



Finlandia Foundation® National

Inspiring, celebrating and connecting the Finnish-American community since 1953

**2015 PERFORMER
OF THE YEAR**

SARA PAJUNEN



2015 Performer Of The Year: Sara Pajunen

In 1996 Finlandia Foundation National (FFN), the premier network of Finnish-American organizations in the United States, inaugurated its Performer of the Year (POY) program to encourage appreciation of Finnish and Finnish-American culture, traditions and talent through live performances at FFN chapters across the U.S.

FFN is pleased to present violinist and composer Sara Pajunen as POY for 2015-16.

Native of Minnesota's Iron Range, Sara was steeped in Finnish folk music as a child. After earning a bachelor's degree in classical violin performance from the University of Minnesota and a Solo Studies degree from Stadia in Helsinki, Finland, she returned to her Finnish-American musical roots.

In 2010, Sara received a grant from FFN to study folk music in Finland. That experience led her to her interest in melding the sounds of her Finnish ancestors with the present. She has toured and recorded with Finland's top folk musicians, as



well as in North America and Europe, sharing the music of her heritage in what she calls “progressive yet reverent ways.”

Sara's first musical collaboration was the duo Kaivama; they recorded an album with her mentor, acclaimed Finnish fiddler Arto Järvelä.

Currently Sara performs with Finnish accordionist Teija Niku as Aallotar. The duo's debut album is founded on the common musical ground the women share from when their families lived near each other in Finland, but also revels in the

cultural differences born when the lineage was separated by an ocean and the passage of time.

Sara has also produced and performed an album of classic Finnish tangos, reinterpreted with influence from various musical genres.

In 2014, the Cedar Cultural Center and Jerome Foundation commissioned Sara to conceive Laatikko/Box. The conceptual sound piece combines Finnish-American archival material, recorded audio interviews with recent immigrants and live violin, voice and electronics to explore the emotional terrain we encounter when we step into unknown worlds.

Sara Pajunen has been called “an amazingly versatile musician who now counts among the most ambitious and notable practitioners of Finnish folk music outside of Finland.”

For more information about the artist: sarapajunen.com

POY has become one of the most popular and successful vehicles for Finlandia Foundation National's ongoing support of Finnish and Finnish-

American culture in the U.S. Since its debut in 1996, the program has brought a variety of talent to wider audiences. Most of the artists have been singers or musicians. Often the performers not only give concerts but teach, as well.

FFN funds a travel grant for POY appearances at a minimum of eight chapter events during the 12-month schedule, which begins September 1 and concludes August 31 of the following year.

For additional information or to book the POY program please contact POY Coordinator Betsey Norgard at norgard@paulbunyan.net

PREVIOUS PERFORMERS OF THE YEAR:

2014 Olli Hirvonen, jazz guitarist, New York City

2013 Marja Kaisla, classical pianist, Philadelphia

2012 Maria Kizirian, singer and songwriter, Los Angeles

PREVIOUS POY, CONTINUED:

2011 Wilho Saari, tradition bearer of the Finnish kantele, Naselle, Washington

2010 Finn Hall, band from Oakdale, Minnesota

2009 Terhi Miikki-Broersma, multi-instrumentalist, Lyndon, Washington

2008 Brent Buswell and Bert Stromholm, accordion duo from Donegal, Pennsylvania and Pompton Plains, New Jersey

2007 Maria Männistö, soprano, Seattle

2006 Kaiku, female vocal duo from New York City

2005 Richard Koski, two-row diatonic button accordionist, Trumansburg, New York

2003-04 Maarit Vaga, soprano, Albion, New York

2002 Ulla Suokko, flutist, New York City

2001 Vicki Gornick, organist, Chisholm, Minnesota

2000 Diane Jarvi, singer, poet and songwriter, Minneapolis

1999 Craig Randal Johnson, pianist, string bassist and conductor, Minneapolis

1998 Bernhard Hillila, comedic lecturer, Valparaiso, Indiana

1997 Koivun Kaiku, kantele ensemble from Minneapolis

1996 Merja Soria, kantele artist and vocalist, San Diego, California

Find more information on past POY programs at FinlandiaFoundation.org

The Performer of the Year term begins September 1 and runs through August 31.

To book the POY program contact POY Coordinator Betsey Norgard at norgard@paulbunyan.net

POY application deadline is mid-February of each year. For information: FinlandiaFoundation.org

Finlandia Foundation National, founded in Pasadena, California in 1953, administers grants, scholarships and programs supporting and celebrating Finnish heritage and Finnish-American culture and traditions.

FFN is a 501(c)(3) organization. For more information: FinlandiaFoundation.org



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