

Trouble with the neighbours: jazz, geopolitics, and Finland's totalitarian shadow

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Abstract

Although Finnish jazz did not emerge under a totalitarian regime, in return for maintaining its national sovereignty, the country repeatedly deferred to its more powerful neighbour in matters of foreign policy, giving rise to the term 'Finlandization' or 'good neighbourliness'. Is it possible to detect in Finnish jazz a kind of cultural 'good neighbourliness'? It has been argued that until the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a tendency to give a more positive valency to culture coming from the east than from the west. Or, on the contrary, did the musicians attempt to oppose Soviet influence, forming their musical identity in reaction to Russia? My paper will explore the effects of Soviet totalitarianism on particular Finnish jazz musicians, and also touch on Finland's sometimes uncomfortably close relationship with another totalitarian power, Nazi Germany. Finally, it will explore how more recent Finnish jazz musicians have been affected by the legacy of Soviet totalitarianism.

Finland has never been a totalitarian country. What, then, is a discussion of the country's jazz scene doing in this book? The answer lies in the Finnish experience of the Second World War and its aftermath, and the impact this had on Finnish national identity and culture. To discuss diasporic regional jazz in relation to the United States

is relatively common; I will focus instead on the Soviet Union, a power bloc more geographically and culturally proximate. I will ask whether, given its influence over neighbouring Finland, the Soviet Union may be said to have cast a 'shadow' over that nation's jazz scene. I will also touch on Finland's at one point uncomfortably close relationship with another totalitarian power: Nazi Germany. Although my focus will be the 1960s and 1970s, I will conclude by asking whether a totalitarian 'shadow' has continued to affect more recent Finnish jazz musicians. Of course, no single factor can be regarded as the 'explanation' for the history of Finnish jazz: a range of influences must be considered, including broader anti-authoritarian impulses and a growing interest in American culture. I will focus here, however, on the impact of the 'shadow' of the totalitarian soviet regime.

Introduction: Finlandization

The popular account has jazz arriving in Finland via the *S/S Andania*, which docked in Helsinki in 1926 and offloaded a number of Finnish-American musicians (Austerlitz 2000, 191 and 2005, 124; Kaarresalo-Kasari and Kasari 2010, 11; Konttinen 1987, 21). In fact, Jukka Haavisto suggests (1996, 10-11) that jazz actually arrived in Finland earlier in the decade, while Paul Austerlitz (2005, 125) points out that there were jazz residencies in top Helsinki restaurants as early as 1921.

Scholars sometimes suggest that the first Finnish jazz recording, by trombonist Klaus Salmi and his Ramblers Orchestra, was released in 1932 and that the jazz magazine *Rytmi* followed two years later (Konttinen 1987, 24).¹ At this stage, however, *jatsi* was a generic term for any music featuring drums or, in particular, saxophones (ibid., 21), essentially meaning dance music. Waltzes, tangos and foxtrots were popular (ibid., 24), as was the 'accordion jazz' performed by groups like the

Dallapé Orchestra – and, according to Pekka Gronow (1973, 60), the most important phenomenon in Finnish popular music of the 1930s.

All this, of course, pre-dates a totalitarian influence on the music. Having been a Swedish province until 1809 and a Grand Duchy under Russia until 1917 (ibid., 53), Finland in these early years of *jatsi* was enjoying the first flush of independence, and the musicians looked west rather than east. The origins of a totalitarian influence on Finnish jazz can be found, instead, in the Second World War. The war had a tremendous psychological impact: Gilmour and Stephenson (2013, 5) suggest it weighs heavily on the Finnish psyche, with a predominant position in the national master narrative.² For Finns, forgetting war has not been an option; instead, ‘actively, even obsessively, remembering and commemorating the war has been a central component of Finnish national identity’ (ibid. 200).

In fact, Finns tend to regard the conflict as not one but three wars: the Winter War (1939-1940) and the Continuation War (1941-1944), both against the Soviet Union, and the Lapland War (1944-1945) against Germany (Stenius, Österberg and Östling 2011, 55). All three, then, were *against* totalitarian powers. At the same time, however, the war(s) left the Finns enduringly and uncomfortably linked to both regimes. They had, after all, been at least co-belligerents with Nazi Germany, since Finnish forces joined the Axis invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.³ At the same time, although no Soviet troops ‘liberated’ Finland at the end of the war the country remained in the Soviet sphere of influence – a key point to which I will return.

The Second World War had a direct impact on Finnish jazz, not least by introducing American swing; according to Gronow (1973, 62), it also brought to prominence a new generation of musicians. At the same time, Haavisto suggests that,

since Adolf Hitler considered jazz ‘un-Aryan’, representatives of the Finnish authorities at times ‘deemed it appropriate to forbid the inclusion of jazz in entertainment programmes’ (1996, 25). While the influence of Nazi Germany on Finnish culture did not extend beyond the war itself, the influence of another totalitarian power, the Soviet Union, was ongoing. Although not part of the Eastern Bloc, it is often suggested that postwar Finnish neutrality was conditioned by the obligation to be on good terms with the Soviet Union (Stenius, Österberg and Östling 2011, 224). By the late 1950s and early 1960s (Singleton 1981, 270), this arrangement was known as Finlandization, a term subsequently applied to any country forced into a subservient role by a powerful neighbour. The term, says Allison, refers to a covert, protracted and insidious process leading to the loss of a nation’s independence in policy-making; although the Finlandized state may remain outside its powerful neighbour’s bloc, it is assumed to lie within its ‘soft sphere of influence’ (1985, 2). More recent scholars have put forward broadly similar definitions (see for example Meinander 2011, 165, and Lavery 2006, 139).

To many, the term ‘Finlandization’ is pejorative, and also ‘grossly unfair’ (Singleton 1981, 285). To understand such controversy, we must look at the political context in the era in which the notion became prominent. Singleton (*ibid.*, 270) states that the term gained currency at a time when Russo-Finnish relations were undergoing a period of strain, partly because of the internal political situation in Finland but more significantly because of a worsening in Soviet relations with the West. Having been used first by academics such as Professor Richard Loewenthal, Singleton suggests, it soon became common among right-wing journalists and politicians – especially in Germany, where it was primarily used to criticize the *Ostpolitik* of Social Democrat chancellor Willy Brandt (*ibid.*, 271).⁴ This context is important, as it positions the whole notion of Finlandization as a product of the Cold War. The term, Allison makes clear (1985, 3), should be seen within this context, in particular the question of what

would happen to a Western Europe bereft of American support. In describing a process that incrementally has led to the loss of Finland's national autonomy, Allison suggests (*ibid.*, 1), the intention was to illustrate, by analogy, a danger posed to Western Europe much more broadly by the Soviet Union in a period of *détente*.

Urho Kekkonen, Finnish president from 1956 to 1981 and perceived by some as having a 'cosy' relationship with Moscow (Meinander 2011, 165), is synonymous with so-called Finlandization (Lavery 2006, 139). Objecting to a term used to depict Kekkonen as the 'errand boy of the Kremlin' (1981, 271), Singleton suggests that Finlandization 'should be removed from the vocabulary of international politics, and be placed where it belongs in the annals of contemporary mythology' (*ibid.*, 285). Kekkonen himself instead spoke (*ibid.*, 278) of 'good neighbourliness', while others refer to the 'Paasikivi -Kekkonen line', named after Kekkonen and his predecessor as president, J. K. Paasikivi, who also strove to keep Finland neutral and outside the sphere of big-power conflicts by 'the prewar attitude of fear, hostility and mistrust of the Soviet Union' (*ibid.*, 283). It is the phrase 'good neighbourliness' that I will use in the rest of this chapter. Whatever term we use, however, the influence of the Soviet Union in Finland in the postwar years was pervasive – even ubiquitous (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 142).

To be sure, having been co-belligerents with Germany hardly made Finland totalitarian in that period; indeed, the country enjoyed what Oula Silvennoinen (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 129) calls the dubious distinction of being the only democracy to fight on the side of Hitler. Nor did a postwar policy of deference towards the Soviet Union make the country totalitarian. Somewhat against the odds, Finland remained independent – and maintained a multiparty, free market system (Austerlitz 2005, 138; Allison 1985, 10). Yet as Bruce Johnson shows in his

introduction to this book, essentialist understandings of totalitarianism have been called into question in the decades since Hannah Arendt,⁵ with the dualistic model of confrontation between totalitarian states and liberal democracies replaced by a more nuanced view. In terms of jazz, as Rüdiger Ritter points out elsewhere in this book, it is too simplistic to suggest that the Soviets simply tried and failed to keep out nasty American music as an exemplar of cultural imperialism. But even during the periodic violent crackdowns, totalitarianism was less than total: jazz records remained available on the black market, and musicians and audiences alike refused to be silenced (Starr 1994, 223-4, 332).

Dallin and Breslauer suggested as early as 1970 that political terror was the linchpin of totalitarianism, understood as ‘the arbitrary use, by organs of political authority, of severe coercion against individuals or groups, *the credible threat of such use*, or the arbitrary extermination of such individuals or groups’ (1970, 1; my italics). Only from today’s vantage point is it clear that the Finns would retain sovereignty; the threat of Soviet force seemed credible enough at the time, and not only during specific crises such as the Night Frost Crisis (1958), the Note Crisis (1961), and the invasion of Czechoslovakia (1968). As Lavery notes, for instance, many Finns saw the end of the Prague Spring as a possible foreshadowing of a Soviet occupation of Finland (2006, 140). I suggest that totalitarianism might therefore be said to have an *infectious* quality – a quality with the ability to cross borders.⁶ As Lavery writes, ‘since achieving independence in 1917, the shadow of the Russian bear has guided, and in some cases misguided, Finland’s foreign policy’ (2006, 12). Finland, then, may be seen to represent almost a refracted totalitarianism, totalitarianism at one step removed; in the terminology of my title, the Soviet Union cast a totalitarian ‘shadow’ over its democratic neighbour.

One result of this ‘shadow’ was an attempt to achieve stability based on reducing mistrust between Finland and the Soviet Union (Meinander 2011, 159). For the Finnish media, for instance, Meinander suggests ‘good neighbourliness’ meant self-censorship – even ‘distortions’ (185-6). Lavery points out that, especially during the 1970s when ‘good neighbourliness’ was at its peak, Finns would not publish dissident literature such as Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago*; participation in organizations such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International was discouraged; and for many, membership of the Finnish-Soviet Friendship Society was a requirement for professional advancement (2006, 142). Lavery also points out that this self-censorship was not necessarily the result of Soviet pressure; instead, ‘the Moscow Card’ was played for domestic reasons, in an era of ‘national self-deception’. But it was no less powerful for that.

Though it is an overused term, Finland, strategically poised between East and West (Howell 2006, 265), really does occupy a liminal space – and even more so during the Cold War. I have suggested that, although certainly not totalitarian itself, Finland represented a kind of ‘refracted’ totalitarianism. The country also found itself poised, as one journal article has it, ‘between defeat and victory’ (Kivimäki, 2012). In a sense, the country was even poised between peace and war: we might borrow from Svanibor Pettan the concept of ‘a war-peace continuum’ (O’Connell and Castelo-Branco 2010, 188). Certainly they were at the ‘peace’ end of this spectrum, but the fact that even the war itself was ‘cold’ is a reminder that the world had moved beyond traditional binaries. This threshold position helped create the conditions for a distinctively Finnish jazz.

Towards a Finnish Jazz

Although jazz existed in Finland as early as the 1920s, it was only following the repeal of the wartime ban on dancing in 1948 (Gronow 1973, 62) that it began for the first time to diverge from dancing (Konttinen 1987, 25). Although the American model remained dominant and sales relatively low (Gronow 1995, 45), some excellent Finnish musicians emerged in the postwar period, among them Olli Häme, Erik Lindström, Valto Laitinen, Herbert Katz, Antero Stenberg and Teuvo Suojärvi. The 1950s also saw the birth of the Scandia label, for jazz and jazz-related recordings (Austerlitz 2005, 139). Most agree, however, that it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that a form of jazz emerged that was fully and distinctively Finnish (Konttinen 1987, 25; Haavisto 1996, 41). Trumpeter Henrik Otto Donner, one of the key musicians to emerge in the era, spoke of a ‘paradigm shift’ (Austerlitz 2005, 143-4), with Austerlitz agreeing that jazz moved from mere spice in the brew of Finnish dance band music to a music performed by dedicated professionals – and aimed at listeners rather than dancers (ibid., 144). Alongside Donner, important musicians of this period included drummers Anssi Pethman and Christian Schwindt, saxophonist Eero Koivistoinen and saxophonist/flautist Esa Pethman. The momentum towards a national jazz continued to build into the 1970s, spearheaded by another batch of highly talented players: drummer Edward Vesala, reedsmen Juhani Aaltonen and Seppo 'Paroni' Paakkunainen, pianist Heikki Sarmanto, and bass players Pekka Sarmanto and Teppo Hauta-aho.

Such a national jazz is not easy to characterize – the very concept of Finnishness, as Kari Kallioniemi and Kimi Kärki point out (2009, 62), is ‘vague and contradictory’ – but the following descriptions are useful, apart from anything else, in depicting the most common self-representing - stereotypes. Jukka Perko, artistic

director of Viapori Jazz Festival, says Finnish jazz is minimalistic: ‘It’s similar to our design, with simple lines, perhaps more edgy’ (Chela 2013). Perko also paraphrases a quote from the most famous Finnish classical composer, Jean Sibelius – ‘Don’t write any unnecessary musical notes!’ – and links this minimalist tendency to the Finnish climate: ‘Our extreme winter weather conditions have forced us to be accurate when sowing and harvesting the crop. We couldn’t afford to lose or waste anything. It was all about precision and hard work, weeding out what was unnecessary – like in our music’ (Chela, 2013).

Kaarresalo-Kasari and Kasari suggest a link between Finland’s landscape (‘thousands of lakes, vast forests and far-reaching wilderness’) and the fact that Finnish jazz tends to be ‘calm and peaceful with floating rhythm or static tempo or even with no recognisable tempo at all’ (2010, 9). Certainly the lack of swing was noted as early as the 1950s (Haavisto 1996, 35) and is still remarked upon today (Kaarresalo-Kasari and Kasari 2010, 8). In terms of mood, some say there’s a melancholy in Finnish jazz. Journalist Dan McClenaghan, for instance, relates the sombre and introspective characteristics of Aaltonen’s music to his nationality: ‘perhaps it’s a Finnish thing’ (2014). Speaking to the Jazz Convention website, drummer Markku Ounaskari agreed:

We Finnish people are a mixture of Scandinavian and Slavic, eastern culture. For me this Slavic, very melancholic, but not depressive music, is very beautiful. Their simple melodies give us a natural and inspirational base to improvise. And definitely we feel this music very deeply inside us (No author 2011).

What of a totalitarian influence on this music? Matti Konttinen (1987, 25) sees Louis Armstrong’s 1949 visit to Helsinki as the dividing line between the ‘rhythm music’ of the early years and the birth of a music we might recognize as jazz today.

That visit coincided almost exactly with Finland's Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance with the Soviet Union. Under the terms of the treaty, Finland pledged to defend itself against any attack on Finland or in the USSR through Finland 'by Germany or any State allied with the latter', while Finland's desire 'to remain outside the conflicting interests of the Great Powers' was also recognized (Lavery 2006, 137). According to Singleton (1981, 280), the treaty formed the basis of all subsequent Russo-Finnish relations. Is it possible, then, that a policy of 'good neighbourliness' towards the Soviet Union influenced Finnish jazz? True, 'good neighbourliness' refers primarily to foreign rather than domestic policy – but jazz, the sonic secret weapon, was indeed part of the international politics of the Cold War.⁷

The effects of 'good neighbourliness' on jazz are difficult to pin down, in part because the Finnish population was far from homogeneous in its attitude towards the music. Gronow (1973: 63) suggests a split between urban, educated youth, who tended to like jazz and rock, and more conservative, patriotic listeners who remained loyal, paradoxically enough, to Finnish tango (Austerlitz 2005, 142). The other factor that complicates the effect of 'good neighbourliness' on Finnish jazz is that the history of jazz in the Soviet Union itself is heterogeneous in the extreme, oscillating wildly from censorship and restriction to state sponsorship (Pickhan and Ritter 2010, 83, Lücke 2007, 1).⁸ Particularly under Stalin, there were handbrake turns in official policy, with even musicians who had enjoyed considerable support liable to find themselves suddenly sent to the gulag (Stites 1992, 73-4; Lücke 2007, 2-3, Starr 1994, 79-228). Khrushchev, who became leader after Stalin's death in 1953, was on the whole less hostile towards jazz than his predecessor, (Pickhan and Ritter 2010, 99; Starr 1994, 261; Stites 1992, 132; Davenport 2009, 33), although there was a backlash between 1962 and the start of the Brezhnev regime in 1964. Richard Stites (1992,

160) suggests it was during the Brezhnev era, which lasted until 1982, that Soviet jazz reached its peak, and it may be no coincidence that there is the consensus noted above that a truly distinctive Finnish jazz emerged during the same period – although even under Brezhnev, the status of the music in the Soviet Union was uncertain. The liberal interlude that followed his rise to power was brought to an end in 1968 by the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (Starr 1994, 275, 290), although the situation was again improving by 1971 when Duke Ellington was invited to tour the Soviet Union having been refused the previous decade (Cohen 2011, 297-300).

Otto Donner suggested that, in Finland, jazz did not progress in an orderly historical sequence from swing to bebop and then on to modal and free jazz; for all practical purposes, bebop was skipped over completely (Haavisto 1996, 44). Musician and critic Sami Ahokas agrees: ‘When you think of the top musicians of that period, such as Herbert Katz and Teuvo Suojärvi, they in a way just swam through the bebop tidal wave directly to the way of playing we now call mainstream. If you want to talk about real bebop, there just simply wasn’t any of it in Finland’ (Haavisto 1996, 27). It would be easy to assume that a policy of ‘good neighbourliness’ can explain this apparent failure of bebop to take hold in Finland at that time. Soviet influence certainly seems to have been behind the condemnation of bebop in late 1940s Estonia, for instance (Reimann 2012, 96). To claim too direct or causal a link with ‘good neighbourliness’ in the case of Finland, however, would be a simplification. For one thing, there *were* some musicians playing bebop, among them pianist Valto Laitinen (Haavisto 1996: 46) and saxophonist Antero Stenberg (*ibid.*, 28). And, while customs restrictions resulted in a scarcity of imported records until 1956, there *were* ways of hearing bebop in Finland: seamen working ferries to Sweden would bring back records, musicians would make ‘dishwashing’ trips to Stockholm to see bebop

musicians, and there were radio broadcasts by the BBC and the Voice of America (Haavisto 2010, 27-8). By 1949, there was a Finnish jazz programme too, actually entitled (oddly from today's 'jazz as metagenre' perspective) 'From Jazz to Bebop'.

Even if it is true that there was *relatively* little bebop in Finland, a policy of 'good neighbourliness' can be at best a partial explanation. Even when it reached a 'crescendo' in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev (Starr 1994, 243), bebop had failed to make a significant impact in Finland – suggesting it was not only Soviet pressure that had prevented the music from flourishing in previous years. Instead, the dominant style of the 1950s was cool jazz, as heard on records such as Pentti Ahola's 'Little White Lies', Kalevi Hartti 'September in the Rain' and Olli Häme 'Without You' (Haavisto 1996, 35-36). And cool jazz was hardly less American – or more Soviet – than bebop.

Ahokas suggests another, more prosaic, reason for the relative failure of bop to gain a foothold in Finland: the Finns simply lacked the technical facility at that time (Haavisto 1996, 27). Haavisto (*ibid.*, 35) suggests a number of other possible factors: a German-Russian musical tradition, Finland's remote geographical location, the almost complete lack of a blues tradition for the first two decades, a general cultural bias against jazz and, finally, five years of war. The relative lack of bebop might also be explained in part by the fact that Finland was at the time still a predominantly rural country: in 1945, approximately one quarter of Finns lived in urban areas and that figure reached 50% only in 1970 (Lavery 2006, 147-8).

If there was a relationship between Finnish jazz and the totalitarian 'shadow', then, it was subtle and complex. It is also contested. Drummer and pianist Jukkis Uotila suggests that, from the 1960s, Finland's leftist movement, under Soviet influence, regarded American jazz as 'something culturally degrading' (Kaarresalo-

Kasari and Kasari 2010, 15); Kaarresalo-Kasari and Kasari suggest that ‘anything originating from the west was negative and anything coming from our eastern neighbour was positive’ (ibid.). Kallioniemi and Kärki assert that the ‘neo-Stalinist atmosphere of the Finlandization era’ ensured that all Anglo-American influences were seen as unpatriotic (2009, 64).⁹ John Coltrane was only one prominent American musician to visit Finland in the early 1960s, while the First Annual Helsinki Jazz Festival, in 1964, featured Miles Davis and Dave Brubeck among others (Haavisto 1996, 39-40). And evidence of an American impact on the music is hard to ignore: Heikki Sarmanto was influenced by Bud Powell; Anssi Pethman by Elvin Jones; Pekka Sarmanto by Paul Chambers and Scott LaFaro; Otto Donner by Miles Davis; Christian Schwindt by Art Blakey and others (Haavisto 1996, 42-3). By the late 1960s, Eero Koivistoinen was performing at international festivals with American trumpeter Clark Terry (Haavisto 1996, 50).

Certainly, ‘good neighbourliness’ was by no means the only influence shaping Finnish jazz in the period. As ever, there were a number of other cultural, social, economic and political aspects; as a reminder that the factors went beyond genre, we might note that it was also in the early 1970s that a distinctively Finnish rock came into its own (Meinander 2011, 177-8). One result of ‘good neighbourliness’, I will suggest, was insularity – but given the country’s geographical position, as well as the lack of immigration in the period (Lavery 2006, 150), it is possible that Finland would have been relatively isolated even without the totalitarian ‘shadow’ of the Soviet Union. Language barriers may also have contributed to this insularity: Estonian, the closest relative of Finnish, was on the other side of the Iron Curtain. The period from 1950 to 1980 was also the most intensive phase in the creation of the Finnish welfare

state (Meinander 2011, 172), something Kaarresalo-Kasari and Kasari link back to the national jazz scene: ‘We are the land of equal rights in many regards. This can also be seen in our bands. They operate without much hierarchy; everyone is equal to each other’ (2010, 11).

We can also find other explanations for the artistic success of Finnish jazz from the 1960s onwards. The Finnish Jazz Federation was founded in 1966 – a year that also saw the birth of the Pori jazz festival. Having not previously been deemed suitable for monetary stipends and other public cultural support, there was legislation to promote the arts from 1967 (Haavisto 1996, 44). Education also played a significant part: following educational camps and workshops in the 1960s, jazz education was formalized with the establishment of the Oulunkylä Pop/Jazz Institute in 1972 (Haavisto 1996, 53-56). The Sibelius Academy, which previously regarded jazz ‘with a certain degree of disdain’, embraced jazz during the 1970s and officially opened its Department of Jazz Studies in 1983 (Haavisto 1996, 55-57).

The emergence of a distinctively Finnish jazz in the 1960s and 1970s, then, cannot be explained only in terms of a totalitarian ‘shadow’. That said, it may be no coincidence that truly distinctive Finnish jazz is regarded to have emerged in the same era that ‘good neighbourliness’ reached its peak (Kivimäki 2012, 493). One key consequence of this policy was insularity. Lavery suggests that the outcome of World War Two changed Finns’ basic assumptions about their place in the larger world:

Before the war, Finns struggled to build a national identity in larger, especially European, contexts. After the war they believed that insulating themselves from the outside world best preserved national identity. The Paasikivi-Kekkonen Line encouraged Finns to think that they stood between East and West, really belonging to neither. Finns spoke of Europe as if their country lay on another continent (2006: 150).

This sense of insularity was evident in Finns' retrospective view of their relationship with another previously totalitarian country: Germany. As Silvennoinen notes, many Finns still feel obliged to explain away the partnership with the Nazis (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 129), particularly following the 'moral turn' (Stenius, Österberg and Östling 2011, 11-16, 25-26) that has emphasized the centrality of the Holocaust and, in the words of Aunesluoma, made Auschwitz the keyhole through which the whole Second World War is seen (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 214). The Finnish response has typically been to claim to have fought a 'separate war', distinct from the Second World War and instead simply the latest in a long chain of heroic and lonely defensive wars against Russia (Stenius, Österberg and Östling 2011, 60). Although few professional historians still hold the view, the claim that Finland fought a 'separate war' remains remarkably persistent in the general population today (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 202, 215). A similar 'separateness' was evident in Finland's relations with the Soviet Union: the desire 'to remain outside the conflicting interests of the Great Powers' that was recognized in the treaty of 1948.

This sense of separation could not help but affect the country's jazz, especially since it also took the form of a geographical isolation. This is in contrast to Denmark and Sweden, both long-time destinations for touring and expatriate US jazz musicians (Nicholson 2005, 206-9, Kaarresalo-Kasari and Kasari 2010, 12). Finland, given its ties to the Soviet Union, was markedly less attractive to these American expats, and Vesala himself suggested that this isolation, the result of Cold War geopolitics, helped keep the music distinct. 'Before I was 21, I didn't even know what the blues was', he told journalist Phil Johnson (1993).

I had no record player and no records but sometimes I heard music in a dance-hall in the countryside, when they played tango. That was my first contact; but when I started to play, I started very strong. Famous European players start when they are seven years old and play

every day, but now I think that my background was good. I learnt to be in the country and I didn't even hear people, I heard wind. If you want to copy, to be an American monkey, then it is different.

As well as avoiding swing, Finnish jazz of the 1960s and 1970s tended to embrace national folk traditions. For some, this was an ideological decision: there is evidence that the communist youth objected to jazz in the 1950s for its American associations (Kallioniemi and Kärki 2009, 63) and tried to right the balance by turning to Finnish folk. Esa Pethman's landmark 1965 album *The Modern Sound of Finland*, for instance, drew on folk and the Finnish classical tradition as well as John Coltrane and Eric Dolphy (Haavisto 1996, 42): this was an album with space for a track entitled *Finnish Schnapps* as well as one called *Blues For Duke*. Koivistoinen's debut solo album *Valtakunta*, released later in the decade and featuring words by Finnish poets Pentti Saarikoski, Jarkko Laine, Tuomas Anhava and Hannu Mäkelä, was a similarly important landmark in terms of Finnish jazz finding its voice. The embrace of folk by Finnish jazz musicians became even more pronounced in the 1970s, in the work of musicians such as saxophonists Sakari Kukko and Seppo Paakkunainen. Kukko combined jazz with ancient Finnish folk tunes in his band Piirpauke, looking not to Western Finnish culture but to the culture of Eastern Finland and Karelia – the northern territories ceded to the Soviet Union and the country's cultural heartland (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 131). Such was the symbolic importance of the region that Vesala and Paakkunainen actually took 'Karelia' as the name of the act they formed in 1970, inspired by the folk-rock of Fairport Convention as well as jazz (Austerlitz 200, 147). Karelia was also closely linked to the Finnish epic, the *Kalevala*, a number of orally transmitted folk narratives collected and combined by Finnish doctor Elias Lönnrot back in 1835 (Austerlitz 2005: 122).

Vesala set the *Kalevala* for theatre (Nicholson 2005: 208); Kukko played with a band actually called Kalevala; Wigwam, a progressive rock group with strong links to jazz, wrote a song, *Häätö*, inspired by the *Kalevala* (Kallioniemi and Kärki 2009: 63). According to Haavisto (1996, 47), Pethman had been working towards a new way of relating to the mythological *Kalevala* landscape as early as 1962: his *Paimenlaulu* (*Shepherd's Song*) can be considered the first recorded jazz composition with identifiably Finnish qualities (ibid., 42, 28).

This embrace of folk by Finnish jazz players was not only the result of insularity caused by 'good neighbourliness': it was also patriotic pride linked to a new self-confidence in relation to the Soviet Union and the Second World War. In the immediate postwar years, Finns tended to see themselves as having lacked agency in that conflict (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 8), the dominant metaphor being that of 'driftwood': Finland as an innocent victim of the destructive forces that were set free in the autumn of 1939 (Stenius, Österberg and Östling 2011, 58). The driftwood concept lost credibility (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 211-2), however, in the 1960s. What emerged in its place was the idea that Finland's leaders had deliberately chosen war in 1941. Rather than driftwood, then, the country had been a skillfully steered rowing boat (Stenius, Österberg and Östling 2011, 59) – and that rowing boat towed Finnish jazz in its wake.¹⁰

It is not at all my intention ascribe *every* change in Finnish jazz to the totalitarian 'shadow': after all, it was not only Finnish jazz that was growing distinct from the American mainstream. Other Nordic musicians, too, were forging distinctive jazz identities, often also by drawing on folk traditions (Nicholson 2005, 203), as often represented on the Munich-based ECM label, for whom Finns including Aaltonen and Vesala also recorded. David Ake makes the point that ECM was

concerned with nostalgia: an imagined home that was both safe and eternal (Ake 2010, 99). The fact that musicians from other countries were also searching for such an 'imagined home' is a reminder that we cannot make too simplistic a link between Finnish jazz of the era and the totalitarian 'shadow' cast by the Soviet Union. Yet 'imagined home' could hardly be a more apt description of Karelia, constructed by Finns, according to Outi Fingerroos (2008, 235), as 'a place of memory and utopias'.

Finnish jazz from the 1980s to the present

Although this chapter focuses on the influence of Soviet totalitarianism on Finnish jazz of the 1960s and 1970s, I would like to conclude by exploring the influence of the totalitarian 'shadow' on more recent Finnish jazz musicians. After a troubled decade following the invasion of Czechoslovakia, Soviet jazz had gained a measure of stability by the late 1970s and, according to S. Frederick Starr, the music of the 1980s far surpassed that of the 1960s in terms of creative originality (1004, 316-7).

The acceptance of jazz by Soviet officials was, of course, good news for Finnish jazz – even if the same changes, related to a broader culture of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, also reduced the influence of the Soviet Union on Finland in general. Relations between the two countries were relatively warm: Andropov, Soviet leader for a brief fifteen months from late 1982, described Soviet-Finnish relations in that year as a 'vivid example of the vital power of peaceful coexistence' (Allison 1985, 108). That process only sped up when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985

(Meinander 2011, 188). Emboldened by changes across the border, Mauno Koivisto, who succeeded Kekkonen as president in 1982, tended to be less willing than his predecessor to see Finland as in the shadow of Soviet Union.

Lavery (2006, 155) suggests that the reduction in East-West tensions during the 1980s allowed Finland to remove some of the ‘Soviet filter’ in its relations with the West. In jazz, international relationships, already pioneered by Vesala and Aaltonen, picked up: Teppo Hauta-aho worked with Cecil Taylor and Alexander von Schlippenbach; Koivistoinen with Jack DeJohnette and John Scofield; Vesala with Reggie Workman. Trumpeters Simo Salminen and Mike Koskinen and drummer Jukka-Pekka Uotila spent significant periods in the United States. This link to America is perhaps best represented by guitarist Raoul Björkenheim, who was born in LA to Finnish parents and has spent approximately half his life in each country; he is, as the title of one *All About Jazz* article had it, the “guitarist between two continents” (Shaw, 2005).

All this might suggest that ‘good neighbourliness’ was no longer a significant influence on Finnish jazz. Yet the influence of Finnish folk remained strong, with musicians such as Heikki Syrjänen of the Ethnoboys utilising Finnish cowherds' horns in an attempt to escape the stylistic baggage of the saxophone (Austerlitz 2000, 203). Saxophonist Paroni Paakkunainen, meanwhile, joined forces with the Sami writer and musician Nils-Aslak Valkeapää. Kallioniemi and Kärki suggest (2009, 61) that the collapse of the Soviet Union caused rock musicians to embrace the Finnish folk tradition: it was primarily the generation that came of age after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, they state, that turned to the *Kalevala* for inspiration. Finnish jazz, as I have shown, had been there first.

By the time the Soviet Union dissolved at the end of 1991, Finland had

reached the end of the Paasikivi-Kekkonen Line (Lavery 2006, 143). Yet while the collapse of the Soviet Union is an obvious cultural as well as political landmark, it did not lead immediately to a radically different type of Finnish jazz. A boom in Finnish jazz did occur, with ‘nu-jazz’ ensembles such as Quintessence, The Five Corners Quintet, Nuspirit Helsinki, U-Street All Stars and Ilmiliekki Quartet, but not until around the turn of the millennium. Far from the brooding Finnish stereotype, this music was closer to acid jazz, building on the work of the pioneering RinneRadio in the 1990s in its incorporation of elements of electronic dance music. It was not melancholy or minimalist, nor were there bursts of fury; rhythm, a background presence in much previous Finnish jazz, was suddenly prominent. Though this nu-jazz scene has perhaps had its day, a number of other leading jazz players are making music that is, at least superficially, a far cry from the tradition we have seen emerging in the 1960s and 1970s. Keyboard player Kari Ikonen plays ‘afro-pop-jazz’ among other genres (Ikonen, no date); saxophonist Mikko Innanen, like Ikonen associated with the Fiasko collective, has been praised by reviewers as making ‘funny’ music (Woodard, no date); Trio Töykeät, led by pianist Iiro Rantala, are similarly described on the website of their label ACT as ‘one of the weirdest, *funniest* and most visionary piano trios in international jazz [my italics]’ (no author, no date).

It would be easy to assume that this move away from melancholy – or melancholy punctuated by fury – is ubiquitous, and that it can be traced simply and directly to the removal of the Soviet ‘shadow’. The reality, of course, is not that simple. **As I suggested earlier, [DELETE IF EARLIER REFERENCE IS DELETED]** Humour was an element in Finnish jazz even under the totalitarian ‘shadow’. Equally, an element of fury remains in the music of today: Innanen, for instance, makes ‘violent skronk’ (Langhoff, 2011) with his groups Innkvisitio and Plop. Despite this

breadth, and a number of international collaborations, such as those set up between Finnish and French musicians by the promoter Charles Gil, much Finnish music is still perceived in Nordic or Scandinavian terms. This, for instance, is Nicholson on pianist Alexi Tuomarila (2005, 217-8): ‘Tuomarila’s playing, a rich, expansive vocabulary that is never flaunted but put to compositional ends within the framework of his improvisations, has a very Scandinavian feel to it’. Reviews of trumpeter Verner Pohjola, formerly a member of Quintessence and the Ilmiliekki Quartet but now a renowned solo artist, similarly summon the Nordic jazz clichés even as they bat them away: ‘a faintly disconsolate beauty that nonetheless avoids all the usual north-European, windswept-jazz clichés’ (Fordham, 2011).

The tendency to locate Finnish jazz within a Nordic context has a certain logic, and no doubt helps Finnish musicians to find a market, but it also distracts and detracts from another, equally important, group of international relationships: those with countries formerly behind the Iron Curtain. Estonian guitarist Ain Agan, for instance, works with his compatriot Mihkel Mälgand as well as two Finns: Teemu Viinikainen on guitar and drummer Mika Kallio. Both Björkenheim and Innanen, meanwhile, have worked with Estonian guitarist Jaak Sooäär. The Estonian group Kadri Voorand features Finnish saxophonist Jussi Kannaste. Kari Ikonen’s trio features Armenian bassist Ara Yaralyan. Elena and the Rom Ensemble are a Finnish quintet led by vocalist Elena Mindru, who is of Romanian heritage. Poland’s Tomasz Stańko, who previously worked with Vesala, featured two Finns – drummer Olavi Louhivuori and pianist Alexi Tuomarila – on his 2009 ECM album *Dark Eyes*. The list could go on. Such shared sensibility with nations such as Estonia and Poland is a reminder that, as much as it can be seen as a Nordic, and a Western, country, Finland

can also be understood as an eastern European country with eastern European problems (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013, 133).

For all the collaborations, there's also an enduring separateness to jazz in Finland. This is partly, of course, simply down to geography. Annamaija Saarela, until recently president of the European Jazz Network, has suggested: 'We are far away from pretty much everywhere, so it is always hard to arrange Finnish bands an opportunity to be seen and heard by audiences elsewhere' (Silas, 2014). But we can also relate it to Finnish history, and the country's ongoing emphasis on having fought a 'separate war'. Did this isolation, *All About Jazz* asked Tuomarila, affect Finnish jazz? 'I believe so', came his reply. 'But I don't know what that characteristic is exactly. Maybe it's something melancholy, some kind of sadness—but in a beautiful way, a good way—a kind of longing' (Lindsay, 2013). Again we have an echo of Karelia, and of 'memory and utopias'.

Certainly, to see the national jazz scene *only* in terms of 'good neighbourliness' would be myopic. Even the notion of categorizing jazz by nation can be questioned, particularly in an era of increasing globalization; it is certainly resisted by Finnish jazz musicians including Rantala (Stenger 2014) and Innanen (Nives 2012). Yet Biddle and Knights suggest that the nation – somewhere between the local and the global – remains 'a crucial but ambivalent category for understanding how cultural texts and practices function in the construction of personal and collective identities' (2007, 1). And a powerful neighbour can clearly have a considerable effect on national identity – nations, after all, being 'imagined communities' (Anderson 2006) – especially when it is totalitarian with a 'credible threat' of coercion.

I acknowledge that I cannot read Finnish, which has left much research beyond my grasp, and would call for more primary research into the effect of the

‘totalitarian shadow’ on Finnish jazz before coming to firm conclusions. Yet I believe I have shown that geopolitical isolation had a significant effect on Finnish cultural life, including jazz, until the collapse of the Soviet Union and Finland’s 1995 entry into the European Union (and possibly beyond). ‘Good neighbourliness’ was only one factor in this sense of separation, but it does provide a useful perspective on the music that is not often discussed – perhaps because the musicians themselves are not even conscious of it. So while situating Finnish jazz within the totalitarian ‘shadow’ does not provide a total explanation, it does, I believe, offer new insights into Finnish musical identity, particularly in relation to Russia, with implications for border countries and relations between East and West more generally – as well as the ways in which jazz mediates identities.

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¹ There are earlier recordings that are sufficiently regarded as jazz to have been included on the series of historical re-issues called *Suomalaista Jazzia* (Finnish Jazz) issued by the Finnish Fazer label. They include:

Markus Rautio with Yrjö's Orchestra, 'Raatikoon Blues' (the word 'Blues' is obviously significant), 1929; Leo Adamson with The Ramblers, 'Muistan Sua, Elaine' ('I remember you, Elaine'), 1931; see Johnson 2002: 53.

² That the war is the most celebrated and debated moment in Finnish history (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013: 199) is in part explained by its human consequences: over 90,000 Finns died and 400,000 were forced to leave their homes. These are, as Juhana Aunesluoma points out (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013: 199), high figures for a population of four million, if not by the grisly standards of contemporaneous Eastern Europe.

³ The union with Germany was pragmatic: Finns might have had grave reservations about the Nazis, says Silvennoinen (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013: 134), but they also saw Germany as a vital counterweight to increasing Soviet power. It is also worth pointing out that, despite widespread and vocal sympathy with Finland during the previous war, (Gilmour and Stephenson 2013: 135) tangible military help from the Allies had failed to materialize.

⁴ Allison agrees that the prominence of the term in the late 1960s was related to Brandt's new role as Chancellor of West Germany (1985: 1-2).

⁵ See, for instance, Gleason (1995).

⁶ Finland is not the only country to have bordered the Soviet Union or the Eastern bloc, yet it was in Finland that this infectiousness was particularly profound. The country's historical relationship with Russia is unique in the region, due to a combination of factors: its former protectorate status under Russia; the fact that, in spite of having been invaded by Russia, Finland, alone in the Baltic sphere, was never Sovietised; and Finland's direct adjacency to Russia. True, Norway also shares a border with Russia but it is short and in the far north, while Finland's shared border is extensive - 1,300km - and in part metropolitan.

⁷ Jazz tended to be seen by the Americans as a cultural weapon, employed in Willis Conover's show on Voice of America (Von Eschen 2004: 13, 18) and in State Department-endorsed international tours by Dizzy Gillespie, Benny Goodman, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington and Dave Brubeck (Crist 2009: 133). Jazz was depicted as a musical enactment of the principles of American democracy (Crist 2009: 138) – despite the paradox that America was sending African Americans abroad to perform a music so fundamentally associated with African American culture at a time when Jim Crow laws were still in place at home. (Crist 2009: 149; Cohen 2011: 305; Pickhan and Ritter 2010: 26; Von Eschen 2004: 4; Davenport 2009: 5).

⁸ If jazz presented a dilemma to all totalitarian states, that dilemma can rarely have been more starkly expressed than in the Soviet Union: yes, this music was American, but it was also the music of *African-Americans*, and as such could be seen to represent both the corpulent bourgeoisie and the oppressed proletariat. This contradiction resulted, at times, in the division of the music into two camps: a bourgeois salon jazz and an 'authentic' proletarian jazz (Lücke 2007: 4; Starr 1994: 79-99; 103, Pickhan and Ritter 2010: 87).

⁹ Austerlitz, meanwhile, offers an opposing view – that Finnish musicians defined themselves in opposition to *Soviet* (rather than American) influence (2005, 143). The cultural baggage carried by jazz – as modern, urban, African-American and democratic – might, in other words, have been a key part of its appeal in an era of bureaucratic, hierarchical and regulated cultural politics.

¹⁰ Kekkonen began to assert in late 1960s that Finland was pursuing an active policy of neutrality, the supreme moment coming in 1975 when he hosted the Conference for Security and Co-operation in Europe and its Final Act in Helsinki. He used the conference to stress that Finland's active neutrality was entirely in accord with the principles of national sovereignty and independence – a point aimed primarily eastwards, since Moscow until this point had been reluctant to recognize Finland as neutral (Meinander 2011: 181-4). Lavery (2006: 142) calls the conference 'Kekkonen's most lasting achievement'. Hosting a prominent international conference might seem to contradict the insularity that I suggest characterized the period, but it can instead be seen as part of Kekkonen's 'balancing act' (Meinander 2011: 167) during this ambiguous and complex period.