

# Finland meets the Balkans: Accordionist **Teija Niku** debuts with her Grupa Balkan and ***Finsko Pajdusko***



**Teija Niku** (born 1982 in Haapavesi, Finland) is an accordion player with extensive experience in performing ever since she was 7 years old. Her first instrument, the 2-row accordion, led her way towards folk music, and even though she took classical lessons on her 5-row chromatic button accordion for a few years as a teenager, it never felt right for her.

Today Teija Niku is a professional folk musician with a master's degree from the famous Sibelius Academy Folk Music Department. She plays a great variety of music: Nordic folk music, Finnish tango & schlager, accordion evergreens, French musette, etc. But her true

speciality is the folk music from the Balkan region, which she's had the honour to learn directly from great accordion masters **Lelo Nika** and **Sasko Velkov**. Not to mention that one of the most important mentors and teachers in Teija's accordion playing history has been **Maria Kalaniemi**.

*– I am very lucky that I have had the chance to study accordion with the masters, Teija says.*

Teija Niku & Grupa Balkan plays folk music from the Balkans – a region, where music is often characterized with fast tempos and heartbreakingly romantic melodies. The virtuosity of the band and pure joy of playing can be heard in the tricky ornaments and improvised solos. Teija Niku's original compositions include typical Balkan folk music tradition ingredients, but you can hear flavours of Nordic tradition in her music as well. Folk tunes from Serbia, Romania, Macedonia and Bulgaria turn into feminine yet powerful versions in Teija's hands.

*– When people listen to Balkan folk music, most notice first the unusual rhythms, but personally I have always been especially inspired by the rich harmonies and skilful decorations, Teija continues.*

Teija Niku also plays in bands Polka Chicks and Karuna. Grupa Balkan are: **Tommi Asplund**, violin (e.g. Tsuumi Sound System), **Tuomas Logrén**, guitar, mandolin, dobro (e.g. Frigg) and **Ilkka Heinonen**, double bass (e.g. Juhiorkesteri, Ruuti, Freilach mit Kneidlach).

## **For more info, please contact:**

Rockadillo Records, Ilmarinkatu 12 A 2, 33500 Tampere, Finland  
records@rockadillo.fi Tel: +358-3-213 1260 Fax: +358-3-213 1297

## **Bookings:**

Tapio Korjus, Rockadillo Production Oy  
tapio@rockadillo.fi

www.rockadillo.fi  
www.teijaniku.com

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