



Illustration: Leevi Räsänen, from the work Studying Gaze (2024)

Studying Gaze

PROFILE CONCERT OF COMPOSER

LEEVI RÄSÄNEN

Welcome to stare and to be stared at! This concert presents some of my chamber music from 2022 and 2024. Each work is tied to the idea of *Gaze* as an act containing the viewer's position, creating hierarchies and meanings between the looker and the one being looked at.

And of course, this same setup is repeated in the concert situation: you look at me, but do you notice that I'm looking right back at you? Do you see me?

Framing the concert, we have my string quartet siblings *the two childhoods* and *Hoodlum*. First, a kind of duality of childhoods, one side and its reverse, one way of seeing and another of remembering, an external and an internal experience. Finally, the hoodlum: the rascal, the scoundrel, mischievous but not necessarily malicious... brat?

I've chosen these works also because they represent, for me, my trademark way of using microtonality. That means using musical intervals smaller than the "normal" semitones, pitches you could imagine slipping between the keys of a piano. When these pitches and distances are combined in certain ways, instruments and sound waves in the air start to react differently, producing new sum and difference tones alongside the ones actually being played. To me, it's very magical. How amazing that a new sound can appear, just because other sounds are in a certain relationship to each other. There's vast power in that, for me.

This is also how I often work: listening and singing these pitches, trying to locate the unwritten tones that lie between, and then pulling them out of the sonic texture like catching a loop with a crochet hook. Small biggens to become bigger, the impressions grow more impressive.

One of these intervals is the natural seventh from the overtone series, which for me is among the most beautiful of all intervals. (I recommend googling it if you want to understand it better – the wikipedia article on the overtone series is actually pretty good so just read it from there.) I feel that because the overtone series is a natural phenomenon that repeats everywhere around us, and in every man-made instrument, it connects the music to reality. And through that connection, the music can carry some kind of real meaning about our reality as well.

The string quartets *the two childhoods* and *Hoodlum* were written to be performed together, and this concert is the first time they're being played in the same programme. The concert's centerpiece is its title work, *Studying Gaze*, commissioned by Kaaos Ensemble who premiered it in December 2024. Situated somewhere between performance and a musical work, it gazes at itself, at its audience, and at its performers, from subtle side-eyeing and glances to notorious stares.

You can read more about the pieces below. I've collected memories and little odd bits from along the way, trying to put together a package you wouldn't usually find in a program booklet.

(With fond memories of my legendary interview quote from 2020, when I said:

"It's terribly selfish and exclusionary if deeper stories behind a work aren't shared. Even if someone claims there is no backstory, I say there is! It might be as simple as: nothing special was going on in my life when I composed this. I woke up every morning at eight, made coffee, ate mashed potatoes and fish balls for lunch every day, and went to bed at nine. It would be freaking amazing if some program note actually said that."

You can enquire me about my lunches at the afterparty...)

But you can also go to the concert with just your ears open and your eyes closed. I promise you'll still catch some kind of understanding of these works. I'll help a littlenbit with that too.

I wish everyone a wonderful concert! Enjoy the music, the stories, and each other's company. Let's hug afterwards! ...unless you've got the flu or even any symptoms because I really can't get sick right now as the grant application season is in full swing!!!

PERFORMERS

Uusinta Quartet:

- ☞ Maria Puusaari, violin I
- ☞ Aleksi Kotila, violin II
- ☞ Max Savikangas, viola
- ☞ Sirja Nironen, cello

Kaaos Ensemble:

- ☞ Martta Jämsä, flute
- ☞ Anna-Sofia Anttonen, saxophones
- ☞ Jerry Piipponen, percussion
- ☞ Janne Malinen, guitar

Tape:

- ☞ Aino Szalai and Anna-Maria Huohvanainen, violins
- ☞ Ida Kosonen, viola
- ☞ Katariina Selenius, cello
- ☞ Teemu Myyryläinen / Gaia Music, recording of string instruments
- ☞ Other content, editing and composition: Leevi Räsänen

Anna Huuskonen-Kuhlefeldt, producer

Jon-Patrik Kuhlefeldt, sound

Sirje Ruohtula, light

The concert lasts about 70 minutes with no intermission.

Translations

of speech on tape

(don't read these if you're Finnish speaking!! Save yourself some element of surprise!! And even if you're English-speaking, only read these when you hear speech in Finnish during the concert. Thank uuuuuu.)

1

A small town in eastern Finland.
Everything along a single road.
Tight-knit, yet sparse.

A blue house by the main road, separated from the asphalt by a ditch and a dense conifer hedge.
Two parents and two children live in the blue house.

I was the other one of them.

I get nervous standing here.
My hip aches, I can't hold myself straight.
Do they see that how I'm leaning?

I keep shifting my weight from one foot to the other,
trying to find a spot with tension in between,
I try to look normal.

Behind the conifer hedge, there was refuge.
Paths and playgrounds of my own,
spaces to play away from the gaze of others.

Every morning I walked to the bus stop on the other side of the hedge.

As the years crawled forward, my steps grew heavier.
Sometimes they grew so heavy that I ended up not taking them at all.

Sixth, seventh, or eighth row, left side of the bus.
Backpack on the other seat, me by the window. I watched as forests gave way to the familiar buildings of the town center.
In the school buses in Enonkoski, you didn't have to fear someone sitting next to you.

I climb onto that bus in my mind. It pulls away as I sway down the aisle, grabbing seatbacks, toward my place. I sit, then turn to look behind me. The seats stretch back in an endless row, my ears are humming. I turn my head forward again and see only black. I can't see myself stepping out of the school bus. I don't know where I go in the yard. I don't remember the sound of the school bell or who I talked to before the first lesson. I don't remember who I ate with, what I said, or what I liked. Through the black, there comes only white fog.

I remember in flashes. I remember in third grade, holding a friend's hand during a pause and how they smiled. I remember in second grade, when a classmate threw a tantrum and for once I got to laugh along with everyone else. I remember sledding hills, and a new classmate coming back from a holiday with little braids in her hair. I remember the day I was left alone and the ink began to spread.

Until last year, I kept having a recurring nightmare where there's a puddle of water at the corner of the school building. In the dream, I'm lying face down in the puddle, without clothes. No one else is in the yard, but still I can't get up.

I wake from that dream in the blue house. I stand alone in the hallway, behind me a glass-doored corner cabinet, on my left the kitchen, on my right the stairs to the upper floor. The room is washed in golden sunlight. The air shimmers with something. I'm comforted by the thought: "what I don't remember, I needn't forget."

So many reasons to look at another person.

a lover's gaze into the eyes
a sideways glance at the coughing passenger in the metro
a glazed stare fixed on a performer onstage
an intense drilling look, trying to tell if the other is telling the truth

I let my eyes follow the well-dressed passersby.
I think I'm eavesdropping unnoticeably (not)
I sit in a café by the river and simply watch as people pass by.

Sometimes one of them looks back at me.

Look at the person beside you. What story do you encounter?

Now look to the other side. Look into their eyes.

Look behind you. Who does your gaze land on, and why?

When I moved abroad to study, I didn't know a soul in the city. I was an observer of people and surroundings. It was liberating to feel as if no one was observing me in return. The long-settled sense that somewhere, always, there was a pair of eyes fixed on me, it faded.

Around me was so much I'd never seen, so much new, that each day felt like two. My experience of time slowed. As I watched others, it seemed as though their time sped up. It felt as though the gaze itself held a hidden force, a power of its own.

I didn't wear sweatpants for fifteen years.

The hairdo I was most proud of was the long mullet bleached pure white, not a hint of yellow. I dyed the roots so often that the smell of bleach almost felt like home.

At some point, when life was already giving much else, I got pissed off and shaved my head.

In eight grade, my music teacher said I dressed like I was "always ready to attend the linnan juhlat in the president's castle." Secretly, I was proud as hell. By saying that, they confirmed all the effort I had been putting in for years.

And now cue the slideshow: First, the self-sewn teddy-bear shorts, then a too-small white shirt (according to someone), then long hair, then blue hair, then back to long hair, then colorful shoes, harem pants, then long hair in a bun, a crocheted beanie I made myself, then slightly shorter long hair because the theatre director thought my long hair was too long, skinny jeans, orange ski pants, uh, then a sweater down to my knees and a bright bag, a yellow cardigan, then "boys' haircut" (quotation marks intentional), uh, powder, brow pencil, then mascara, eyeliner, foundation, hairspray, perfumes.

end slideshow

So yeah, I really did try. But it was always a snake-eats-snake situation, because the more I tried, the more noticed I became. Even though at the same time, all I wanted was to disappear from everyone's gaze and just *be*.

Looking back, in my youth, I was actually very obedient.

I could've just blacked out my eyes and shaved my head bald right then, blasted an electric guitar and knocked over trash cans. Set off a bunch of firecrackers, tuned up a moped, smoked and drank, well, yeah...

That's my mental image of rebellious teens. They probably had plenty more going on, but that's everything I feel, as an adult now, like I missed out on.

Sometimes I really wonder, had something gone differently, what it would've been like to be that baggy-pants teenager, slouching around with hands in pockets and a hood over my head, kicking stones on the sidewalk, spitting just a little too often, cutting every corner I could. Coming home, not saying a word, stomping straight to my room with my shoes still on, closing the door, and then, making some noise.

the two childhoods (2022)

I've written many program notes for my first string quartet, often under some specific word-count limits. *The two childhoods* is perhaps the most personal work I've ever composed. It was the first time I touched upon things that, years later, I would finally work through in therapy. When finishing the piece in early 2022, after more than half a year of composing it, I wrote the program note below based on a broad mind map I had built during the process. That map was the first one I ever drew on the yellow sheets of paper that have since become a central part of my work. The text you'll read is more revealing, maybe even more naïve, than what I'd write today. Only through therapy, and really only this year, 2025, have I come to understand how painful and immense these matters actually were. This concert marks the first time I've published this text alongside a performance of the piece.

The two childhoods has been hugely significant for me in many ways: it is my most frequently performed work, that has traveled across Finland as well as to Scotland and Portugal. It was the piece I received my very first working grant to compose, and the one whose discoveries still feed into my new works. It was also the first time I reached a lasting feeling about composing: *"I want to create more stuff like this."*

I love my home town, Enonkoski. Its plentiful mushroom forests and bilberry branches sagging under the weight of their berries, spruce branches bent from heavy snow to an arc, the sweet-savoury breeches on the lakeside and, above all, my childhood home and summer house. Some of the most memorable moments of my life spent in them. My memories of childhood places have grown extremely sweet. Yet because of everything I've experienced there, my childhood has withered into a queue of stuttering memories, flashes amid a gray and weighty mass. The vast majority of my mind has been wiped into lukewarm mumble that I wouldn't care to look back on.

My time at the school of Enonkoski was blackened by a few nasty teachers and a large number of cruel fellow students who ultimately forced me to change schools. I wasn't left with options, I was only 11 years old at the time. My parents' love, sense of justice and determination opened me up to a fresh

start in Savonlinna, where I knew little about the adversities that I would encounter after the first few years. I got sick with an eating disorder. Whether it was because of my new bullies or the even more deepened pursuit of perfection is hard to say, but this time around me there were a few important and good friends and a class that seemed to be on my side in large part. There, for the first time, I also had the support of adults.

It felt important to try to address memory-mush through my art, writing nostalgic music or something that would reflect my attempts at understanding my own history. I think I still don't really understand what happened in my childhood. When I come to look at my school years, I see myself most often through the eyes of those others. Even now, my worst nightmares have something to do with me being back in elementary school.

Art I remember. Every opera and theatre performance, concert or record I enjoyed listening to. Every piece I so tirelessly (and sometimes very exhaustedly...) played at the piano and the recitals where I performed despite the fact that my hands were sweating and my heart was slamming almost through the chest. The constant requests from relatives and family friends to play something, because the music brought joy.

Joy is what music still brings me and I'll take it with me wherever I am. This piece is my song from Enonkoski.

The piece was written for TEMA and Savonlinna-quartets with the kind funding of the Arts Council of South Savo under Arts Promotion Center Finland.

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***The two childhoods* is performed by Uusinta Quartet:**

☞ Maria Puusaari, violin I

☞ Aleksi Kotila, violin II

☞ Max Savikangas, viola

☞ Sirja Nironen, cello

Studying Gaze (2024)

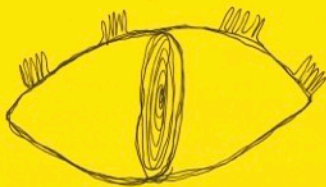
You can make your own DIY programme for this piece: just grab a yellow slip of paper from the hall entrance and draw and write on it yourself. The composer recommends these images and texts:

TAMÄ ON
PAPERI -
KAPPALE.

JOTA SINÄ
MYT KATSELET.

THIS IS A
PIECE OF
PAPER.

YOU ARE
LOOKING
AT IT.



JA SINUA
SE KATSELEE
TAKAISIN.



AND IT IS
LOOKING
AT YOU.

Images: Leevi Räsänen, from the work Studying Gaze (2024)

Take your handmade program home as a souvenir! Or send it as a postcard to the Minister of Culture, or the Pope, or Kekkonen!

Exploring gazes and their directions in Kaaos Ensemble:

- ☞ Martta Jämsä, flute mouthpiece and objects
- ☞ Anna-Sofia Anttonen, baritone saxophone, saxophone mouthpiece and objects
- ☞ Jerry Piipponen, percussion (note: for percussionists we don't bother writing "objects" because that's basic FYI)
- ☞ Janne Malinen, guitar and objects

maailma ympärilläni käy yhä nopeammalla vaihteella, ja minä (2022)

In this wordy title, one word is especially important: *vaihde*. A gear, like in a vehicle? Or as in a shift, between periods of time? Each of us moves at our own gear in any given moment, sometimes faster, sometimes slower. Slower, like... pondering, observing, still? And being okay with just that?

I realized my own gear had changed during the long walks I took in winter 2022 along the streets of Glasgow. My flat in New Gorbals was just far enough from the buses and subway that it didn't matter, it made sense to walk the whole 40 minutes to school each way. First along the river or through the park (along the river you'd spot good-looking joggers, but in the park you'd usually walk in peace), then winding up whichever streets toward the northwest. I watched from which angles and in what tones the sunlight fell on the yellow bricks, how everything smelled, and which rooftops appeared when. Even the drops of water falling on my face from scaffolding didn't disgust me. Once on my way home I stared too long at a man pissing in a side alley corner, and he came running after me yelling. After that I stuck to the bigger streets.

The piece was commissioned and premiered in 2022 by AEKI Ensemble (Sara Atake, clarinet – Antoine Flores Gracia, saxophone – Hsin-Di Shih, cello) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA. It was originally written for clarinet, saxophone, and cello, but has since been performed in versions for flute-clarinet-cello, traverso-baroque violin-violoncello, string trio, and now today in a brand-new version for flute, saxophone, and cello.

Notes from my sketchbooks during and shortly after composing (freely translated, as mostly they were in Finnish):

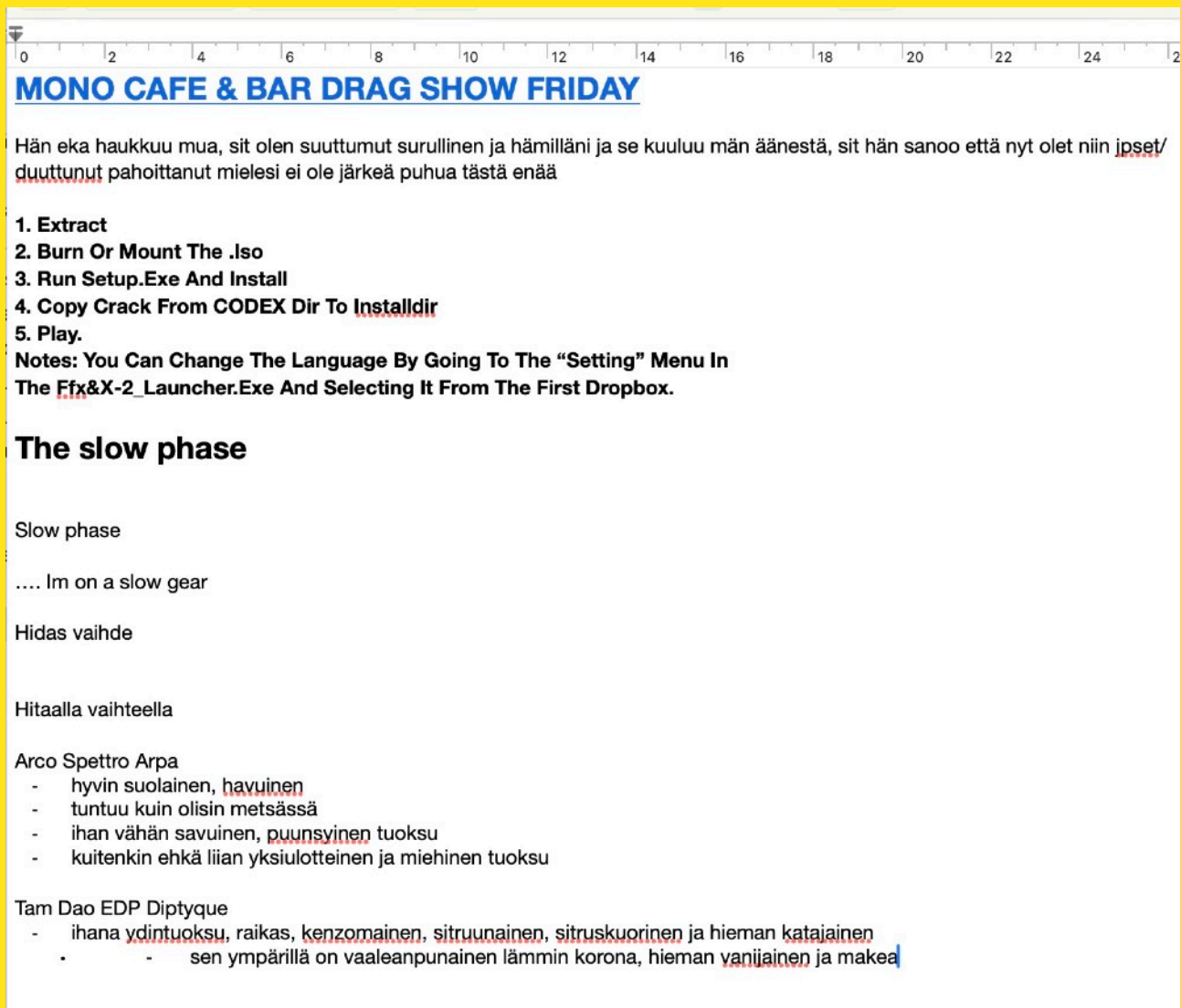
Glasgow, 11.1.2022

“An upward-reaching sixth” [for the non-musicians: a sixth is the distance between two notes, for example the gap between “Kas” and “Mik” in the Finnish children’s song *Mikki Hiiri merihädässä*, ask your friends in the audience about this]

“from squirms to denser murmurs”

“Change pace, not a one-way-ticket”

Digital notes, January 2022:



0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16 18 20 22 24 26

MONO CAFE & BAR DRAG SHOW FRIDAY

Hän eka haukkuu mua, sit olen suuttunut surullinen ja hämilläni ja se kuuluu män äänestä, sit hän sanoo että nyt olet niin ipset/duuttunut pahoittanut mielesi ei ole järkeä puhua tästä enää

1. Extract
2. Burn Or Mount The .iso
3. Run Setup.Exe And Install
4. Copy Crack From CODEX Dir To Installdir
5. Play.

Notes: You Can Change The Language By Going To The “Setting” Menu In The Ffx&X-2 Launcher.Exe And Selecting It From The First Dropbox.

The slow phase

Slow phase

.... Im on a slow gear

Hidas vaihde

Hitaalla vaihteella

Arco Spettro Arpa

- hyvin suolainen, havuinen
- tuntuu kuin olisin metsässä
- ihan vähän savuinen, puunsyinen tuoksu
- kuitenkin ehkä liian yksiulotteinen ja miehinen tuoksu

Tam Dao EDP Diptyque

- ihana ydintuoksu, raikas, kenzomainen, sitruunainen, sitruskuorinen ja hieman katajainen
- sen ympärillä on vaaleanpunainen lämmin korona, hieman vanijainen ja makea

[The second note would translate roughly as follows:

”So first he mocks me, then im madd sada and confused and you can hear it from mye voice, then he says youre so ipset / nad theres no sense talking about it anymore”]

Glasgow, 9.3.2022

“On the other hand, right now I don’t have much to lose. I know the people around me are on my side, even if they don’t exactly like me, at least they don’t despise me. It feels like many find me nice and want to spend time with me. I’m somehow more genuine than before. I’m myself.”

“My mind was clear, or at least I wasn’t trying to run away from anything. I was present, and even if I didn’t especially care about the conversations I was having, I enjoyed them. I enjoyed that I didn’t need to *be* anything, or be on my way anywhere, no need to prove anything. I answered most questions with ‘No, I don’t know that one’ and ‘Right’ or ‘Interesting.’”

maailma ympärilläni käy yhä nopeammalla vaihteella, ja minä is performed by:

☞ Martta Jämsä, flute

☞ Anna-Sofia Anttonen, soprano saxophone

☞ Sirja Nironen, cello

Hoodlum (2024)

Hoodlum (2024) is the second part of a whole consisting of two string quartets: *the two childhoods* (2022) and *Hoodlum*. The two works deal with the transition from childhood to adolescence. While *the two childhoods* aimed to grasp lost, hazy memories and sought understanding, *Hoodlum* fantasizes about wilder, alternative youths.

"Middle fingers and kicked stones. Unrestrained energy erupting from within, electric guitar roars. Caution thrown to the wind. Time to make some noise."

Overheard in the rehearsals of the piece:

Max: "In Finnish, it could be 'hunsvotti' [scoundrel]." [My thought: damn, why did I name this in English and how did I not come up with this word! Might steal it for future use though... Max, you'll get a credit for this...]

Sirja: "like there was a drum set in it" [My thought: wow, trendy! But also, how fun would it be to write another drum-set piece... okay, the first one only had hi-hats, but still, it had the vibe... commissions welcome 😊] [Ed. note: "hi-hat", the same metallic instrument heard mid-piece in *Studying Gaze*, played by Jerry.]

Performed by Uusinta Quartet:

☞ Maria Puusaari, violin I

☞ Aleksi Kotila, violin II

☞ Max Savikangas, viola

☞ Sirja Nironen, cello

Composer

Leevi Räsänen



Photo: Emppu Veinola

Composer Leevi Räsänen (b. 1997, Enonkoski) works with memories, affects, and the human experience. His works are inhabited by both unexpected, childlike playfulness and deliberately calculated microtones of emotion. Leevi is interested in iterative composing, in which he filters and transforms verbal and musical material through digital, physical, and memory-based processes, such as collage or photography. The idea of artworks as empathetic, supportive spaces for listeners to enter has grown central to his practice.

Räsänen approaches composition with curiosity and playfulness. In his process-based work, the outcome is not fixed in advance; it stretches, reshapes, and fuses again and again as the process unfolds. Having studied at the Sibelius Academy and the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, Räsänen has had his oeuvre of over 30 works performed across the Nordics, Scotland, South Korea, Spain, the United

States, the Netherlands, and most recently Portugal. His work is supported by the Kone Foundation.

www.leevirasanen.com

<http://soundcloud.com/leevirasanen/>

IG: @lanttira

if you want the whole list of who has commissioned and performed my works google uwu or just come ask, I'll happily tell you more!!

You can also always send me an email:

leevirasanen@outlook.com



Photo: Tuomas Tenkanen

Uusinta Ensemble

**Today, channeling
memories and
fantasizing alternate
realities in the Uusinta
Quartet:**

- ☞ Maria Puusaari, violin I
- ☞ Aleksi Kotila, violin II
- ☞ Max Savikangas, viola
- ☞ Sirja Nironen, cello

Uusinta Ensemble, a Helsinki-based chamber group specializing in acoustic contemporary music, highlights the diversity and relevance of modern art music. Founded originally in 1998 in Helsinki as a young composers'

ensemble for performing their own music, its current 'second generation' formation is dedicated to premiering ambitious new compositions and fostering international collaborations with composers and festivals all over the world. The group has premiered over a hundred new works and performed in more than 250 concerts, with five acclaimed album releases in their catalogue and more on the way. Since January 2023, the ensemble's artistic director has been composer Jarkko Hartikainen.

Kaaos Ensemble



Photo: Tuomas Kettunen

Tonight's gazers:

- ☞ Martta Jämsä, flute mouthpiece and objects
- ☞ Anna-Sofia Anttonen, baritone saxophone, saxophone mouthpiece and objects
- ☞ Jerry Piipponen, percussion (again: no need to write "objects" here, since duh, percussion)
- ☞ Janne Malinen, guitar and objects

Kaaos Ensemble is a new music quartet whose unusual combination of flute, saxophone, guitar, and percussion offers a wide range of sonic possibilities. The idea to form the group arose from a desire to explore Finnish works from the 1970s and 80s written for this exact combination, and to bring them back to light.

Founded in 2017, the group gave its debut at the Helsinki Music Centre as part of the Suomi100 concert series performing, among other works, Magnus Lindberg's early work *Linea d'ombra*. In 2021, Kaaos Ensemble was invited to the Time of

Music Festival in Viitasaari, where they gave two concerts. In 2022 the ensemble was invited to Oulu's *October of New Music* festival, where in addition to its own concert, it served as the ensemble for Kaija Saariaho's masterclass, premiering works by four young composers.

Kaaos Ensemble works closely with young composers of our time, commissioning new works for its line-up. They have commissioned works from Lauri Supponen, Matilda Seppälä, Ilkka Hammo, Meriheini Luoto, and Alex Nante, performing them in venues such as the Helsinki Music Centre, Forum Box gallery and Tenho Restobar.

Kaaos Ensemble's activities and commissions have been supported by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, Sibelius Fund of the Society of Finnish Composers, and Arts Promotion Centre Finland.



For further information about works, scores, or recordings after the concert, contact Leevi Räsänen: leevirasanen@outlook.com

You're also warmly welcome to send emails with the subject "Composition commission," "Proposal for collaboration," or just any questions or news :)

The concert is supported by Musiikin Edistämissäätiö and the Otto A. Malm foundation. Thank you for your support!