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## **From World Exhibitions to Sunrise Avenue: A Short History of Music Exportation and Research in Finland**

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## **From World Exhibitions to Sunrise Avenue: A Short History of Music Exportation and Research in Finland**

There are two main axioms whose musicological repercussions I want to probe in my essay. The first is that there is really no such thing as »Finnish« music *per se*. Any music, whether classical, popular, or something else, can potentially become defined as »Finnish« according to various factors or associations, just as all music can potentially become a signifier for a religion, an ideology, a person, or a nation. It is, of course, important to note that some musics resist their discursive exploitation, so to speak, as »national« music more effectively than others; how and to what extent they do this is beyond the scope of the current discussion. Some of the issues that I address below nevertheless have some resonance with this question as well.

The second axiom in my essay is that the transnational and the international often construct what we come to understand as the »national«.<sup>1</sup> In considering the music of smaller nations such as Finland, this is obvious: nationally meaningful symbols – whether musical, visual, or something else – receive their national signification in the context of international interactions. Their distinctiveness or local uniqueness is grasped in the context of a larger variety of symbols.

The field within which I consider these questions in this essay is Finnish music exportation, both as a contemporary activity and as a more historical phenomenon. I am not as much focused on figures, business reports and statistics, however, as I am on music exports as a potential object of music research: probing exports as a field of musicological inquiry or even a domain of applied research. Due to the political and ideological pressure threatening the future of musicology and the humanities in general in today's Finland – which I suspect is the case in many other countries as well – we have become forced to look elsewhere for new scholarly domains where musicological knowledge might appear to gain greater relevance. Briefly, then, I ask whether the study of music exportation could – or even should – be one of them.

### **World exhibitions as an early form of cultural export**

Music exports have had huge potential as a domain of musical meaning for a long time. Exporting Finnish music has, at least since the beginning of the twentieth century, been not only a financial activity but also a form of modern nation-building. Since Finland lacks a centuries-old history as an independent nation and an autonomous political entity, culture, and perhaps music in particular, has been the arena in which the argument for Finland's originality and cultural uniqueness has been most intensively made. Exporting music and musicians abroad, of course, has been a manifestation of this.

An early example of this process dates from over a century ago. The thirteenth world exhibition in Paris in the year 1900 featured, alongside some of the latest industrial and technological innovations, a new ideological emphasis on the domestic as the locus of the national spirit. While the city's earlier 1889 exhibition had still displayed optimism in a universal, industrial future, eleven years later this ideal

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, London 2009.

utopian society was no longer evident. What remained was the idea of a national »home«, where a truly authentic national culture was to be the basis of good human life. Herder's idea of the nation as a living organism embodying a unique national soul also necessitated the idea of a cultural home, a particular kind of place for nurturing its well-being and authenticity.<sup>2</sup>

All this seemed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to be a kind of counter-reaction brought about by a particular disillusionment with technology and industry. The focus on the distinctive and unique national »place« seemed to bring about a profound need for culture and the arts as the fundamental basis of one's identity and good life. The world in future was to be seen as a celebration of various localities, and exotic Finland, striving for its independence and recognition, was one of them on display in Paris in the year 1900.

For Finland, the construction of the national pavilion at the 1900 world exhibition was of course an international opportunity to showcase the country at its best. The painter Albert Edelfelt (1854–1905), who was employed as Finland's art commissioner in Paris at the time, praised the pavilion as »a temple for the Finnish soul to reside in«. Considering the close relationship between nationalism and religion in late nineteenth century Europe, it is especially interesting that Edelfelt's metaphor of »a temple«, a religious space, seems to have stood the test of time. Just a few years ago, in her marvelous monograph on Sibelius, Glenda Dawn Goss characterized the pavilion as »a physical re-creation of a Lutheran country church«.<sup>3</sup> The temple was indeed a church; in those years, national and religious sentiments were intertwined in the collective consciousness.

It was very much thanks to Edelfelt that Finland was allowed to exhibit separately from Russia, who legally ruled Finland as a Grand Duchy at the time. The construction and design of the pavilion was an early manifestation of the collaborative work of the best Finnish talent: not only Edelfelt, but also artists and architects such as Axel Gallén, Lars Sonck, Emil Wikström, Louis Sparre, Magnus Enckell, Hjalmar Munsterhjelm, and Pekka Halonen, just to name a few, were involved in the project. The outcome was an impression of Finland as an innocent paradise capable of recreating itself repeatedly through nature. It was, however, an idyll jeopardized by Slavic expansionist and colonializing politics. The art on display was obviously embedded with deep political significance. The Finns played up the ethnic distinctiveness that made the country appear unique in the European imagination.

The Finnish music program at the exhibition was designed along the same lines. Although Finnish music was to be quite poorly received in France for many decades, in 1900 the exotic-sounding works composed by Jean Sibelius, Armas Järnefelt, Ernst Mielck, and Robert Kajanus (the principal Conductor), were received enthusiastically. Sibelius's music in particular was praised, and the author Gustave Babin was impressed by the extent to which the »soul of Finland itself was palpable in that enormous hall«. The eminent critic Karl Flodin, in his booklet *Musique en Finlande*, wrote of Finnish songs that »emanate from a sorrowful inspiration and go back to the remotest antiquity«. So there was a long history behind Finnish music, according to Flodin, and its leading creator in the future, of course, was to be Jean Sibelius.<sup>4</sup>

Why have I dwelt at such length on the Paris world exhibition of more than a century ago? Apart from the Helsinki Philharmonic's high-profile concert, which was the culmination of its European tour, Finnish music was not displayed as prominently as the more material arts, such as painting, sculpture,

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<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Kerstin Smeds, *Helsingfors–Paris. Finlands utveckling till nation på världsutställningarna 1851–1900*, Helsingfors 1996.

<sup>3</sup> Glenda Dawn Goss, *Sibelius. A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland*, Chicago and London 2009.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 284–85.

architecture and handicrafts. Through this early example of Finnish cultural exportation, however, my aim is to highlight the idea already presented at the start of this essay, and which lies at the very heart of Finnish cultural exports both then and now – namely, that in order to gain national significance, any given music needs first to gain international recognition. In other words, that to become a truly significant example of Finnish art, it must first gain recognition abroad. Mikko Heiniö has named this phenomenon the »x-y connection«, and regards it as the fundamental pattern of Finnish cultural self-appreciation.<sup>5</sup> Heiniö's discussion revolves around two hugely popular operas – *The Red Line* by Aulis Sallinen, and *The Last Temptations* by Joonas Kokkonen – that were big export success stories in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Heiniö shows elegantly in his study that there was a curious double-twist at work in the reception of these works. They were perceived as nationally significant, even national monuments in music, but only after they had been received positively abroad (in London and New York). The musical material mattered too: on the one hand, the operas were traditional and comprehensible – almost too much so, according to young radical composers such as Esa-Pekka Salonen and Jouni Kaipainen<sup>6</sup> – but, on the other hand, they claimed to be original and authentic and thus new.

I suspect this pattern is not unique to Finland but is typical of most small, peripheral countries striving for recognition. However, a lot has changed in the almost forty years that have passed since. Exporting music has become a more professionalized undertaking.

Year	Total Earnings (€ million)	Annual percentage change
1999	3.8	
2000	9.4	+148%
2001	15.4	+64%
2002	17.9	+16%
2003	20.0	+12%
2004	21.7	+8%
2005	28.9	+33%
2006	26.2	-9%
2007	19.8	-24%
2008	23.3	+18%
2009	32.1	+38%
2010	34.5	+7%
2011	33.1	-4%
2012	35.8	+8%
2013	40.4	+13%
2014	42.8	+6%

Table 1: The economic growth of Finnish music exports in 1999–2014, after Muikku 2015.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Mikko Heiniö, *Karvalakki kansakunnan kaapin päällä*, Helsinki 2009.

<sup>6</sup> See »Palkittu nykymusiikin säveltäjä Jouni Kaipainen: Jo riittävät karvalakki-oopperat«, in: *Suomen kuvalehti* 65 (1981), 28, pp. 54–55.

<sup>7</sup> Jari Muikku, *Suomalaisen musiikkiviennin markkina-arvo ja rakenne 2013–2014*, Helsinki 2015. [https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/music-finland/en/documents/Tunnuslukuja\\_ja\\_tutkimuksia\\_8\\_vienti2013-2014.pdf](https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/music-finland/en/documents/Tunnuslukuja_ja_tutkimuksia_8_vienti2013-2014.pdf). The value of Finnish music exports continues to rise, and figures collected by the Finnish Music Information Centre (FIMIC) for 2015 showed an 8% rise over 2014. The total value of Finnish musical exports in 2015 was 46.5 million Euros.

Looking at the figures in Table 1, it is obvious that Finnish music exporting has changed from a small cottage industry to relatively big business in just fifteen years. It is important, however, to emphasize the qualification »relatively« here – for a country with a similarly small population to Finland (9 versus 6 million), Sweden boasts a music export revenue almost three times as big as its neighbor. On this occasion, we don't need to discuss this imbalance further. Sweden has succeeded in this area remarkably well, while Finland's traditionally poor output in music exporting has amounted to a national inferiority complex. The recent situation shows that this is changing.

Limiting my focus to popular music for a moment, it is obvious that the improved success rate in music exports over the last 15 years is the outcome of a more professional level of competence, as far as managers and performers are concerned. Ideologically, the increase stems from broader tendencies prevalent in western popular culture, such as globalization, the idealization of the marginal and authentic, new interest in national locations, and the increasing interest in alternatives to the hegemony of Anglo-American popular music. In our age of advanced information technology, however, exoticism and the proximity to nature are no longer enough.

While the Harmony Sisters, or »Geschwister Waltonen« as they were known on their European tour, could still enchant German listeners in the 1940s with the story of Finland's archaic natural beauty, the gleaming waters of the thousand lakes and its untamed forests, Sunrise Avenue, a Finnish rock band that has enjoyed enormous success in Germany for almost a decade, represents none of these things in their music and their public image. While the Harmony Sisters were sponsored by the national radio, Sunrise Avenue is managed and recorded under international contracts. Arguably the most successful Finnish music in Germany after Sibelius, this rock group sings in English and their melodic rock-ballad style brings to mind American superstars such as Bon Jovi rather than anything Finnish. Their handsome lead singer Samu Haber has a German father, which might explain some of the band's appeal in Germany and German-speaking Europe. But a large part of their appeal is still based on their national origin as Finns.

The same cannot be said of the monster-metal group Lordi, who first gained popularity within an explicitly nationalistic frame, winning the Eurovision Song Contest. This victory was greeted with controversy. Lordi's extraordinary costumes provoked amusement, shock, and even anger. It was suggested that Lordi's win was a protest against the whole tradition of Eurovision Song Contests, which had lost their relevance as a truly competitive institution as early as the 1980s. Scholarship has not paid much attention to the Lordi phenomenon either. One of the few scholars to discuss the group, Dafni Tragaki, argues that Lordi's »neomedieval horror-glam spectacle« reflects a desire to escape from the everydayness of global capitalism into an archaic reality that has a close affinity with the fundamental basis of our identity.<sup>8</sup> In other words, Lordi supposedly offers an alternative to the tameness of civilized life and its daily pursuit of money and power. Both Sunrise Avenue and Lordi tap into the gold mine of national stereotypes and an aesthetic of cultural otherness. Neither of these musical acts could have come from the colonializing countries of popular culture such as the Britain or the United States. They speak the same language, but with an accent; they know the tradition and history of popular music but purposefully distort and, particularly in Lordi's case, make a self-conscious parody of it. This noticeable difference from the canon and the mainstream becomes the musical source of national meanings.

Be that as it may, Lordi, if anything, represents a local curiosity from Finland, a country where heavy metal has been proclaimed as one of the top products for export, alongside Nokia cellphones and

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<sup>8</sup> See *Empire of Song. Europe and Nation in the Eurovision Song Contest*, ed. Dafni Tragaki, Metuchen (NJ) 2013.

Marimekko design. Lordi has, however, not really made it in the foreign markets so far, in spite – or rather because of? – the encouragement from the state. In 2006, the president Tarja Halonen gave Lordi a bronze key flag award for exemplary Finnish work.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps Lordi is too controversial – a monster who does not take his listeners to the fantasy world but rather uses his character to propagate diversity and liberal values. Or perhaps, more simply, he is just not as good a musician as he should be to really break through and achieve international fame. Or something else is on the way. The factors that lead to international recognition are sometimes difficult to predict.

I am obviously running out of space on this occasion, but the most important question still remains: what are we to make of music's international mediation in the national context, in the everyday praxis of musicology? Are there some areas in which we could, as scholars and scientists of music, somehow contribute to such a domain as musical exportation? Should musicology, in fact, become by definition a national or at least a social science? These questions would not have made as much sense ten years ago as they do today. The pressure to produce outcomes that in one way or another benefit the funder of the academic work, namely the state of Finland, has become considerable, and social relevance is now an important criterion upon which research, funding applications and independent scholars are evaluated in Finland. Scholarly evaluation often does not take place from within but largely from outside, or rather from above. The idea of musicology as a national science, as an institutionalized mode of nation-building, would in fact be nothing new in Finland. This was the basis of the early Finnish musicological research, which by coincidence emerged in the same year as the Paris world exhibition in 1900. That was the year when Ilmari Krohn gained his doctorate: the first PhD in musicology in Finland. Krohn, together with his students, was busy finding the »national« element in music, its Finnishness, and with establishing the national grounding of our musical history. Finland's music history, and ultimately the history of the nation, was founded on scholarly lines.

There are, I think, plenty of ways in which musicological expertise can help music businesses and the exportation of national musics. Existing research on transnationalism, reception history and even music semiotics, for instance, provide useful knowledge for efforts to export Finnish music abroad. Some scholars find this kind of case-specific problem-solving fascinating, and their research can be highly relevant for export organizations. But will it become musicology's mainstream in the future?

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.gettyimages.fr/detail/photo-d'actualit%C3%A9/one-of-the-band-members-of-monster-hard-rockers-photo-d'actualit%C3%A9/71061648#helsinki-finland-one-of-the-band-members-of-monster-hardrockers-lordi-picture-id71061648> for a visual document of the award ceremony.