

## **Musical culture of the Finnic nations**

A preface to the concert of Vaasan ylioppilaskuoro and Pavia university held in spring 2015, where the choirs performed, among the pieces of Veljo Tormis, Pekka Kostiainen and other composers, Urmas Sisask's "*Eesti missa*"

The humanity is facing times when nations and cultures have become endangered. Estonian composer Veljo Tormis has composed his trilogy "*The forgotten nations*" in order to warn us all of the disappearance of nations and their musical culture. In his piece he introduced small Finnic nations. When he had a lecture in Vaasa, Finland, the spring of 1998, he pointed out that we must, however, realize that also the bigger and more powerful cultures and nations are facing the same dangers. His trilogy is a cry for help for preserving the differences between nations and cultures.

Nowadays the so called "mass culture" is covering everything. The same phenomenon was present in a smaller scale even in later times, when Europeans took their own culture to their overseas colonies. This is called cultural imperialism. Without belittling the destructivity this early cultural imperialism had on the native nations, one can constitute that the difference to today is that at least the culture taken to the colonized dependencies was the European nations' own art culture. Also, at those times the conquerors could not even understand the culture of the colonized countries as being culture. The overtaking of another art culture, the one of a conqueror, happened to for example to many Finnic nations' (for example in Finnish, Estonian and Hungarian) culture. From example Franz Liszt did not know the musical culture of his country and nation in the least. (He did plan to familiarize himself with it, but never had the time) The industrialized mass culture, however, is far more efficient destructor of the differences in cultures. This is because even though it is mostly based to the Anglo-Saxon tones, it is, as Nicolaus Harnoncourt put it, made simpler for the public.

Understanding the differences in musical cultures did, however, started to lift its head already at the times of the above mentioned cultural imperialism. Exploratory expeditions among the Eastern European nations were made during the times of Mussorgsky, the in late 1800 and early 1900's. Through them one discovered that the music of Russian and other Eastern European nations does not always follow the rules (asymmetric rhythm, Bartok's quarter chords and the diversity of keys) of Western European music, but has its own rules. This finding inspired "The Russian Five" as well as Hungarian Bartok and Kodaly, Estonian Veljo Tormis and Urmas Sisak and Finnish Pekka Kostiainen

and other modern Finnish composers to compose their most known pieces. To understand the pieces of these composers one should get familiarize with the common characters of these nations and cultures.

### **About the Finnic nations' culture in general**

Let us go for a little exploratory expedition into the poetry of Finnic nations and compare it to Western European poetry. Here we have two classical poems, one from Finland and another from Italy. If we concentrate on the style of the narrative, can we notice a difference between the two poems?

Kalevala

Ensimmäinen runo

Mieleni minun tekevi, aivoni ajattelevi  
lähteäni laulamahan, saa'ani sanelemahan,  
sukuvirttä suoltamahan, lajivirttä laulamahan.  
Sanat suussani sulavat, puhe'et putoelevat,  
kielelleni kerkiävät, hampahilleni hajoovat.

Veli kulta, veikkoseni, kaunis kasvinkumppalini!  
Lähe nyt kanssa laulamahan, saa kera sanelemahan  
yhtehen yhyttyämme, kahta'alta käytyämme!  
Harvoin yhtehen yhymme, saamme toinen toisihimme  
näillä raukoilla rajoilla, poloisilla Pohjan mailla.

Kalevala (Italian)

Il Primo Runo

Nella mente il desiderio mi si sveglia, e nel cervello  
l'intenzione di cantare, di parole pronunziare,  
co' miei versi celebrare la mia patria, la mia gente.  
mi si struggon nella bocca, mi si fondon le parole,  
mi si affollan sulla lingua, si sminuzzano fra i denti.

Caro mio fratello d'oro, mio compagno dai prim'anni!

Ora vieni a cantar meco, a dir meco le parole!  
Da diverso luogo, insieme ora qui ci siam trovati!  
Raro avvien che c'incontriamo, che possiamo stare insieme  
quassù in queste terre tristi, nelle povere contrade.

(trans. Paolo E. Pavolini)

2) Dante: La divina commedia

« Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita  
mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,  
ché la diritta via era smarrita.

Ahi quanto a dir qual era è cosa dura,  
esta selva selvaggia e aspra e forte,  
che nel pensier rinova la paura!

Tant'è amara che poco è più morte;  
ma per trattar del ben ch'i' vi trovai,  
dirò de l'altre cose ch'i' v'ho scorte.

(Alighieri Dante, Inferno I, 1-)

»Elomme keskimatkaan ehtineenä  
samoilin synkkää metsää, koska olin  
pois harhautunut tieltä oikealta.

Ah, vaikea on sanoin ilmi tuoda  
tuon metsän sankkuus, kolkkous ja jylhyys,  
sen pelkkä muistokin taas nostaa pelon!

Se karmea kuin kuolema on miltei;  
vaan kun myös hyvää sieltä löysin, tahdon  
kuvaila muunkin siellä kokemani.»

(suom. Elina Vaara)

It looks like the Finnish poet likes to say things twice. In poetics this is called parallelism, repetition. But it is actually repetition? When studying the poem more closely, one will notice that in the poem things are not repeated. Instead they create a half for the other thought just said. It is like two things that are coordinated to each other, just like these Finnish combined words:

n. minuuteni/olemukseni as in „me” is expressed:	mieleni (my mind) – aivoni (my brain)
n. sanottavani (=things I got to say)	sanat – puheet (words – talks)
n. puhuva suuni, joiden avulla äänneitäkin muodostan, jne. – my teeth)	kieleni – hampaani (my tongue – my teeth)

So, it is not just about a poetic style but a way of thinking and expressing. This proves that the Finnic languages prefer structures that parallel things, even in everyday language. Also, the most Western Finnic nations (the Sami people, Hungarians, Finns), whose languages are already familiar with subordinating structures, still prefer parallel ones. Here are some examples of combined words:

it. mondo, eng world fin. maailma (= maa (earth) + ilma (air))

Where Italian and English use one abstract concept, Finnish divides the concept into two and creates a new word by paralleling two things: the concrete earth plus the abstract air make the world. To put it more philosophically, the visible world is made complete in a natural way with the invisible.

it. uomo, eng. human mans (Mansi language) elumholum (= living-dying ergo human)

it. fratello, sorella, eng. brother, sister. hung. testvér (=body- blood ergo a sibling)

The phenomenon is extremely wide in Finnic languages:

Hungarian

hír/név “message/name” ergo reputations

szó/beszéd “word/talk” ergo gossip, rumour

test/vér “body-blood” ergo sibling

domb/ság “hill-mountain” ergo a hilly region

arc (orr+száj) „nose-mouth” ergo face

jött/ment „gone-come” ergo poor or suspicious-looking person\*  
él-/hal valamiért live-die for something’ ergo want something badly  
fü-/fa „grass-tree” ergo everything  
jár/kál (<jár+kel) „wonders-rises” ergo wonders around  
tős/gyökeres ’kantanen-juurinen’ (eli hyvin vanhahtava),  
szántó/vető ’kyntäjä-kylväjä’ (eli talonpoika),  
hús-/vér „meat-blood” ergo real  
éjjeli-/nappali „nigth-day” ergo nonstop  
csont-/bőr „bone-skin” ergo skinny

### Finnish

maa/ilma , „earth-air” ergo world  
yötäpäivää „night-day” nonstop  
silmänä/korvana, „an eye-an ear” to keep an eye on something

### Estonian

luu/liha ’luunahka’ „bone-skin” ergo body  
õud/vennad „girlhalf-boyhalf” ergo sibling

### Mansi language

uj/hul ’eläin-kala’ (eläin), „animal-fish” ergo animal  
elum/holas ’kuoleva-elävä’(eli ihminen), „living-dying” ergo human  
maa/wit ’maa-vesi’ (eli seutu), „earth-water” ergo region  
lunt/vas ’hanhi-ankka’(eli yleisesti vesilintu), „goose-duck” ergo water bird  
agi/pig ’tyttöpoika’ (eli lapsi); „girl-boy” ergo child

### udmurt language

sudini/serekjani ’leikkiä-nauraa’ (eli viihtyä, huvitella), „play-laugh” ergo enjoy, have a good time  
sin/pel ’silmäkorva’ (todistaja), „eye-ear” ergo witness  
sil/vir ’liha-veri’ (eli keho) jne. „meat-blood” ergo body

These examples show that alone the two parts of a combined word would have a completely different meaning than what the words mean together: Hungarian “test” is body and “vér” is blood. It is only when put to together that they mean “a sibling”

As we could see from the examples, the concepts can also be defined in different ways in different cultures. Firstly, in Western thinking the Aristotelian definition (*definitio*) makes a line between A and not A ergo finds out the ways A is different from everything else. For example “a table” is different from all other furniture in a way that it was for legs, wooden surface and can be eaten on. One cannot eat on a closet. So, a table is furniture with four legs usually used when eating. This definition approaches the concept from below (*per genus proximus ergo furniture*), after which it makes a difference between it and all other concept in the same level (*per differentiam specificam ergo “four legs” and “used when eating”*) The problem, however, with this kind of definition is that it can never be perfect: there are three-legged tables and even legless tables for example in trains.

Secondly, Finnic nations do not approach the concept from below, but choose two concepts that are already in the reality and set them side by side, as can be seen from these examples of combined words in Finnic languages:

it. bambino/bambina	mans. agipig (“girlboy” ergo “a child)
it. bruto, eng. animal	mans. ujhul (“any animal-fish” ergo “an animal”)

These kinds of definitions are not restrictive but open. These kinds of word pairs give out a minimal list ergo nominate two prototypes. Indo-European languages are mainly subordinate whereas Finnic languages are more coordinating (Jan Kaplinski, Sándor Karácsony, Gábor Lúko, Kari E. Turunen, Zoltán Kodaly) The fact that the phenomenon is present in Finnic languages in the verbal level, or in language philology, proves that this is not just a theory presented by scientists. In most Finnic languages a person alone is an “unfinished half” and needs its another half to make a whole:

Finnish:

puoliso “a spouse” (derived from the word for “half”)  
osapuoli (“part-half” ergo a party”

Mari language

pelasem “my spouse” (derived from the word for “half”)  
sümbel “my heart’s half” ergo “my love”

Mordva language

pola “spouse” (derived from the word for “half”)

Hungarian

feleség(e) “a spouse” (derived from the word for “half”)

szívemnek fele “my heart’s half” ergo “my love”

This kind of thinking means that “I” exist only with my other half. The same phenomenon is seen in the Hungarian words for to answer is “felel” which means “to give one’s side”

The Kalevala above was originally presented with two parties, a main singer and “the person who agrees”, and originally the verses were sung by these two in turns, like in the example below:

1. Sii-tä-pä ai-oil-la a-je-li, a-je-li ri-su-köis-sä rip-sut-te-lt. rip-sut-te  
ke-sät hei-lui het-te-his-sä, het-te-hi, suu-rim-mil-la suon se-lil-lä, se-lil-lä ✂  
2. tal-vet mäis-ki män-ni-köis-sä, män-ni-köi, pel-mu-si pe-tä-ji-köis-sä, pe-tä-ji,  
kol-ka-e-li koi-vi-köis-sä, koi-vi-koi, le-pi-köis-sä leyh-kä-e-li, leyh-kä-e. ✂

3. Kyl-mi-pä pui-ta ja pe-hu-ja, pe-hu-ja, ta-soit-te-li tan-te-ri-a, tan-te-ri,  
pu-ri puut le-het-tö-mäk-si, le-het-tö, ka-ner-vat ku-kit-to-mäk-si, ku-kit-to,  
pil-vat hon-gis-ta pi-ris-ti, pi-ris-ti, las-ki-pa las-tut män-ty-lois-ta, män-ty-löi. ✂

Example: Pekka Kostianen: Pakkasen luku, part 6

Like poetry and language, also the musical message is divided into two, just like in the example above. The first musical half makes sense only when combined with the other half, after which they combine a whole. In Western music this is just a stylistic phenomenon occurring rarely, (for example in Bach’s pieces) whereas within Finnic nations it is a way of musical thinking. The vast spectrum of keys presented in the music of these nations is also due to this kind of co-ordinate way of thinking and crafting. These keys and their notes are not in subordinate relations with each other but are coordinated with each other endlessly, for example in Bartok’s *Allegro Barbaro* or *Cipósütés* or Pekka Kostianen’s *Pakkasen luku* and Urmas Sisak’s *Eesti missa*.

In Western Europe the musical cultures use mainly major and minor keys, where the notes are in dependant, subordinating and hypotactic relations with each other. Every note has its own character in the tonic-subdominant-dominant- trinity. The piece starts with emotions and always arrives after many dominant and subdominant turning points to the tonic. For this reason a musical piece always has an

ending, where as a Finnic musical piece does not necessarily have an ending, but its ending is unfinished. The waving of feelings is impossible to show with aim for the dominant and then sometimes reaching the tonic. The individual “Finnic notes” get their meaning when they relate to another note and so forth. Music of the Finnic nations expresses feelings only through change the singing range or volume or through key changes. From a cognitive point of view it might be interesting to mention that the uneducated Finnic nations never talk about notes with terms like “high” and “low” but use instead the words “thin” and “thick.” One should bare this in mind when listening to tonight’s pieces by Kostiainen and Sisak. In them the feelings are presented by coordinating two segments with each other.

Tempo giusto (♩ = 78 - 84)

Piano

The image shows a musical score for the piano accompaniment of Bartók's 'Allegro Barbaro'. It consists of three systems of staves. The first system is a grand staff with a bass clef on the left and a treble clef on the right. The tempo is marked 'Tempo giusto' with a quarter note equal to 78-84 beats per minute. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). The first system includes dynamic markings 'sf' (sforzando) and 'mf' (mezzo-forte). The second and third systems continue the piece with various musical notations including slurs, accents, and dynamic markings like 'sf'.

Example: Bartók: Allegro Barbaro

For someone used to the Western European music of the time, this kind of Finnic music might sound brutal or even barbaric. But it does not sound brutal for people who live in the musical culture in question.

And then there is Finnish music. Finnish musical culture was found only by scientists. Before that the musical of Finland did not differ from other countries’ (like Sweden’s) music. The scientists’ discoveries in the change of 1800 and 1900s had two levels:

- a) Songs and tones with Kalevala measure
- b) folk song with rime and verses



I have already mentioned the songs with Kalevala-measure. Kalevala is assembled of Finnish singing tradition, hence the song with “Kalevala-measure.” They are usually quite narrow by their key (tri-, tetra- or pentatonic) and rhythm (2/4 + 3/4, 5/8, 5/8 + 4/8, 3/8 + 6/8 and so on), but otherwise very rich tunes with two verses.

Songs with rhyme have four verses that rime, but only two verses, 7-level tunes. They are a bit closer to the music and tunes known in Western Europe. The two levels in all of these are usually different in their topic as well. There are a lot of epic story of the heroes presented in Kalevala (Väinämöinen, Joukahainen, Louhi etc.) among the Kalevala-measured songs. The heathen-like “Pakkasen luku” and Christian-spiritual “Eesti missa” of tonight’s concert belong to this kind of stylistic level. The other level of Finnish musical culture include the songs with rime, which are mostly love stories, like Kostiainen’s “Mull’ on heila” or Jouka Törmälä’s “Sinisiä punasia ruusunkukkia”, which are also performed in today’s concert.

The musical score is for a section of the 'Eesti missa (Credo)'. It features three parts: a soloist (ST/AB), an organ, and a tambourine (Šamaanitrumm).

- Soloist (ST/AB):** The part begins with a *Rubato* tempo and a dynamic of *f* (forte). The rhythm is marked as 2+2+2 over a 2/2 time signature. The lyrics are: (Preester): Mi-na u-sun ainsasse Ju-ma-lasse. The tempo then changes to *in tempo*.
- Organo:** The organ part is in 6/8 time. It starts with a rest, then enters with a *mf* (mezzo-forte) dynamic and a *dimin.* (diminuendo) marking.
- Šamaanitrumm:** The tambourine part is marked with **\*\*** and consists of a simple rhythmic pattern of quarter notes.

Example: Urmas Sisask: Eesti missa (Credo)

We hope the concert will give you an interesting experience of the difference of our musical cultures.