



MARCH 2024

# Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter Newsletter





# FINLANDIA FOUNDATION SEATTLE CHAPTER

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Foundation Seattle Chapter board  
through June, 2024.

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Members-at-Large serve two-year, staggered  
terms. 1st year terms begin July 1.

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# Letter from the President

Suomi Seura, an organization based in Finland that serves the interests of Finnish people living abroad, presents each year the "Finnish Expatriate of the Year honor to "a Finn living abroad or a descendant of Finnish emigrants who has been particularly successful in their field". The 2023 Finnish Expatriate of the Year award was given to the Finnish Expatriate Choir, led by Maria Männistö and Eva-Christina Pietarinen, who founded the choir during the Covid pandemic with singers in North America and many European countries. The choir's first performance was (virtually) at the 2021 Finnish Expatriate Parliament and following that event the group continued to rehearse online and released a CD titled Yli rajojen/Across Borders in December 2022. Performances at the 2023 FinnFest followed, and for this summer the choir is planning a tour in Finland. Congratulations Eva-Christina, Maria and the Expatriate Choir!

The music from the CD is available on Spotify (search for Yli Rajojen in Spotify) and on Bandcamp through this link: <https://finnishexpatriatechoir.bandcamp.com/album/yli-rajojen-beyond-borders>. More information about the award and the choir is in the Suomi Seura publication Suomen Silta, which you can read on the organization's website <https://suomi-seura.fi/>. The magazine is available in Finnish, English and Swedish.

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ilmari Kianto, a notable Finnish author. He published some 60 books over a career that spanned 6 decades, however, is known almost exclusively for 2 novels: Punainen viiva and Ryysyrannan Jooseppi, which depict the lives of poor people in the Kainuu region of Finland. Nearly 200 of Kianto's texts have been used in compositions, for example, his poem Nälkämaan laulu was turned into a song by Oskar Merikanto and Aulis Sallinen composed an opera from Punainen Viiva.

2024 also marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of poet and children's literature author Kirsi Kunnas. In addition to authoring children's books, she translated books by authors such as Tove Jansson, Astrid Lindgren, Lewis Carroll and Maurice Sendak into Finnish. Her sons are singer/songwriter Martti Syrjä and guitarist Mikko Syrjä of the band Eppu Normaali, which was quite popular in my youth in Finland.

Speaking of language and literature, Lily Obed, FFSC Finnish language instructor for the past several years, is not able to continue in this position and therefore we are looking for a new language teacher. If this is something that interests you, please contact us by email at [info@finlandiafoundationseattle.com](mailto:info@finlandiafoundationseattle.com). The Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter annual meeting will be held at the Finnish Lutheran Church in Seattle on Wednesday April 24th at 6:30 PM. The agenda for the meeting includes officer's reports from the past year, discussion about the future of FFSC and election of board members. Please join us for this important event!

Soon after the annual meeting is Vappu, which for several years has been celebrated at Idylwood Park in Redmond. This year the Vappu picnic will be on Sunday April 28th. Details about the annual meeting, Vappu picnic and other local events will be posted on FFSC website ([www.finlandiafoundationseattle.com](http://www.finlandiafoundationseattle.com)) and on Facebook.



FFSC PRESIDENT

## Letter from the Editor

Spring has arrived to Seattle and so have the cherry blossoms! Thank you for everyone who I got to meet at the Finnish Independence Day Dinner in Seattle, I am very glad you have enjoyed reading the previous newsletter and I am sure you will find this one interesting as well! We have many interesting news and stories to cover.

I am thrilled to announce that you can now find Finlandia Foundation of Seattle in Instagram: @finlandiafoundationseattle. Discover events, new places and important announcements along cultural facts about Finland. Give it a follow, let me know if there are any interesting events and I am happy to share it to our account!

Now it's time to apply for Scholarships and Grants for projects related to Finland up to \$1000! On the page 17 you will find more information about successful applications and requirements. Deadline for applications is April 1, 2024. Winners will be notified by April 15, 2024. Get creative and send your application sooner than later!

Have you packed your picnic baskets ready? Vappu is around the corner and it will be fun to get together with this community again, have Finnish treats and meet new people. Lastly I want to remind you to attend the Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter Annual Meeting, more details you can find [here](#):



*Laura Galeev*

FFSC NEWSLETTER EDITOR



## JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL MEETING.

FINLANDIA FOUNDATION SEATTLE CHAPTER INVITES YOU ON WEDNESDAY **APRIL 24 6:30 – 7:30 PM** TO THE FINNISH LUTHERAN CHURCH, 8504 13TH AVENUE NW, SEATTLE

FFSC MEMBERS: PLEASE JOIN US AT THE ANNUAL MEETING TO HEAR FFSC OFFICER'S REPORTS FOR THE PAST YEAR, DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF FFSC AND ELECT BOARD MEMBERS.





# The Three Questions

**EELI TOLVANEN IS A FINNISH PROFESSIONAL NATIONAL HOCKEY LEAGUE (NHL) PLAYER FOR THE SEATTLE KRAKEN TEAM. HE WAS BORN AND GREW UP IN VIHTI, FINLAND.**



In this column we will be interviewing fascinating Finnish minds and learning about their life in Seattle area. We asked Eeli Tolvanen The Three Questions and are sharing those with you.

**Finland has a strong hockey tradition and has produced many NHL talents. How does it feel to represent your home country in the NHL, and do you find yourself drawing inspiration from any Finnish hockey legends? How do you think your Finnish background contributes to the diversity and richness of the Kraken team?**

It's an honor to represent Finland either playing in

Seattle and for the Kraken or in the national team. I've always looked up to Finnish players that made it to the NHL and it was a dream for me to make it one day.

**In a sport as dynamic as hockey, teamwork is crucial. How do you build and maintain strong chemistry with your teammates both on and off the ice? Are there any memorable moments that highlight the unique bond within your team, and how do these connections contribute to success on the rink?**

Team chemistry is big in hockey for us in Seattle, it's always been important that everyone can be themselves in the locker room and ever since joining the Kraken I've always enjoyed to

go to the rink and travel with my teammates. Best memories are the games or even the travel when we get to explore other cities and go for nice meals.

**Hockey is not just a physical sport but also a mental one. Can you share any pre-game rituals or mental preparation techniques you use to stay focused and calm under the pressure of intense matches?**

I'm the kinda guy who doesn't have lots of rituals of course I always take a nap during the day and have couple cups of coffee on my way to the arena and then at the rink just try to relax and get my mind the right spot for the night.

# VUODENAJAT SEASONS

By Melanie A Wood, MBA

Photography by Melanie A Wood, MBA



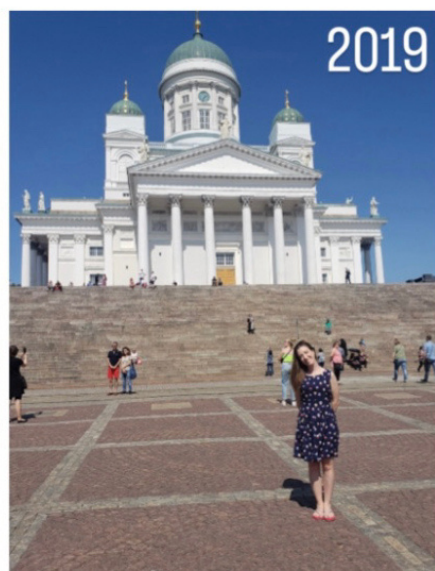
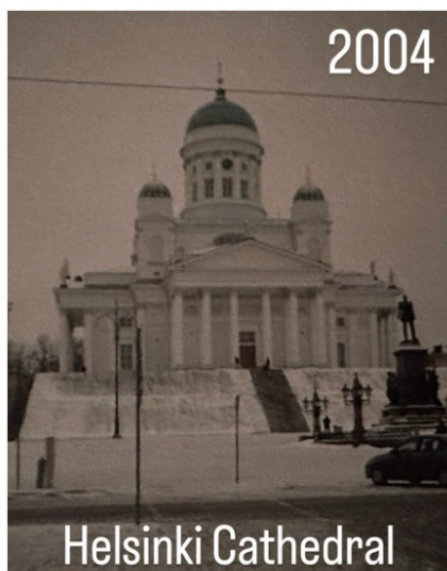
## INTRODUCTION

My love for Finland, the Finnish culture, and Finnish language developed steadily over the course of two decades and continues to grow to this day. It began in January of 2004 as a young adult, finding my way through the dead of winter for four months in **Mikkeli, Finland**. Fifteen years later, in 2019, my perspective of Finland found new depth, character, and meaning when I revisited Helsinki, Estonia, and Turku during the peak of a hot summer. After the pandemic began to ease, I made a third trip to Finland in the summer of 2022.

Each of my three visits to Finland have been vastly different in terms of climate, season, and

my personal stage of life. Winter versus summer, younger versus older, childless versus motherhood, and carefree versus grieving. Despite such contrasts, two threads wove universally throughout all trips and unified them in harmony: friendship and the Finnish language.

In 2023, I discovered Finlandia Foundation's Seattle chapter while searching online for local Finnish language classes. I enrolled in courses and enjoyed nine weeks of Finnish classes. Finlandia Foundation's Seattle Chapter mission is "preserving Finnish culture in the Northwest." Beyond language classes, I was delighted that I might be able to connect with a Finnish



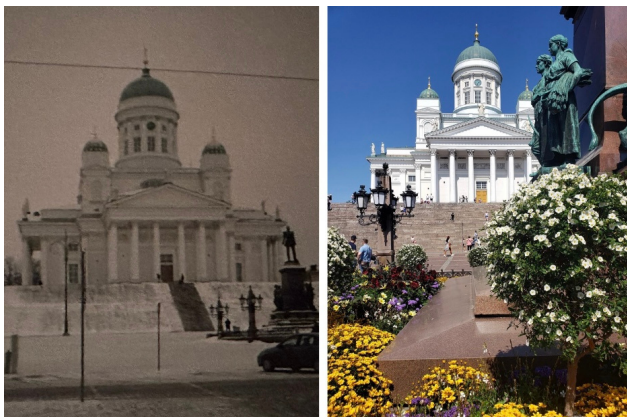
Melanie by the Helsinki Cathedral in 2004, 2019 and 2022.



community local to Seattle and so I began paying attention to local events sponsored by the Seattle chapter. Although I am not a native Finn or descendant, I can contribute to this mission of preserving Finnish culture in the Northwest because my experiences are authentic and firsthand. I ended up volunteering at the **Finnish Bazaar** and Joulumarkkinat in late 2023. In true Finnish spirit, everyone welcomed me with open arms and hearts when I shared my connection to Finland. No one gave pause that I am not a native Finn but instead they embraced me and made me feel like my experiences, and the love within my heart, were authentic enough to belong. This is the Finnish culture I have grown to learn and love throughout my life.



Harness racing on a frozen lake in Finland, 2004.



The Helsinki Cathedral.

## 2004: WINTER ADVENTURE

In January of 2004, I boarded a plane in my hometown of Seattle, Washington and was bound for **Helsinki, Finland**. I was a 21-year-old college student embarking on a four-month study abroad program. It was my third year of undergraduate studies at Western Washington University (WWU) and the idea of learning in an entirely different setting appealed to me. Having lived in Seattle my entire life, I wanted to experience a dramatically different climate. I wanted to be surrounded by a foreign language. I also wanted to go somewhere that I could not envision myself otherwise going in life. Although WWU offered study abroad options in many countries, I felt that Finland met all of my desired requirements best and so here I was on a plane flying to the other side of the world. I would soon be living and studying in a small city named Mikkeli (population 34,000) located 144 miles north of Helsinki and attend the **Helsinki School of Economics** Mikkeli campus through the winter. At the time, I viewed my trip to Finland as having a defined beginning and defined end. I had no idea how much Finland, and the Finnish culture, would come to mean to me throughout the course of my entire life.

Helsinki was cloaked in darkness when I landed that night. Much of the airport signage was in Finnish and I found myself following symbols and pictures to baggage claim, a phone booth, and then the taxi area. I used an international calling card to order a taxi. This was before the days of global smartphones and Uber. I stepped outside and cold air whipped across my cheeks like knives.

Everything was covered in snow with no trace of cement or ground in sight. My nose hairs froze as I waited. Never had I felt coldness to this extreme. Dramatically different climate? Check. The taxi driver hardly spoke English which made getting to the hostel a bit tricky. Fortunately, I had printed out a map of the area on paper and we communicated mostly through pointing. Immersion in foreign language was indeed on my checklist and this was my first taste of it. The street was deserted when the taxi pulled up to the hostel. I remember feeling anxious as I nervously hoisted my heavy suitcase out of the trunk then scurried as fast as my legs could carry me into the safety and warmth of the hostel. Once in my room, I immediately locked the door, spun around in place, and leaned back against the door while exhaling a sigh of relief. I had made it. **I was in Finland.** Really in Finland. I found the bed immediately and was asleep before I could even notice the mattress was hard and the sheets were scratchy.

Morning in Helsinki came, and the host University had provided specific instructions for getting to the bus station, which bus to take, at which time, and which stop to get off in Mikkeli. It was important to be on that specific bus because someone would meet me at the stop in Mikkeli. Soon I was in the countryside and looking out the window as we passed fields upon fields, lakes upon lakes, and day transitioned into night. The stop in Mikkeli was much more intimidating than my arrival at the airport. There was no bus station; only a small street with a single pole holding a metal sign I could not read. It was an open area with buildings visible only far in the distance. Only lit by the moon, everything was covered in **thick snow**. The weather conditions felt dangerous to an inexperienced person such as myself and if I

was incorrect in getting off at this stop, I knew that finding help may be difficult at this hour with most places being closed. I stepped off the bus, the icy coldness met my skin, and I felt terrified. Fortunately, there was indeed a gentleman waiting there for me and he immediately began to help with my luggage. He walked me to a building with he walked me to a building with quarters set up to receive exchange students temporarily. Getting settled in Mikkeli was easy. I was assigned to an apartment with another exchange student from Japan. Her name was Jing. We had a small apartment that offered everything I needed. My room was furnished with a bed, desk, and dresser. Jing had her own furnished room and we shared a common area, full kitchen, and bathroom. I would build many fond memories living with Jing over the next four months; **she was my first friend.**



The World Trade Center, Helsinki in 2004 and 2019.



Without a car, I walked everywhere. Behind my apartment complex was a snowy trail that winded along a frozen creek through a forest. I used this trail to access a small bridge that led to an adjacent neighborhood. Then I crossed a main road and went a few more blocks to the university. School was straight forward, and I would sit with local students in the cafeteria during lunch. I sampled many different **traditional Finnish foods** during this time. Friendships were forged while sitting around these tables and soon I was meeting friends at restaurants or bars around town, visiting apartments and houses on the weekend, and sometimes taking trips across Finland or neighbouring countries. A group of us took a ferry that sailed overnight from Helsinki to Sweden across the Baltic Ocean and spent the weekend wandering Stockholm. Another weekend I found myself riding a train up to Oulu with another exchange student from Germany. She and I went on an arctic safari expedition that included driving dog sleds and riding snowmobiles. I visited **Rovaniemi** where I met with the “real” Santa Claus, dined at the northernmost McDonald’s in the world, and we stumbled across the Arctic Lapland Rally that just happened to be going on that weekend.

Back in Mikkeli, some friends took me to a horse race that took place right on top of a frozen lake. They drove the car over the frozen lake which had me so anxious, yet the Finns were not concerned. I was constantly learning about Finnish culture. The **sauna**, I quickly learned, originated in Finland and was a basic commodity. The sauna soon became part of my daily ritual. My apartment complex had one and I learned that just about every apartment and home had a sauna. After a while, I felt that Americans were missing out to only visit saunas at swimming pools or fitness centers.

In the United States, it was rare to have a sauna in the average private residence. In Finland, even the most modest and frugal of homes seemed to have a sauna. One night around 2am, Jing knocked on my door. “Melanie! Melanie! Wake up Melanie! **The Northern Lights** are out, come see!” She wrapped herself in a heavy grey blanket and I grabbed my jacket. We rushed outside and around the front of the building, where quite a few people were gathered. I looked up and will forever remember that moment. An emerald curtain filled the sky majestically and appeared to sway back and forth, dancing around as my jaw hung in awe. It was more **magnificent** than any photograph or video I had seen, and we stood there as long as we could until the shivering set in and we were forced to go warm up inside.



Melanie and Jing watching the northern lights.



Arctic Lapland Rally, Rovaniemi, Lapland, Finland, 2004.

The closest friendship I formed that winter of 2004 was with a girl named **Taru**. Taru was kind, funny, humble, and always smiling. We became fast friends. She took the time to tell me all about the Finnish ways of life, teach me about the language, and made me feel welcome. She gave me my first taste of **salmiakki**, a Finnish candy, along with a friendly warning that I might not like it because Americans tended not to. She described it as black licorice with a salty taste as I gave it a try. I loved it. From then on, I always kept a small box of salmiakki on me for the rest of my stay. I noticed early on that Taru always seemed pleased when I would ask questions about the Finnish language. One day, Taru exclaimed, "It's so nice that you ask about Finnish words and how much interest you show in our language. Finnish is a difficult language; most Americans don't even try." I was surprised because I was fascinated and impressed by their language. Discovering that American exchange students had a reputation for disregarding the Finnish language made me want to learn Finnish all the much more. I decided that I would learn as much Finnish as I could while living in Mikkeli. Taru helped me with the basics. First, I needed to learn pronunciation. The biggest things were learning that the Finnish letter "J" is pronounced like an English letter "Y," and the Finnish "Y" is pronounced like an English "U." There were new characters, too. I learned that two dots over a vowel are called umlaut and the Finnish alphabet included two umlaut vowels: **ä and ö**. An "ä" meant to pronounce it like an "a" in the English word "apple." The other umlaut vowel, "ö," is the Finnish letter that I struggled the most to pronounce. An "ö" meant to pronounce it like a "u" in the English word "fur." Taru taught me my first word containing the "ö" umlaut vowel and that is "söpö," which means "cute" in English.

Near downtown Mikkeli there was a sign on the road that pointed to the nearby town of **Jyväskylä**. I learned how to pronounce that city which helped me remember the Finnish j, y, and ä pronunciations all in one word. I kept learning basic words. The earliest words I remember learning are thank you (although presumably every exchange student learned this word), milk, excuse me, cheese, beer, excuse me, one, two, three, beautiful, I would like, and hamburger. If I needed to get by someone in the market, I'd say "anteeksi!" ("excuse me!"). I would gleefully order a double cheeseburger and say with a big smile, "tuplajuustohampurilainen, kiitos!" ("double cheeseburger, please!"). I memorized the days of the week. One day, Taru taught me the word "**sisu**" which is a Finnish word with no direct English translation. Wikipedia defines sisu as a Finnish concept described as "stoic determination, tenacity of purpose, grit, bravery, resilience, and hardiness." Sisu is held by Finns to express their national character.



Taru and Melanie in Finland.

**"SHE TOOK THE TIME TO  
TELL ME ALL ABOUT THE  
FINNISH WAYS OF LIFE,  
TEACH ME ABOUT THE  
LANGUAGE, AND MADE ME  
FEEL WELCOME."**



This impressed me about Finnish culture, and it was not lost on me that there is no direct English translation. Why couldn't more Americans be like this, I wondered. I saw *sisu* in many of the people I met, and the general **friendliness of Finns** also stood out to me.

One weekend, Taru invited me to come spend the weekend at her parent's house. Meeting her family was a delight. It was very special to be invited into her home and see their authentic way of living. Her parents served "**muikku**" – a small and flavorful freshwater fish that holds a special place in Finnish culinary tradition. Taru and I stayed up to the wee hours of the morning laughing, listening to music, and taking a sauna together. Soon after, we decided to take a weekend trip to **Tallinn, Estonia**. This is also an evening ferry out of Helsinki that crosses the Baltic Sea and arrives to Estonia in the morning. While in Tallinn, we were innocently mistaken for shoplifting. A **terrifying scene** unfolded. We were led down a flight of stairs into the basement, ushered into a tiny janitor closet, and then they closed the door and locked it. It was pitch black. Panicked, we clung to each other and cried.



Melanie arriving to Stockholm, Sweden by ferry from Helsinki, Finland, 2004.

Taru knew some Estonian, but not enough to communicate with them and we were not sure in that moment what the plan was. Some time later, we heard footsteps approach. The lock clicked, the door opened, and police escorted us out. We were both relieved to see the light of day again and at the police station it only took a few minutes with a translator for the authorities to realize that an honest mistake had been made. They let us go and we decided to go straight to our hotel for the rest of the day. After that, Taru and I were bonded. I knew that we would always be friends. We made it back to Mikkeli in one piece and eventually, my time there came to an end. Taru drove me to the airport and saw me off. While waiting for my flight at the gate, I wrote this in my journal:

***"April 28th, 2004: Today I leave Finland. I am in the airport, Taru brought me. We had such a nice time yesterday and today. We walked around downtown [Mikkeli], took a sauna and did face masks again. I soak up these last minutes and only have one more hour here. I love the nature here. I love the language. I love the people. Just two days ago I was walking home slowly along the trail- likely for the last time. I looked up at the sky and saw the Big Dipper and Cassiopeia. A half-moon. A white rabbit crossed in front of me, and I breathed peacefully the crisp air. This place, Finland, has made me renewed and fresh. I am sad to leave. I will never forget these precious four months. They mark a period of my life in which looking deep into myself for answers and understanding became unavoidable. I am changed for the better. Each day I learned something new, and no time was wasted. The worst part is not knowing if I'll ever be back. The best part is that I came."***

## 2004-2019: INTERMISSION

After I returned to the **United States** in 2004, I didn't know when (or if) I would ever return to Finland. I wanted to, of course. For many nights, over many years, I dreamt about visiting Finland only to wake up and discover I was merely dreaming. In 2005, Taru visited me in the United States. She was doing a study abroad program in **Toronto, Canada** and during a week of holiday she came to stay with me in my family's house in the Seattle, Washington area. After having spent a weekend at her family's house in Finland, it was very special for her to come stay at my house in the US, meet my parents, and see our ways of life. We took a trip up to Vancouver, Canada and shared many laughs while reminiscing our Mikkeli memories (especially our disastrous run in with the police in Tallinn, Estonia).

Many years would pass with my fondness for Finland lingering in the background of my life. Big life moments came. In 2007, I moved to the state of New Mexico. In 2010, I welcomed my first and only son. In 2013, I moved back to Washington state. In 2014, I began my career with Microsoft. In 2018, I decided to go back to school for my Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree at **Washington State University** (WSU). Years were flying by; fourteen since my experience in Mikkeli. Now deeply entrenched in motherhood, my career, and now graduate school, I had succumbed to the belief that my dreams of going back to Finland someday would be just that: dreams.

In January 2019, I received an email from WSU. "Subject: Are you ready for **Northern Europe?**" I opened it.

"Cougs, Happy New Year! Our International Field Study for 2019 is in July to Helsinki, Finland and Tallinn, Estonia. Full details can be found..." I picked up the phone, called my parents, and the moment they said "hello?" I blurted out "**I'm going back to Finland!**" This was all the confirmation I needed to know that going back to graduate school was the right choice and that I was exactly where I was meant to be. The next month, in February 2019, my heart broke into many pieces with the unexpected passing of one of my dearest friends, **Andrea**. Andrea was my college roommate in 2001 and we'd been close ever since. I struggled greatly to process this loss. I felt so lost. I held it together for work and did my best to show up as a present parent, but I cried myself to sleep every night for many months. During this time of grieving, traveling back to Finland in July 2019 would offer a unique opportunity for healing. Perhaps one of the only ways I would find some level of **peace** during this extremely painful time would be to revisit a piece of the past. Somewhere far, far away.



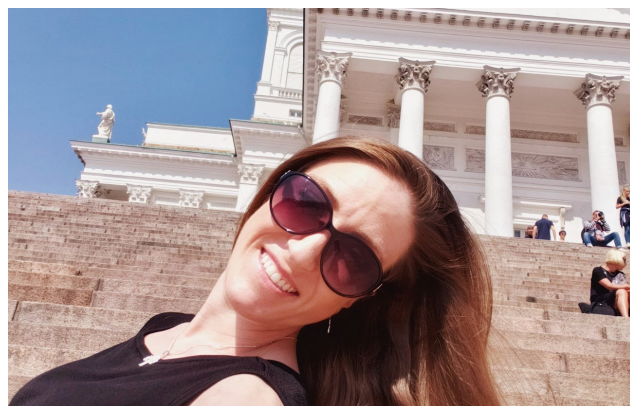
Melanie in Tallinn, Estonia, 2004 and 2019.



## 2019: SUMMER HEALING

Fifteen years after having left Mikkeli, I returned to Finland with WSU for the study abroad trip. We spent a few days in **Helsinki, Finland** and a few days in Tallinn, Estonia. This second trip to Finland came at just the right time; it felt like rain after a long drought. While fellow WSU students were looking around in awe and wonder, the way I had fifteen years prior, I was looking around and seeing everything for a second time. Distant memories that felt like yesterday were rushing to greet me fondly. What shocked me the most was the difference in climate. **Summer** presented a wildly different side of Finland compared with the wintry Finland that I remembered. Everything was familiar yet new, a strange paradox. The landmarks were familiar, yet I saw them through a whole new lens. With the snow melted, new parts of the city had come alive. There was a tremendous amount of outdoor activity, the air was warm, and the water glistened in the sun. A stark contrast to frozen lakes with large chunks of ice bumping against another in choppy waters. I saw grass. **Colourful flowers** were in bloom. Street vendors had all sorts of fruit and crafts out for sale. As I marveled at these differences, I realized that in many ways the differences between these seasons served as a metaphor for the woman I had become. I was nothing like the girl who had visited prior; just as the seasons were completely different, so was I. With the dark wintry times of my early to mid-twenties far behind me, I'd graduated into a new season of life with motherhood, a meaningful career, and having found my groove. Despite these recent months of darkness in grief, I found myself basking happily in the sunshine. I was smiling and I could breathe. I walked around Helsinki pondering this metaphor of changed seasons and a changed self.

It brought peace, calmness, and relief. I wish I could have known as a young woman standing on the frozen steps of the **Helsinki Cathedral** that someday I would revisit the very same steps of the cathedral and standing in the same spot, I would enjoy the warmth of summer as a transformed woman. I would be free from some of the demons that haunted my younger adult years and just as winter transforms into summer, so would I equally transform. Flowers would bloom where there was once a barren snow-covered ground. It was in these delicate moments that I was able to find some compassion for my younger self. In these moments of wholeness, I could also begin to process some of the grief of losing Andrea. I felt her in this warm breeze. She was all around me in Finnish nature. She finally understood, from my perspective, all that Finland meant to me. I believed that she knew I was here and that she was happy for me. I purchased a necklace in the market square in her memory. I enjoyed a salmiakki-flavored ice cream in front of Helsinki Cathedral, I bought a flowy **Marimekko** dress on the main promenade, and I visited the Moomin store. These are all things I can only enjoy while in Finland as they are rarely found (if at all) in the US. At the conclusion of the WSU study abroad portion in Helsinki and Tallinn, I stayed an extra week to reunite with Taru.



Melanie in Helsinki, Finland, Helsinki Cathedral, 2019.

I took a train from Helsinki to **Turku** where Taru now lives with her husband and three beautiful children. She greeted me on the train platform with a big hug and our friendship picked up right from where we left off fifteen years ago; it was as if there had been no lapse of time. Her friendship washed over my soul, and we laughed and laughed over old memories. We forged new memories and traded stories of motherhood. We arrived to her house and I got to meet her husband and children. It was delightful to share meals over their table, especially breakfast when the sun would spill in through the window. We would go for bike rides in town. Their family spoke plenty of Finnish around me and referred to it as a “language bath.” Taru and I attended a music festival called **Down By The Laituri (DBTL)** and saw Bonnie Tyler perform live. We had a marvelous time and though it was one week, it felt like an entire summer to me. How healing it was to be greeted so warmly and experience the richness of friendship that was strong after all these years; a friendship to be cherished. I promised Taru I would return in 2020 and bring my son. Unfortunately, the pandemic hit, and those plans were put on hold along with the rest of the world.

## 2022: LANGUAGE & HARMONY

In July 2022, WSU announced that the study abroad program would resume post-pandemic and they were headed for **Prague**. I decided I would go and then fly to Finland afterwards. By now, Finland was much more familiar to me and far less foreign. I was yearning to be around Finnish culture and feel a sense of belonging on a deeper level. I imagined how learning the Finnish language might bridge a lasting

connection that would satisfy my desire for belonging, even while I was in the United States. Much of the limited Finnish I had learned during my earlier Mikkeli days had faded from memory and I found myself eager to learn Finnish words for everything around me. For three months leading up to this trip I began using the **Duolingo** language app daily. I completed every module in the app and memorized around 1,200 words. I taped notecards onto many things around my house with the appropriate Finnish definition written in big letters. I listened to Finnish radio stations. By the time the trip rolled around, I hoped I would be able to carry on very simple conversation with Taru and locals.



Taru and Melanie biking in Turku, Finland 2019.



Down By The Laituri Music Festival in Turku.

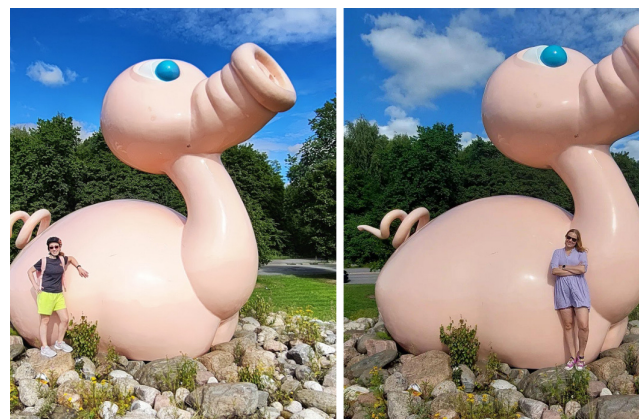


July came and I experienced Prague with WSU. Then I hopped on a flight north to Helsinki and took the train to Turku. I took in the beauty of Finland and savored every moment all over again. Taru greeted me at the train station and once again we shared a week full of chatting, telling stories, eating, drinking, and laughing. We walked along trails through nearby forest and rode bikes through town. Taru mapped a bike route that would take us through the earliest known location of Turku, pass by a well-known sculpture of a mythical creature known as “Posankka.” **Posankka** is a mythical pink animal with a rubber ducky (“ankka”) lower body and a pig (“possu”) head. Turku declared Posankka as the Official City Animal in 2019 so this was a fun spot to stop. We took a ferry over to a local harbor and dined on the pier while watching the grand Viking ferry come through the channel. (This is the same ferry line I rode in 2019). This trip was yet another opportunity for Taru and I to continue and grow our friendship. We encouraged each other on topics of motherhood and career. We could also set aside our routine responsibilities, for a moment, and just be kids at the DBTL music festival again. We watched one of my favorite Finnish artists, **Erika Vikman**, perform and then Earth, Wind, and Fire took over. During this 2022 visit, Finland felt more like a homecoming than a trip abroad. As far as language is concerned, I was able to communicate a bit in Finnish but found myself quite limited in what I actually knew. I quickly discovered that despite my months of learning as much Finnish as I could, I struggled with making sentences and communicating in Finnish the way I wanted to. Stringing nouns and adjectives into sentences eluded me. I did not know present versus past tense and I needed help with verb conjugation. I was

unclear about certain rules. Yes, I was off to a great start learning Finnish and I was proud of all that I had learned. I decided that I would need structured language courses taught by an instructor if I wanted to be able to communicate in Finnish. That decision led to me seeking out **Finnish language courses** in the Seattle area and inevitably discovering the Finlandia Foundation Chapter.



Melanie and Taru reunion, 2004 and 2022.



Melanie & Taru by Posankka, Turku, Finland, 2019.

**“DURING THIS 2022 VISIT,  
FINLAND FELT MORE LIKE A  
HOMECOMING THAN  
A TRIP ABROAD.”**

## HORIZON

Each trip to Finland has been unique and special. I will always remember my extended 2004 stay in **Mikkeli** fondly. My reunion in 2019 was filled with many “then and now” comparisons and moments of reflection on personal growth. My most recent visit in 2022 seemed to stand independently of the others. Despite such differences, it is everlasting friendship and Finnish language that unify them in harmony. I have entered a new era in which I believe traveling to Finland will perhaps become a more regular occurrence for me on the horizon.

Until I return, the most recent memory I have of Finland is saying goodbye to Taru and boarding the train in Turku bound for the **Helsinki airport**. While riding this train, my mind wandered. Reflecting on all three trips, I paused to consider how much I had enjoyed the snowy, icy, long winter in Mikkeli. There is something to be said for a good winter in Finland. That first trip was critical in giving my second trip in 2019 so much meaning. The parallels drawn between changing seasons and personal growth would not have happened for me in Helsinki without having lived in Mikkeli during that 2004 winter. I then remembered what **Tove Jansson**, author of Moomin, once wrote for Moominpappa’s character: “Luultavasti myrskyjä onkin vain siksi, että niiden jälkeen saataisiin auringonnousu.” Translation: “There are probably storms just to get a sunrise after them.” This moment was perhaps my most profound moment in **Finland** to date. I recognized that there is no summer without a long winter.



Horizon in Helsinki, Finland.



Melanie and Taru in Finland.

**“LUULTAVASTI MYRSKYJÄ  
ONKIN VAIN SIKSI, ETTÄ  
NIIDEN JÄLKEEN SAATAISIIN  
AURINGONNOUSU.”**

**“THERE ARE PROBABLY  
STORMS JUST TO GET  
A SUNRISE AFTER THEM. ”**

**MOOMINPAPPA**



# FINLANDIA FOUNDATION OF SEATTLE

## SCHOLARSHIPS & GRANTS

UP TO  
\$1,000

The Seattle Chapter of the Finlandia Foundation announces the availability of up to **\$1,000** in scholarships or grants for projects related to Finland. Deadline for applications is **April 1, 2024**. Winners will be notified by **April 15, 2024**.

### APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

The successful applicant must have a clear plan for using the award money to support a project related to Finland. College undergraduates are especially encouraged to apply. Submit the following to apply for a grant or scholarship:

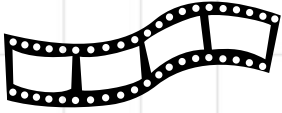
- A letter that includes a description of the project for which the application is submitted, start, and expected project completion dates and a budget.
- Evidence of the project's Finnish or Finnish American cultural, educational, or scientific merit.
- College students should submit an official transcript of all college-level studies.
- Letter of recommendation written by someone able to evaluate the applicant's Finland-related project.
- Applicant's contact information: name, mailing address, email address and phone number.
- Funds will not be available for projects with a start date earlier than April 30, 2024. Acceptable use of funds includes, but is not limited to, language class or workshop fees, travel, materials or equipment necessary for the project.
- Special consideration is given to applicants who reside or study in the State of Washington.

### SUBMITTING THE APPLICATION

- Applications should be submitted in electronic form by email to [scholarships@finlandiafoundationseattle.com](mailto:scholarships@finlandiafoundationseattle.com). Applications sent by email must be received no later than **April 1, 2024**.
- Applications may also be sent by regular mail to Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter: P.O. Box 5024, Bellevue, WA 98009-5024. Applicants are advised to use registered mail or some other form of mailing that provides a receipt with the date of mailing when sending applications through regular mail. Applications sent by regular mail must be postmarked no later than April 1, 2024.
- Winners are encouraged, but not required, to attend the Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter annual meeting at the Finnish Lutheran Church (8504 13th Avenue NW Seattle) on Wednesday **April 24, 2024, at 6:30 PM**.

For more information see <https://www.finlandiafoundationseattle.com> or email [scholarships@finlandiafoundationseattle.com](mailto:scholarships@finlandiafoundationseattle.com).

# FINNFO – FACTS ABOUT FINLAND



**1**

Rank of 2021 James Bond film, No Time to Die, among films which opened with largest weekend attendance in Finnish movie theaters.

**156,000**

Size of audiences for the opening weekend of Barbie and Oppenheimer in Finland.



**40-46**

Estimated number of wolf packs in Finland.

**291-331**

Estimated number of wolves in Finnish wild.

**77**

Percentage of Finns who report they always wash their hands after using toilet.

**500,000**

Estimated number of Finns with learning disabilities.



**2**

Number of children Finns hope to have.

**1.4**

Number of children Finns actually have.



**55**

Percentage of Finns in Greater Helsinki area who would accept a small nuclear power plant in their neighborhood.

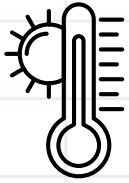
**15**

Percentage of of Finns in Greater Helsinki area who would accept a small nuclear power plant within a kilometer of their residence.





# FINNFO – FACTS ABOUT FINLAND



**8,775**

Number moving into Helsinki in a recent twelve month period.



**7,500**

Number of that total who were immigrants.

**37.2 C  
(98.96 F)**

Highest recorded temperature in Finland.

**2010**

Year in which highest temperature was recorded in Finland, (Liperi).



**1914**

Year in which previous highest temperature was recorded in Finland.

**1, 2, 3**

Rank of wheat, rye and oats among grains consumed annually by Finns.



**10 min**

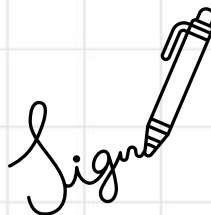
Amount of daily time spent reading by 10-14 year old boys in Finland.

**20 min**

Amount of daily time spent reading by 10-14 year old girls in Finland.

**5,000**

Number of signatures required to form a recognized political party in Finland.

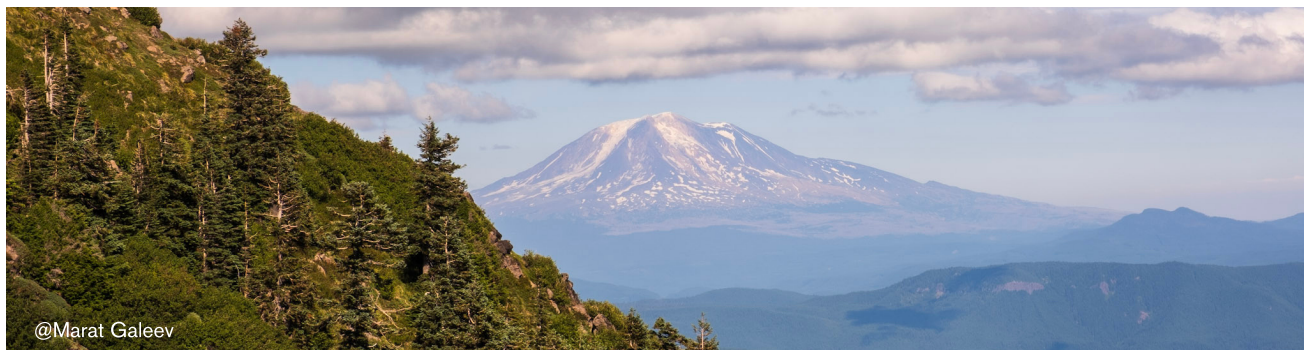


**1**

Rank of Swedish People's Party in length of time in coalition governments in Finland from 1935 to present.

Sources: All from Helsingin Sanomat. 1 and 2, 7/26/23, B6; 3 and 4, 6/15/23, A19; 5, 6/26/23, A20; 6 and 7, 8/21/23, A6; 8 and 9, 7/10/23, A12; 10 and 11, 7/28/23, A20; 12-14, 7/26/23, A7; 15, 7/9/23, B8; 16, 6/19/23, A5; 17 and 18, 8/19/23, A4; 19, 6/22/23, A20; 20, 6/18/23, A9. Finnfo written by Gary London. Infograph by Laura Galeev.

# LOCAL ART NOTES



Local **Aki Kaurismäki** fans, disappointed that his recent **Fallen Leaves** did not make the cut for nomination for the Best International Film Oscar, may be cheered by a special presentation of the Finnish director's *Drifting Clouds* at the SIFF Egyptian on March 14 at 7:00 p.m. Following a screening of this 1996 classic, Seattle musician Ben Gibbard, of Death Cab for Cutie and The Postal Service fame, will talk about what this film means to him.

**Drifting Clouds** is part of what is variously called Kaurismäki's "Helsinki Trilogy," "Finland Trilogy," "Loser Trilogy," or, probably most descriptively, "Proletariat Trilogy." These are tales of down-and-outers on the fringes of Finnish society who struggle against great odds and merciless bureaucracies to find a sliver of happiness and love. *Drifting Clouds*, regarded generally as the most optimistic of the trilogy, brings together such Kaurismäki regulars as Kati Outinen, Kari Väänänen, Elina Salo and Sakari Kuosmanen.

Tickets for this March 14 event, one in SIFF's Talking Pictures series, are available through [siff.net](http://siff.net) and are \$20.00 for SIFF members and \$25.00 for non-members.

March offers a feast for Fennophiles at the Seattle Symphony. Concerts on March 14 and 16 feature the work of two Finnish composers — **Jean Sibelius's Violin Concerto** and **Sebastian Fagerlund's Stonework**. Separated by 110 years, the Violin Concerto is seen as one of the great works of late Romanticism, while Fagerlund's *Stonework* is reflective of his characteristic "post-modern impressionism."

The mid-March program begins with *Stonework*, one work of a three-part trilogy, and continues with the Violin Concerto, with **Ning Feng** as soloist. Feng, who plays a 1710 Stradivarius, was born in China, studied there, in Berlin and at London's Royal Academy of Music. Having won a number of international competitions, Feng embarked on a solo career which has resulted in an international reputation. Prior to his Seattle appearance, Feng has concerts in Shanghai and Wuhan, China, while afterwards he will solo with the Berlin Kozerthaus Orchestra.

# LOCAL ART NOTES

Now on virtually every list of greatest violin concertos, the **Sibelius** had a disastrous debut in 1904 when it premiered with a last-minute replacement soloist. Subsequent revisions and world-class soloists have made the piece a staple of international concert halls and of numerous recordings. Called “undoubtedly one of the most intense and difficult violin concertos,” this is the only concerto composed by Sibelius.

Rounding out the program is **Carl Nielsen’s Symphony No. 4** (The Inextinguishable). Premiered in 1916, this is the most performed symphony by the Danish composer — a Nordic contemporary of Sibelius. Both men were born in 1865, though they apparently met only once.

At the podium on March 14 and 16 will be Russian-born conductor **Dima Slobodeniouk**, who moved to Finland at 17 and attended the **Sibelius Academy**, where he trained under the estimable **Jorma Panula**. Much in demand as guest conductor, Slobodeniouk comes to Seattle after leading performances of *Peer Gynt* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. After leaving Seattle, he will conduct the London Symphony Orchestra in a program to include Sibelius’s *Oceanides*.

There are no Finnish composers represented in concerts on March 21, 22 and 24, but the conductor is one of Finland’s best-known. **Osmo Vänskä** returns to the Seattle Symphony after leading what Thomas May described as “a breathtaking, meticulous performance” of **Mahler’s Symphony No. 2** at the close of last season.

Vänskä, another Jorma Panula protégée at the Sibelius Academy, has led the **Lahti Symphony Orchestra**, the Iceland Symphony Orchestra, the Scottish Symphony Orchestra, and, for 19 years, the Minnesota Orchestra. His most recent contract was with the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra. He now has a full schedule of guest conducting appearances.

Featured works during Vänskä’s visit in Seattle are Prokofiev’s *Symphony No. 6* and Tchaikovsky’s *Piano Concerto No. 1*, with Simon Trpčeski as soloist. An audience favorite here, Trpčeski made his US debut with the **Seattle Symphony** more than twenty years ago.





# LOCAL ART NOTES

In 2012, he performed Ravel's G Major Piano Concerto with another notable Finnish conductor, **Susanna Mälkki**, at the helm. Tickets for Seattle Symphony tickets are available at the box office at Benaroya Hall, through [seattlesymphony.org](http://seattlesymphony.org) or by calling 206.215.4747.

A very different musical experience is awaiting those who come to the **National Nordic Museum** on June 21 to hear **Tuomo and Markus** — musicians from Finland who have attracted attention and a following well outside its boundaries. Their music is a bit difficult to pin down in terms of genre, but their **"Nordic Americana"** contains elements of folk rock, jazz, soul and prog-rock. Think Wilco, Calexico or the Jaybirds — groups with which Tuomo and Markus have been associated. The group's debut album, "Dead Circles," was released in 2018, while their most recent, "Game Changing," appeared just last year. Rolling Stone critic David Fricke has championed Tuomo and Markus as far back as their "marvelous" performance at the 2017 SXSW in Austin.

Tuomo and Markus are not new to Seattle. A 2017 guest appearance on local KEXP is still available on YouTube. Tickets for the Museum show, which begins at 6:00 p.m., are available on site, at [nordicmuseum.org/events](http://nordicmuseum.org/events), or via 206.789.5707. Ticket price for members of the Museum are \$30.00, while non-members pay \$35.00. This event is co-sponsored by **Finlandia Foundation Seattle Chapter**.

Another genre defying Finnish band will be making its way to Seattle on March 24, when **Steve 'n' Seagulls** plays at the Nectar Lounge. While the strongest musical influence on this five-member group is bluegrass, it is also possible to detect **country, rock and Finnish folk**. One of the musicians said he liked the term "progressive bluegrass" to describe the music. The band, whose members met in Jyväskylä as students, became something of an international sensation in 2014 with its cover of AC/DC's Thunderstruck, now seen by 150 million viewers. (Yes, you read that correctly. See for yourself what all the fuss is about by checking out this irresistible video on YouTube). Over the past decade, Steve 'n' Seagulls, like Finnish bands of all genres, has demonstrated a high degree of musicianship, evident as the group has continued to do their own innovative versions of well-known rock and metal favorites. The band has recorded five albums, while maintaining a demanding touring schedule. The upcoming Seattle stop is part of a month-long North American tour — the twelfth for the band.



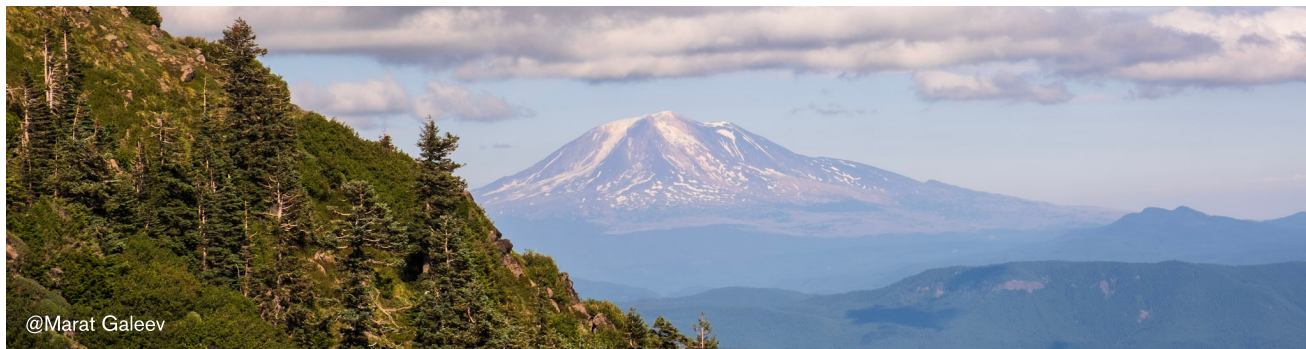
# LOCAL ART NOTES

The show at the **Nectar Lounge**, located at 412 N 36th Street in Fremont, begins at 8:00. This venue is open only to those 21 and above. Advance general admission tickets at \$22.00 may be purchased through [tixr.com](https://www.tixr.com).

Local fans of **Korpiklaani**, Finland's popular **folk metal band from Lahti**, will be pleased that the six-man group is returning El Corazón on April 24. Last here in 2019, Korpiklaani has made Seattle one of its 24 stops in its 2024 North American tour. Founded in 1993 and evolved through several name changes and a number of band members, Korpiklaani, since it adopted that name change in 2003, has made a dozen albums, with its newest "**Rankarumpu**" to be released during its tour of the same name.

Korpiklaani, whose earlier iterations were more mythological and Sámic, has become less folk and more metal. With **Jonne Järvelä** the only original member of the band, its musical evolution is not surprising. The most recent addition to Korpiklaani is **Olli Vänskä**, whose father is Osmo Vänskä, who, as indicated above, will be making a return engagement to the Seattle Symphony in March with a very different kind of music. **El Corazón**, located at 109 Eastlake Avenue East, is an all-ages venue. Advance tickets for the 6:30 p.m. Korpiklaani concert may be purchased through [see tickets.us](https://www.seetickets.us). Tickets at the door are \$35.00

Finlandia Foundation National is excited to announce a collaboration with **Sibelius Academy's Global Music** program for **Soiva Music Camp 2024**, taking place from July 15-21 in the Pacific Northwest. This camp offers youths aged 12-17 the opportunity to unlock their creative potential in a supportive and nurturing environment. Learn more about this exciting opportunity and register by **April 30th** at: <https://form.jotform.com/240087642895062>.





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