

THE WORLD OF ESTONIAN MUSIC

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Sounds good 2015

THE WORLD OF ESTONIAN MUSIC



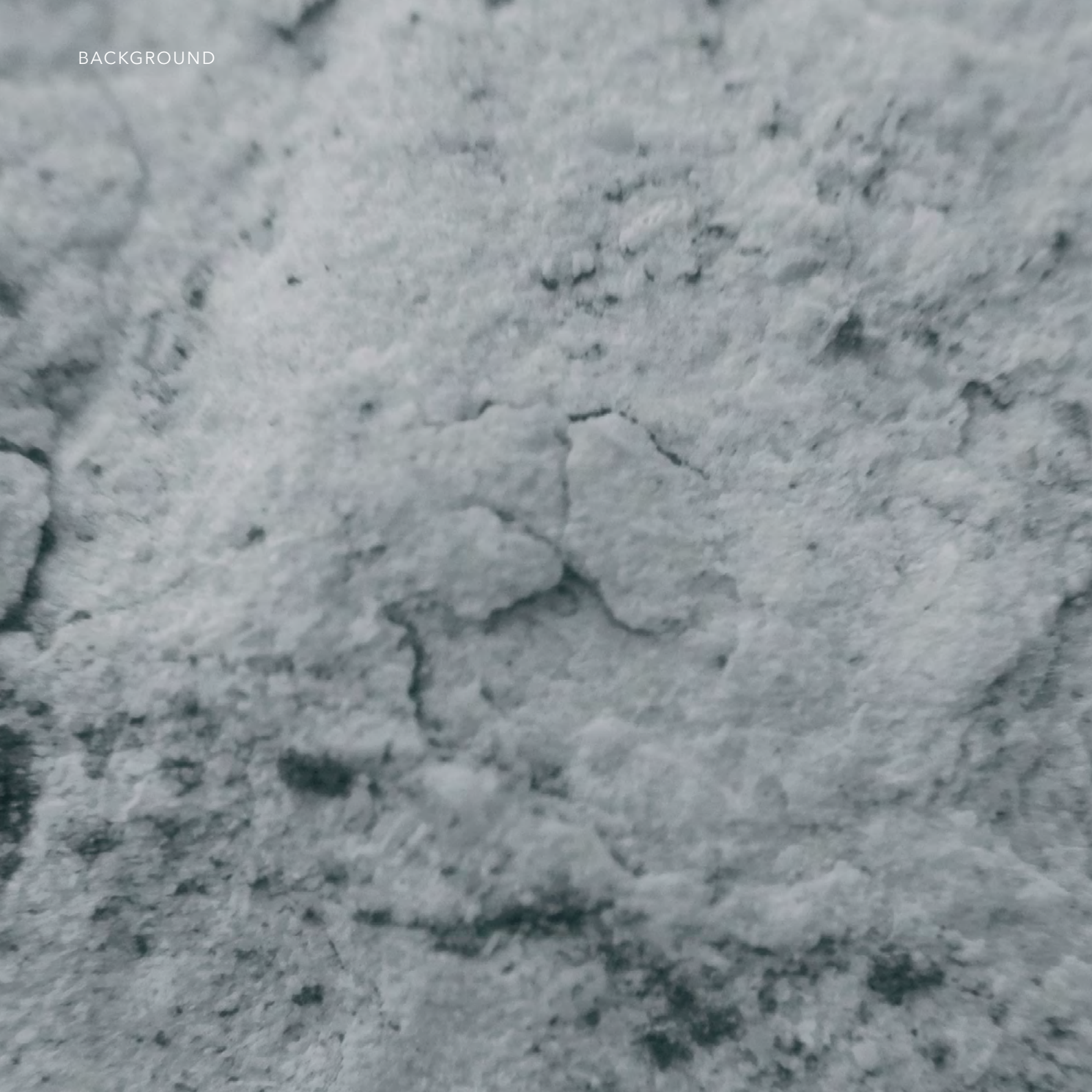
The concert introducing „Arvo Pärt. Adam’s Lament“, the Grammy-winning record, is about to start in half an hour in St John’s Church. The queue meanders across Freedom Square, turns into Harju Street and continues for another few hundred metres. Everybody has a ticket, but they arrived early to get a better seat.

Music is worth it!

BACKGROUND



BACKGROUND



Estonia is a young state and a young culture. In the ancient past, Estonians were a peasant nation who had their own ancient way of life and culture, but not much is known about either. We only know about runo songs (*regilaul*), which were not sung for quite a while but, having done a stint on the archive shelves, they are now enjoying a new lease on life. Before the 19th century national awakening period, German-language high culture prevailed on the Estonian territory.

Estonian music education has been connected with the Russian school for a long time. The first Estonians travelled to St Petersburg to study at the conservatory there at the end of the 19th century. After graduation, most of them returned home to teach others. Around 1919 two parallel schools of music emerged in Tallinn and Tartu, which both tried to find their own way during the Republic of Estonia (1918-1940).

The Soviet reign (1944-1991) brought along a new approach to the Russian educational landscape, and the Iron Curtain blocked Western influence in all areas of culture, including music. During and after World War II dissidents often had to face the security organisation's interrogations and acts of repression. Many cultural people managed to flee to the West. In the late 1940s the authorities ruled that composers could only write ideologically correct music suited to the prevailing socialist realism. In practice, this was often (pseudo) national-romantic, programme music, as anything else was banned.

Access to Western music and information was difficult, and many developments in Estonian music occurred on their own strength: sometimes in parallel with the West and sometimes separately. Every fragment of information, book or record that found its way to Soviet Estonia had a huge impact: it was shared by many (often in secret), was discussed and offered inspiration.

Soviet music education had a strong system and professional standards. The musicians today still have a solid technical foundation and the precision of their performance is often praised by music academics. Non-academic styles have lagged behind, although higher education in traditional and rhythm music is now available in Estonia.

Estonia regained its independence in 1991, but a fresh breeze was already blowing through Estonian music in the late 1980s. Composers and musicians were able to travel to the West, and the horizons of people writing about music changed quickly. However, something in Estonian music that is recognisably ours has been preserved. What is it? Maybe a reflection of Nordic nature, the melancholy of cloudy skies and scant sunshine visible between bare trees, or direct or indirect usage of folk songs.

Estonia is a small country, where talented people can be active in many fields. Musicians can leap from one music style to another: keep one foot in classical music and the other in jazz, with an occasional dose of pop. We have internationally acclaimed composers and musicians,



Jaan Viljur with his fife.



The ceiling painting in the Estonian National Opera dates from 1947. It can perhaps cast light on such notions as "pseudo-national romantic" or "socialist in content, national in form".

whose roots lie in experimentation. The background of Erkki-Sven Tüür's progressive rock is perhaps the most talked about, and a new generation of composers is emerging who make electronic music meant for listening and not dancing. A pinch of rebellion and a wish to experiment are parts of a strong creative spirit. Even Arvo Pärt tried his hand at instrumental theatre in the early 1970s.

BACKGROUND



Heino Eller

Heino Eller (1887–1970) is considered one of the trailblazers of Estonian classical music. In his work, he combined the classical-romantic tradition, modernist means of expression and folk music intonations. Eller primarily created instrumental music: about 40 orchestral pieces and more than 200 piano works. As a composer who studied the violin, Eller also wrote over 30 works for the violin. His best known work, still popular today, is “A Homeland Tune” for string orchestra.

Many titles of Eller’s works refer to nature: “Dawn”, “Twilight”, “Pines”, “In the Shade and in the Sunshine” etc. These titles express mood, space and inner freedom.

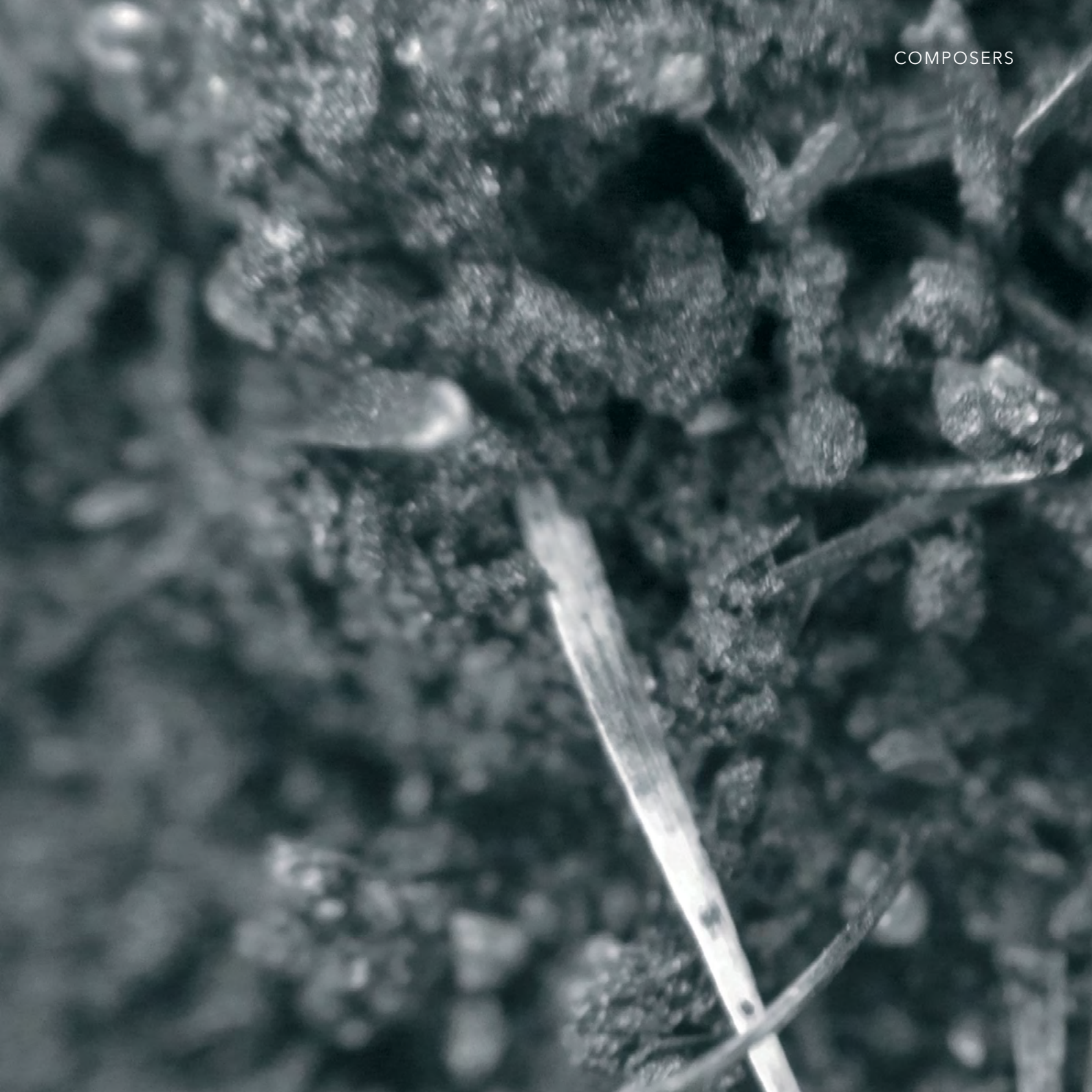
Heino Eller studied violin at St Petersburg conservatory, but graduated as a composer.

In 1920–1940 Eller taught music theory and composition at the Tartu higher music school. He laid the foundation for the Tartu school of music, to which Eduard Tubin also belonged, and which played a significant role in Estonian music in the first half of the 20th century. From 1940 until his death Eller was a professor of composition at the Tallinn conservatory, where Arvo Pärt and Lepo Sumera were among his numerous students.

Heino Eller’s music has been recorded by several prominent recording companies. The pianist Sten Lassmann, in particular, has thoroughly researched and performed Eller’s works. He is in the middle of recording Eller’s collected piano works on eight CDs for Toccata Classics.



COMPOSERS



COMPOSERS



The beginning of professional composing in Estonia can be dated to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, when most Estonians involved in music studied at the conservatory in St Petersburg. At that time, the first large-scale compositions were produced in various genres: overtures, instrumental concertos and oratorios (by Rudolf Tobias), symphonies (by Artur Lemba), plus the first compositions for the stage.

Today's Estonia is part of the global world and composing has moved in all possible directions. However, some significant trends and elements can be distinguished.

Folk songs have often been used since the early 20th century, when young composers participated in expeditions to gather traditional music. Folk tunes in their purest form were introduced into composing, especially into choral music, by Mart Saar; they were used in instrumental music by Heino Eller and Eduard Tubin, still the greatest symphonist in Estonian music. Folk tunes were later frequently used by Ester Mägi and by Veljo Tormis in choral music.

Estonia is one of the most religiously indifferent countries in the world, but sacred music clearly dominates in Estonian classical music. Catholic and Orthodox, and to a lesser extent Lutheran, melodies and especially texts frequently occur in the works of Estonian composers. Besides Arvo Pärt's music, the music of Galina Grigorjeva stands out in this area.

It's clear that quite a few Estonian composers have been inspired by the beautiful local nature - there is plenty of it everywhere, and people have

always been drawn to it. About half of the country is covered by forest and six per cent of the landscape is taken up by swampland and bogs with primal plant species. The density of the population is a mere 30 people per square kilometre and thus everyone can find a solitary place to be.

The music of Jaan Rääts was inspired by neo-classicism, often based on repetitions and lively rhythms. Later, music with repeated rhythm patterns was written by, among others, Raimo Kangro and Erkki-Sven Tüür in his earlier work. This kind of music may have a (subconscious) connection with the incantation rituals of Estonian native religion.

Focusing on sound is an essential aspect primarily among composers who studied composition in the 1990s, after Estonia regained its independence, and studied, at least partly, at universities abroad. Helena Tulve, Toivo Tulev and Mari Vihmand studied in Paris: hence the influence of spectral music on their compositions.

There is great variety of genres, although chamber music has a clear advantage over symphonic forms and orchestral music in general. Orchestral music is not often commissioned in Estonia and, if it is, recognised composers are usually preferred, such as Arvo Pärt, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Helena Tulve, Tõnu Kõrvits and Ülo Krigul. The greatest Estonian symphonists in the past were Eduard Tubin, Eino Tamberg and Lepo Sumera. Choral music is also a popular genre for commissions.

All this together - nature, religion and focusing on sound - may seem quite serious, but Estonians do have a sense of humour, especially enjoying



The beginning of Estonian professional music. Composers Peeter Süda, Juhan Aavik, August Topman, Raimund Kull and Mart Saar, graduates of St Petersburg Conservatory, in 1913.

a laugh at their own expense. Estonian composers have written quite a number of witty pieces, including those where humour is a result of blending various quotations and musical styles. Tõnis Kaumann and Timo Steiner, for instance, successfully convey their sense of humour in their music.

Since the early 1990s, Estonian composers have excelled at the annual International Rostrum of Composers: one of the most significant forums of contemporary music, where a jury listens to recordings and selects the best works for world radio station repertoires. In 2004, Helena Tulve's orchestral piece "Thaw" won first prize at Rostrum; several composers in the under-thirty category have won awards, including Mari Vihmand's "Floreo", Jüri Reinvere's "Northwest Bow" and Ülo Krigul's "JenZeits". The 2015 Rostrum takes place in Tallinn.

COMPOSERS

For several years now, Arvo Pärt (1935) has been the most frequently performed living composer in the world. He is mainly known as the inventor of the *tintinnabuli* technique, which can be associated with new simplicity, but is based on a totally unique system of rules and is linked with Orthodox and Gregorian aesthetics. However, his avant-garde past has also been increasingly appreciated outside Estonia. Together with his contemporaries Veljo Tormis, Eino Tamberg, Jaan Rääts and Kuldar Sink, who all wrote neo-classicist compositions in the 1950s, Pärt cultivated the avant-garde mood in the mid-1960s and boldly experimented with the dodecaphonic composition technique.

Arvo Pärt graduated from Heino Eller's composition class at the Tallinn State Conservatory in 1963. He worked as a sound engineer for a radio station and since 1967 has been a freelance composer. Pärt wrote the first *tintinnabuli*-style compositions in 1976, after a long period of creative inactivity. In 1980 Pärt emigrated to Vienna and settled in West Berlin two years later; he is now back in Estonia.

Among the most important performers of Arvo Pärt's music are The Hilliard Ensemble and Paul Hillier, the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir, the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra and Tõnu Kaljuste. In 1984 Pärt began his cooperation with ECM Records, who have released more than ten Arvo Pärt CDs, the latest being "Adam's Lament" (2012). Arvo Pärt has received a large number of prizes, and two CDs have been awarded the prestigious Grammy ("Da Pacem" and "Adam's Lament", both in the category of choral music). In 2014 he received the Praemium Imperiale music award.



In 2010, on the initiative of the composer's family, the international Arvo Pärt Centre was started in Laulasmaa, near Tallinn, where visitors can peruse materials about Pärt's life and work. His music and world of ideas have set an example and inspired a diverse range of composers and musicians.

www.arvopart.ee



www.estinst.ee/music02
Arvo Pärt, "Für Alina"

The composer Veljo Tormis (1930) is a contemporary of Arvo Pärt, Eino Tamberg, Jaan Rääts, Kuldar Sink and other Estonian composers who started out in the 1950s. This group of composers began with neo-classicist compositions and continued in the 1960s to experiment in modernist composition methods. At the same time, music in the Western world was experiencing the innovations of György Ligeti, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Mauricio Kagel and others. Although Tormis has also written orchestral and chamber music and excellent stage works, most of his output is vocal music, especially choral pieces based on runo songs.

With his synthesis of folk tunes and modernist composition techniques, Tormis sparked a new interest in runo song in Estonia, which has steadily grown since the 1990s.

Besides Estonian folk songs, Tormis has focused on many endangered nations and has made efforts to preserve their languages. Thanks to him, such languages as Votic, Ingrian, Vepsian and Livonian can be heard today probably more frequently on world concert stages than in their natural environment.

www.tormis.ee



COMPOSERS



Erkki-Sven Tüür

The composer Erkki-Sven Tüür (1959) has tried to balance the spiritual and mystic in his work with a clear manner of expression and more contemporary and expressive sounds. As a composer, he thinks it important to create bridges between the emotional and the rational worlds, just as he has created bridges all his life between rock music and more academic contemporary music. Although he blends different aspects of musical thinking and styles, he does not regard himself as a postmodernist.

Erkki-Sven Tüür, who studied composition with Jaan Rääts and privately with Lepo Sumera, has named Johann Sebastian Bach and Gustav Mahler as his role models; Gregorian hymns

have influenced his thinking in terms of melody. Among the 20th-century composers, he has been inspired by György Ligeti's music. His earlier compositions, where he piled repetitive textures on top of one another, reveal his fascination with American minimalists. Symmetrical repetition and rhythmically stressed chords create, especially in his earlier works, characteristic sound pictures. All of his compositions of the new century are based on the "source code". Tüür has created a framework for himself, which mainly has an effect on voice leading and interval sequences.

www.erkkisven.com

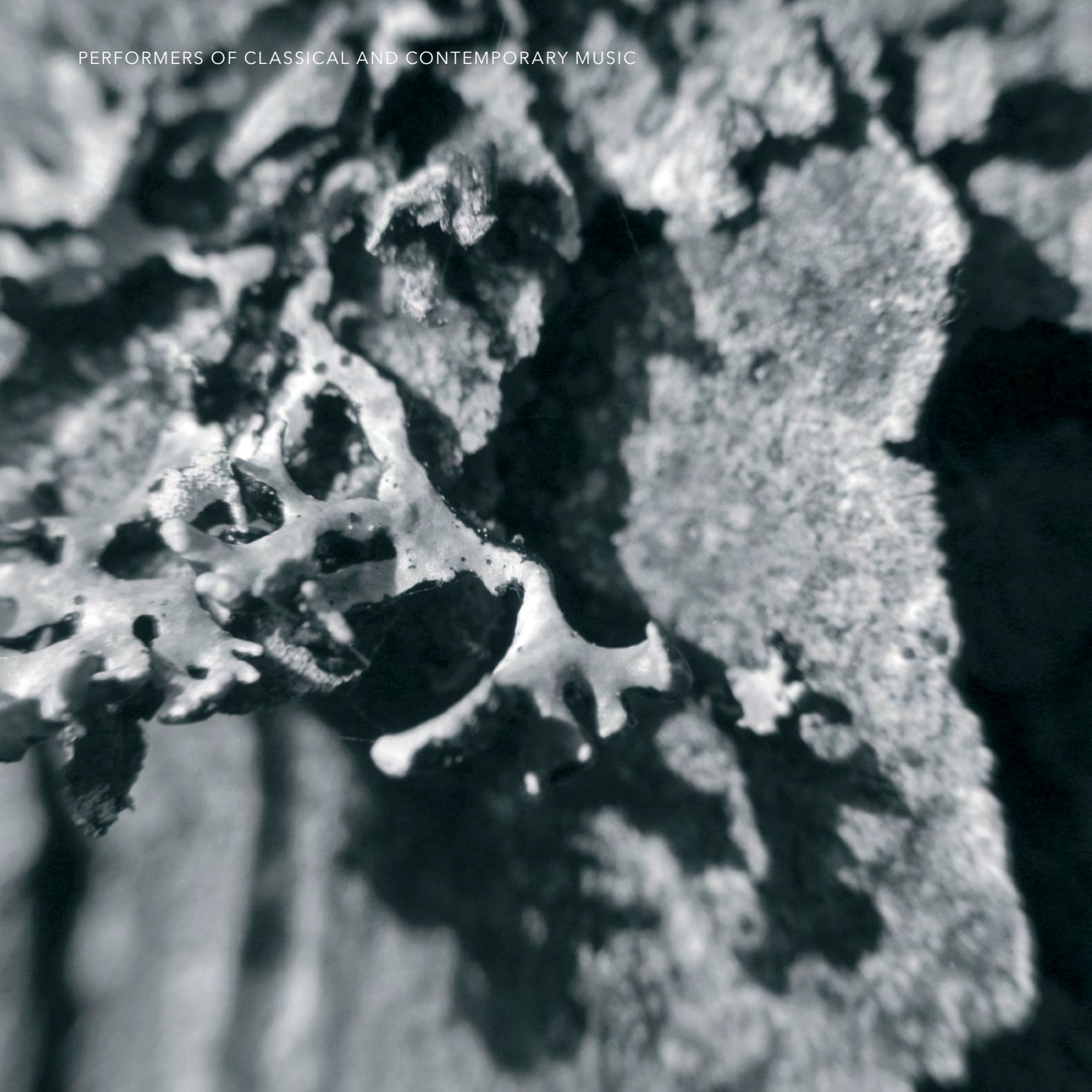


www.estinst.ee/music03
Erkki-Sven Tüür, "Illusion"

PERFORMERS OF CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY MUSIC



PERFORMERS OF CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY MUSIC



One of the landmarks of Estonian classical music is the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, which was founded in 1926 as a radio orchestra and still plays a crucial role in Estonian cultural life. The Tallinn Chamber Orchestra should be noted here as well, which alongside the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir has recorded several groundbreaking works by Arvo Pärt.

Two top vocal ensembles frequently tour the world. Jaan-Eik Tulve, a superb authority on Gregorian chant, conducts the vocal ensemble Vox Clamantis, whose repertoire often mixes Gregorian chant with contemporary music, even adding jazz and other genres. The composer Margo Kõlar and his vocal ensemble Heinavanker focus on religious folk songs, early sacral music and runo songs, blending them with new compositions.



Kristi Mühling with kannel.



The Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and the conductor Neeme Järvi in the Estonia Concert Hall.

The acclaimed contemporary music ensemble U: prefers experimental music, performing the classics of contemporary music. It commissions new pieces from both Estonian and foreign composers. Estonians have a secret: an Estonian folk instrument, the chromatic *kannel* (from the zither family), with its exciting shades of sound, is perfectly suited for performing contemporary compositions. As two acclaimed ensembles have a *kannel* player, composers are able to test the possibilities offered by this particular instrument. Besides a *kannel*, Resonabilis has vocals, flute and cello; Una Corda, on the other hand, only contains plucked string instruments: harpsichord, harp and *kannel*.

A few excellent exceptions aside, Estonian performers are outstanding chamber musicians rather than soloists. Estonia has always had impressive chamber ensembles, which have determined the direction of com-

posing, e.g. the early music ensemble Hortus Musicus, which has been active since 1972. Contemporary composers have written music for its period instruments. Another outstanding group has been the NYJD Ensemble, which strongly influenced the repertoire of contemporary music in the 1990s.

Among individual performers, piano culture prevails. A hefty part of the Russian school still survives in Estonian piano music, offering a powerful manner of performance, technical precision and a varied repertoire. Several acclaimed pianists have maintained their links with Russia: they studied there, tour Russia or simply love the music of Russian composers. For example, Tanel Joamets and Ivari Ilja, the piano accompanist of the famous Russian baritone Dmitri Hvorostovsky, still give concerts in Russia, where they are treated as true stars. Our pianist of the younger generation,

PERFORMERS OF CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY MUSIC



Paavo Järvi and the Paris Symphony Orchestra in Tallinn.

Mihkel Poll, on the other hand, has gained increasing recognition in Western countries.

Considering its small population (1.3 million), Estonia has produced an impressive number of internationally acclaimed conductors: the Järvi family (Neeme and his sons Paavo and Kristjan), Eri Klas, Tõnu Kaljuste, Anu Tali, Olari Elts, Andres Mustonen, Risto Joost and many others. For a long time the conductors, especially of the older generation, tended to focus on presenting the work of Rus-

sian composers in the West. However, there is plenty of Estonian music that can be successfully performed abroad. Tõnu Kaljuste, for example, has performed numerous works by Veljo Tormis and Arvo Pärt, and for the younger conductors there are enough talented composers whose compositions are definitely worth studying and presenting to audiences.



Vox Clamantis and Arvo Pärt after a concert in honour of Pärt at Fondation Beyeler in Switzerland.

The vocal ensemble Vox Clamantis has been active since 1996 and consists of diverse musicians – singers, composers, instrumentalists and conductors who are united by their fascination with Gregorian chant. Besides Gregorian chants, considered to be the foundation of European professional music culture, Vox Clamantis often performs earlier polyphony, contemporary music and even jazz or music of other peoples. Many Estonian composers have written music specifically for Vox Clamantis, including Arvo

Pärt, Helena Tulve, Tõnis Kaumann, Toivo Tulev and Erkki-Sven Tüür. Vox Clamantis has recorded for ECM and Mirare. The CD “Arvo Pärt. Adam’s Lament” earned a Grammy in 2014 in the category of Best Choral Performance. In 2013, the CD “Liszt. Via Crucis” won the Diapason d’Or. The artistic director and conductor of the ensemble is Jaan-Eik Tulve.

www.voxclamantis.ee





Tõnu Kaljuste with the head of ECM Records Manfred Eicher and with Arvo Pärt at the recording of "Adam's Lament".

The conductor Tõnu Kaljuste (1953) is internationally acknowledged for his highly diverse repertoire, which ranges from operas and classical symphony pieces to contemporary music. Kaljuste has cooperated with great figures of northern and eastern European modernism, such as Alfred Schnittke, György Kurtág, Krzysztof Penderecki, Giya Kancheli and Einojuhani Rautavaara. He has proved to be a superb connoisseur and introducer of Estonian composers, e.g. Arvo Pärt, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Veljo Tormis and Heino Eller.

Kaljuste is the founder and was the first conductor of the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and the Tallinn Chamber Orchestra. Since

2004, Kaljuste has been the artistic director of the project theatre Nargen Opera, which he founded; since 2006 he has run the Nargenfestival. Since 2010 he has been a professor at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, and the head of the conducting department.

Tõnu Kaljuste has worked together with various record companies, such as ECM Records, Virgin Classic and Caprice Records. Kaljuste's recordings have won several awards; Arvo Pärt's "Adam's Lament" earned him a Grammy in 2014 in the category of Best Choral Performance.

www.tonukaljuste.com



Suure-Jaani Music Festival. The sunrise concert on Hüpasaare bog island has just finished.

Estonians like to walk through early morning dewy grass, through a forest and along a boardwalk to a concert taking place on a bog island. Or they might take a boat to a small island where the concert venue can be reached by lorry or by strolling along a sandy seashore. Or they'll bravely freeze in front of a stage set up on a seashore, a blanket around their shoulders and another covering their knees. Or listen to an orchestra on a stage in the middle of a foggy lake.

Such undertakings constitute a cosy experience, nostalgic for many, a reminder that, although most of us now live in cities, we are basically country people and tough.

Estonians can also of course go to concerts without having to wrestle with nature, in both bigger concert halls and smaller and more exciting venues. Tallinn has the grandest venue, the Estonia Concert Hall, plus the modern Nordea hall, which accommodates concerts in any genre.

The inhabitants in Pärnu, Tartu and Jõhvi can also enjoy music in excellent venues. Estonian music is often performed in St John's Church in St Petersburg, an important gathering place for the Estonian community at the beginning of the 20th century.

Concerts across Estonia often take place in manor house halls, churches, museums, community houses and schools. The Old Town of Tallinn alone offers a number of beautiful venues from different eras, perfectly

CONCERT VENUES



Leigo Lake Music Festival in southern Estonia.

suiting to chamber concerts. Buildings that used to have totally different functions can also be used for concerts, a 14th century round building called Hobuveski (horse mill), for example, used to grind flour using the strength of eight horses. Today, it is a popular theatre and concert venue. One truly grand venue is the House of the Brotherhood of Black Heads, a medieval social meeting place of a guild for unmarried merchants.

A significant development, certainly not typical only of Estonia, sees concerts and music theatre moving into former industrial buildings, especially in northern Tallinn. At the moment, renovation work is going on at Kultuurikatel (Tallinn Creative Hub), a historical power station, where halls with various functions are supposed

to be completed soon. In 2014, Vaba Lava (free stage), focusing on theatre, dance and music, was opened in the Telliskivi Creative City. Music people are very pleased with the huge building on the territory of the Noblessner shipyard, where the acoustics are especially suitable for operas, orchestral pieces and large-scale compositions including chorus, vocal soloists and orchestra.

Festivals often seem to become one with their genius loci. The Birgitta Festival could not really happen anywhere else but in the Pirita Convent: the ruins of the 15th century convent of St Birgitta. The Saaremaa Opera Days mainly take place in the courtyard of the Kuressaare Castle, founded in the 14th-15th centuries. Incidentally, the convent building of the



The Estonian National Opera rehearsing Wagner's "Parsifal" in Noblessner Foundry, a former submarine factory dating from 1913.

castle is the only surviving fortified construction in the Baltic countries that has not needed to be rebuilt. The Tallinn International Organ Festival is greatly enhanced by all the churches, with their wonderful altars and organs, where the concerts take place: the 13th-century Tallinn Cathedral and St Nicholas church-museum, the home of Bernt Notke's famous "Danse macabre", and others.

Of course not all festivals organised in Estonia deal with the Middle Ages or indeed with medieval architecture. Each era - early music, Baroque and Classical - tends to have its own festival here - or even several. The Festival Orient offers music cultivated by eastern nations. The Estonian Music Days and the Estonian Composers' Festival - one in Tallinn and the other in Tartu - direct the public's attention to the works of currently active Estonian composers. Yet another popular undertaking is the Nargenfestival, lately focusing on the works of a few composers, while commissioning new music from other composers.



For the 1980 Olympic Games, Veljo Tormis wrote the grand-scale ballet-cantata “Estonian Ballads”, which reflects the nation’s painful past through a blend of runo songs and classical music. In 2004, the conductor Tõnu Kaljuste and Peeter Jalakas, the director of the Von Krahl theatre, dusted off the composition and invited the audiences to experience the new “Estonian Ballads” in the Soorinna barn near Tormis’s birth-



place. Instead of operatic voices, the soloists were singers with excellent knowledge of runo songs; the ballet, in turn, was converted to a Japanese *butō*-dance. Inspired by the “Estonian Ballads”, the Nargen Opera and Von Krahl Theatre also staged Tormis’s more intimate production “Songs of Estonian Women” on Naissaar, and the technocratic-spirited “Songs of Estonian Men” in Tallinn Creative Hub and Noblessner.

CONCERT VENUES



Omar's barn on Naissaar Island - one of the Nargenfestival venues.

Nargenfestival developed from the project theatre Nargen Opera and the conductor Tõnu Kaljuste's vision of establishing his own concert hall and festival on the island of Naissaar, not far from Tallinn. Since 2006 Nargenfestival has been a wonderful summer-long party, which emphasises original Estonian music and drama. The festival traditionally kicks off in Haapsalu with the days of

the composer Cyrillus Kreek in June, and ends in September, when superb musicians perform Arvo Pärt's works. The Nargenfestival programme is culturally diverse, ranging from folk music to classical masterpieces. The festival takes place on islands and other venues accessible by sea, with the most significant part in the Omar's barn on the island of Naissaar.

THEATRE MUSIC



THEATRE MUSIC





The building of the Estonian National Opera and the Estonia Concert Hall.

The heart of local musical theatre is the Estonian National Opera in Tallinn, although musical theatre is also regularly performed at the “Vanemuine” theatre in Tartu. Both are much loved by the local population, having started out as popular drama theatres before the first Republic of Estonia. The myth that the opera house in Tallinn, opened in 1913, was built purely on people’s donations is still going strong, even though this is only half true, as donations covered only a part of the construction costs. The issue of building a new opera house crops up from time to time, and opera

people are waiting patiently.

Today the Estonian National Opera is an opera, operetta and ballet theatre, where the repertoire includes the best of the world’s theatre music. “Vanemuine” focuses on drama theatre, although it also offers operas, musicals and ballets. Both theatres have always commissioned original Estonian works as often as possible. New operas, ballets and dance productions do not usually stay in the programme for long; children’s musicals tend to fare better.

Internationally acclaimed operas by Estonian composers are Erkki-Sven

Tüür’s “Wallenberg” (premiere in 2001 at the Dortmund Opera House) and Jüri Reinvere’s “Purge” (2012 at the Finnish National Opera) and “Peer Gynt” (2014 at the Norwegian National Opera). Tüür’s opera has already been performed at “Estonia”, but Reinvere’s operas are still waiting their turn.

Several Estonian singers have a successful career on world opera stages. The wonderful baritone Georg Ots is still remembered fondly by Russian and Finnish audiences. Today’s acclaimed singers include bass Ain Anger, tenor Juhan Tralla and mezzo-soprano Anneli

THEATRE MUSIC



Tüür's "Wallenberg" at the Estonian National Opera in 2007. By mixing styles, the Russian director Dmitri Bertman's production prefers a more distant and more philosophical view of the events.

Peebo. Several Estonian conductors are known internationally mainly as opera conductors, for example Kristiina Poska and Mihkel Kütson.

New operas have recently increasingly been staged as projects outside the opera house. Probably because of this, the people involved have been eager to experiment with the form. Besides long, several-act operas, the public can now also enjoy short operas, which are perhaps more acceptable in a cool and damp factory building, sitting on hard seats. There is still no blackbox-style hall for bigger project operas, thus creative solutions and exciting venues have been found in old factory buildings as well as in barns. Besides traditional theatres, operas have been performed by the Von

Krahl Theatre and Nargenfestival.

In the past decade, Estonian operas have offered poetry (Tõnu Kõrvits's "Butterfly", and the chamber operas "Firegarden" and "My Swans, My Thoughts"), sound experiments (Helena Tulve's "It Is Getting So Dark"), social-critical mixtures of styles (Timo Steiner's "Two Heads", and Märt-Matis Lill's "Exploring Indias"), defining the essence of Estonians (Tauno Aints's "Old Barny") and much more. Olav Ehala has written wonderful musicals for children and young adults.

There have been fewer new ballets and dance productions based on original music. The more reason to gratefully recall Tauno Aints's full-length ballet "Modigliani - the Cursed Artist", the contemporary



"The Dancing Tower" at the Tallinn Creative Hub (Kultuurikatel).

dance performance "Hamlet" with Taavi Kerikmäe's electronic music, Ülo Krigul's music for Sasha Pepe-lyev's technocratic dance production "Dancing Tower" at Tallinn Creative Hub and Ardo Ran Varres's exciting dance performance "Carrmen!".

The grand old men of Estonian opera and ballet music are Eduard Tubin and Eino Tamberg.



The composer Jüri Reinvere (1971) has produced, within a short period of time, two operas, where he also wrote libretti on the basis of literary material. In 2012, the Finnish National Opera in Helsinki premiered "Purge", after Sofi Oksanen's novel, and in 2014 the Norwegian National Opera produced "Peer Gynt", where Reinvere brought Ibsen's national hero into a contemporary context.

Who is Jüri Reinvere? His good friend, the writer Sofi Oksanen, has called him a true cosmopolitan with Estonian roots. Several of his works tackle Estonia and its history. At the age of 18, Reinvere began studying composition at the Warsaw Music Academy, and continued at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. Since 2005 he has been residing in Berlin.

Reinvere's musical language is immensely diverse, ranging from neo-simplicity to audio-artworks and sound sculptures compiled of the sounds of nature. He mixes different art fields and aesthetics and has often used multimedia. Reinvere's poetic approach contains philosophical themes, such as the concept of time, the mystery of God, man's psychological depth and the trauma in post-socialist societies.

www.reinvere.de



THEATRE MUSIC

Bass Ain Anger (1971) is in such international demand that every performance in Estonia is an event. He has been called one of the best contemporary Wagner-basses. Essential world opera houses welcome him to perform Italian and German, as well as Russian, opera repertoires. Ain Anger studied singing at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre; his international career began in 2001, in Leipzig, and since 2004 he has been working at the Vienna State Opera.

Anger's world-class performances both on opera and concert stages have made him the favourite of such conductors as Christian Thielemann, Franz Welser-Möst and Donald Runnicles.



Ain Anger

SONG FESTIVALS AND THE ESTONIAN CHOIR TRADITION



SONG FESTIVALS AND THE ESTONIAN CHOIR TRADITION





There is at least one event where Estonians abandon their privacy-seeking nature and are willing to stand shoulder-to-shoulder. This happens at the song festival, held since 1869, when the country began the era of national awakening. In 2003 the festival was included in the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Although a song festival is an impressive large-scale open-air concert, its main value for Estonians lies

in the atmosphere. Everybody who has a chance to sing at the festival finds it an overwhelmingly powerful and touching experience. Although the choir on stage is enormous, only a fraction of all those who want to get there actually succeed. The others can join in as spectators.

A song festival and its repertoire have always reflected whatever is happening in society. From the awakening era people moved on to the first period of independence,



SONG FESTIVALS AND THE ESTONIAN CHOIR TRADITION



The punk song festival in Rakvere, 2008.

Unfortunately followed by the harsh oppression, when a large number of the songs expressed an alien mentality. Besides the obligatory songs extolling everything Soviet, the organisers usually managed to slip in a much beloved piece so that the song festivals instilled a sense of unity and hope. In the late 1980s, night song festivals spontaneously emerged, which gradually developed into the Singing Revolution. Since singing themselves free, the Estonians carefully select the song festival repertoire and to the traditional songs always add pieces expressing the spirit of the day. New pieces are also commissioned – meaning that

Estonian composers have got used to writing music for 10 000 or 20 000 singers and for extraordinarily numerous wind instruments.

The ardent wish to take part in a national song festival has made the Estonian choir landscape buzz. Dozens of choirs have been put together, although quite a few have not lasted long. In 2008 amateur choirs faced other types of motivation: a new TV programme, “Singing Battle”, inviting choirs to perform popular songs, then there was the punk song festival and pop choir festival. All these have caused quite a shift in the canonical repertoire of amateur choirs, while introducing

new people to choir music. Most Estonian schools have choirs for different age groups, and children are also motivated by the wish to get into the song festival.

The landmarks of Estonians as a well-known singing nation are the two most acclaimed professional choirs with long histories: the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and the Estonian National Men’s Choir. In the field of professionally performed classical music and premieres, Voces Musicales, Collegium Musicale and others have recently attracted favourable attention.



Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir and Kaspars Putniņš in St Nicholas Church.

The Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir (EPCC) is among the best known Estonian music collectives in the world. The choir is characterised by a powerful, precise and clear sound. EPCC was founded in 1981 by Tõnu Kaljuste, who worked as the artistic director and chief conductor of the choir for twenty years. Paul Hillier and Daniel Reuss took over later; the current conductor is Kaspars Putniņš.

The choir's repertoire ranges from Gregorian chants to music of the 21st century, with special emphasis on the work of Estonian composers (Pärt, Tormis, Tüür, Grigorjeva, Tulev, Kõrvits

and Tolve) and introducing it to the world. Each season, the choir gives 60–70 concerts at home and abroad. Besides concerts, the choir is often busy recording (for such record companies as ECM, Virgin Classics, Carus and Harmonia Mundi), and has won various awards, including two Grammys: in 2007 for "Arvo Pärt. Da Pacem" (conductor Paul Hillier, on Harmonia Mundi) and in 2014 for "Arvo Pärt. Adam's Lament" (conductor Tõnu Kaljuste, on ECM).

www.epcc.ee



SONG FESTIVALS AND THE ESTONIAN CHOIR TRADITION



Pärt Uusberg in the procession at Naissaar Island's first Song Festival.

The bulk of the composer Pärt Uusberg's (1986) work is choral music, although he has also written ensemble music, piano pieces, orchestral and film music. His choral songs are mainly based on texts by Estonian authors or liturgical texts. Uusberg's wonderful sounding and insightful music enchants with its simplicity, tenderness and emotional pinnacles. Pärt Uusberg studied composing with Alo Põldmäe, Galina Grigorjeva, Toivo Tulev and Tõnu Kõrvits.

The majority of Uusberg's choral music has been conducted by the composer himself and performed by the chamber choir Good Night, Brother (the choir was established in 2008 by

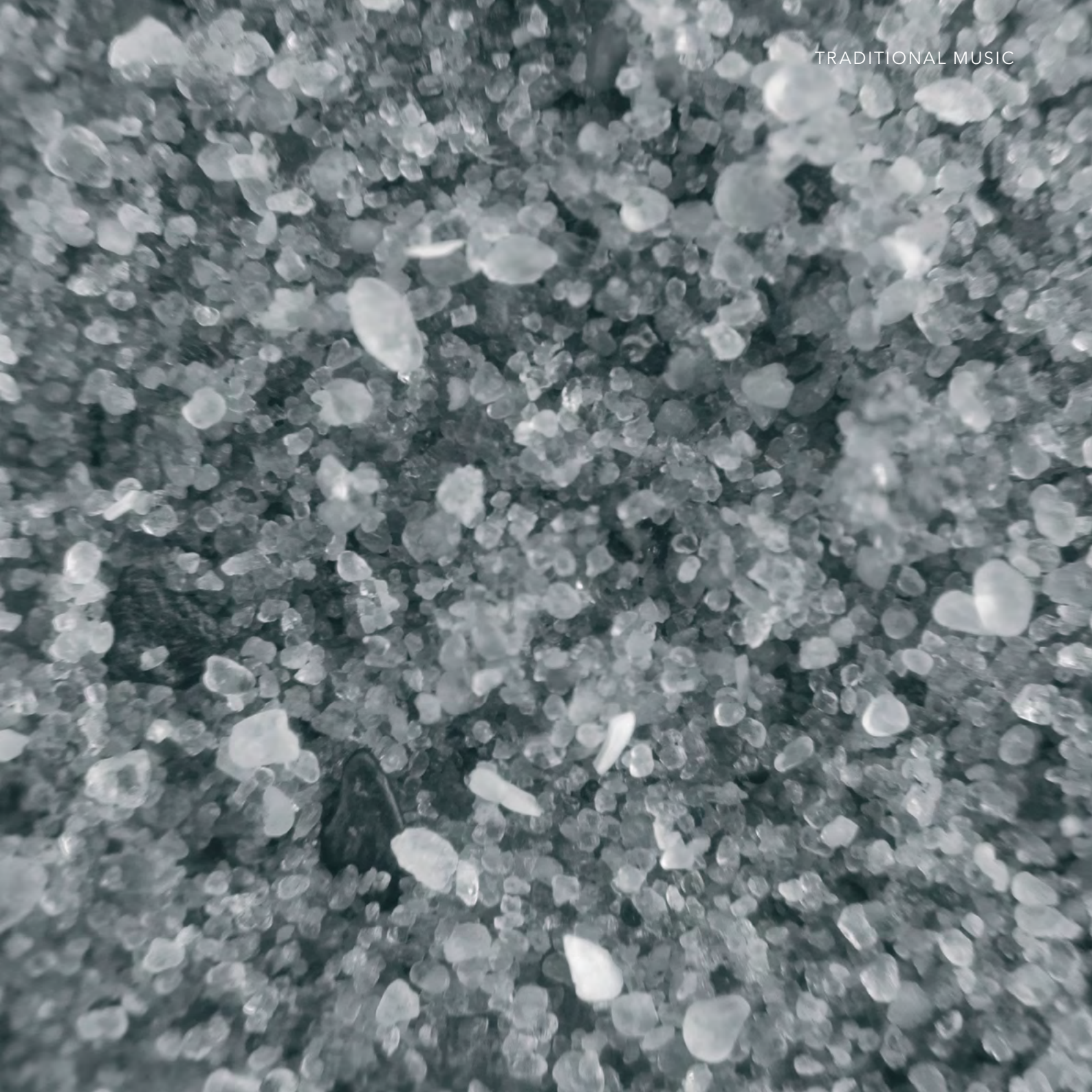
Uusberg). He has worked with a number of other choirs as well, including Voces Musicales and Collegium Musicale. Many Estonian choirs commission new music from him. Uusberg has had several author's concerts in Tallinn and Rapla churches. In 2012 he was named the best choir composer of the year. His choir music has been performed at song festivals, and at the 2014 general song festival no less than three of his pieces were sung. Pärt Uusberg's songs for mixed choirs have been published and he has recorded a CD of his work.

soundcloud.com/p-rt-uusberg

Pärt Uusberg



TRADITIONAL MUSIC



TRADITIONAL MUSIC





Festival Viru Säru.

Estonia's own blues is traditional music and its oldest manifestation is runo song. Forming the basis of jazz and blues in America were the work songs of slaves, and runo songs reflect the everyday life and festivities of Estonians as an archaic peasant nation. Runo song was also supposed to influence natural phenomena and cure diseases: these runo songs were called magic spells.

Runo song is an oral heritage based on recitative melodies. The lead singer and the choir sing alternately. The continuous flow performs text rather than notes, with one melody often used for different texts. Runo song can no longer be called a living tradition, but the work of the composer Veljo Tormis has brought the runo song out of museums and given it a new lease on life. Many traditional musicians today are trying to interpret the runo song in a new way.

Several large-scale folklore-gathering expeditions were organised in Estonia when there were still people around who remembered the heritage passed on from one generation to the next. Thanks to these efforts, we can now boast of one of the biggest folk song collections in the world. The folklorist Jakob Hurt called upon people to gather folklore as early as 1888; between 1904 and 1916 music students travelled around Estonia and recorded folk songs. Later, the enthusiast of traditional music and folk instruments August Pulst organised tours of village musicians all over the country. Despite the opposition of prominent cultural figures, he managed to arrange concerts for folk musicians in the Estonia Concert Hall.

Traditional culture and music are stronger in particular Estonian regions, where the music has blended with that of other cultures. For



www.estinst.ee/music09
Trad.Attack!

example, listening to songs in Seto-maa near the Russian border it becomes clear that this is one version of the runo song. The Seto polyphonic singing tradition, or leelo, with its over one thousand years of history, is on the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Until World War II, large parts of western Estonia and the islands were inhabited by coastal Swedes, who cultivated religious folk songs with special sounds. This music long ago stopped being a living tradition although, for example, Cyrillus Kreek (1889-1962), who grew up on the small island of Vormsi, used the melodies in his work.

Along with runo songs, Estonian traditional music has also used a wide range of folk instruments – mainly in dance music and in rituals. Until the early 20th century playing musical instruments was seen as

TRADITIONAL MUSIC



Viljandi Folk Music Festival.

primarily suitable for men. The instruments were mostly made at home, and only the more complicated ones were purchased. More familiar brass instruments were various flute-type fifes and trumpet-type horns and bugles, with bagpipes made of seal stomach offering the greatest musical possibilities. Most characteristic among the stringed instruments are *kannels* and bowed harps from Hiiumaa Island, but violins and, more recently, guitars and mandolins have been used. Concertinas, various percussion instruments and metal Jew's harps have also been used.

The most important meeting place of Estonian traditional music today is the Viljandi Folk Music Festival, started in 1993. It has developed into one of the largest traditional music festivals in the Baltic and Nordic countries. During the

festival days in July, the entire town of Viljandi can experience how local identity and folk heritage meet up with today's way of thinking and living. In the course of four days, around one hundred concerts with international performers take place indoors and out; there are workshops, exhibitions etc. In addition, it is possible to enjoy spontaneous music-making and singing together – in runo song, after all, everybody can repeat the lines first sung by the lead singer – and thus take an active part in the summer folk festival.

A significant event in the development of the Viljandi festival and the wave of new traditional music was the opening of the Department of Folk Instruments at the Viljandi Culture Academy at the end of the 1980s. Instead of Soviet-era customs, the innovative approach set as an example the more liberal Western



Festival Viru Folk in Käsmu on the northern coast of Estonia.

interpretation of traditional music, mixing music of different peoples together and adding pop music approach. At that point traditional music began to be taught in Estonia as a living tradition and not just through museum exhibits.

Besides the Viljandi festival, other smaller festivals have emerged, offering exciting programmes with an international scope (the Maa ja Ilm Festival in Tartu, Hiiu Folk on Hiiumaa Island, the Võru Folk Festival, Viru Folk in the coastal village of Käsmu and others). A range of traditional activities have gradually developed around the festivals.

The term 'traditional music' as adopted by Estonians in the early 1990s is connected with music of ethnic origin conveyed through the oral tradition, the development of the music and authors' compositions with similar features. Folk music in the Anglo-American culture has a wider meaning.



Paabel plays Estonian folk-fusion. Paabel's music is a powerful symbiosis, mixing sensitivity with tradition, contemporary sounds and improvisational freedom. The band's music combines various old instrumental pieces, runo songs and original compositions, all skilfully blended.

www.paabel.com

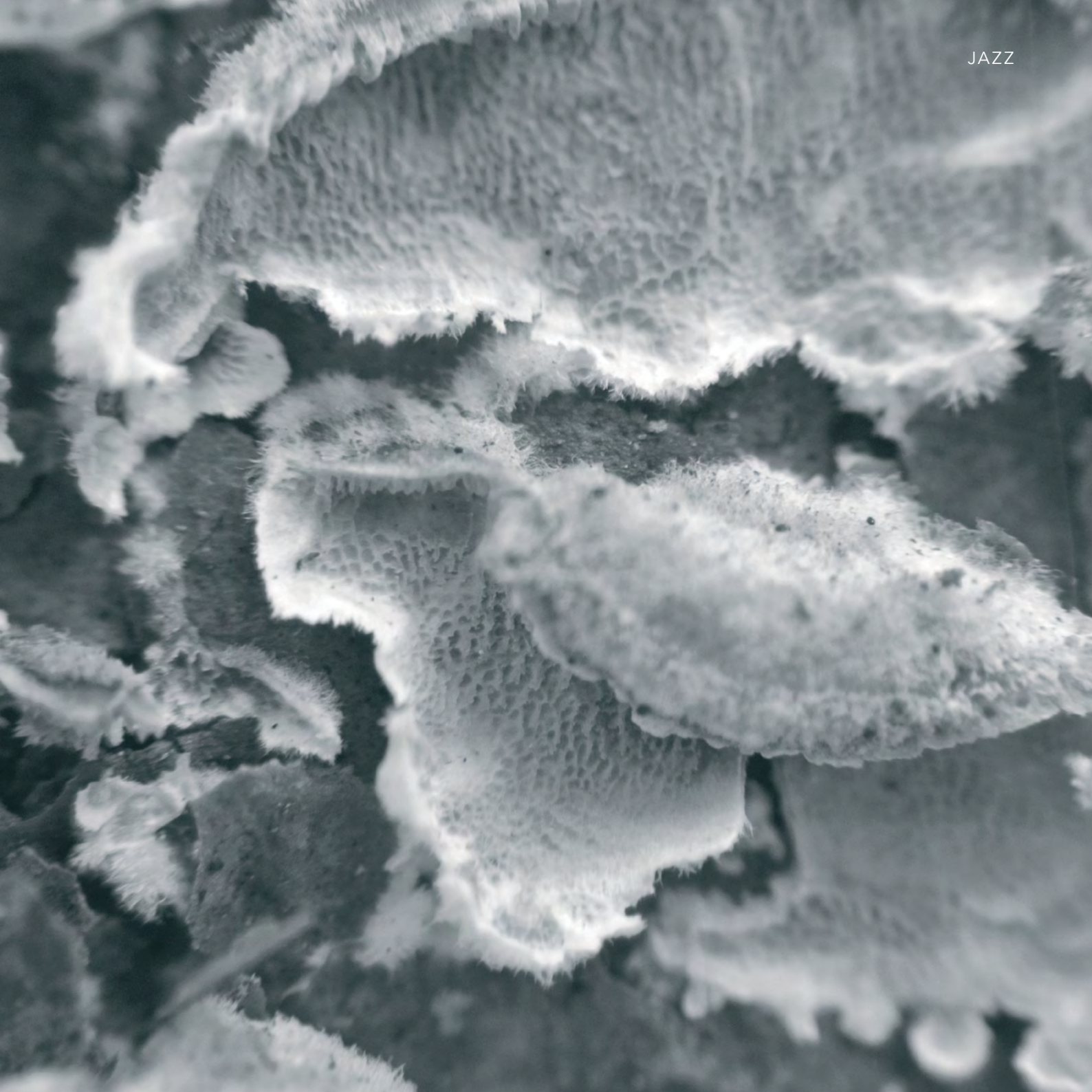
TRADITIONAL MUSIC



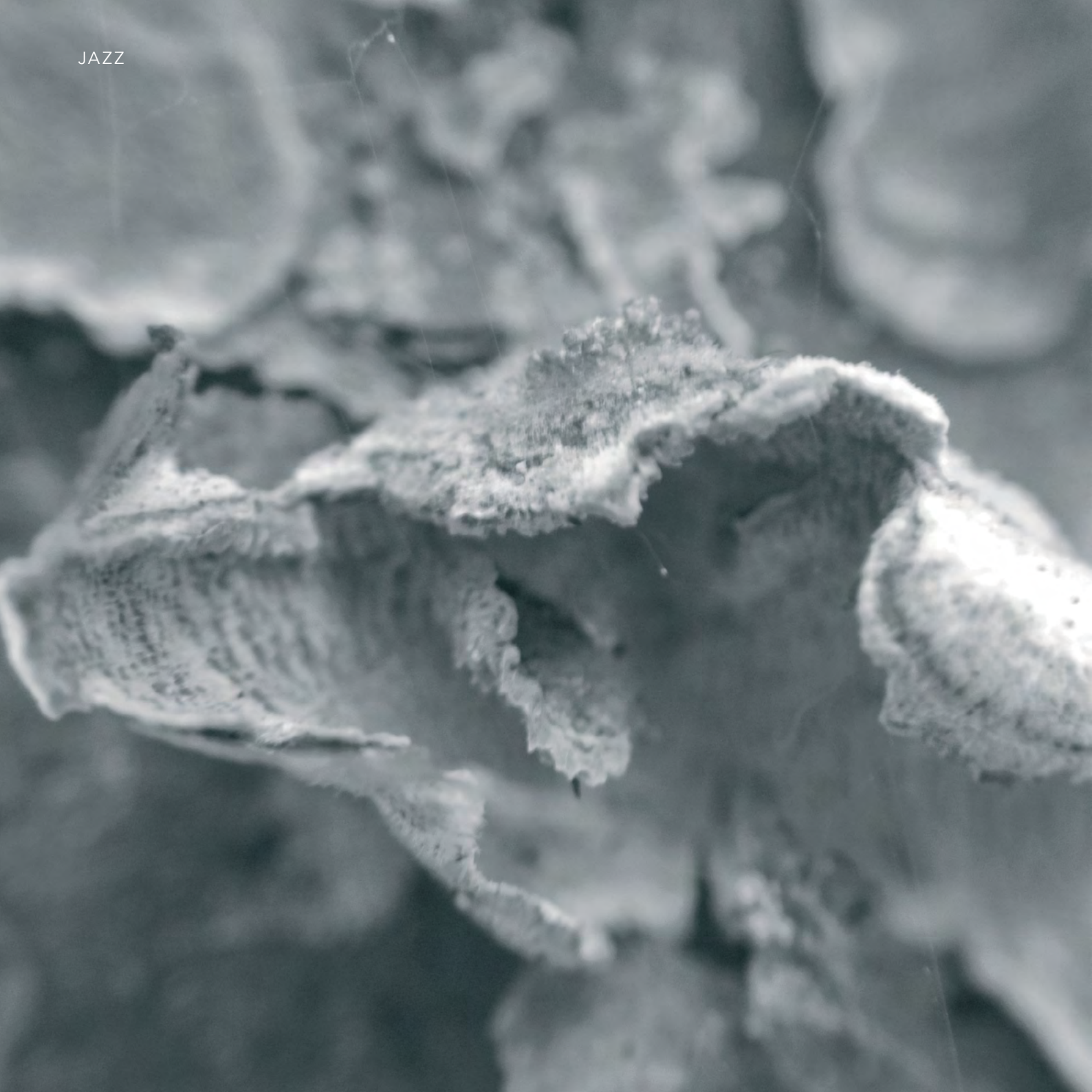
Svjata Vatra (Holy Fire) is an Estonian-Ukrainian folk band, which according to the musicians themselves plays 'fire folk'. The instruments of Svjata Vatra, founded in 2005, are quite unusual: temperamental Ukrainian trombone and Estonian bagpipe produce unique sounds. The cooperation of three Estonians and one Ukrainian produces an un-Nordic blaze. The band skilfully unites different cultures and builds

a bridge between old material and modern people. Svjata Vatra's concerts are powerful and spectacular, with the energy emanating from the band's lead figure Ruslan Trochynsky inspiring the other musicians and enthraling the audience.

www.svjatavatra.com



JAZZ





Estonian jazz music is diverse and developing. Creating original music is a standard that has quickly taken root here. Young musicians and groups present new and often rather experimental music quite early in their careers.

Although jazz arrived in Estonia as early as the 1920s (mainly played by restaurant bands), a long disruption of the tradition took place in this field. Jazz was banned during the German occupation of Estonia (1941-1944), and it was not exactly favoured by the Soviet regime in the 1950s. By some miracle, it was possible to organise the international Tallinn Jazz Festival in 1967, which is still vividly remembered. The festival was a springboard for the pianist Tõnu Naissoo, who a year later recorded his debut "Tõnu Naissoo Trio". In 2014 the Norwegian company Jazzaggression Records reissued this first Estonian jazz album, which sounded highly innovative back then. Many jazz musicians popular in the 1970s-1980s are still active today and have inspired a whole

new generation, which has been able to fully enjoy the open borders and information space while they are learning their trade.

The most extensive of the Estonian jazz festivals is Jazzkaar, organised since 1990. This is also the Estonian festival with the largest number of concerts and performers. There have been altogether over 3000 musicians from 60 countries: Bobby McFerrin, Chick Corea, Angie Stone, Dianne Reeves, Charles Lloyd, Avishai Cohen and others. Besides traditional jazz, the Jazzkaar programme contains ethno jazz and encounters with various forms of pop and club music.

There are of course other jazz festivals scattered across Estonia, roughly divided into feel-good experiences in the open air (Juu Jääb, Sõru Jazz and Saare Jazz) and more experimental creative festivals for younger people (IDeeJazz, ImproTest and Visioon).

Jazzkaar has played a significant role in Estonian jazz life for quite some time, but the key event in Estonian jazz

of the new millennium was the founding of the Estonian Jazz Union (2004). One of its main functions is to organise regular jazz concerts. The Tallinn centre of jazz evenings has long been the jazz club at the NO99 theatre, which has been supplemented by the new club Philly Joe's and the Tallinn TV Tower. Regular jazz concerts take place in other towns as well, in clubs in Tartu, Pärnu, Rakvere, Viljandi and Narva.

On the initiative of the jazz guitarist Jaak Sooäär, jazz music was included in the curriculum at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in 2004. The first university-educated Estonian jazz musicians had to study abroad (Sooäär in Denmark, the percussionist Tanel Ruben in Sweden, the saxophonist Raul Sööt in the US, etc.), whereas now it is possible to acquire a jazz education here, often in master classes held by teachers from abroad.

The biggest international interest, however, has been attracted by our jazz musicians who have acquired skills, ways of thinking and contacts at universities abroad. One of the most exciting among them is the saxophonist and band leader Maria Faust, who has lived and studied in Copenhagen for years. The pianist Kristjan Randalu grew up in Germany, and is a cosmopolitan who appreciates Estonian (traditional) music and is eager to work with Estonian musicians. The singer Kadri Voorand, with her unique voice, expanded her horizons in Stockholm and is now internationally acclaimed for her various co-operation projects. The contrabassist Peedu Kass acquired a significant part of his training in Aarhus, Stockholm and Helsinki.



Despite her young age, Kadri Voorand's (1986) voice is mature and balanced. Music written by Kadri reflects her strong personality and a feminine view of the world. Through improvisation and her original manner of expression, she creates highly diverse contemporary jazz, enhanced by her background in classical music, experience with traditional music and love of choral music. Voorand has cooperated with many of the best Estonian jazz musicians, such as Kristjan Randalu, Tanel Ruben and Taavo Rimmel. She has issued a debut album,

"Echo of a Feeling", and the trio album "Cosmogenic Etude", and has participated in the CDs of many other musicians. Kadri Voorand sings in the acclaimed vocal ensemble Estonian Voices. The winner of the award "Young Jazz Talent 2008" studied jazz singing at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre and at the Stockholm Royal Music Academy; she is currently teaching at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre.

www.kadrivoorand.com



Maria Faust (1979) from Saaremaa Island is a saxophonist and composer, and has been residing in Copenhagen for some time. Her bands are among the most fascinating phenomena of contemporary jazz both in Estonia and in Denmark. Wind instruments dominate in her clearly structured pieces, and her stylistically diverse music combines influences from rock with avant-garde music. Maria Faust briefly studied conducting brass bands in Estonia, and in 2002 she moved to the Esbjerg conservatory in Denmark. After earning her MA in jazz saxophone, Faust also studied composition. She has created music and issued CDs with several of her bands: the contemporary bigband the Maria Faust Jazz Catastrophe, the orchestra the Maria Faust Group and the all-woman improv quartet Pistol Nr. 9. She has also played on the CDs of other musicians. For her album "Sacrum Facere", she received two Danish jazz awards in 2014, in the category of composer and album of the year. Maria Faust's bands have performed mainly in the Nordic and Baltic countries, but also elsewhere in Europe, Russia and China.

www.mariafaust.com



JAZZ



Kristjan Randalu

Kristjan Randalu (1978) is one of the most diverse and fascinating pianists of his generation, and is in great demand as a soloist, cooperation partner, composer and arranger. Randalu has an amazing ability to slide from one genre into another, from jazz to classical music, with traditional music or pop thrown in for good measure. Audiences are captivated by his warmth, passion for music, quiet confidence and honesty. Randalu's musical expression exudes uncompromised decisiveness.

Kristjan Randalu's family moved to Germany when he was a child and piano became his essential companion. He studied in Cologne with John Taylor and at the London Royal Academy of Music with Django Bates, and also received a grant from the Manhattan School of Music.

www.randalu.com

POP MUSIC



POP MUSIC





Jaak Joala and Radar in 1981.

It is difficult to decide when exactly Estonia's own pop music emerged. For a long time, Estonian pop music largely relied on copying Western music. There have been a few exceptional composers whose songs are performed to this day, such as Raimond Valgre, who wrote his ever-green swing-flavoured pieces in the 1930s-1940s.

Domestic music for entertainment was popular in the Soviet Union, but it mainly consisted of foreign hits rather than the work of local composers. In the 1960s beat

music cultivated by school bands offered some rivalry to light music, although beat also copied Western bands.

Original music-makers appeared in the 1970s. As all information about the developments of Western music arrived here via convoluted paths, when compared later the parallels between the music in Estonia and the "original" was quite amazing for both parties. A large role in the 1970s and 1980s was played by the rock band Ruja, which created its own music, and their

charismatic singer Urmas Alender. The songs by Ruja, Apelsin and various other bands used the texts of excellent young poets who playfully arranged words so that writing tunes for them did not push the music into the background.

Estonians can certainly be proud of the bands born out of the great enthusiasm for progressive rock in the 1970s. Sven Grünberg's new synthesizer, liberal thinking and often amazing instrumental associations all contributed to music played by the band Mess, whose

POP MUSIC

music is still striking. A similar grandeur that ignored genre boundaries was common in another prog band, In Spe. It was founded by Erkki-Sven Tüür – one of the best known Estonian composers in the world today, especially in the field of symphonic music.

In the 1980s Estonian musicians – the already mentioned Ruja, Jaak Joala, Tõnis Mägi, Anne Veski and others – introduced fresh Western ideas to one sixth of the world. (The Soviet Union called itself one sixth of the planet.) Estonian musicians are still warmly remembered in Russia. They had a lot to offer, as they had secretly listened to Radio Luxembourg and watched Finnish television.

The most important local music event was the Tartu Pop Music Days, dominated by more artistic rock music. At the end of the 1980s Rock Summer was initiated, which brought an incredible number of performers from abroad to Tallinn at the beginning of the new independence era.

Enthusiasm for punk arrived via Finland. It reached its apogee when J.M.K.E.'s freedom-flavoured song "Hello, perestroika!" was aired on television in 1987.

In the 1990s Estonian stages were invaded by dance music and, as a newly independent country, Estonia also tried its luck at the Eurovision song contest. It paid off: in 2001 Tanel Padar and Dave Benton secured a victory for Estonia and the following year's contest took place in Tallinn. Since 2009 Eurovision songs have been selected at

"Song of Estonia", which besides the new project-based bands managed to introduce various excellent operating bands as well. In the last decade, domestic audiences have delighted in such original pop phenomena as Vaiko Eplik, Jarek Kasar (Chalice) and Jaan Pehk.

Success outside Estonia was initially rather modest, but much effort was made to improve the situation. Kerli, residing in California since 2006, has become an acclaimed bubble goth artist and has released two CDs that have been popular internationally.

At the beginning of the new millennium we again arrived at a point where people stopped their desperate attempts to copy the West and began to produce something typically Estonian. Estonian musicians have been internationally successful mainly in narrow niches, e.g. Pastacas's somewhat naive electronics, Pia Fraus, appreciated more by the Japanese than by Estonians, Mari Kalkun's Võro-language songs based on local folklore, Maria Minerva and Metsatöll.

Since 2009, the local music industry festival Tallinn Music Week (TMW) has greatly helped Estonian bands to have a chance to perform abroad. The festival invites music experts from all over the world. So far, TMW has been most useful to the band Ewert and the Two Dragons, but has also helped Iiris, Elephants From Neptune, Odd Hugo, Faun Racket, Sibyl Vane and Talbot spread their wings a bit.



LP "To The Cold Land", Stupido Records, 1989. J.M.K.E. was the first band to sign a recording contract abroad, in Finland.



Metsatöll is an Estonian folk metal band whose identity is based on the 13th-14th century Estonian fight for freedom and Estonian folk heritage. Metsatöll differs from other metal bands in its use of traditional music instruments (*kannels*, bagpipes and fifes) and folk melodies.

The heavy music band Metsatöll has been the most successful in reaching mainstream stages. Having first conquered the hearts of Estonians, it smoothly moved on to classical stages. In 2006, together with the Estonian National Male

Choir, the band performed Veljo Tormis's choral work-incantation "Curse Upon Iron". Since 1999, Metsatöll has released over ten singles and DVDs, and in 2008 they signed a contract with Universal's branch in Finland, Spinefarm Records. Metsatöll has had 430 concerts in Europe and North America and has sold over 70 000 records.

www.metsatoll.ee



POP MUSIC



Ewert And The Two Dragons is a bright-sounding indie-rock band. Their music is considered romantic and organic, and the lyrics are epic cantos. Their success began with their debut album "The Hills Behind the Hills" (2009). Their next album, "Good Man Down" in 2011, sold even better in Europe and North America, while winning various music awards at home. In 2011 the Dragons won the Skype award at the Tallinn Music Week and performed at several European showcase festivals. In 2012 the band signed a worldwide publishing deal with BMG Rights Management Germany. The following year, the band was recognised at the European Border Breakers Awards in Groningen, Holland.

www.ewertandthetwodragons.com



Maria Minerva and Ajukaja (DJ Raul Saaremets).

Maria Minerva's music has been primarily described as strange, imaginative, hypnagogic and lo-fi. Maria Minerva, aka Maria Juur, studied art history in Tallinn and is now based in New York. She charms her listeners with her skill in producing cutting-edge, cosmopolitan electronic music that seems to float between sleep and wakefulness, and in the music crude disco-energy meets post-punk.

Since 2011, the Californian indie record company Not Not Fun has released a number of Maria Minerva's EPs and albums. The latest album, "Histrionic", is considered to be the most focused so far. Maria's concert calendar has been quite full ever since.

www.maria-minerva.com

FILM MUSIC



FILM MUSIC





The film "Hotel of the Perished Alpinist" was set in the Alps. The "hotel" for the film was built in the mountains of Kazakhstan. The film's architecture, design and music still astonish today with their fresh approach.

Estonian film music has historically been an area of experimentation. At a time when composers were not fully free to express themselves in concert halls, they could realise their musical ideas through feature films, and especially puppet and animated films. Examples of creative Estonians under ideological pressure working in animated films were known all across the Soviet Union. The most striking cases in Estonia are perhaps Arvo Pärt's soundtracks in the 1960s

for Heino Pars's film "Adventures of Cameraman Kõps" and for films made by the founder of the local puppet film studio Elbert Tuganov (e.g. "Tales of a Little Atom").

Although writing music for films (as well as for theatre and TV) was only a part of the work of many academically educated composers and for pop musicians, there are a few people in Estonian film music who are primarily known for their film music. One of them is Sven Grünberg, who became

famous all over the Soviet Union with his soundtrack for Grigori Kromanov's sci-fi film "Hotel of a Perished Alpinist". He is still the most productive Estonian film composer. Another composer, Olav Ehala (1950), is known for his dozens of wonderful songs, mainly in films and theatre, which every Estonian recognises from the first note.

Besides composers with a classical music education, today's Estonian film music contains works by numerous pop and indie musicians.



The composer Sven Grünberg (1956) has written music for more than one hundred films and theatre productions. In the 1970s he became known for his progressive rock band Mess, which added visual elements to music. Grünberg was the first in Estonia and one of the first in the Soviet Union to produce music on a synthesizer. He became popular for the music written for the film "Hotel of a Perished Alpinist" (1979). His CDs "Breath" (1981) and "OM" (1988), where electronic sounds blend with natural instruments, have attracted international attention.

Grünberg started a new period with quite different works that cross the boundaries of cultures: the film "Songs of Milarepa" (1989), based on the Tibetan yogi and poet Milarepa's (1040-1123) texts, and the album "Milarepa" (1993). Fascination with Oriental philosophy and culture has introduced its melody and rhythm elements into his music. Grünberg is the founder and director of the Institute of Buddhism (2001).

Since 1993, in four Finnish and three Estonian universities, Sven Grünberg has taught a subject that he invented: the role of music and sounds in shaping film dramaturgy.



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