencies and in buttonholing high-ranking ministry officials. It seemed as if everyone needed Kokkonen’s help for something. His pronouncements were viewed with the gravitas usually reserved for divine prophecies carved into stone. He was, unwittingly, made into an oracle to whom everyone listened whether he had something to say or not.

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Recordings of the year

Contemporary & classical

The following quotes are from the reviews published during the year 2021. Full reviews and more can be found at fmq.fi/reviews.

Kare Eskola, Anna Pulkkis

Writers: Martin Anderson, Kare Eskola, Anna Pulkkis

For The Baltic Sea
Kamus Quartet
Alba ABCD 412

“Part of the proceeds from the new disc of the Kamus Quartet are being donated to the protection of the Baltic Sea, but the thoughts prompted by the music on the disc are just as important. [...] The message of the disc is encapsulated in Lotta Wännäsöoki’s often-performed Culla d’Aria [Cradle of Air], whose delicate flagolets rock the listener gently in a texture of something very fragile and vulnerable. The tour around the Baltic concludes with the lament Sorg och gladje [Sorrow and joy] by Swedish composer Andreas Tarrodi, a piece with long, bleak musical lines out of which the Kamus Quartet conjures an eerily quiet summer night in the outer archipelago.” • KK

Other Finnish Works for Violin
Mirka Mäntylä (violin), Tiina Karakorpi (piano)
Alba ABCD 507

“Tschetschulin, Möberg, von Knorring, Holmberg, Netzel and von Bonsrart were composers born around the middle of the 19th century. They were cosmopolitans who inhabited not Finland specifically but the European realm of music in general, even if that realm studiously ignored women who wrote music. Nevertheless, there are gems to be discovered in this repertoire, disdained by contemporaries and marginalised by history. Tschetschulin, a violin virtuoso herself, wrote salon pieces with a glowing charm. Netzel’s confident sensitivity appeals strongly to the listener, and Holmberg’s Andante sounds like it wants to be an orchestral piece when it grows up. The concluding track on the disc, von Bonsrart’s Phantasie, proceeds in soaring melodic arcs in a sort of Wagner-for-the-salon idiom.” • KK

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“Part of the proceeds from the new disc of the Kamus Quartet are being donated to the protection of the Baltic Sea, but the thoughts prompted by the music on the disc are just as important. [...] The message of the disc is encapsulated in Lotta Wännäsöoki’s often-performed Culla d’Aria [Cradle of Air], whose delicate flagolets rock the listener gently in a texture of something very fragile and vulnerable. The tour around the Baltic concludes with the lament Sorg och gladje [Sorrow and joy] by Swedish composer Andreas Tarrodi, a piece with long, bleak musical lines out of which the Kamus Quartet conjures an eerily quiet summer night in the outer archipelago.” • KK

ZINOVJEV: Suspirando 2 ‘Fado’
Harri Kaukio (accordion, live electronics), Markus Hohle (cello, live electronics), Tuukka Tervo (recording, mixing)
Sao Publishing 52000

“Suspirando 2 is not only a compelling work in its own right; it is also a harbinger of good things to come in Zinovjev’s career as a composer. He clearly has an excellent command of collaboration with musicians and an advanced understanding of sound and of drama.” • KK

Northern Variations
Osmo Palmu (guitar)
Palmu Records PR 5

“Finnish folk tunes seem at first glance to be culturally far removed from the Spanish core of the classical guitar repertoire, but all it takes is one musician with a vision for a link to be forged. Guitarist Osmo Palmu embraces his role as such a mediator with gusto: his disc Northern Variations contains guitar classics and also original works by Palmu in the same style but drawing on Finnish traditional music.” • KK
“There are works of art that push the public out of their comfort zone by approaching subjects that are controversial, difficult or even repulsive, and more convenient to ignore than confront. A representative example in Finnish contemporary music is Heinz-Juhani Hofmann’s Ihmissydän (Human Heart, 2011), an hour-long monologue opera for mezzo-soprano and tape that handles a taboo subject, the sexual abuse of a child.” • AP

“On the whole, this disc remains relaxed dance rhythms – the finale in 2018 and based on an earlier piece of the same name. Pairing the Joonatan Rautiola and pianist Marko Hilpo play with an apotheosis of the latter. Rautiola and piano, Joonatan Rautiola (alto saxophone), Gravity Groove

“Accordionist Janne Valkeajoki has devised accordion adaptations of Lindberg’s piano suite, Jubilees (2000) and Dos Coyotes for cello and piano (2002). Lindberg is pleased with Valkeajoki’s versions of the pieces, and no wonder: many of the essential features of his music work better on the accordion than on the piano. Valkeajoki is so adept at arranging and performing this material that it seems as if these nimble arabeques, continuous and expansive pillars of sound and incisive yet organic accents were always intended for keyboard and bellows.” • KE

“There’s an expansive hinterland of Finnish orchestral music that recording labels have been remarkably reluctant to explore – an entire corpus of works by such composers as Kajanus, Wegelin, Melartin, Kaski, Raitio, Pingoud, Pergament, Pylkkänen – an entire corpus of works by such composers as Kajanus, Wegelin, Melartin, Kaski, Raitio, Pingoud, Pergament, Pylkkänen and Marttinen, which has only occasionally seen the attention of the microphones, even when it’s inspired by the national folk epic. It is therefore gratifying to see the Swedish label nu grabbing this particular bull by the horns with this programme of Kallio’s based orchestral pieces.” • AP

“Imagery and concept art on the one hand and between political and activist features of his music speak for itself.” • AP

“Perhaps the chief marvel of this recording – apart from Jakob Kulberg’s effortlessly poetic playing – is the sheer beauty of so much of the music. The style of both Saaraiho and Nørgård might still be ‘difficult’ for some listeners, but if you are one such, try putting your suspicions aside and take note not just of the eloquence of the cello lines but also of the transparency, the delicacy, the weightless loveliness of so much of the orchestral writing.” • MA

“Sibelius’s piano output is full of one gem after another; and they usually hold together as collections, too: he assembled his miniatures with care and an ear to tonal progressions and variety of expression. […] Eero Heinonen plays them with a straight touch that takes the listener’s breath away and would make Maria Callas green with envy.” • KE

“This is more than just a light-hearted historical entertainment, as it concludes with a heavenly version of ‘Casta diva’ by Bellini, delivered with an emotional human touch that takes the listener’s breath away and would make Maria Callas green with envy.” • KE

“The performances are spotless: Kajsa Dahlbläck’s soprano is pure and agile, and her fellow musicians all acquitted themselves splendidly when given their chance to shine. The booklet gives the French texts of the songs and an English translation; and the recorded sound is vivid, almost as if you were sitting by the musicians.” • MA

“Of course, it’s a light-hearted historical entertainment, as it concludes with a heavenly version of ‘Casta diva’ by Bellini, delivered with an emotional human touch that takes the listener’s breath away and would make Maria Callas green with envy.” • KE

“Perhaps the chief marvel of this recording – apart from Jakob Kulberg’s effortlessly poetic playing – is the sheer beauty of so much of the music. The style of both Saaraiho and Norgård might still be ‘difficult’ for some listeners, but if you are one such, try putting your suspicions aside and take note not just of the eloquence of the cello lines but also of the transparency, the delicacy, the weightless loveliness of so much of the orchestral writing.” • MA
The group dextrously takes up some of the most worn classics of Finnish folk music and brings up a completely new and compelling aspect. Otra’s arrangements are surprising, fresh and adventurous.” • RH

“Ánnámáret is part of a powerful new force in Finnish folk music and identity.” • RH

“This trio has once again produced a visionary album with a great deal of variety. The swing is often infectious – one longs to dance at a live gig performed by this band!” • RH

“The tunes are close to traditional danceable folk music (from different regions) but always with personal twists and turns.” • TD

“SVÄNG have now returned to their roots in a refreshing and energetic rediscovery of tradition – an inexhaustible source of joy.” • AK

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“The contrasts found in polska tunes reflect the structures of Pandolfi’s sonatas quite wonderfully. The transitions between the two genres are bold and invigorating.” • TD

“The Ilkka Heinonen Trio operates with a broad and downright electrifying range of colours.” • TD

“The debut album of kantele player and singer-songwriter Marjo Smolander is an interesting combination of different musical collaborations.” • TD

“Annamåret is part of a powerful new force in Sámi music and identity.” • RH

“This album proves it is possible to use laments to say something important in the world of here and now.” • TD

“Each track makes the listener marvel at the many facets of the stories and of the music. The wild and wonderful tales of folk tradition have here found a worthy interpreter.” • AK

“Percussionist Minna Koskenlahti’s first solo album, Toinen/Other, is an utterly hypnotic experience. It challenges the listener to engage with thoughts and emotions.” • AK

“A decade into their career, Finnish-African jazz-funk band Helsinki-Cotonou Ensemble has come up with its fifth and strongest album.” • WS
Jazz & beyond

**KAIJA MÄENSIVU**
*Hand Picked* 2021 Flame Jazz Records

“Maensivu also has three strong originals on the disc, saving the best for last: closing tune *The Lemur* is also the perfect showcase for her bass playing, scampering agilely as a lemur up a tree.” • WS

**TOON VERHEYEN QUARTET**
*Remi* 2021 Toon Verheyen Quartet

“While this hard-swinging combo is stylistically firmly rooted in the past, the delivery is rather fresh.” • JEH

**RIITTA PAAKKI QUARTET**
*Piste* 2020 Flame Jazz Records

“Riitta Paakki and her band never show off. They work together admirably well, delivering a delightful musical experience.” • MN

** TOFINAN**
*New Habitat* 2020 Fiasko

“High on logic but never too calculated, Rissanen eases himself into the role of a weathered storyteller as the album flows along.” • JEH

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**GOURMET**
*New Habitat* 2020 Fiasko

“Tango-stomping, disco bass lines on tuba, Brazilian carnival rhythms, twisted country and dito dixie, are some of the ingredients. But you will also find continental romantics and dystopian free-tonal characteristics.” • JEH

**AKI RISSANEN**
*Divided Horizon* 2021 Edition Records

“The eight compositions on this record, most by Innanen, exhibit a broad stylistic and musical spectrum.” • JEH

**INNANEN–PASBORG–PIROMALLI**
*This is It* 2021 Clean Feed

“The seven tracks on the disc, all written by Lassy, seem to form a thematic whole and succeed in maintaining a coherent, magic mood.” • PR

**ROGER FREUNDLICH**
*Cap City* 2021 Running Moose

“While the music sticks to tradition, the sound of the recording is contemporary. The album is a timeless delight for admirers of all things hop.” • JEH

**TIMO LASSY & TEppo MÄKYNEN**
*Live Recordings 2019–2020* 2021 We Jazz Records

“Live Recordings 2019–2020 is a slam dunk of restrained energy and vivid communication.” • PR

**JAF TRIO**
*2020* 2020 We Jazz Records

“The album is musically diverse. Clocking in at just over half an hour, it is short enough to make the listener wish for a couple of extra tracks, but as such it also leaves an appetite for the band’s next album.” • LK

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**KIRI RA!**
*2021 Oona Recordings

“Mostly acoustic with discreet electronic underpinning, this is simply beautiful music with some of the husk left on.” • WS

**ELIFANTREE**
*Hachi* 2021 Eclipse Music

“There seem to be no bounds to the sheer imagination poured into the sound worlds and effects inhabiting this album.” • LK

**TIMO KÄMÄRÄINEN**
*Blink and You Miss It* 2021 Eclipse Music

“Perhaps that’s Kämäräinen’s super-power: he manages to sound like a band-member even when occupying the sonic space all by himself. What an absolute gem of a disc Timo Kämäräinen has come up with.” • PS

**AKI HIMANEN & ALEKSI KINNUNEN**
*Dawn Drops* 2021 Jazz-o-Tech

“This interim release is clearly ready for post-pandemic parties – and who isn’t?” • WS

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**Writers:**
Jan-Erik Holmberg
Laura Korhonen
Marita Nyrishen
Petri Silas
Wif Stenger

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**TOFINAN**
*New Habitat* 2020 Fiasko

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**RECORDINGS OF THE YEAR**
The events industry organised a safe-distance-demonstration “Enough is enough” in June 2021 in Helsinki.

Coronavirus restrictions brought live music events to a halt in Finland in March 2020, and calendars remained almost completely empty for performing musicians well into autumn 2021. The following pages highlight musical events live and streamed that – in spite of it all – took place in 2021.

Kaija Saariaho has done it again: her opera Innocence, premiered in Aix-en-Provence, proved to be a masterpiece and was enthusiastically received by the audience and critics alike. Its distressing subject, a school shooting, was merely the starting point for a multifaceted exploration of humanity and trauma. Text, music and drama came together in a rich and emotional blend. Is this the best opera Saariaho has ever written?

Innocence is Kaija Saariaho’s most complex opera to date. Never before has she pushed the boundaries of human vocal expression quite so hard. Remarkably, though, she has created a continuum where all these various elements blend together. Still, there is much in the score that is familiar from her earlier operas: lyrical wind motifs, a lucid string sound and the golden shimmer of harp, percussion and celesta. The unseen choir builds a link between the orchestra and the soloists and contributes to the soundscape with its magical hums and vocalises.

The framework event in the present time is the wedding of the school shooter’s brother, which is a useful device for bringing together an international group of people. The genius of Sofi Oksanen’s libretto is in how natural are the shifts between times and how she keeps revealing new and surprising facets of the characters. Many of the characters seen had a part to play in the events leading up to the shooting. The only wholly innocent person is the Romanian bride (the vocally brilliant Lilian Fara-hani), from whom the family trauma has been concealed. The title of the opera probably refers to her, but also to the lost innocence of everyone else.

Perhaps the most exciting appearance was that of Markéta, the only victim of the shooter who is a singing character in the opera. Her vocal technique certainly made listeners sit up and pay attention. Saariaho wrote music for her that is very different from everything else, undulating in simple pentatonic motifs that at times escalate into yelps reminiscent of joiking or cattle calls.

Conductor Susanna Mälkiä was the linchpin of the production. We have Mälkiä’s clarity to thank for the fact that the opera did not seem nearly as complex as it actually is and that the dramaturgical flow was understandable, unflagging and unbroken.

Spring festivals – restrictions notwithstanding

Defunensemble organised the streamed d(oo)n(e) festival on 28–29 May, featuring premieres and new works by Juhani Nuorvala, Laura Maurekainen, Juha T. Koskinen, Sami Klemola and others.

The Oulu Music Festival was held for the 31st time in March. Over a two-week period, the festival presented chamber music, symphony concerts and rhythm music, and all concerts were streamed live. The concert titled Jäähyväiset [Farewell] on 25 March concluded Jaakko Kuusisto’s tenure as artistic director. The next artistic directors of the Festival, violinist Elina Vähälä and sax player Jukka Perko, appeared as soloists with the Oulu Sinfonia at a concert where Perko performed Outi Tarkiainen’s saxophone concerto Saivo and Vähälä performed Kuusisto’s Violin Concerto.
The theme of the contemporary music festival Musica nova Helsinki this year was Polytopia, referring to a plurality of locations and performance practices, and inspired by Iannis Xenakis. The programme featured world premieres, spatial art, evocative soundscapes and a societal dimension. Events with live audiences could not be held due to the coronavirus restrictions still in place, but the festival went ahead with a roster of online performances and radio broadcasts.

The programme featured a number of pieces by the 2021 resident composers Lina Strehl and Simon Steen-Andersen as well as music by Xenakis. Included was Steen-Andersen’s cult work Black Box Music as well as the premiere of a site-specific performance that intertwined with the architecture of the Helsinki Central Library Oodi, Run Time Error. The festival’s other premieres included Roope Mäenpää’s commissioned piece Jamais vu, to be, and Tromba Marine by Lauri Supponen, Ghost Notes by Kati Klemola for orchestra and Hammond organ, Incandescent by Maria Hyninnen and Meuře, a concerto for natural horn and Baroque orchestra by Olli Virtaperko.

In 2021 the term of conductor André de Ridder came to a close. The new artistic director of the festival is soprano Tuuli Lindberg.

The five-piece band (Majia Kauhanen, Eija Kankaanranta, Minski Yammela, Anna Wirtten and Kaisa Saarikorp) sing African-American-inspired vocals in Finnish accompanied by an intriguing range of instruments.

The closing performance had Kimmo Pohjonen taking us into his UZone, from which there’s little chance of return. Always with Pohjonen you get a show. He’s dressed like some sort of shaman, illuminated in chiaroscuro light with projections or light design behind. His accordion sounds like a balafon, a drum kit or a cinema organ, and at the beginning there are even some rather jaunty tunes. He’s always moving, as if the accordion has a life of its own. I suspect it does and in lockdown he’s created it like some sort of revenge-seeking Frankenstein’s monster. It seems such a long journey from the accordion wizard of Aspo Spelmän to this diabolic accordion extravaganza.

Juurijuha-RotFest laid on quite a feast. The music builds to a spectacular finish, as Pohjonen gets sweeter and more frenetic before he’s plunged into darkness. But he could have gone all out and programmed some tumultuous applause into his instrument for the end!
Summer of folk music

Finland’s summer once again became a celebration of a huge spectrum of folk music.

The Sommefestival (28 June – 1 July) offered a selection of Finnish folk music, ranging from Zépadmät to Johanna Juhol and from runo song to kantele.

The programme at the Haapavesi Folk Music Festival (3–3 July) was all domestic this year, with artists including Danchev/Domain, Ilkka Heino, Ma Rouf, Pauanne and Pekka Keränen with prominent folk accordionist Leija Lautamaja. The concerts were also streamed.

The Kaustinen Folk Music Festival – the largest folk music festival in the Nordic countries – was held hybrid on 12–18 July. Among the hundreds of performers during the festival week were Anne-Mari Kivimäki & Piranen | Blom | Company.

The theme of the Time of Music festival (6–11 July) was “Time shifts – Memorials for the future”. The programme included in-person concerts, hybrid events and a 20-minute ritualistic installation. A comprovisation for two ensembles in different locations – Ensemble Extrakte, a multicultural collective led by Sandrep Bhagwati, and the Töölölä ensemble – was live-streamed daily.

Artistic director Johanna Tallgren wrote about the festival and the concepts and practices of curating in his column for FMQ:

“When it became apparent that most of the international guests invited to the Time of Music festival in summer 2021 could not make it and that the programme would largely have to consist of chamber music, it dawned on us just how much repertoire there is that reflects in nostaligia and bittersweet tones on the lost world of bourgeois chamber music. (-) Modern commemorative nostaligia harking back to a lost age is understandably a non-existent genre in Finland, given our relatively short history. Could emphatic escapism in fact be the best reflection of the current time, where all of us wish that we were living in the past? Perhaps a symbolic farewell to that which is past is the best way to proceed to something new?”

• Full column at fmq.fi.

Finnish-Iranian musician Majidi’s Aeneid, the choral opera of the A/Voces group, was performed in the Festival of Pure Combined Art in Stockholm.

In autumn 2021, Finland had a surfeit of jazz festivals. Due to the exceptional circumstances, April Jazz in Espoo was put back to 27–31 October. Featured performers included Joe Lovano on tenor sax, fado singer Carminho and pianists Lenni-Kalle Tajapalo and Aki Bissanen.

The international Tampere Jazz Happening (4–7 November) was held for the 40th time, and this anniversary year’s festival programme included artists such as John Scofield & Dave Holland, Lakecia Benjamin, Pepe Wiltberg & Jukka Eskola Statement and Linda Fredriksson. (Read also Harri Tuominen’s article at fmq.fi.)

In September, five Nordic Jazz Comets ensembles embarked on a tour of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland. Headed by the Finnish Jazz Federation, this project involved bands exploring how to tour and give concerts more sustainably.

In August, a new international programme titled Jazz Finland Residency was launched jointly by Jazz Finland, the Department of Jazz at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki, UMO Helsinki Jazz Orchestra and the Finnish Musicians’ Union. In October this project brought one of the world’s most sought-after bass players, Linda MAY Han OH, to Finland to teach and to give concerts.

We Jazz (28 November – 5 December) offered a cross-section of current and timeless jazz music across a wide spectrum of genres. Advance information indicated that the programme was to include Atomic, harpist Amanda Whiting, Dark Horse, Ilmiliekki Quartet, Koma Saxo feat. Sophia Jernberg, Ruth Taivakki Quartet and the Tino Lassy Trio, among others.

November Music

November Music was held from 5 to 14 November at various locations in the Dutch city of S-Hertogenbosch. This year’s festival composers in focus were Kadi Sääsahio and Rebecca Saunders. The programme featured a great deal of Finnish music and many performers from Finland, including recorder player Juho Myllylä, the Meta quartet string, kantele player Eliza Kankaanrantti and singer Aino Peltomaa.

The international Tampere Jazz Happening, Linda Fredriksson, Anjupe.

World premières

Orchestral works premiered in the autumn included Juuret (Roots) by Seppo Pohjola, Wake! by Kimmo Hakola (Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra), Double Concerto for violin and piano by Iiro Rantala, Bassoon Concerto by Juma Leinonen (Helsinki City Orchestra) and Concertino for clarinet and orchestra by Esa-Pekka Salonen (Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra). The autumn also saw the premiere of the church opera Ende und Beginn by Olli Kortekangas, based on Letters and Papers from Prison by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and the choral opera Äärimmäisyys [Extremity] by Malia Ruskam and Antti Nylen, combining choral music and sound design with parkour, Franciscan philosophy and climate anxiety.
According to a study by Donne – Women in Music, only 5% of the 14,747 compositions scheduled worldwide by 100 orchestras in the 2020-2021 season were composed by women. Only 1.11% of pieces were composed by Black and Asian women and only 2.43% by Black and Asian men.

- The recording market in Finland continued to grow for the sixth year running, with an overall volume of EUR 57.62 million and growth of 4% on the previous year.
- The growth mostly occurred in revenue from streaming, which constituted 88.4% of the overall market.
- At the same time, growth in the sales of vinyl discs has practically halted the decline in sales of physical recordings. Vinyl sales grew by 19% on 2020 and constituted 46% of the overall market in physical recordings.

Source: The Association of Finnish Symphony Orchestras

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