

Music from the Thousand Lakes

A one-day seminar on Music from Finland, Karelia, and the Meänkieli

Date: 14 October 2025

Time: 1.30 pm-6 pm

Venue: Seminar Room 204, Faculty of Music, Schwarzman Centre, Radcliffe Observatory
Quarter, University of Oxford, OX2 6GG

or

Online: link provided closer to event date

Tickets: [click here](#)



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Schedule

Time	Speaker	Presentation Title
1.30-2.00 pm	MA Dalva Lamminmäki	Kantele: Played, Written, and Archived
2.00-2.30pm	Prof. Philip Bullock	Mapping Multilingual Helsinki/Helsingfors: Sibelius's Work in the Theatre
2.30-3.00pm	Dr Kristian Wahlström	Teaching Metal Music Performance in Finland: Balancing Between Preserving a Music Tradition and Promoting Students' Innovations
3.30-4.00pm	Coffee & Tea Break	
4.00-4.30pm	Dr Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi	The Role of Song Lyrics in the Reclamation and Revitalisation of Meänkieli
4.30-5.00pm	Dr Charlotte Doesburg	Familial Bonds and Childhood Nostalgia in Metal Music from Finnish and Russian Karelia
5-6pm	Drinks & Nibbles	

Kantele: Played, Written, and Archived

The kantele is the national instrument of Finland, which has been played in the area around the eastern Baltic Sea and Karelia for centuries. In the Karelian-Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, the Kantele has a mythological origin; the first kantele was said to be made from the jawbones of a pike and the hair of young maidens.

The collection of folklore in Finland began in the first half of the 19th century. The Folklore Archives seek to collect oral tradition, personal narratives, and memory lore. The book series *Suomen Kansan Vanhat Runot* ('Ancient Poems of the Finnish People') contains a total of around 100,000 poems, nearly all *Kalevala*-metre folk poems (published between 1908 and 1948). Elias Lönnrot compiled the Finnish national epic, *Kalevala*, based on the collected poetry.

In this presentation, I will briefly introduce the use of SKVR Database of Old Poems (www.skvr.fi) and explore the cultural meanings of kantele instruments by using examples from archival texts. The excerpts are taken from a corpus and sorted by the search word "kantele". As a method, I employ close reading to research and understand the intended message and meaning of the text.

Biography

MA Dalva Lamminmäki is a doctoral grant researcher at the University of Eastern Finland. Her doctoral dissertation, which belongs to the field of folklore studies, examines Finnish sauna culture as a locus of both traditional and modern well-being in Finland and as intangible cultural heritage.

Mapping Multilingual Helsinki/Helsingfors: Sibelius's Work in the Theatre

Located at the easternmost reach of what has typically constituted 'Western' Europe, and – at the same time – having a significant history as one of the most Westerly outposts of the Russian Empire, Helsinki (or Helsingfors in Swedish) is one of Europe's newest capitals. Deliberately founded as the capital of the then Duchy of Finland in 1812, it constitutes an attempt by the Russian authorities to challenge Swedish influence (as represented by the former capital, Åbo, known as Turku in Finnish). My talk examines Helsinki's status as the Finnish capital under the period of Russian rule (1808-1917) and in the first decade of independence, exploring the parallel histories of its Finnish and Swedish-language institutions. Challenging accounts that have emphasised national romanticism, a search for self-determination and a rejection of Russian influence as decisive aspects of Finnish nineteenth-century culture, I foreground instead cosmopolitanism and linguistic hybridity as key facets of the city's make-up. In particular, I argue for the importance of the scores that Jean Sibelius wrote for a number of stage productions, and which illustrate his extensive and productive collaboration with a number of Finland's Swedish-speaking writers, as well as connecting the city to artistic movements elsewhere in Europe.

Biography

Philip Bullock is Professor of Russian Literature and Music at the University of Oxford, and Fellow and Tutor in Russian at Wadham College. He has published widely on aspects of Russian culture from the eighteenth century to the present day, and has a parallel interest in the comparative histories of the Nordic countries, particularly Finland. He edited and translated *The Correspondence of Jean Sibelius and Rosa Newmarch, 1906-1939* (2011) and, with Daniel Grimley, edited *Music's Nordic Breakthrough: Aesthetics, Modernity, and Cultural Exchange, 1890–1930* (2021). Amongst other projects, he is currently engaged in a study of the Lithuanian composer and painter, Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis, whose 150th anniversary falls this year.

Teaching Metal Music Performance in Finland: Balancing Between Preserving a Music Tradition and Promoting Students' Innovations

Metal is often an important outlet for emotions and aggression (Sharman & Dingle 2015). In instrumental music learning, encouraging students' creativity promotes their self-actualization (Rogers 1994) and supports a good relationship with music (Kurkela 1993; Björk 2016). However, without studying the music tradition, students could remain reinventing the wheel. Therefore, this session discusses a frequent pedagogical topic: how could tradition and innovation be balanced most fruitfully?

With this problem, aesthetic music education (Reimer 1972) and praxial music education (Elliott 1995) have been regarded as opposing philosophical poles. For their integration, I suggest that the process of learning music can be analogous to the principles of academic research. In academia (see e.g., Garofalo 2023), original research does not exist without fundamental awareness of previous studies. Conversely, repeating previous research can never suffice, but original research problems and results are self-evidently crucial.

I discuss how I have practically applied this thought to metal pedagogy. Firstly, I present my (Wahlström 2022) pedagogical design called Student-Centered Musical Expertise (SCME). Secondly, I explore a pedagogical application of Clark Terry's practice method for improvisation called Imitation-Assimilation-Innovation (see O' Donnell 2011). This is illuminated by my empirical study on teaching metal lead guitar and hard rock groove.

Biography

Dr Kristian Wahlström is an established guitarist and has played professionally for over 20 years in the Finnish music scene. As a freelancer, he has performed live with, e.g., Michael Monroe (Hanoi Rocks) and Perttu Kivilaakso (Apocalyptica) as well as recorded with Darude among others. He has taught guitar and bands now for over 20 years at the Helsinki Pop & Jazz Conservatory, a pioneering institution for popular music in the Nordic countries. He also teaches guitar pedagogy. He holds a PhD in musicology from the University of Helsinki. His research interests include student-centered pedagogy, groove, and psychodynamic music research.

The Role of Song Lyrics in the Reclamation and Revitalisation of Meänkieli

Meänkieli is a minoritised Finno-Ugric language traditionally spoken in northern Sweden. It became endangered following the colonial policies of the Swedish state. This presentation analyses the function of contemporary Meänkieli song lyrics in the reclamation and revitalisation of the language and culture. The amount of Meänkieli in the songs in the data set varies from names, words, or phrases within a Swedish/English frame to lyrics written and sung entirely in Meänkieli. Thematically and emotionally, the songs express a longing for and a glorification of Northern Sweden, or a resistance to the majority society and culture. The songs diversify the Swedish soundscape and help process traumatic experiences, while also supporting the younger generations' linguistic and cultural expression and identities. This presentation is based on work conducted with Constanze Ackermann-Boström (Uppsala University) and Pär Poromaa Isling (Umeå University).

Biography

Riitta-Liisa Valijärvi is Associate Professor of Finnish and Minoritised Languages at University College London and Associate Professor (*docent*) of Finno-Ugric Languages at Uppsala University. Her research areas include language revitalisation and reclamation, minoritised languages (including Meänkieli, West Greenlandic, and North Sámi), language documentation and description, nonbinary and gender-inclusive language, and music.

Familial Bonds and Childhood Nostalgia in Metal Music from Finnish and Russian Karelia

Karelia is a transnational region divided by the Finnish and Russian border. It is symbolically unified through its centuries-old traditions of folklore, culminating with the publication of the *Kalevala* by Elias Lönnrot in 1849. For many metal musicians with Karelian roots, the *Kalevala* and the folklore associated with it form not only an important source of inspiration but also identification. Due to the weakness of Karelian identity, metal musicians in the exploration of their Karelian roots often turn to folklore. However, rather than only adapting the well-known stories of the epic, they are increasingly adapting the principles upon which the folklore rests.

One of these principles is the importance of familial bonds and childhood. The family provides a safe home during childhood, but parents, siblings, and other (deceased) relatives can also give advice and counsel during adulthood. The recurring appearance of music centred upon childhood experiences, as well as advice given to adult children, can be read as a continuation of the age-old world in which Finnish Karelian folk poetry was practised. Thereby, Karelian metal musicians show two enduring aspects of Karelian identity: familial bonds and the centrality of the home in childhood recollections.

Biography

Dr Charlotte Doesburg is a Leverhulme Trust Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Faculty of Music, University of Oxford and a Junior Research Fellow at Somerville College, University of Oxford. Her current research project focuses on identity negotiations by metal music artists from the transnational region of Karelia. She has a PhD from University College London (UCL, 2022) on Finnish national identity, Karelian Finnish folklore and Finnish metal music. Charlotte has published in several journals, *Metal Music Studies* (2021) and the *Journal of Finnish Studies* (2024), and co-edited the volume *Multilingual Metal, Sociocultural, Linguistic, and Literary Perspectives on Heavy Metal Lyrics* (Emerald, 2020).