

## THE INFLUENCE OF RUSSIAN/SOVIET CONDUCTING PEDAGOGY IN FINLAND

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In issue 3/2021 of the journal *Musiikki*, **Simo Mikkonen** presented the influence of Soviet pedagogy on the Finnish music institute system from the 1960s onwards, focusing mainly on the most popular instruments, the piano and the violin. The training of orchestral conductors was understandably mentioned only in passing, as it belongs more to professional music education than to the music institute level. The topic nevertheless interests me personally, because in the late 1990s I had the opportunity to observe the legendary Russian conducting pedagogue **Ilya Musin** (1904–1999) during one of his final teaching visits to the Sibelius Academy. Encouraged by this experience, I later travelled to St Petersburg to study orchestral conducting for three years.

Inspired by Mikkonen's article, I began to investigate which Finnish conductors have studied under Soviet or Russian teachers. The group can be divided into two main categories: those who travelled to the Soviet Union or Russia to study, and those who studied in Finland but received instruction from visiting teachers from our eastern neighbour. The first category can be further divided into those who travelled specifically to study conducting and those who received conducting instruction alongside studies on their principal instrument. Within my own circle of acquaintances, there were four conductors who had studied in Russia, and I learned of two others who had studied in Leningrad or St Petersburg – one of whom I met in person, while I interviewed the other by telephone. In addition, I interviewed conductors who had studied in Moscow via email. The second main group, those who studied in Finland, ultimately proved so large that within the scope of this essay I did not attempt to locate interview subjects among them. In addition to the literature listed at the end of this article, I obtained historical information from, among other sources, the digitised collections of the National Library of Finland and the extensive historical section on the official website of the St Petersburg Conservatory.

The preliminary results of my enquiries surprised me more than I expected. The eastern direction has in fact played a far more significant role in Finnish conductor training than I had initially assumed, or than is generally acknowledged. In what follows, I summarise the interaction between Finland and the Soviet Union/Russia in the field of conducting pedagogy.

St Petersburg had, from the nineteenth century onwards, been one of the most important destinations, alongside Leipzig and Berlin, for Finnish musicians seeking high-level musical education. Founded in 1862, the St Petersburg Conservatory succeeded in recruiting distinguished musicians such as the Swedish singer **Henriette Nissen-Saloman**, whose Finnish pupil **Alma Fohström** later followed her as professor of singing at the Conservatory. The future rector of the Sibelius Academy, the pianist **Ernst Linko**, also studied in St Petersburg in 1914–15. Conducting was not recognised as an independent discipline in the nineteenth century; at that time, it was considered advisable for an aspiring conductor to study composition and music theory. One of the first actual conducting classes was established at the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1906, with **Nikolai Tcherepnin** (1873–1945) as its founder and first teacher; he later served as rector of the "Sergey Rachmaninov" Conservatory in Paris. Other major conservatories around the world soon followed suit. The Paris Conservatoire established its conducting class in 1914 under **Gabriel Fauré's** directorship, with **Vincent d'Indy** serving as the first professor. The Ukrainian-born **Nikolai Malko** (1883–1961), a pupil of Tcherepnin, is generally regarded as the father of Russian orchestral conducting; he founded the conducting department at the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1925.

The first Finnish conductor known to have studied at the St Petersburg Conservatory was **Tiitus Mäntynen** (1894–1960), the long-time conductor of the Mikkeli City Orchestra. Born in Lappeenranta,

Mäntynen studied bassoon in his youth, among other places, at the Vyborg Orchestral School directed by **Leevi Madetoja** between 1914 and 1916. He was admitted to the St Petersburg Conservatory in 1916, intending to complete “the course for bassoon and military band conductors” (Länsi-Savo, 1925). Mäntynen’s studies in St Petersburg, however, lasted only one year due to the upheaval caused by the Russian Revolution and ensuing civil war, and it is therefore difficult to assess how profoundly the still developing pedagogical ideas of the Russian conducting school influenced him. After returning to Finland, Mäntynen graduated from the Helsinki Music Institute in 1924 and subsequently undertook a study trip to Paris before being appointed conductor of the Mikkeli amateur orchestra, as it was then known (ibid.).

Following the Russian Revolution, St Petersburg was renamed first Petrograd and then Leningrad, and the Conservatory’s name changed accordingly. In the late 1950s, the Finnish conductor **Onni Kelo** (1930–2015), born in Vyborg, began his studies at the Leningrad Conservatory, studying for three years under Professor Ilya Musin. Musin had been a pupil of Nikolai Malko and had begun teaching at the Conservatory as early as 1932. Musin’s famous books on conducting technique had not yet been written at that time, but his revolutionary pedagogical ideas had certainly begun to take shape during Kelo’s period of study. After returning to Finland, Kelo enjoyed a long career conducting the city orchestras of Turku, Oulu, Jyväskylä and Mikkeli.

After Onni Kelo, no Finnish conductors studied in Leningrad for a considerable period, but eastern pedagogical influences nevertheless reached Finland. Born in Liepāja, Latvia, **Arvids Jansons** (1914–1984) was appointed assistant conductor to **Yevgeny Mravinsky** (1903–1988) in 1952, and one year later became the Leningrad Philharmonic’s second permanent conductor. In 1972,

Jansons was appointed one of the professors of conducting at the Leningrad Conservatory.<sup>1</sup>

Arvids Jansons first visited Finland in 1961 during a tour with the Leningrad Philharmonic, and in 1964 he appeared as a guest conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. From 1972 to 1981, Jansons maintained very close cooperation with the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. At the Finnish National Opera, he conducted performances of **Tchaikovsky’s** *The Queen of Spades* in 1976 and 1977, and **Prokofiev’s** *The Duenna (Betrothal in a Monastery)* in 1978 and 1979. Jansons also taught the conducting class at the Sibelius Academy practically every time he visited Finland, providing Finnish students with a unique opportunity over a period of approximately ten years to benefit from instruction by a professor of conducting from the St Petersburg Conservatory without ever leaving Helsinki. Mikkonen notes in his article that visits by Soviet pedagogues are not mentioned in the official histories of the Sibelius Academy, yet many Finnish conductors consider Arvids Jansons one of their most important teachers. These include **Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Ari Angervo, Kari Tikka, Ari Rasilainen, Tuomas Pirilä, Markus Lehtinen**, and indeed almost everyone who studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy during the 1970s and early 1980s.

**Alf Nybo** (b. 1945), who worked for many years as répétiteur and assistant chorus master at the Finnish National Opera, first encountered Arvids Jansons while studying at the Sibelius Academy but became more closely acquainted with him while assisting him during productions of *The Queen of Spades* at the National Opera. Their collaboration led first to private visits to Jansons and later to a year of study (*stažirovka*) in Leningrad as a scholarship student.<sup>2</sup> During the academic year 1979–1980, Nybo studied at the Leningrad Conservatory under both Professor Arvids Jansons and his son **Mariss Jansons** (1943–2019), who had himself been teaching

at the Conservatory since 1970.<sup>3</sup> According to Nybo, Mariss Jansons taught him as much as his father Arvids, making Nybo the only Finnish conductor who can claim to have been a pupil of Mariss Jansons. Nybo played a significant role in disseminating the Russian conducting tradition in Finland by teaching compulsory conducting courses at the church music department of the Sibelius Academy for fifteen years from 1980 onwards, during which time hundreds of church music students studied under him.

Arvids Jansons also made a strong impression on **Tapio Tuomela** (b. 1958), who began studying conducting at the Sibelius Academy in 1981. Tuomela applied for a scholarship to study in the Soviet Union and eventually studied at the Vilnius Conservatory under **Juozas Domarkas** (b. 1936) from 1983 to 1985 (*stažirovka*).<sup>4</sup> Domarkas had studied conducting in the 1960s at the Leningrad Conservatory in the class of Ilya Musin. While in Vilnius, Tuomela also made occasional trips to Leningrad to observe the teaching of Arvids Jansons. Better known as a composer, Tuomela conducted opera extensively at the Finnish National Opera in the 1990s and served as assistant conductor at the Savonlinna Opera Festival.

**Tuomas Hannikainen** (formerly Ollila), who studied conducting at the Sibelius Academy, travelled in 1990 to the Leningrad Conservatory to study under Ilya Musin, remaining there for two years (*stažirovka*). From 1991 onwards, Hannikainen succeeded in inviting Musin regularly to Helsinki to teach masterclasses for Sibelius Academy students. Among those who benefited from Musin's teaching were **Sakari Oramo**, **Harri Karri**, **Mikko Franck**, **Hannu Lintu**, and numerous other conductors who studied in the 1990s. Musin's teaching divided student opinion at the time because it seemed to conflict with established Finnish pedagogical methods. Nevertheless, many conductors of the younger generation, as earlier in the case of Arvids Jansons, cite Musin as one of their teachers.

In addition to Musin, another influential figure in conducting at the Leningrad Conservatory during the 1990s was the Tatar-born conductor **Ravil Martynov** (1946–2004).<sup>5</sup> The Finnish violinist **Antti Laasanen** graduated in 1992 from the Leningrad Conservatory in the class of violin professor **Antonina Kazarina** (1930–2019) and subsequently worked in orchestras in Finland and Spain. In 1998 he returned to St Petersburg to study conducting (*stažirovka*) under Professor



Conductor Ilya Aleksandrovich Musin (1904–1999). Masterclass, 16–28 September 1991. Photo: Adolfo Vera. Sibelius Academy Archive, University of the Arts Helsinki.

Martynov. Laasanen continued his studies for two and a half years, travelling between Finland and Russia, before beginning work as concertmaster of the Seinäjoki City Orchestra in early 2001.<sup>6</sup> I met Laasanen in the summer of 2001 when, as a beginner, I attended a conducting course in Seinäjoki.

I travelled to St Petersburg in 2001 and eventually studied in the class of **Leonid Korchmar** (b. 1943). Korchmar had first studied under **Leo Ginzburg** in Moscow and later under Ilya Musin in St Petersburg, and he also served as Musin's assistant during the latter's final years of teaching.<sup>7</sup> Two years after my arrival, another Finnish student, **Markku Laakso**, joined Korchmar's class. We both studied in St Petersburg for approximately three years (*stažirovka*). I later invited Korchmar to teach several masterclasses in Finland in the mid-2000s, attended by Sibelius Academy students, military band conductors of the Finnish Defence Forces, and other interested participants.

The Sibelius Academy also maintains a student exchange agreement with the St Petersburg Conservatory, but this option has been utilised by very few students. In 2015, however, **Kara Koskinen**, a student in

**Leif Segerstam's** conducting class, travelled to St Petersburg as an exchange student. After her exchange year, she applied for postgraduate studies (*assistentura-stažirovka*) at the St Petersburg Conservatory and completed her degree in spring 2021. Koskinen's conducting teacher in St Petersburg was **Alexander Alekseyev** (1938–2020).<sup>8</sup>

Alongside Musin, another highly popular and influential teacher at the Leningrad Conservatory was **Nikolai Rabinovich** (1908–1972). To my knowledge, no Finnish conductor studied directly under him, but Rabinovich's pupil, the Estonian conductor **Eri Klas** (1939–2016), served as professor of conducting at the Sibelius Academy from 1993 to 1997. Through Klas, Finnish students undoubtedly absorbed influences from the St Petersburg conducting school, even if they were not always aware of it.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, mention should also be made of the Gnessin Academy of Music in Moscow (the Gnessin Institute until 1992), which has been of particular interest to accordion students. Three Finnish musicians completed conducting degrees there alongside their accordion studies. **Timo-Juhani Kyllönen** studied at Gnessin from 1976 to 1982, and his conducting teacher was **Sergei Trubachov** (1919–1995). **Kalle Välimaa** studied at Gnessin from 1985 to 1991 under the conducting professor **Vladimir Zinovyev** (b. 1939). The third Finnish accordion student at Gnessin was **Jukka-Pekka Kuusela**, who first studied during the academic year 1989–1990 at the Leningrad Conservatory, receiving several conducting lessons from Ravil Martynov, before moving to Moscow from 1990 to 1994 to study conducting under **Yuri Simonov** (b. 1941).<sup>10</sup>

Moscow and St Petersburg are in many respects opposites of one another, and orchestral conducting is no exception. Conductors trained in Moscow tend to conduct in a more pointillistic manner, as if guiding musical events from outside by giving signals. In St Petersburg, by contrast, emphasis is placed on flow and naturalness, and the conductor is very much “inside” the music. In Musin's school, the metaphor of touching the sound is also used: sound is conceived as a kind of material that the conductor can shape in the space before him or her. Despite differences in training and conducting philosophy, both Russian capitals have produced many talented conductors, some of whom have achieved major careers in the West.



Rehearsal pianist Dmitri Grigorjev, Kara Koskinen, Sasha Mäkilä, rehearsal pianist Olga Levintova. Photo: Sasha Mäkilä.

In summary, Russian and Soviet conductor training has had a greater influence on Finnish conductors than is generally recognised. Even the idea of a dedicated orchestra for the Sibelius Academy's conducting class, whose existence is regarded as one reason for the high standard of conductor training in Finland, is reportedly derived from Soviet conductor training.

Throughout the 1970s, Sibelius Academy students benefited from the teaching of Arvids Jansons. In the 1980s, Alf Nybo taught what he had learned in Leningrad to church music students at the Sibelius Academy. In the 1990s, the conducting class at the Sibelius Academy was led by Eri Klas, who had been trained in Leningrad, and at the same time Ilya Musin was a welcome masterclass teacher. From the 2000s onwards, connections with conductor training in our eastern neighbour have become more sporadic and have largely depended on the initiative of a few adventurous students. Although current geopolitical circumstances have effectively halted institutional cooperation with Russia, the historical influence of Russian and Soviet conducting pedagogy continues to resonate in Finnish conducting practice and pedagogy, shaping the training of future generations.<sup>11</sup>

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## Endnotes

1 At the Leningrad/St Petersburg Conservatory there are several professors of conducting, and in addition there are also associate professors and hourly-paid teachers. At the Sibelius Academy, by contrast, there is only one professor of conducting.

2 According to the certificate Nybo received from the Leningrad Conservatory, the following was covered during his traineeship: "the basic principles of conducting technique and familiarisation with the following repertoire: Mozart: Symphony No. 36 ('Linz'), Beethoven: Symphony No. 1, Franck: Symphony in D minor, Tchaikovsky: Symphonies Nos. 1 and 4, Brahms: Symphony No. 1." The works listed are largely the same as those I studied during my first years at the St Petersburg Conservatory in the early 2000s.

3 Mariss Jansons graduated from the Leningrad Conservatory in 1969 from the class of Nikolai Rabinovich, after which he studied for a short period in Austria as a pupil of Hans Swarowsky and Herbert von Karajan. In 1979, when Alf Nybo became acquainted with Mariss Jansons, he had just been appointed Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic.

4 Juozas Domarkas is also known in Finland, as he served as conductor of the Joensuu City Orchestra from 1990 to 1993.

5 Martynov studied in Moscow as a pupil of Leo Ginzburg (1901–1979), Kirill Kondrashin (1914–1981) and Gennady Rozhdestvensky (1931–2018), and later in Leningrad under Ilya Musin, while also serving as Yevgeny Mravinsky's assistant. Among Martynov's pupils, the Estonian conductor Arvo Volmer (b. 1962), who served as conductor of the Oulu City Orchestra from 1994 to 2005, is well known in Finland.

6 In this context it is also worth mentioning another violinist-conductor, the Polish-born Boguslaw Kobierski, who plays in the Lappeenranta Orchestra and studied conducting as a pupil of Ilya Musin. According to Alf Nybo, the Syrian-born cellist Munir Bakieh, who lived in Finland, also went to St Petersburg in the 1990s to study conducting in the class of Professor Aleksandr Polishchuk (b. 1960), and invited him to Finland to teach masterclasses as well.

7 After Musin's death, some of his pupils became pupils of Leonid Korchmar, while others – at least nominally – became pupils of Yuri Temirkanov (b. 1938), Chief Conductor of the St Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra.

8 Alekseyev studied at the St Petersburg Conservatory as a pupil of Eduard Grikurov (1907–1982), and, like Mariss Jansons, he also received instruction from Hans Swarowsky in Vienna.

9 After his professorship, Eri Klas served as Chief Conductor of Tampere Philharmonic from 1998 to 2006. Among other conductors from the former Soviet Union who have worked in Finland, mention should also be made of Igor Bezrodny (Turku City Orchestra, 1986–1990), Leonid Grin (Tampere City Orchestra, 1990–1994) and Peeter Lilje (Oulu City Orchestra, 1990–1993).

10 As a conductor and pedagogue, Yuri Simonov occupies an interesting position between Moscow and St Petersburg. He studied at the Leningrad Conservatory under Rabinovich and, as a young man, served as Yevgeny Mravinsky's assistant. After winning a conducting

competition in Italy in 1968, his career took off both in the Soviet Union and abroad. He was Chief Conductor of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow from 1970 to 1985 and Chief Conductor of the Belgian National Orchestra from 1994 to 2002. Simonov is a popular teacher at masterclasses, and several Finns have studied with him to gain new perspectives on conducting. Simonov's conducting style is, however, clearly Moscovite, even though he now lives and teaches in St Petersburg.

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