

Musicians' portrait: Markku Kaikkonen

'Make the most out of everybody's potential'

Markku Kaikkonen has been working as a music teacher in the field of special music education. He is one of the founders of the Special Music Centre Resonaari, which organizes goal oriented music education for people with special needs.

Mr. Kaikkonen developed the Figure note -notation system together with his colleague Mr. Kaarlo Uusikylä. Figure notes make note reading possible for students who are not even able to read normal texts. Figure notes have been opening new possibilities to develop goal oriented music education for disabled people. Great progress of the student's musical skills and personal development gives self respect and music teaching has always positive influence on the student rehabilitation.

In the long run there will be a new group of professional musicians and there will be new music markets and audiences for new musicians. Markku Kaikkonen himself calls this development as a 'cultural revolution'.

In the year 2005 the Special Music Centre Resonaari won the first price of the 'Cultural act of the year' competition, which is organized by the Finnish Broadcasting Company. Resonaari has been creating something totally new in the field of Finnish cultural life.

1) Studying time

I started my music studies in a local music school with piano and singing lessons. First years I was studying only classical music, but later I started to study guitar and drums by myself and playing in bands. New musical styles meant to me to transferring my personal studies in a social context.

After gymnasium I went to Oulu University and started to study Teacher Training Department. Beside music many other subjects were important for me in University and I felt that I got wide general knowledge in many school subjects like languages and mathematics. At the same time my teacher encouraged me to start music studies in Conservatory.

After few year University studies I applied and got studying place in Oulu Conservatory Church Music department. Church music and organ playing was totally new world for me and afterwards I realize that I got many important competences in Conservatory. There were no religious reasons behind my Church music interests and the change from the rock bands to church music was great experience for me.

After studying in Oulu University and Conservatory I moved to Helsinki and started my studies in Sibelius-Academy Music Education department. It took some years for me to get in social life. After few years studies I started to work confidential posts in Teachers Association as student representative and making editing work in music magazine. For me it was very important to get know different musicians and personalities.

During the Academy studies I got good basic skills and knowledge for the music teacher and musician profession. The most important for me was anyhow influence of the some remarkable teachers. Music exercise (dance) was new way for me to understand music and body. The other remarkable teacher I found in the field of music therapy. Music therapy gave me more understanding what influence music has for the human mind. Afterwards it is easy to tell that music therapy studies have been playing in a major role in my current work. Orf - pedagogy taught for me new teaching methods and gave freedom to work without notes. Also improvisation became more important in my music teaching concept.

Studies abroad have been giving new perspective to understand better home land. The great experiences for me were when I was learning how to teach ballet for disabled people. It raised major questions for me, what is the relation between humanity and art. The new way of thinking became the respect of every people potentiality, trying to take all potentiality in use and taking all possible benefit from ones potential. These ideas have been in a very important role in my pedagogical growing and current working identity.

The greatest challenge for me during the Sibelius-Academy studies was how to learn pedagogical and didactical skills. When I made my first training period in school, I realized that I had no needed skills and knowledge to meet reality in school room. I felt myself powerless and hopeless. I felt that studies should have been giving more tools to face real working life challenges.

2) Working life

For me the biggest challenge as teacher is to build a long term working plan for the children. It is easy to teach special skills and give knowledge for the student, but the real challenge is to make conditions for long term learning and at the same time take in the consideration children grown as whole personality. It is a great pedagogical challenge to know what, when and how one must teach children and what is the order of the studied things.

I was already working as a teacher during my studying time. After graduating I started to teach special students in public school. At the beginning it was very difficult. It was hard to believe that it can be so difficult to work with youngsters. The students had big problems in their personal life and I got no contact to students. It was clear that something must be done and I started to give private instrument lessons for students with the help of other teacher who worked with the rest of the group during the instrumental lessons. Slowly the relation between me and students got better and finally we were able to play in bands and we even gave a concert for the parents, which was naturally great success. It seems to be very important for the special students to get individual training and get real progress in their music hobby.

I made my military service as civil servant in a mental hospital. After military service I continued working in a hospital. Working with difficult patients like in a closed youth department was important experience for me.

When I started to work in my current working place, Special Music Centre Resonaari, I was the only worker in a school. Music Center Resonaari organize goal oriented music education for people with special needs (disabled students). Little by little more students and new teachers started to work in Music School. Today there are 7 teachers and 106 students in Resonaari.

At the beginning there were no ready structures and everything has to be created from nothing and everything was new for me. I worked very hard to build up teaching models and

structures. I also have to face the fact that I had no training for the management, leadership, financing the activity, marketing and curriculum planning.

I find it important that training in Higher- Education gives a broad basic skills and knowledge, connection to working life and open mind for new solutions. To put it on the other words there are three different "personalities": wondering personality (attitude/open mind), research personality (finding information) and developer personality (creating new practices). With "different personalities" young musicians are able to find new solutions and ways of working. In my mind it should be written down in teaching plans that one of the main goals of the training is foster student creative thinking and open mind attitude. We have to be able to find and create new worlds.

3) Creating new practices

At the moment I find it difficult that there is no clear concept for special music education and there is always a great danger for the misunderstanding between music therapy and music education. Conservatories organize training for the music therapy but there is no proper music pedagogical training for the teachers working in the field of special music education. There is also no National Curriculum for the goal oriented music education in the field of special music education.

Today Special Music Centre Resonaari is organizing music education and music therapy, gives information services, make research and produce learning material. The biggest invention and new teaching material is called Figure notes, which make note reading possible for the students who are not even able to read normal texts.

We realized very soon that students were able to read notes very fast and it opened for us new possibilities to develop goal oriented music education for the disabled people. Figure notes suites especially well for the students who have learning difficulties and it gives first time real possibilities for new target groups to participate goal oriented music education. Beside music studies goal oriented music teaching has always positive influence for the student rehabilitation.

Today we are more and more interested in how to use new pedagogical information and Figure notes to develop "ordinary" music education for instance with young children and seniors. There are new possibilities for the co-operation with music schools and organizations working in the field of disabled people.

For us it has been very important to develop pedagogical methods hand in hand with research and on-line-testing with students.

We have been working a lot to reach official Music School status with ministry of Education, National board of Education and city of Helsinki. Today we are proud to tell that we have Music schools with new concept. We truly believe that there will be "cultural revolution". We have new target groups for the music education and there will be new group of professional musicians and there will be new music markets and audiences for new musicians.

To put all this together: if we respect people, it is our duty as educators to take human potential in full use. Personal development gives self respect for the individual and new values for the society.

Text by Timo Klemettinen

