

Piirpauke Stronger Than Ever

Piirpauke, the pioneer of Finnish world music since their establishing in 1974, has renewed its line-up and released a new album, "Koli" (Rockadillo Records, 2010). In a way, the new album is a return to the group's roots as a jazz band playing Finnish folk songs. The central figure of the band, **Sakari Kukko** and a long-time Piirpauke member **Ismaila Sane** have now been joined by top-class jazz rhythm section **Eerik Siikasaari & Rami Eskelinen** (from Trio Töykeät), as well as rock guitarist **Jukka Orma** (Sielun Veljet etc.).

The music on the album comes partly from the roots of the Finnish pelimanni music, partly from the classical compositions from the time of the Finnish national romanticism – all performed with a strong multicultural soundscape in a true Piirpauke style. Four of the album's tracks are original compositions by Jean Sibelius (1865 - 1957), including the highly popular concert piece "Valse Triste". The arrangements are made with sense of style, closely following and respecting the original works but also making them full-bodied Piirpauke pieces in their own right.

"Koli" entered World Music Charts Europe in September 2010 at Number 2, and climbed to Number 1 spot in October. A Finnish artist hasn't been at Number 1 on the chart for several years. This is also the first Number 1 position of Piirpauke's history.

The 2010 Piirpauke live line-up is from left to right:
Ismaila Sane - percussion
Eerik Siikasaari - double bass
Jukka Orma - guitars
Sakari Kukko - saxes, flutes, piano
Rami Eskelinen - drums



Sakari Kukko talks about the new album "Koli"

Piirpauke was formed in 1974 when a group of jazz musicians started using folk music as a base for improvisations. Our repertoire quickly extended towards Balkan and even further, and in the course of years the band has had several international members. My interest in classical music could also be heard in the repertoire: Piirpauke has played tunes by Mozart, Schubert, Dvorak, Ravel, Shostakovitch, Beethoven, Bartok, de Falla, Klami and Merikanto. After traveling around the World both musically and physically the circle is now full – jazz musicians are again playing Finnish folk music. Having said that, the connection between traditional and classical music is now the main theme of the album, as well as national romanticism, indicated by the album title and the wood grouse on the front cover.



The opening track **Blue Alma** is from a series of Ostrobothnian dances, opus 17 a no. 3, moderato tranquillo, composed hundred years ago by Toivo Kuula (1883–1918). This composition represents the culmination point between Finnish folk and art music. One of the legends of Finnish folk music, Matti Haudanmaa (1858–1936), played also **Paimenen polska** (Polska del Pastor) to Toivo Kuula. **Kaustinen-Dakar** begins by two more melodies from Matti Haudanmaa's repertoire (**Kaapo Syrjälä's Polska from Kurikka** and **Heikki Rintala's Polska from Lapua**) but leads to Senegal, proving that polska and mbalax are the same. Just like polska and buleris! **Romance** by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky is the only non-Finnish composition on this album. At the time Finland was a grand duchy of Tsarist Russia. Tchaikovsky was born in Finno-Ugric Udmurtia and has always been dear to the Finns. He was also an influence to Sibelius, so he suits this album's theme very well.

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) composed **Musette** for a play by Adolf Paul called König Christian (King Christian). I dedicate this version to my father Pauli Kristian Kukko. Sibelius had a vision of bagpipes when he was composing this piece, and the folk music influences are obvious. In **Rondino**, Sibelius is assumed to be looking back on his childhood, and **Romanssi** (Romance) is his response to Tchaikovsky's challenge. It has been said that Sibelius found his true self after hearing the Ingrian folksinger Larin Paraske in 1891 and visiting the wilderness of Karelia. Koli in northern Karelia was the scenery where numerous Finnish artists of the national romanticism era came for inspiration.

Sibelius told his son-in-law that he had a dream in which he composed a jazz piece. However, he didn't write it down when he woke up, and felt very sorry about it afterwards. Well, at least a jazz musician has now composed **Ainola Festivo** under the influence of Jean's **Romance**. On Sibelius' worldwide hit **Valse Triste** I hear some flamenco influences. **Lo-Hi** is based on the Eastern Karelian kantele song **Maanitus** (Trepatska). I found it on a compilation album called **Entiset etniset**, which contains some of the oldest folk music recordings by the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE. On the compilation it was performed by Vanja Tallus a.k.a. Ivan Trofimoff. From the same archive compilation I found **Pippuripolska** (Spicy Polska), performed by Riskun pelimannit from Karvia. **Konstan parempi valssi** (Konsta's Better Waltz) by Konsta Jylhä (1910–1984) was the biggest hit of the folk music boom in the early 1970's, soon challenged by Piirpauke's **Konevitsan kirkonkellot**. It was about time to make a Piirpauke interpretation of Konsta's signature tune.