

Finland's Nature, Arts and Independence

Finns have relied on the nature to keep them warm, nourished and clothed throughout the ancient history. The land has provided clean water, crops, fish and game, and materials for transportation and housing. The harsh climate has required survival skills and *sisu*, but it has also provided natural beauty that has created inspiration and works of art in a number of disciplines.

Late 1800's brought forward the Finnish identity in language, music, poetry, architecture and design. It continued to strengthen and was presented in various fields of life. The Finnish proverb 'We are not Swedish, we will not become Russian, so let's be Finnish' describes well the commitment of the people.

Kalevala, Elias Lönnrot's work of epic poetry of Karelian and Finnish folklore and mythology brings the early poems, songs, music and pictorial art together. The life was straightforward and simple, because it was efficient and it helped the people survive in the challenging environment.

Finland became an autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland in 1809 after the Swedish armies minus the Finnish soldiers had retreated across the Ahvenanmeri (Åland Sea) and Tornionjoki (Tornio River) and Russia became the new ruler. The idea of independence had started to develop toward the end of the period when Finland was part of the Swedish Empire, but got to a faster pace under the rule of the Russian Tsars, or rather their governor generals.

In the mid-1800's the Central European romanticism reached Finland and the German composer Fredrik Pacius, the Father of Finnish music, came with it, liked Finland and stayed. He composed *Maamme* in 1848 and the first Finnish opera, *Kaarle-kuninkaan metsästys* (The Hunt of King Charles) in 1852.

Year 1882 started a new era in Finnish music, when Martin Wegelius founded Helsingin musiikkiopisto (Helsinki Music Institute), currently Sibelius-Akatemia (Sibelius Academy), and Robert Kajanus started Helsingin kaupunginorkesteri (Helsinki City Orchestra). Both institutions had a tremendous effect on the development of Finnish music. Sibelius did his Finnish studies in Helsingin musiikkiopisto and Helsingin kaupunginorkesteri devoted a lot of time for playing Sibelius' works year after year.

Jean Sibelius was born in 1865 in Hämeenlinna, Finland. Next year Finland will celebrate the 150-year anniversary of his birth. FFCPC will host a dinner in his honor on February 14, 2015.

Other early 1900's Finnish master composers were Oskar Merikanto, the most popular Finnish composer in that time, Erkki Melartin, Toivo Kuula and Leevi Madetoja. Next generation composers, Aarre Merikanto and Uuno Klami combined modern and national themes, struggled to gain acceptance first, but became well liked and respected with passing time.

Postmodernism brought forward Einojuhani Rautavaara, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Tuomas Kantelinen and others, who have and are making their music and names known in Finland and around the world.

The Golden Age of Finnish Visual Arts was in 1880-1910. Akseli Gallen-Kallela, Pekka Halonen, Albert Edelfelt, Helene Schjerfbeck and Eero Järnefelt were the best known painters.

Famous authors were Zacharias Topelius, Elias Lönnrot, Aleksis Kivi, Minna Canth and Juhani Aho. The prime poets were J L Runeberg, Eino Leino, Larin Kyösti, V A Koskenniemi and Aaro Hellaakoski.

Finnish architecture with clean lines, natural materials and colors is well established around the world. The best known Finnish architect is Alvar Aalto (Mt. Angel Abby Library). Others are Carl Ludwig Engel, Armas Lindgren, Eliel Saarinen, J S Siren, Viljo Revell, Eero Saarinen and Timo & Tuomo Suomalainen.

Happy Independence Day to 97-Year Old Finland!