

The Kalevala, Popular Music, and National Culture

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Abstract

This article examines the diverse and at times hard-to-discern relationship between the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*, and Finnish popular music. The *Kalevala*, existing in a number of variations already in the nineteenth century, can be considered part of a long-term process of storytelling by singing. The printed epic is only one phase in this tradition. From this point of view, Finnish culture retains its Kalevalaic singing tradition, which has simply received a new range of features over time. We identify traces of the *Kalevala* in Finnish popular music, from progressive rock to parody performances, to esoteric experimentation, and to the sounds of the electric kantele, the Finnish zither. The *Kalevala* appears to hold a special place in Finnish heavy metal culture, which – among its repertoire of mythologies – draws on the myths involved in nation building and in the emergence of Finnishness. Finnish popular music, just like the *Kalevala* tradition, was born in the riptide of influences from East and West. All in all, this singing tradition has played a part in producing the self-image of the Finns and, in some cases, also the image to the outside world.

Over the last few decades, the neo-nationalist interest in national identity and its inheritance that emerged after the Cold War has been discernable also in Finland, as an increased interest in Finnishness and its various manifestations. The originally Anglo-American popular culture has been of particular importance in shaping Finnish national identity, which, this time, is not determined solely by folk traditions or the European high culture born thereof. Also scientific interest in the postmodern identity formation based on popular culture has emerged in research in the humanities (Salmi & Kallioniemi, 2000; Laine, 1999).

Although Finland's national epic, the *Kalevala*, has shaped the image of the Finnish past and affected the country's art and culture in various ways throughout the twentieth century (Fewster, 2006), it has been a particular source of musical inspiration for the youth culture of those born in the 1970s, to an extent impossible for the post-war generations. For them, the *Kalevala* represented hateful force-fed reading as part of the school curriculum (Kauppinen, 1985). The purpose of this article is to examine the multiple connections between the *Kalevala* and Finnish popular music from the early years of entertainment and pop music all the way to the current international success of Finnish heavy rock, in which the national epic and related folklore play an important role. Use of the *Kalevala* in connection with popular music has led to both ideological and esoteric interpretations. The *Kalevala* has been parodied and mocked in pop music, and, finally, throughout the EU-era, has been the object of, at times quite intense, rehabilitation efforts – all these having been attempts to examine the foundations of Finnish identity by means of popular culture.

Popular Culture, Finnishness and “Imagined Communities”

Benedict Anderson's (1994) pioneering study of the formation of national identity has become increasingly important when considering how popular culture is used to create “imagined communities” comparable to traditional national entities. Although Anderson speaks particularly of the impact of printing, novels and the press on the formation of such communities, his theory obviously fits in with the idea that the twentieth-century mass media (radio, film, TV, recorded music) and eventually the computer have stimulated new forms of communities, in which people know each other only due to a common interest (Kallioniemi, 1998, pp. 100-116).

Encounters between Finnishness and popular culture have at times been of interest to folklorists under the rubric “poplore” (Knuutila, 1974). In recent years a number of studies dealing with popular culture and national identity have appeared, which have taken nationality as constituted in the everyday practices and situations in which the products of popular culture are used (Edensor, 2002).

The models offered by popular and youth cultures are increasingly also lifestyle choices, in which transnational and national characteristics become creatively intermingled. At the same time, the traditional conflict between “patronizing” mainstream culture and popular culture has been mitigated or has lost some of its significance, which has greatly facilitated the reinvention of an epic like the *Kalevala*. Descriptions by the western press of Finland as “backward” were typical in the 1990s, but have now disappeared almost completely. However, as late as 1997 the English newspaper *The Guardian* still wrote “that Finland is a quietly cultured country, and – yes, all right – they do tend to have folk-dancing competitions on the telly most evenings” (*The Guardian Weekend*, 1997, p. 57).

As a result of this process, Finnishness became an ever more important source of inspiration for certain youth groups during the 1990s: for the skinheads because of their xenophobia, for heavy rock enthusiasts because of their interest in Finnish mythology and ancient times, and for the hip-hop movement because of their use of the Finnish language and its dialects.

The traditions for legitimising nationality have generally been sought in the distant past, the beginnings of time. Demands of originality and authenticity have been applied to them. Likewise the images attached to Finnishness can be seen either in a traditional or modern way. As a concept, Finnishness is quite vague and contradictory. Stereotypical images of Finnishness show nature (the land of thousands of lakes), taciturnity, silence, unpretentious authenticity and exotic marginality. These images also approach mythical interpretations of Finnishness: Kalevalaic shamanism, a culture of the supernatural and the liminality, as well as a mystic Easternness (Broms, 1985/1992, pp. 156-175). The Snellmanian and Fennomanian paternalistic and enlightened Finnishness, on the other hand, is part of a nationalist project aimed at education and at a specific civilizing ideal. From the beginnings of industrialization and modernization it has been at odds with international influences (consumerism and western hedonism) and with folk culture. This aspect can also be viewed as central when characterizing stereotypes of Finnishness.

Modern views of Finnishness aim to embrace the contradictions between these images instead of favouring one particular image over another. Mika Hannula (1997) has tried to see Finnishness as kaleidoscopically personified, at once both broad-ranging and private. Such an extended national identity embodies the popular, the marginal, and the “inferior,” all of which speak something of the essence of Finnishness. For Edensor (2002), that kind of national is dynamic, contested, multiple and fluid. This diversity, the multitudinous cultural effects, and the flexible symbols of the national produce an enormous cultural resource that is not a monolithic set of ideas adhered to by everyone, but a seething mass of cultural elements. This kind of conception is constantly in a process of becoming, of emerging out of the dynamism of popular culture, elusive and indeterminate, perpetually open to context, to elaboration and to imaginative reconstruction (Edensor, 2002, p. vii). The contradictions and paradoxes involved in Finnishness no longer need to be made presentable time and again; instead they themselves say something about how Finnishness is understood today.

The Kalevala and Popular Music

At the core of this understanding has always been the desire to see the unique and authentic characteristics of national identity, that which makes each nation particular. In the same way as folklorists have talked about our early spiritual inheritance (Siikala, 1996, p. 141), popular music, and in particular its 1960s rock ideology, has used romanticism and folk tradition to search for a form of expression that would relate to the past in the same way as, for example, the nineteenth-century Romantics turned to the Middle Ages for inspiration (Kallioniemi, 1998, pp. 61-76).

The poetry referred to here must be understood to include the entire ancient Finnish tradition, and not just the *Kalevala* epic compiled by Elias Lönnrot. A variety of ideologies and passions have entwined around music inspired by this tradition, ranging from artist-composers' works to New Age inspired pieces, to parodies of popular culture, and to “miscellaneous entertainment” (Häyrynen, 2005). Uses of the *Kalevala* as a means for this kind of “examination of identity” in popular music expression is an ideal example of how an ancient epic work can continue to open up for the present.

Musical expression has always fit naturally with the Kalevalaic poem (Jaakkola & Toivonen, 2005). The old epic singer's occupation has been seen to provide a transmission of the oral tradition, a kind of narrated history. This tradition evolved further with each generation of singers. Of particular interest has been that this transfer of the oral folk tradition has traditionally taken place through singing. Thus the linkage of the *Kalevala* to popular music also came about naturally and the impact of the *Kalevala* on the emergence of a national rock culture has been of particular importance. It has provided a lyrical-linguistic model on which a new type of expression in Finnish rock has been built since the 1970s (Knuuti, 2005, pp. 132-138).

Singing has a strong esoteric role in the *Kalevala*. Väinämöinen performed powerful acts through singing. The animals of the forest gathered to listen when he sang and his singing sank Joukahainen into the swamp. Important objects, like boats, were created by singing. There are numerous examples of this role of singing. The transfer of tradition through singing implies, according to Lauri Honko (2000, p. 10), that the *Kalevala* is a process that the collector of folklore Elias Lönnrot began with the five publications of the *Kalevala* between 1833 and 1862 and which has continued throughout the era of rock culture on to the present day, culminating in the audiovisual and intertextual *Kalevala*

represented, for example, by the *Hyper-Kalevala* (1996).

The Kalevala as an Object of Ideological Struggle and Parody

The rapidly changing climate of Finnish society after the Second World War and the pliability of the *Kalevala* to various purposes is portrayed well by how quickly it changed from an instrument of ideological battle to an object of parody between the 1950s and the early 1970s. This change was influenced by Finland's exceptionally rapid industrialization and urbanization after the war and the fact that "the parade doors opened to western mass culture in Finland after it recovered from the general strike (1956)" (Knuutila, 1992, p. 123).

In this context, the *Kalevala* became an instrument of ideological struggle due to the national values found in it as well as its musical and popular role. Both the left and the right used the epic in portraying their ideal Finland. In the 1950s, both therefore found themselves resisting the influx of American popular culture into Finland with the aid of the *Kalevala* and folk traditions. At this time, the *Kalevala* became the brightest star of Finnish national culture also for the SKDL (the Finnish People's Democratic League) communist youth. When they saw American culture threatening the national heritage, the best way to illustrate this threat was by portraying Hollywood as posing a threat to the *Kalevala*. In the mid-1950s the newspapers told Finns that the Americans were intending to shoot a film in Lapland based on the *Kalevala*. The news sparked the imaginations of the songsters of the SDNL (the Finnish Democratic Youth League). Thus, the song, "*Pari sanaa Kalevalan filmauksesta*," ("A Few Words About the Filming of the *Kalevala*") was born (Kurkela, 1986, p. 57). It vividly describes what a Hollywood version of the *Kalevala* would look like: Väinämöinen would be the leader of a jazz band, Kyllikki a jazz girl, Kullervo a gangster-cowboy, and Lemminkäinen a scalp-hunting Indian:

The Lemminkäinen, Ilmarinen, Aino-
maids agile, lithe and supple,
and the Northern slaves

All to the "States" will be taken to get
gold teeth.

Soon sings Väinämöinen: All right,
yeah...

Jazz, rumba, one or the other the
orchestra plays,

The witch-mistress of the Northland,
keeps the rhythm, tries the
drum.

Väinämö-daddyo grabs the
accordion, plants it on his
knee,
Plays the swing and the jitterburg.

Lemminkäiset, Ilmariset, Aino-neidot
sorjat,
Notkeat ja norjat, sekä Pohjan orjat
"Valtoihin" nyt kuljetetaankultahampaat
saamaan.
Kohta laulaa Väinämöinen: oolrait,
jees...

Jatsia, rumbaa tai jompaa kumpaa
orkesteri soittaa,
Pohjolan akka, tahtia hakkaa, rummulla
koittaa.

Väinämö-pappa haitarin nappaa,

polvelleen telaa,
pelaa swingin ja jitterburgin.

Themes from the *Kalevala* were, however, quite rare in Finnish popular music until the 1950s (Tolvanen, 2005, p. 124). Along with Kreetta Haapasalo (1815–1893), promoted by Topelius, the kantele had become a favorite of the Fennomans and supporters of the *Kalevala* tradition. In addition to *Kalevala* folk music, Haapasalo's repertoire included dance music and couplets intended to entertain the commoners. The Finnish couplet singers of the early twentieth century such as Pasi Jääskeläinen (1869–1920) and Olli Suolahti (1885–1951) often accompanied their singing with the kantele (Tolvanen, 2005, p. 127).

Since the 1920s, YLE, the Finnish Broadcasting Company, played a lot of folk music but the kantele, for some reason, remained rare. The same applied to film music. In the 1960s Martti Pokela appeared a great deal on television with his kantele-playing family and in his own way influenced the popularization of the *Kalevala* musical tradition. This happening perhaps, in part, contributed to a situation particular to the 1960s modern climate, in which the kantele and the *Kalevala* came to be seen as an old and embarrassing part of Finnish "birch-bark moccasin culture," only fit for parody at this stage. The habit of beat bands to perform dressed as Väinämöinen with all the requisite accessories was an example of this pop humor, which clearly also held a mocking tone (Bruun, Lindfors, Luoto, & Salo, 1998, p. 81).

Parody took, however, many forms, some of which introduced the renewal of tradition without degrading it. In addition to its parodic elements Wigwam's song "Häätö" ("Eviction"), which enjoyed international

acclaim in the 1970s, was also the beat era's bow to the Kalevalaic tradition:

Grunt and pant pufferiness
Another son halfwitmess
Go where I you order
To the other side of the Norther
(Pembroke, 1970).

Ähky puhku puhmeroinen
Toinen poika tohmeroinen
Mee sinne kun mä käsken
Pohjan tuulen tuolle puolen

This Kalevala-section "incanted" by Henrik-Otto Donner for the complicated song bears testimony to the interest the new Finnish rock culture felt for Kalevalaic expression (Meriläinen & Kononen, 2000).

Wigwam was a Finnish progressive pop supergroup that often introduced themes related to the *Kalevala* into their songs. In 1999, the bass player Mats Hulden, creator of the song "Häättö," prepared a new Swedish-language translation of the *Kalevala* with his father Lars Hulden (Silas, 2005, pp. 130-131). A particularly parodic example that also made use of tradition was the band Karelia, which combined beat music with Finnish sled songs and joikus, traditional Sami chants. Armas Nukarainen, Iivana Nyhtänköljä, Aslak Ninnu and Ferdi Sirmakka dressed up in Kalevala costumes and performed curiosities that made reference to the Kalevalaic world, like "Joiku Blues" and "Kerimäki Beat," crowed out by Nyhtänköljä (Edward Vesala) (Bruun, et al., 1998, pp. 179-180). In these songs, traditional Finnish music was presented with a modern musical accompaniment. Inspired by national romanticism, Karelia recorded a song called "Väinämöisen Soitto" ("Väinämöinen's Song") in 1971, at the same time that the popular progressive-tinged rock band Kalevala was so named after the national epic itself.

The Kalevala and the Rise of National Popular Music

Whereas the arrival of pop and rock music in Finland in the 1950s and 1960s was largely based on the production of imported songs and imitation of the Anglo-American pop/rock genre (Kallioniemi, 2000, pp. 80-92), an attempt was made in the 1970s to change the performing language into Finnish. In the early 1990s, the Dutch sociologist Louis van Elderen noticed that four trends formed the core of Finnish national popular music: old-fashioned mainstream popular music (humppa, waltz, tango), schlager or evergreen materials, and neo-folk music, all of them influencing Suomi Rock, which he called "Red Ochre rock," referring to

the red paint used on the wooden cottages dotted around the Finnish countryside (van Elderen, 1994, pp. 53-55).

As national roots were discovered during the 1970s and 1980s, Suomi Rock was gradually born. During this time, foreign and domestic influences merged in a unique way to form a recognizably Finnish pop music, which facilitated the birth of a nationally identifiable rock culture (Jalkanen & Kurkela, 2003, pp. 581-610). Here the *Kalevala* played an important role, both in the rise of neo-folk music and in the formation of a national rock-lyric and associated expression.

During the 1970s, in part as a result of the educational aesthetic dating from the 1950s, there was a big debate about whether Finnish bands should sing in English or in Finnish. Perhaps due to the neo-folklorist movement of the 1970s and the neo-Stalinist atmosphere of the Finlandization era, all Anglo-American popular culture influences were seen as unpatriotic. This was one of the reasons behind a rise in the interest in folk music during 1960s and 1970s, leading to a new kind of folk music which understandably also found inspiration in the *Kalevala*. "Laulupuu" (1975) by the group Pihasoittajat drew on this lyrical tradition for its textual influences:

I sing the oak onto the ground
Smooth branches for the oak
An apple to every branch
A golden wheel for each apple
A cuckoo to each wheel
(Pihasoittajat, 1975/1996)

Laulan tammen tantereelle
Tammelle tasaiset oksat
Joka oksalle omenan
Omenalle kultapyörän
Kultapyörälle käkösen

This verse is an example from the mid-1970s of a *Kalevala* and *Kanteletar* influenced pop-folk ballad that used tradition without parody. Neo-folk musicians searched for psychedelic influences and were interested in all kinds of folk music from children's songs to drinking songs. A reverent attitude toward the Kalevalaic tradition was also evident when pop-singer Jukka Kuoppamäki wrote a song about Väinämöinen (1974). Kuoppamäki underlined the forward-looking essence of the Finnish folk tradition by playing an electrically amplified wah-wah-kantele without a trace of parody (Bruun, et al., 1998, p. 180). For Kuoppamäki, the *Kalevala* also represented an occult science, which would lead the people of Väinölä to new-found prosperity in the years of Finlandization, at

a time when the search for authentic Finnishness through the *Kalevala* also served political and ideological purposes.

At this stage, mythological and esoteric references to the *Kalevala* were already abundant in Finnish pop music. The Red Ochre Rock of the 1980s employed jenkkä-tunes and sleigh songs in much the same way as foreign stars used reggae, country or latin music (Bruun, et al., 1998, p. 357). Kalevalaic melodies were apparent in the song "Tuonela" by the new wave band SIG, and, speaking of the Finnishness of his songs, the band's frontman Matti Inkinen referred to the *Kalevala*. In 1991, guitar legend Albert Järvinen recorded a song called "The Rise of the Kantele." Even the melodies of the most popular Finnish band of the 1980s, Dingo, influenced by British neo-romanticism, were compared to Kalevalaic ancient music (Jalkanen & Kurkela, 2003, pp. 612-14). The champions of neo-mythology, heavy art rock band CMX have on many occasions admitted to turning to the musical worlds of the *Kalevala* for inspiration, for example in their 1995 song "Rautakantele" (Bruun, et al., 1998, p. 465).

The referencing of the *Kalevala* in general was a consequence of the birth of a national Finnish-language rock culture. Professor Heikki Laitinen of the Sibelius Academy sees the grand Finnish vocal tradition as stretching from the Kalevalaic past to rock music. In the development of Suomi Rock in the 1980s, its key players made use of the most important features of the Kalevalaic cadence. In the same way, the rhyming of contemporary rap-artists repeats structures that were already familiar to the ancient Finns. All the world's cultures are dominated by singing, but in Finland this use of vocals has been even more pronounced because instruments have not had a very significant role in the tradition. The *Kalevala* was, after all, collected specifically from sung runes (Kotirinta, 2000).

According to Heikki Laitinen, Suomi Rock musicians tie into the tradition of rune singing, whereas the writers of Finnish pop tunes are strongly attached to the ideal of literary form. Laitinen also sees it as natural that hymns are currently the subject of re-interpretation for popular musicians. Even the oldest Finnish hymnbooks contained many Kalevalaic dialect verses, and when Suomi Rock was born, such dialect phrases became one of its key features (Kotirinta, 2000). Particularly the music of Finnish new wave artists uses plenty of dialect verse, as well as another Kalevalaic particularity, alliteration. This phenomenon is well illustrated, for example, by Tuomari Nurmio's song "On Aika Soittaa Sinfonia" ("It's time to play a

symphony") from the album *Punainen planeetta (Red Planet)*:

The beam will soon destroy
Our old home planet
It's time to play a symphony
As we agreed

Darling, no longer ask
The destination of our journey
Space is now our home
Nothing else matters

Maybe one day we will again
Hear the hum of the wind
Perhaps somewhere is another
Homeland as beautiful (Nurmio, 1982)

Säde räjäyttää pian
vanhan kotiplaneetan
on aika soittaa sinfonia
niin kuin sovittiin

Rakas, älä kysy enää
mikä on matkan määränpää
avaruus on nyt asuntomme
muu on samantekevää

Ehkä joskus saamme vielä
kuulla tuulen huminaa
ehkä jossakin on toinen
yhtä kaunis kotimaa

The 1990s, Neo-nationalism and the Beginning of Globalization

We've never had none of that, predictions and knights' castles and ghosts. We've been in the forests of Karelia, singing lamentations and playing the kantele. Maybe that's our heavy metal background. (Matti Inkinen, SIG, 1985, quoted in Bruun, et al., 1998, p. 491)

If the 1970s and 1980s are regarded as the golden era of Finnish rock culture, a period that gave birth to a huge number of different artists who – either in their shamanistic and primitive performance or in their lyrics – varied the Kalevalaic tradition, the 1990s provided a whole new framework for once again recycling the national mythology.

The recession of the early 1990s, Finland's entry into the European Union, and the increased pressures of internationalization and its related demands for greater economic efficiency led a large number of the youth to turn to the Finnish language, to the ancient past, and to the identity of the pre-industrial era for inspiration and "liberation." The *Kalevala* and its pagan

world, interest in the Middle Ages, esoteric matters, satanism and neo-mythology—all provided material for this transformation. The *Kalevala* was the means for rediscovering the mythical dawn of Finnish culture in an era of mobile phones and personal computers.

This interest in the mythical past was apparent already during the 1980s as musicians of the new generation drew inspiration from neo-paganism and neo-mythology. Combining Indian religions with the *Kalevala*, Petri Walli, singer and guitar player of Kingston Wall, created an eccentric world-view relating to Finnishness, which he called the Bock Saga, after the travel guide known as Ior Bock. Bock's real name is Holger Svedholm, and he became famous not only because of his theories, but because he was seeking Lemminkäinen's (one of the *Kalevala* heroes) cave from his own property. In his follow-up theory, Walli presented Finland as the original home of all the world's peoples, the roots of which were in Egypt. The lyrics of Kingston Wall's album *Tri-Logy* puzzled and undoubtedly also amused listeners. The album included many Kalevalaic tales and the *Kalevala* was represented in rhymes like "Every woman is Ain-O, every man is Sam-Po."

In the national romantic spirit, the artist Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (1870-1946) had imagined Finland as the cradle of the world's cultures and Bock built upon this idea by combining the sounds of the Finnish language in peculiar ways, offering an oral ancient history in which the Ice Age and Atlantis became linked. The temple of Lemminkäinen was awaiting discovery in Uusimaa, the world's spiritual centre, deep in the Finnish bedrock (Bruun, et al., 1998, p. 491). This kind of neo-mythology mixed Scandinavian mythologies, esoteric symbolism and the *Kalevala* with impunity but, for the same reason, provided fascinating material for the new Finnish pop music.

For a time during the 1990s it seemed that the *Kalevala* and Finnishness roused particular interest in international popular music and popular culture circles. The "Mysteries of Finnishness" were highly exaggerated when lo-fi dance artist Jimi Tenor was described as a suburban shamanistic craftsman from the wilderness, and the avant-garde techno act Panasonic was described as a cultural metaphor for the extreme poles of contemporary Finnish culture: primevalism and the ultramodernization of the Finnish high-tech revolution, linked to architect Alvar Aalto's functionalism. The folk music band Värttinä became an international success story because of the new boom in world music.

The "crazy" record producer Bill Drummond who came to Finland from Britain

conceived the idea of imaginary Finnish artists, such as a Sami punk band, and began to realize his ideas under the label Kalevala Records (Drummond, 2000, pp. 1-17; 109-121). Drummond's obsession with Finnish primitiveness went so far that he travelled to the Arctic Circle and buried a picture of Elvis Presley there in order to secure world peace:

I thought about the strange, crazy, commercially failed pop that I found in Finland. The British media never understood the idea behind Kalevala Records. It is, after all, quite unique that someone decides to stage and completely re-create a country's band culture on the basis of one's personal vision, as I did. When I published four Kalevala singles, the British press thought they were a joke. They thought we'd done it all back at home.

(Joenniemi, 2000, pp. 48)

Finland's entry into the European Union in 1995 gave a further impetus to those who wanted to reinterpret the Kalevalaic tradition: the Kalevala poetry recital world championships rewarded the best electronic song in Kalevala cadence and a Shaman of the Year title was awarded as well. Following the international musical styles of the time, the event was billed thus: "Arise out of your corners O Grunge-Kullervos and Hip-Hop Lemminkäinens! The guitar will do for a kantele, Väinö made it his own!"

In the 150th anniversary year of the *Kalevala* in 1999, the seven-part "Taivaantakoja" ("Skysmith") poem-song commissioned for the occasion commented on the relationship between national mythology and popular music. In addition to influences from the *Kalevala*, "Taivaantakoja" also drew on lullabies, incantations and love songs. Along with the soloists, the performance included an all-male choir, cellists, two kantele players, percussionists and bass players. As the group was performing, role players carried out a live-action role-play, based on the *Kalevala* and entitled *Vainovalkeat*, ("Persecution Fires") with the participation of 130 players (Piela, 2002, pp. 318-348). The *Kalevala* process was truly brought into the new millennium.

National and International Heavy Metal Bands

Well, there's a touch of Uuno and Kullervo in all us Finns, after all. A little more in some, a little less in others. Kullervo was also a pretty reflective guy so it applies to a thirty-year-old heavy-rock man like a fist to the eye. (Amorphis keyboardist Santeri

Kallio commenting on mythical *Kalevala* hero Kullervo. Hirn 2006).

Kalevalaic Finnish heavy metal achieved unique international visibility both at the end and in the beginning of the millennium. Heavy metal is the popular music category in which mythologies play a particularly important role and the *Kalevala* was perfectly suited for this context. A number of bands have combined heavy metal music and the *Kalevala*. This is based on a broader interest in the mythologies and national projects of different countries which emerged in metal music circles in the early 1990s. Of course, interest in mythology was already strong in heavy metal circles since the 1970s, when heavy music appeared as a working-class version of middle-class progressive rock in England. In Finland, however, the effects were not truly felt until the 1990s.

Viking metal, the “founding band” of which is generally taken to be the Swede Thomas “Quorthon” Forsberg’s band Bathory, is the best-known manifestation of this international phenomenon that reaches out to national mythologies. With his 1989 album *Hammerheart*, Quorthon, who originally played quite satanic black metal, created a wholly new kind of metal music which turned to Nordic myths, the golden shields of Valhalla and Odin, the one-eyed master of the ravens. The later connection between black metal and Viking metal can be seen mostly in the way in which nationalist thinking and pride in one’s ethnic roots have gained popularity with the more fanatic listeners. The so-called National Socialist Black Metal bands which form the more extreme contingent leave little room for misunderstanding regarding their rebellious attitude to political correctness. Finnish mainstream metal bands, however, respect our national mythology and use it as material and inspiration for music in which contemporary culture and the *Kalevala* meet on both a musical and textual level.

The most common example of a *Kalevala*-influenced heavy metal band is Amorphis and their song “My Kantele.” Time and again, the song has been presented as an example of ties between Finnish metal music and national mythology because the lyrics have been adapted from English translations of the poems of the *Kanteletar* (the whole of the *Kanteletar* has not, unfortunately, been translated into English).

Truly they lie, they talk utter nonsense
Who say that music reckon that the
 kantele
Was fashioned by a god

Out of a great pike’s shoulders
From a water-dog’s hooked bones:

It was made from the grief
Moulded from sorrow
Its belly out of hard days
Its soundboard from endless woes
Its strings gathered from torments
And its pegs from other ills

So it will not play, will not rejoice at all
Music will not play to please
Give off the right sort of joy
For it was fashioned from cares
Moulded from sorrow.

(Amorphis, 1996)

In the song the kantele is not a positive force, a symbol of creativity and culture, but instead its sound brings grief – the kantele plays its sorrow (Mäkeläinen, 2002, p. 5). This particular use of grief refers both to Slavic melancholy and to the dark imagery of death metal. The song’s tonal world reaches above all, however, in the direction of folk and progressive influences. On their first, more grim albums, *The Karelian Isthmus* (1993) and *Tales from the Thousand Lakes* (1994), the names of which already refer to basic Finnish clichés, the band used the English translation of the *Kalevala* to introduce archaic overtones to their melodic death metal. Through this combination of myth and metal, the band quickly achieved immense popularity, especially in Central Europe, and sold hundreds of thousands of records.

For a time, the band also tired of the stamp brought by the *Kalevala* and there are hardly any references to it in their 1999 album *Tuonela (Hades)* – with the exception of the name itself. Gradually the band returned to its success-bringing formula, however. The cover art of their 2003 album *Far From the Sun* can be regarded as the all-time best advertisement for *Kalevala* jewelry, and with the album *Eclipse* in 2006, the band returned also thematically to familiar lyrical grounds with great success – albeit this time with an English translation of Paavo Haavikko’s play *Kullervo*, which they became acquainted with through Pekka Lehto’s failed film project (Haavikko, 1989). The film music originally commissioned from Amorphis thus easily transformed into an album of their own. And finally it was made into a trilogy, as their next album, *Silent Waters* (2007), which focused on the character of Lemminkäinen and was based on translations of Pekka Kainuulainen’s *Kalevala*-inspired poems, was followed by another album of translations of Kainuulainen’s work. Published in 2009, the band’s ninth studio album, *Skyforger*, actually

focuses on *Kalevala's* blacksmith, Ilmarinen, even though the name refers to the Finnish ancient god Ukko who, like Thor, forges the cover of the sky. The stories again travel along familiar Kalevalaic trails. The wonder-machine Sampo, for example, which Ilmarinen forges and which according to the epic creates wealth for its owner, is the product of a long and painful process:

Sparks sent flying, my mind thundering
The room of my heart flashing to the
sky

The flaring and fumes fill my senses
Pervade this room and this space

The days, they blend into the nights
The moon, the sun unite
Order of stars expires
A wonder is born

I listen and aim, I observe
I use all the forces and let it transpire
I confront the darkness absolute
And blinding, dazzling brilliance

From roaring flames the shapes emerge
Come forth they do with vile charms
Their poisoned core hides in beauty
But I see and perceive their deceit, I see

Into the blaze I shove them back
To lose their forms to hungry fire
Again and yet again
I start my work anew
(Kainulainen, 2009)

Without doubt, Amorphis has provided more international visibility for the *Kalevala* than any other cultural player, with perhaps the exclusion of J. R. R. Tolkien, who was fascinated by its language and mythos.

The History-consciousness of Kalevalaic Heavy Metal

Metal bands have sung of themes as wide-ranging as the raid-warning fires on the coastlines, the plunders of the people of Häme, and the conditions in Finland after the Ice Age. The band Scum from Eastern Finland delight in Karelian mysticism:

We are from Karelia, and the lyrics come from the heart. The region has much more mystery to offer than just the tales of the *Kalevala*. The border during the Greater Wrath (the Great Northern War) runs through Parikkala. In ancient times, raid-warning fires were lit on the nearby *Haukkavuori* and

elves are said to have lived there. All of this provides inspiration for the lyrics.
(Pete A, Scum in DeFresnes, 1996, A12)

Even black metal musicians interested in the forces of darkness no longer limit their quotations to satanic verses; instead, their songs resound with Kalevalaic mythology and Finno-Ugric pathos. Black metal and death metal growlers have lost their hearts to national romanticism.

Our northern nature inspires these bands, but even the imaginations of those swearing in the name of 1980s “old school” heavy metal have started to soar. In the style of its 2002 album *Kalevala Mysticism*, the band Morningstar from Äänekoski sought to connect traditional heavy metal and the *Kalevala*:

Under the northstar we were born...
Gods of nature will guide our way
Through the evil, insane world...

I believe that some day
When the world is gone...
We'll still be here in the North,
Our spirits will become
One with the land...

Strong as the sons of Kaleva
We'll stay alive, choose our side...
(Honkonen, 2002)

The band, founded in 1988, describes in their song “Sons of Kaleva” one of the central themes of Northern heavy metal mythology, survivalism. The sons of the North have been hardened by the cold winds to such an extent that even major upheavals in the world cannot sever the connection between the mystic soil and the heroes of the *Kalevala*. On the album's cover, though, heavily armored warriors attack a giant gothic-style castle – hardly a fitting image for something so attached to Finnish history, however mythical.

The band's vocalist Ari Honkonen explains what the *Kalevala* and Finnish folklore represent to him:

It is an interesting topic! I'm not interested so much in nationalist elements, but in cultural ones. We have a rich culture, which we need not be ashamed of. Instead of a viking helmet, a hammer, and Thor, we have birch-bark moccasins, sisu, incantations, songs, and bear-hunting spears! Being between East and West is always interesting. Metal music can do with

lyrics, themes from a time and culture in which men had to be made of iron and ships from wood.

(A. Honkonen, personal communication, February 26, 2004)

The band's earlier albums have already dealt with the history of the North: Saint Olaf, the crusades to Finland, shaman spells, and burning boats (De Fresnes, 1996, A12). The cultural conventions relating to heavy metal music and hero epics are similar around the world, but they also take on local features. This commitment to the local has produced the kind of originality that Finnish music has been acclaimed for in the international music media.

It seems that a large number of different metal bands are conceived in Finland today, some more strongly linked to our national culture than others. Perhaps being situated between East and West has brought this current eclecticism to the Finnish metal music field. After Lordi won the Eurovision Song Contest in 2006, Finland must have become even more closely associated with heavy metal as a nation. Finland appears to be one of the few Western European countries where metal music is almost constantly at the top of the charts. Kalevalaic tones permeate the field of Finnish metal music, all the way to the smallest and most bizarre musical subcultures. The band Ensiferum with its Bathory-inspired Viking metal constantly bows toward the *Kalevala* and its own Finnishness. In addition to the instrumental "Kalevala Melody," Finnish national culture receives tribute in the *Finnish Medley* – a potpourri which includes the songs "Karjalan Kunnaila," "Myrskyluodon Maija," and "Metsämiehen Laulu" (Ensiferum, 2010). The band's album covers feature a bearded man, greatly resembling Väinämöinen, perhaps the most central character from the *Kalevala*, carrying a sword and a shield emblazoned with the Finnish flag which, of course, didn't exist in archaic times. The image is otherwise a reference to mythical past, but this one thing is totally (and hopefully intentionally) anachronistic.

Many other Finnish heavy metal bands also draw on the *Kalevala*. The band Aarni's song "The Weird of Vipunen" makes use of the giant Antero Vipunen from the *Kalevala* to delve into Tuonela – a world of mummified reindeer and shaman drums. The very name of the group Finntroll combines Finnishness and mythology. In its imaginative songs priests are chased away by trolls.

There are heavy metal musicians also outside Finland who have seen the *Kalevala* as representing something fresh, perhaps inspired by the interest shown in the epic by J. R. R.

Tolkien and, even more so, by the artistic and commercial triumph of Amorphis.

All this goes to show that the *Kalevala* is part of contemporary youth culture. Finnish youth of today swing in the cross-winds of national and international cultures and create new identities from this encounter (Junkkari, 1996, p. 244). On the other hand, national identity nowadays closely ties in with popular culture. Especially its local adaptations in a way form the basis for a new national culture (Suoninen, 2003, pp. 114-115). Thus it is no wonder that music has also become hybrid, its cultural and tonal influences deriving from many different sources. The folk tunes of the *Kalevala* sound alongside the riffs of Anglo-American metal music and even "kebab-metal" (surely a humorous definition, meant to mock the current diversity of metal genres) melodies hailing from the Balkans. Similarly, songs can be inspired by the *Kalevala*, *The Lord of the Rings*, or by the American horror writer H. P. Lovecraft. The heritage of the heavy metal genre, intertextuality, irony and a respectful awareness of traditions are as much a part of contemporary metal music as is adolescent masculine bluster and rebelliousness. Alongside countercultural symbols like studs, leather, ammunition belts and death symbols, many bands value axes, helmets, shields, myths of the past and esoteria, as well as, of course, the imagery of the *Kalevala*.

In the early 1990s, the semiotician Henri Broms said that national life here in Finland was losing its mystical-symbolic dimension, its myth and colourfulness (Broms, 1985/1992, pp. 156-164). Having only so recently been a people of seers and songs, we now only sang when drunk. The disappearance of the Eastern mentality in favour of Western hard truths has brought about the tragic dissolution of emotiveness, a social nausea, and an empty place where, until recently, existed symbols, rhythms, and images.

According to Broms, the power of Finnish culture comes from the people's mythical character – we are, as the Finnish philosopher J. V. Snellman said, a people of "nocturnal knowledge." (Broms, 1985/1992, pp. 165-175.) Through this feeling and mythical twilight, geographic locations quickly achieve symbolic significance. In Finland, Karelia, the presumed location of the *Kalevala* country, and, in European cultural history, India have often represented a journey to mankind's innocent and creative period of dreams and childhood, a journey to the culture's subconscious. The talents of these symbolic places have been music, songs, and dance.

In 2003, Kari Kallioniemi produced a series about the relationship between popular

music and national identity for the Finnish Broadcasting Company's television channel Teema. In the process, he interviewed S. Albert Hynninen, the singer-songwriter for the doom metal band Reverend Bizarre, and also a student of folkloristics at the University of Turku. In an episode entitled "Night and Day," Hynninen summed up the feelings of his generation in a way that immediately brings to mind Broms's words from the early 1990s. Hynninen spoke of his interest in this "old way of feeling" as well as the prevalence of images of Tuonela in Finnish national mythology, exemplified by the work of Finnish artists Hugo Simberg, Kalervo Palsa and Alpo Jaakola, among others (Takamaa (Hinterland)-television series, YLE Teema, 2003).

Does this kind of death imagery and the legacy of national mythological angst reflect the nausea of the Finns' overly efficient Western society for exactly the reasons Broms suggests? Maybe the Finns are indeed forever losing something of their way of feeling, a way that – on the other hand – contemporary youth cultures and their music are once again striving to grasp. Heavy music and its reinterpretation of the *Kalevala* provides a channel to that endangered way of feeling.

Another perspective on the *Kalevala* and the reinterpretation of traditions it represents is provided by the kantele-playing child star Viola who leapt to fame in 2006 with her appearances on the children's programme *Pikku Kakkonen* on the Finnish television channel TV 2. In her hands, the Kalevalaic instrument is transformed into a straightforward means of self-expression and accompaniment for the younger generation (Uotila, 2006). On her album, Viola Uotila sings and plays traditional children's songs, a few Finnish folk tunes, as well as Anglo-American folk songs. All have in common the fact that their sunny atmosphere is as far from any Tuonela imagery as it could possibly be.

The Kalevala Lives on Through its Interpretations

As a phenomenon, the popularization of the *Kalevala* is almost as old as the *Kalevala* itself. The malleability of the *Kalevala*, or "Kalevalaness," to countless appropriations in schools, on stage, in music, in literature, in movies, in comic books and in jewelry as well as in clothes, is undeniable evidence of its persistence in the Finnish culture. According to folklorist Seppo Knuutila, the *Kalevala* in all its versions and adaptations has penetrated Finnish cultural and social life to such an extent that we do not even notice how the phenomenon surrounds and affects us daily (Knuutila, 2002,

pp. 250-251). At issue, then, is the absorption of the *Kalevala* into Finnish culture in a way the mental depth and extent of which is almost impossible to show.

One characteristic of national symbols is the ease with which they permeate everyday thinking. As a written text, the *Kalevala* has been present in Finnish culture for more than 170 years: it lives on in constantly varying interpretations; it reproduces, changes, and renews. But the sung oral tradition from which Elias Lönnrot collected the material for his cohesive *Kalevala* is much older than this. The dim echoes and even clear processual variants of these songs are likely to appear in Finnish popular music in the future, sung both in Finnish and in English. This likelihood is probably typical of every country's epic folk traditions; the English are unlikely to soon reject the Arthurian knightly romance they partly inherited from the Continent nor the Greeks their quarrelsome Pantheon, so firmly have they been forged into the cultural deep structures of those countries.

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