

SVÄNG – *contemporary harmonica music*



Line up:

Eero Turkka – chromatic and diatonic harmonicas

Eero Grundström - chromatic and diatonic harmonicas

Jouko Kyhälä - harmonetta, chromatic and diatonic harmonicas

Pasi Leino - base-harmonica

The four charming members of SVÄNG have clearly set new standards when it comes to concerted music on the harmonica - both in terms of repertoire as well as technique. With a sophisticated yet entertaining program of own compositions these harmonica visionaries convince both audience and professional circles around the globe of the unlimited capabilities of this often underestimated tiny instrument. Now the group is releasing their latest album "KARJA-LA" with the German label Galileo. The master piece doesn't only include tunes derived from traditional Finnish folk music and Balkan rhythms, but also features elements making reference to Sibelius, Merikanto and other national romantic composers.

In general Sväng stretch their repertoire undogmatically wide and invite their audience to an extraordinary journey of sounds: a free-spirited, sensual and vital mix of music, which has been honored with the attribute of the „harmonica equivalent of the Kronos-Quartet.“. Contemporary harmonica music, which is certainly unprecedented in terms of compactness and virtuosity.

Three of the group's members are graduates of the renowned Sibelius Academy, while representing the very opposite of any form of academicism. And with Pasi Leino Sväng have a representative of the more than famous Finnish harmonica orchestra tradition in their circle. Jouko Kyhälä describes the brilliant quartet's music as follows: "Our background comes from our country's history. Finland lies between the east and the west. Both the melancholic Russians as well as the cheerful Swedish used to dominate the country. Hence both aspects are present in Finnish mentality and music alike. We have a deep passion for minor tonality with all its wistfulness. At the same time we also have a lot of joie de vivre".

Apart from numerous concerts in Finland, Sväng intensively toured countries such as France, the UK, Germany, Japan, Austria and Italy among others. Moreover, the band excited an audience of millions in front of their TV screens as part of Jools Holland's legendary New Years Show on BBC2 on 31st of December 2008.

Band members:

Eero Grundström: Eero Grundström graduated from Sibelius Academy in 2009. He is a multi-instrumentalist, composer and true improvisation wizard and has worked in all musical fields including free improvisation, theatre, circus, rock, jazz and modern. Apart from harmonica, Eero plays harmonium and other keyboards.

Eero Turkka: Eero Turkka got interested in blues harp as a little boy and ended up studying in Sibelius Academy. Besides harmonica he plays several other ethnic instruments and sings in multiple bands, including Turkka & Paalanen, Äijä, Trepaanit and Cedip Tur. Eero has a strong passion for Balkan style music and has graduated from Sibelius Academy in 2006.

Jouko Kyhälä: Dr. Kyhälä graduated from Sibelius Academy folk music department in 1999 as the first to major harmonica. He completed his post graduate studies and became the first Doctor of Harmonica Arts in April 2007. Kyhälä has multiple musical capacities having worked with folk, jazz, pop, improvisation and modern dance projects as a composer, musician, performer, etc. Kyhälä plays keyboards and harmonica in over 20 albums. His other projects include Markku Lepistö & co, Pekka Lehti & Outo Voima.

Pasi Leino: Pasi Leino is the most senior member of the band. He worked several years with a best known Finnish harmonica trio/quartet "Raimo Sirkiä". They were victorious in 1994 Trossingen harmonica festival.

artist-hp: www.facebook.com/svangharmonica and www.svang.fi

CDs: Sväng (2005); Jarruta (2008), Schladtzshe! (2010)
Sväng play Chopin (2010)

Upcoming album: "Karja-La", March 2014

concerts hitherto: Helsinki Festival, Kaustinen Folk Festival, Konzerthaus Vienna, Porgy & Bess Vienna, Jazzfestival Saalfelden, Palace of Arts Budapest, Philharmonie Luxembourg, RASA Utrecht, Trad It! Groningen, Quasimodo Berlin, Burghof Lörrach, AltstadtHerbst Düsseldorf, TFF Rudolstadt, Ulmer Zelt, La folle journée Nantes, BBC 2 Later with Jools Holland's, Linbury Concert Series, Bath Music Festival, Songlines Encounters Festival, Love & Music Festival Scotland, Japan Tours in 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, Itinerari Folk Trento, Musica dei Popoli Firenze, Folkest Spilimbergo, Malmö Festival, Førde Folk Festival Norway, ...

Press comments:

„This brilliant foursome – the harmonica equivalent of the Kronos Quartet – has everything a band needs: awesome playing, a vivid musical imagination, a great gift for entertainment and a deep passion for music. (...) Sväng will take you to musical places you never dreamt existed.“ (*songlines magazine*)

"A Finnish harmonica quartet! They might sound like a novelty act, but Sväng are writing and playing music that's surprisingly strong on melancholy and pathos. Of course, there's also a great sense of humour and enjoyment in the extraordinary sounds that they bring out of an undervalued instrument - although the word harmonica rather undersells the large bass instrument and chromatic models they've developed. They also write some pretty catchy tunes. Like most of the musicians on the inventive Finnish folk scene, the four members of Sväng - Jouko Kyhala, Eero Grundstrom, Pasi Leino and Eero Turkka - have come out of Helsinki's Sibelius Academy. It's probably safe to say they're the world's leading mouth-organ ensemble." (London Evening Standard, Simon Broughton)

"The idea of a harmonica quartet probably fills most people with shudders anticipating a bad case of Dylanitis. But the opening track of their second album, 'Haidukka', begins with haunting strains that hark back to Sergio Leone's Once Upon a Time in the West. Then a riff that would sit happily in a klezmer song takes over as the four mouth organs – bass, chromatic and diatonic are all used – kick off a lively dance. Trains come to mind, though the album title and cover suggest we are on a mad, merry, manic road trip. Most tracks are slow-paced, intricate and meditative – or at least as far as the harmonica squeal allows.

Sväng were founded in 2003 by Jouko Kyhälä, who has a PhD in harmonica from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. His three Scandinavian bandmates are respected mouth-musicians with a talent for, among other things, overbending – blowing or sucking so hard that you get a new sound – and they explore the entire chromatic scale. At times, the envelope is really pushed. The fifth track, 'Kua Kua Kome Kiki?' has amazing high notes, and turns around a beautiful rhythm that could be an English folk round or even alt country from the US. It's weird as hell, and quite brilliant.

A hit at WOMEX 2007, Sväng will thrill fans of experimental and ambient music. This is a wonderfully original album and while my first impulse was to shelve it as one for the purists or oddballs, it has all the appeal of really good pop music at its heart. " (songlines 51, Chris Moss, "Top of the world")

"The Finnish harmonica rascals Sväng return with Jarruta, making mighty sound that it might be hard to believe all comes from mouth-organs. The pounding, tuba-punching bass end comes largely from Pasi Leino's bass harmonica, an instrument that doesn't usually sound acoustically very bassy except at close range, so Leino's is fitted with close mics. On top of that is Jouko Kyhälä's Hohner Harmonetta, a rectangular metal sandwich-like object fitted with a matrix of buttons that operate reed-groups as chords, and the smaller and more familiar diatonic and chromatic harmonicas played by Eero Grundström, Eero Turkka and Kyhälä.

Their material here, largely self-written, draws on the music of the Balkans, Finnish Roma, Finnish fiddling, Lucky Luke comics and Japanese anime soundtracks. Their exploitation to the full of the ability of diatonic and chromatic harmonicas to pitch-bend, with usually more than one instrument doing that at a time, gives a wonderfully greasy, slithering feel to the music.

From keeningly, soaringly melancholic through chuggy cartoon perkiness to a churning, menacing fuzz-harmonica transformation of a Finnish Roma song to wide-screen massiveness, the playing and arrangements are works of brilliance.

So much more than just a smart idea in ironic big suits, this is a unique combo, not just among harmonica band but anywhere." (f-roots, Andrew Cronshaw)

„Sväng has shown what delightful possibilities abound when the medium of the harmonica quartet finds itself in sophisticated yet fun-loving hands.“ (Sing Out, vol. 50, 2/2006)

“Absolutely packed with energy, overflowing with zest and fire, this group really means what they play – and with much of the album being original pieces composed by the band members, there is no shortage of innovation.” (CD Baby)

“The point of this CD is to spread what I can only describe as wonderful and surprising music... If you´re deadest against reedy music, steer clear. But open-minded listeners and harp fans will find a lot to like in this energetic and emotionally rich album.” (Spin the Globe)