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# Kansanmusiikin ammattilaiset

Taloudellinen tilanne  
ja toimintaympäristö



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## *Professional folk musicians in Finland*

English Summary

The big changes that have taken place in Finnish folk music and the profession of folk musicians in recent decades have mainly been experienced as a greater variety of educational opportunities, increasing professionalization in the field and new fusions of folk and other popular music. Often dubbed “amateur music” up to the 1970s, the field of folk music now accommodates both professionals and amateurs working side by side.

University-level folk music education was launched at the Sibelius Academy in 1983, and vocational secondary level education came on offer at two educational institutions in the following decade. These steps have led to a sharp increase in the number of young folk musicians, who have introduced new features into traditional folk music.

The goal of this study was to survey the number of professionals working in folk music, their opportunities to pursue professional work in the field and their financial situation. Another objective was to highlight professional folk musicians’ views on employment, the current status of folk music and the respect shown for it. The study offers a cross section of the employment and livelihood options available to folk music professionals in Finland in the early 21st century.

The study focused primarily on musicians performing folk music for a living. In this context, the term, folk musicians, refers to all musicians living in Finland who give public performances of material that is based partly or entirely on the musical traditions of the musicians’ own cultural background. The surveyed group also includes individuals working in other, non-performing folk music professions. Teaching and research duties, publishing and printing work and organizational activities are other examples of professional folk musicians’ employment.

Folk music professionals are considered to include musicians who are described as folk musicians in the art world and who professionally create and perform music that is defined as folk in the Finnish context. Professionalism was determined on the basis of the musi-

cians' own view of their work, instead of restricting the concept in advance by basing it on membership in organizations, income earned from performing folk music or other similar factors. Language and nationality were not taken to be determining factors in terms of folk music, and the survey included representatives of Swedish, the Sami, the Roma and immigrants.

The current status of folk music was reviewed with reference to the structures and experiences of the field. Structural factors were examined using statistical data and previous surveys of artists. Experiences of the current status were collected through a survey conducted among professional folk musicians.

In order to collect material, a list of folk music professionals in Finland was compiled on the basis of different types of documents and brochures. The resulting list consisted largely of students, teachers and graduates of the Sibelius Academy's Department of Folk Music. Contact information could not, however, be obtained for all folk musicians; some were unwilling to participate in the survey, while others could not be reached at all. Information on Finnish-Swedish, Sami and Roma professionals were the most difficult to come by.

Folk music professionals proved to be a relatively small group: the base group of the survey consisted of 297 people. Finnish professionals were the biggest group, followed by immigrants, whose contact information was obtained from the "Immigrés" file maintained by the Global Music Centre in Finland. The file contains information about immigrant musicians, bands and groups that reside in Finland and perform or teach music related to their own culture. The file was introduced in 1996 and at the time of the survey had last been updated in December 2004.

A total of 48.1 per cent of the people selected for the study answered the survey. The fewest answers were received from immigrants, 35 per cent of whom could not be reached at all due to changed or incorrect contact information. The low response percentage may also be a result of cultural and language issues, although the questionnaire was submitted also in English and Swedish. The response percentage among Finnish, Finnish-Swedish and Sami folk musicians amounted to 53.2 per cent. Nevertheless, the overall number of respondents, as well as that of professionals, remained too low for the possibility of certain deviations to be excluded. Owing to the small number of responses from other than Finnish musicians, minority groups could not be treated separately.

Respondents were categorized into professionals or amateurs based on their own indication. A total of 68 per cent of the respondents considered themselves to be professionals, 13.8 per cent categorized themselves as amateurs, and nearly as many were unable to classify the exact nature of their activities in folk music. Approximately four per cent of the respondents were retired or did not con-

sider themselves to come under the scope of the survey. Those reporting themselves as amateurs were excluded from the study.

The responses provided by professionals and those unable to categorize their activities are treated as one group. Many of the latter engage in teaching duties that are at least to some extent related to folk music. The group also includes semi-professionals who have performed publicly outside their full-time occupation for years or decades. Professionals studied in the survey thus came to include 82 per cent of the total of 144 respondents.

While men accounted for a larger share in the initially compiled survey group, women were in the clear majority in terms of all respondents and professional folk musicians. The response percentage of those living outside the Greater Helsinki area was also higher than that of respondents in the metropolitan area. The survey was sent to approximately the same number of individuals in both areas. (Table 1.)

*Table 1. Survey group and respondents by gender and place of residence.*

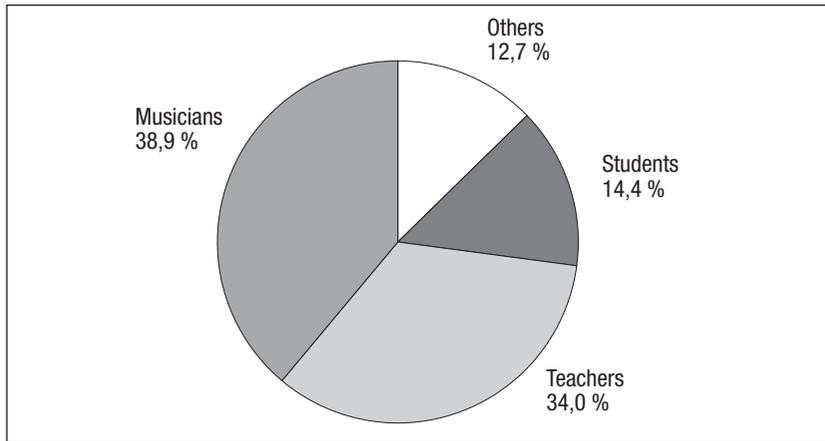
<i>Survey group</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Greater Helsinki area</i>	<i>Rest of Finland</i>
Included in original survey (N=297)	44.8	55.2	49.2	50.2
All respondents (N=138)	52.9	47.1	40.6	59.4
Responses from professionals (n=118)	56.8	43.2	43.2	56.8

Based on the occupation indicated by the respondents, folk music professionals were categorized into musicians, teachers, students and other practitioners. The variables used for these groups were gender, age group and regional distribution among the metropolitan area and the rest of Finland. Owing to the small overall number of respondents, all of the questions could not be dealt with in great detail. A number of respondents also left some of the questions unanswered, which made the analysis of individual questions less meaningful and useful.

The biggest professional group, accounting for nearly two fifths of the respondents, consisted of individuals who defined themselves as musicians. Approximately one third worked in duties related to education, while students and professionals occupied in other folk music duties accounted for one fourth of the respondents. (Figure 1.)

Women's share of respondents among professional folk musicians was highest in the age group born in the late 1960s. In age groups born after 1970, men have increased their share slightly, but women still account for the majority of professionals.

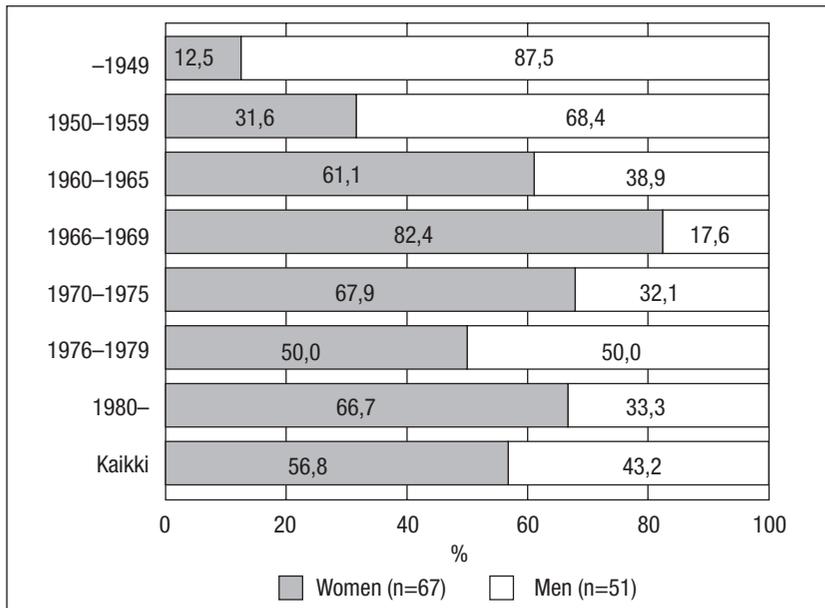
Figure 1. Folk music professionals who responded to the survey by professional group (n=118).



Folk music professionals, especially women, are highly educated. The impact of education can be clearly seen in the age and gender distribution of the professionals who answered the survey. Furthermore, women accounted for over two fifths of professional folk musicians.

The share of musicians among women born in 1966–1975 has grown, and the share of female folk music students has considerably increased among students younger than this. The younger age groups, born after 1980, consist of students, meaning that the future of folk music will continue mainly in the hands of women. (Figure 2.)

Figure 2. Gender of survey respondents by age group.



The majority (58 per cent) of professionals lived outside the metropolitan area. This applied to the clear majority of teachers, as well as musicians, two thirds of whom worked elsewhere in Finland. Only a scant minority of respondents occupied in other folk music work indicated Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa or Kauniainen as their place of residence. Nearly all of the students lived in the Greater Helsinki area, the majority of which studied at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki.

The average income of folk music professionals was 20,130 euro in 2003, which was less than the average gross income of other wage earners and musicians in general. The average gross income of employed folk music professionals ranged from 17,400 to 27,000 euro. While income increased with the number of years in the profession, many folk musicians still earned less than the average 20,000 euro after ten years of employment. (Table 2.)

*Table 2. Average taxable gross income of folk music professional groups according to gender and region in 2003.*

<i>Professional group</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Greater Helsinki area</i>	<i>Rest of Finland</i>	<i>All</i>
	(€)	(€)	(€)	(€)	(€)
Musician	17.415	23.126	19.703	21.534	20.783
Teacher	23.200	24.480	26.235	22.076	23.511
Student	4.430	5.780	5.080	2.000	4.843
Others	24.340	28.485	25.335	29.850	26.977
All	18.160	22.580	17.563	22.290	20.130

The smallest average income was that earned by women working as musicians, while the biggest was earned by professionals working in other folk music tasks outside the Greater Helsinki area. Women's earnings were approximately one fifth lower than those of men. Furthermore, women more often than men fell into groups with a gross income less than the average 20,000 euro.

The main sources of income for professionals included the performing and teaching of folk music, although the performance and teaching of other music was also common. Only a small portion of respondents was able to live solely by performing folk music. Women's income came mainly from teaching and men's from performance fees. For men, income from sources other than folk music also accounted for a considerable share.

Most of the respondents had engaged in some form of teaching in the past 12 months. Teaching duties were available in the metropolitan area, but interest shown towards them was greater in other parts of Finland. Teaching was an important source of income irrespective

of gender, and was considered to promote both the development of folk music and one's own professional skills. Teaching in folk music is still mainly carried out by women, although the number of female musicians was equal to that of teachers. The clear majority of men considered themselves to be primarily musicians. They also did not consider teaching to be as important as did women.

Most professionals would prefer to dedicate themselves to working as performing musicians. This was also a popular option among many teachers and professionals occupied in other folk music duties. Folk music professionals residing outside the metropolitan area had clearly more performance opportunities than did those in the Greater Helsinki area. The main employers in the field include educational institutions and associations. Performances related to commercial events are mainly held elsewhere in Finland, whereas the metropolitan area offers performance requests from companies and opportunities to play in studios. Most performances are arranged in Finland, but folk musicians in the Greater Helsinki area, in particular, were also in demand abroad.

The majority of musicians and teachers ascertained that performance opportunities had at least slightly decreased in number and that the offering was poor. Nevertheless, most professionals considered their own work situation to be at least good both now and in the future. The most positive assessments about employment at the time of the survey came from teachers, women and professionals living in the Greater Helsinki area. Belief in the future was weakest among teachers and those living elsewhere in Finland. Respondents assessed employment prospects for the folk music sector as a whole to be clearly worse than their own. In general, the situation is expected to improve in the future.

The regard for the profession of folk musicians was felt to be relatively good, although some professionals expressed their concern about insufficient respect for the field as a whole. First-rate professional skills and all-round competence in musical technique and as a performer were judged to increase the appreciation for the profession. Music of poor quality, excessive focusing on amateurs or semi-professionals and new vocational training, in turn, were considered to erode respect. Men were more satisfied than women in the respect shown towards their profession.

While Finnish folk music organizations are mainly aimed at amateurs, they also unite professionals and amateurs. Folk musicians usually join organizations as amateurs, and membership is often kept up after turning professional. Professionals consider these organizations to be important to amateurs, but deem their concrete significance to individual professionals to be lesser and difficult to determine. More than one fifth of the respondents found folk music organizations to have no importance whatsoever.

Organizations were considered to be clearly more important to the field of folk music as a whole than to the work of individual artists. They represent folk music in the public sphere, and big central organizations were found to give more credibility to the field. Many professionals believed that folk music organizations play an important part in teaching, publishing and programme planning. Problems cited included the small size and fragmentary nature of organizations, as well the organizations' inability to react quickly enough to changes taking place in folk music.

Slightly more than half of the respondents reported membership in a folk music organization, by far the most popular of which were the Finnish Folk Music Association and the Kantele Association. Approximately one in every four respondents was also a member of other music organizations. Membership in other than folk music organizations was most common among musicians. Most of them were members of the Finnish Musicians' Union (a labour union for musicians), as well as Teosto and Gramex, both of which administer copyrights: the former those of composers, the latter those of performing artists. In the case of teachers, membership was most common in the Finnish Music Teachers' Union. One fifth of the respondents did not belong to any music organization.

Based on the responses received, the average folk music professional is a 38-year-old Finnish-speaking musician living outside the Greater Helsinki area and more often female. He/she has worked as a professional for nearly 13 years and has completed an academic degree at the Sibelius Academy after 1989. Musicians, in particular, typically have a low income level due to the uncertainty of employment and livelihood. They often have to seek additional income outside folk music and in teaching, and occasionally in non-artistic fields. Men are slightly older than women and have left their studies unfinished more often than women. As folk music players, professionals are masters of the accordion, violin and kantele. For men, the guitar is more common than the kantele, and there are fewer male than female singers.

Folk music professionals form a small group in the Finnish folk music and music culture. The field's strengths and problems are much the same as those in other marginal fields in music. In its most visible form, Finnish professional folk music is determined by the majority population group, which controls education channels and publicity, making it difficult for professionals representing minorities, such as the Sami, the Roma and immigrants, to make themselves visible. Owing to a limited public, minority representatives would find it difficult to work as professional musicians in Finland if they were to exclusively perform material based on their own musical heritage.

Education has enhanced the interest in folk music and produced more professionals in the field. It has expanded vocational education

opportunities in music and provided especially women with a new path to becoming professional popular musicians. Similar to other art professions, however, education typically provides a good foundation for finding one's self-expression and developing professional competence, but cannot ensure regular employment and sufficient income in the field of folk music.

The demand for folk music is limited and has not always been able to match the increased supply of professionals provided by education. On the whole, folk music as a field will continue to offer limited opportunities in terms of employment. With education producing more performing artists, competition for employment is likely to remain stiff. The development of employment and income levels also needs the contribution of professionals familiar with folk music production, programme planning, distribution and marketing both in the Finnish and international music industries.

The professionals' positive outlook on the future of folk music gives reason to believe that it is precisely because of its heterogeneity that the field can create opportunities for musical and professional development. A heavily institutionalized field could not offer such potential for freedom. Instead, its structures would exert tighter control on development trends in the content and professional aspects of folk music.

