

## SVÄNG – *harmonica attack from Finland*



**Eero Turkka** – chromatic and diatonic harmonicas

**Eero Grundström / Filip Jers** - chromatic and diatonic harmonicas

**Jouko Kyhälä** - harmonetta, chromatic and diatonic harmonicas

**Pasi Leino** - base-harmonica

### **At a glance:**

- ... 16 years of playing harmonicas in unchanged line-up
- ... 8 albums (incl. Sväng plays Chopin; Sväng plays Sibelius – and 2018 Sväng plays Tango)
- ... concerts/tours in 26 countries, including 5 tours to Japan & China
- ... official showcases at womex (2007); Babel Med Marseille (2014); Kulturbörse Freiburg (2017)
- ... 5 Top of the worlds by songlines magazine UK; 2 nominations to "German Record Critics 'Award"
- ... awarded to "Artist of the Year" (held at Finnish Etnogaala in Helsinki January 2019)
- ... nominated to Nordic Council Music Prize 2019 – [www.norden.org](http://www.norden.org)
- ... numerous appearances at radio & TV, including Jools Holland's legendary New Years Show on BBC 2
- ... Helsinki Festival, Førde Festival, Malmö Festival, Konzerthaus Vienna, glatt & verkehrt Festival, Philharmonie Luxembourg, Dranouter Festival, RASA Utrecht, Trad It! Groningen, Rudolstadt Festival, Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, La folle journée Nantes, Palace of Arts Budapest, Bath Music Festival, songlines encounters Festival London, Pau Casals International Music Festival El Vendrell, Musica dei Popoli Firenze, Folkest Spilimbergo etc etc

**"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)

### **More detailed:**

Harmonica Ensemble may not immediately inspire thoughts of high art or serious music-making, but Sväng, founded in 2003, have proved to the disbelievers that this tiny instrument can be very expressive and that its potential is, in fact, unlimited! With a dynamic, energetic stage presence and a repertoire of original music composed by the group member themselves, Sväng are set to dazzle and delight listeners the world over. In their music Slavic melancholy is bolstered by a compulsive rhythmic groove which betrays the groups' love of music of all stripes.

Perhaps their strong appeal can be attributed to the novelty of the ensemble sound Sväng created in the last years coupled with their unique program of virtuoso Balkan rhythms, passionate tango, world music from the North and wild improvisations. A spectacle that must be witnessed live!

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".

Sväng's debut album, released in 2004, was an instant success and was followed by a womex showcase in 2007 and successful tours around Europe, USA, Mexico, Japan and even China, including many radio and television appearances, including Jools Holland's legendary New Years Show on BBC 2. Sväng also appeared on top-notch classical stages: they were invited to arrange and play music of Fryderyk Chopin by French festival "La folle journée" in Nantes. In December 2015 they celebrated 150th birthday of Jean Sibelius, the most remarkable classical composer from Finland with CD "Sväng plays Sibelius"

Their latest album "SVÄNG PLAYS TANGO" was released in July 2018 at German label galileo, like 4 albums before it was a "top of the world" by British songlines magazine. In spring 2020 they will release their new album drawing on finnish traditional music.

Sväng does also enjoy collaboration with other musicians, regularly they play concerts with Austrian accordionist Otto Lechner.

**artist-hp:** [www.facebook.com/svangharmonica](https://www.facebook.com/svangharmonica) and [www.svang.fi](http://www.svang.fi)

**youtube-channel:** <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIjOmh6vrYr4CB6t2GwXeCQ/videos>

**spotify:** <https://open.spotify.com/artist/3iyRVpE76iO4TEhsxtBAON>

**soundcloud:** <https://soundcloud.com/svang>

**CDs:** Sväng (2005); Jarruta (2008), Schladtzshe! (2010), Sväng plays Chopin (2010), Karja-La (2014), Sväng plays Sibelius (2016); Hauptbahnhof (2017); Sväng plays Tango (2018)

#### **Band members:**

**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. Eero is one of the most well known Finnish experimental harmonium players - regularly on stage with symphony orchestras. Eero's compositions often pay reference to Finnish classical composers and are frightened by his band mates because of containing extraordinarily many notes, pushing the physical act of playing harmonica to its limits. Eero is also very busy in other projects, like Suistamon Sähkö, Juuri & Juuri and in duo with Maria Kalaniemi - therefor he is sometimes replaced by

**Filip Jers:** Filip holds a Master Degree of Fine Arts in jazz from the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm - he was the first harmonica player ever to study there. Music critics named him the "Swedish Harmonica Sensation". Filip loves to improvise and moves very easily between jazz, blues, folk & world, pop and classical music - therefor he works very often as studio musician on different artists CD's. In 2014 the Filip Jers Quartet was winner of the "Best Group Award" at the European Jazz Competition held by the EBU in Rotterdam. Due to his incredible skills on harmonica Filip is not a substitute but the 5<sup>th</sup> member in Sväng - although he fails to be Finnish.

**Eero Turkka:** got interested in the blues harp as a little boy. He was playing the blues in the streets of St. Petersburg for some years, but finally ended up studying in Sibelius Academy. His second main exam at Sibelius Academy was the birth of Sväng. His "Romanian Suite", composed and arranged for harmonica quartet, was the first music performed by Sväng. Besides harmonica Eero plays several other ethnic instruments. Eero speaks fluently Bulgarian and Russian and has a strong passion for Balkan style music which can be heard in his compositions and has graduated from Sibelius Academy in 2006.

**Jouko Kyhälä:** graduated from Sibelius Academy folk music department in 1999 as the first ever with harmonica. He completed his post graduate studies and became the first European Doctor of Arts with harmonica in April 2007. Dr. Kyhälä has multiple musical capacities having worked with traditional music, jazz, pop, improvisation and contemporary dance as composer, musician and producer. He performs also as solo artist and with duo Kyhälä & Jers. With Sväng he plays mostly harmonetta, a rare chord harmonica, which is not produced anymore. On tour Dr. Kyhälä spends many hours repairing and maintaining it! Music written by Dr. Kyhälä is very often inspired by nature, finnish history and comics.

**Pasi Leino:** is the most senior member of the band, playing the deepest frequencies on an instrument that looks like a toaster. He is the only band member who has not graduated from Sibelius academy but he is the only one in Finland who masters the bass harmonica and his three band mates. He worked several years with the very well known Finnish harmonica trio/quartet "Raimo Sirkiä". They were victorious in 1994 Trossingen harmonica festival.

**Press comments (English):**

To article about Sväng in [FMQ, January 2019](#)

Top of the world CD - songlines, Nr. 128:

"If you have missed out on the past 14 years of Sväng, this would be a good moment to play catch up. This zany and brilliant harmonica quartet from Finland have been thrilling audiences around the world with their virtuosic playing and opening eyes to the wonders of bass harmonica. Their concerts are entertainment personified, but they are far from being a gimmick. Their compositions and musical influences take in Finnish tango, Balkan dance tunes, Russian love songs and Romanian Gypsy music, all arranged with a deep sensitivity to the traditions from which it comes. Hauptbahnhof brings together some of their best-loved tunes from the last 14 years alongside some new compositions. They have chosen well. "Svängarska Kopanitsa" delights in the off-kilter Bulgarian dance rhythms, with a lyricism, percussiveness and wit that shows off Sväng at their best. "Hedwig's Theme" (from the Harry Potter movies) never sounded so eerie and magical and there are some of Sväng's favourite encores from concerts such as their "Svängtime Rag" or the fiery Romanian tune "Moara", a true contest between the instruments. Here's to another 14 years (or more). (*Fiona Talkington in songlines magazine, 128*)

„... I'm lost in mystification and respect for how they put together these fearsomely smart arrangements of their own compositions and make them so alive and natural. ...“ (froots)

„A touch of Howlin' Wolf, hints of anarchic fiddle playing, traditional Baltic runo song, and a jumping minuet: prepare yourself for the latest journey into the unknown from those frolicsome and feisty Finns, Sväng. The territory here is often quite scary, but scarily good. Armed with their harmonicas they venture over borders recollecting historical conflicts, entwining us in age-old love stories - ever inventive - as we shift a little uncertainly in our seats and then give in to the helpless state we find ourselves in, thanks to the efforts of such wild and wonderful musical minds.

'Kyytilainen' (The Captured Passenger), which wrestles with the story of post Finnish civil war relationships, deserves world-wide fame for its stunning melody. It's moving and invigorating: surely there must be a TV series somewhere crying out for a truly memorable theme? 'Karja-La' celebrates Karelia, home of the Kalevala, and they say it's a utopia where the quadrille is still danced. Sväng are just four creative, energetic, brilliant, off-the-wall guys who play harmonicas together. Listen, and then dream with them.“ (Top of the world, songlines July 2014, Fiona Talkington)

„Four men and four harmonicas, that's Sväng in all its glory. The quartet has already made itself a name on the world music scene, and for good reason. Few groups have really created a sound that is this personal and recognisable. Combining influences like Finnish tango, Balkan music and Finnish *pelimanni* music isn't easy, but they get it all to sound like just Sväng music. ... Pelimanni melodies can be heard at their most beautiful in *Wedding March for Eero and Neda* - before it all turns into a Balkan feast! *Impivaara* is a fascinating collage of Finnish forest moods, almost postmodern with different kinds of sampling (for example Sibelius). Musicianship is on the highest level here, and the Sväng guys also prove to be excellent composers, very talented with shaping even long tunes in an organic way, lacking any sign of dullness.“ (Finnish Music Quarterly, 2/2014)

Simon Broughton in songlines Blog (26.03.2014) about showcasing Babel Med

"The Finnish harmonica quartet Sväng are Songlines favourites and we had them at our Encounters Festival in 2010. The music is original but always drawing on Finnish traditions, or sometimes Balkan music. Eero Turkka, one of the quartet, has married a Bulgarian lady and now lives in Sofia. The standout piece in the concert was 'Karja-La', like Shangri-La, the title-track of their new album. It's a musical depiction of Karelia, the heartland of Finnish identity - as a nostalgic past, a place of conflict, emigration and Russification. The recent events in Crimea illustrate the topicality of the music. What I like about Sväng is the depth of the music alongside the sense of fun."

"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)

"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)

"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)