

A photograph of two men in an office setting. The man on the left, with blonde hair and wearing a black sweater over a dark shirt, is standing and gesturing with his hands as if explaining something. The man on the right, with brown hair and wearing a striped shirt, is sitting at a desk with a black suitcase, looking towards the first man. The background shows a white ceiling with a circular vent and a rectangular light fixture.

**TIME.
WORK.
DISCIPLINE.
NO SHORTCUTS.**

**BY:
MARIJA PLENTAJ**

At first, the idea was to issue a professional paper by Mika Väyrynen in this year's "Echo" magazine. However, professor Väyrynen did not have a recently dated article in English and I suppose that very few people, including myself, would have understood an article in Finnish. Thus, we decided it would be best to do an interview instead. The main topic of the discussion were teaching techniques or, as I realised later, the absence of stencil method. Professor also explained that his connection with Croatia is a bit more than just this interview. Three of his ex-students from The Sibelius Academy have returned home after graduating and are now working as teachers. Namely - Ivan Šverko, Mia Čojbašić and Josip Nemet. He has also recently accepted appointment as Visiting Professor of Accordion playing at Pula Music Academy. Therefore, he will be seen in Croatia every now and then in the future.

Considering many years You have spent successfully teaching accordion, can You say that there is a way or method of learning that is better than others, in sense that it makes a player achieve higher technical readiness and ability of bringing music to the listeners in shorter period of time and in an easier and more fun way?

First of all, word "method" does not exist in my vocabulary. I find methods limiting, often narrow minded and boring. There are strategies and principles, for example in technical training - but everything must be flexible and adjusted to each persons unique mental and physical structure. On the other hand, there are no shortcuts in music. It would be like trying to teach somebody to be airline pilot in less hours... He/she

would probably learn to fly, but there are risks. Same with playing and learning music: even most talented of us must go through long way. After playing 20 years person reaches for sure some level, but it can not be compared to profundity and skill of people who have played 40 or 50 years. It's all about long term working, loving music, aiming for a better result every day and giving development time. Not about "methods".

You are teaching at the Sibelius Academy, where students from all over the world are studying. Did You notice that students coming from certain countries are better than the others? If so, students from which areas stand out and how (technical readiness, musicality, advanced knowledge or comprehension in certain areas of music...)? Is that connected to the culture from which the student comes from?

I must point out, that The Sibelius Academy is not just some little conservatory in province. It's one of worlds leading musical institutions which can be easily compared to Juillard in New York or Moskow Conservatory. Entrance tests are very demanding and only very low percentage of candidates get in to the Academy. Group is therefore very selected and all students are for sure very talented and skilled already when entering the Academy.

As teacher and musician, I don't know words "best" or "better". Those words should be deleted from every musical conservatory. That's not what music is all about. Work of teacher should be described with sentence - "help, do not disturb". To me all students are the same. When they enter they all have technical / musical aspects which are weaker. My

work is to help them. Technically, I have not seen anyone "ready" during their first couple years at the Academy. Technique is also very multidimensional thing, and much more than pushing buttons fast and precise. That's just the beginning level.

Difference with nationalities is only that in some countries certain kind of repertoire is played perhaps more than some other styles. Here students must go through many styles and periods in music history. From Baroque to Romantic, from accordion classics to contemporary repertoire, from chamber music to concertos, even to electro acoustic music - if they so wish. Studies must give wide knowledge and skill about music. We don't teach for exams only, we teach for life and to what comes in their lives after studies.

What is the dynamic of relationship between students and teachers in Finland? Are they more close to each other and more friendly than in other countries and what do You think would be the best relationship between student and teacher? I presume that there is not a recipe and that every relationship is individual. Some students need "tough love" and pressure, while others need praising and motivating, is that correct?

As teachers, we have made some kind of "Hippocratic oath". Again, I don't compare different countries and mentalities (even I had travelled a lot and been performing and teaching in so many countries). Comparing does not belong to music. Also, I can not generalize the relation with students and teachers in all Finland. In general, our teachers are correct and not aggressive, but things depend on

individuals. There are teachers from whom students are afraid. I am not one of them.

One point for me is, that students who come here are already 18-22 years old. They are adults and should be treated as adults. It's not my work to "motivate" them, they must find their own motivation. Children and teenagers need motivation, but to adults - they must find things themselves. Studies at our Academy take 2,5 (to those who have already teach-

ers qualifications from Conservatory) or 5,5 years (to those who come here without such diplomas). In 5,5 years, working with the same student - there are different kind of periods and days. As in life itself.

Who were Your mentors and what did You learn from each one? Do You apply their methods in Your teaching? Could You describe Your "method" of teaching?

I think I already answered about

my "method" in previous answers. I have had teachers, of course. But after my childhood, I am pretty "self made" musician. Three of my first teachers were really important to me. Namely - Tapani Luojus, Vesa Vienola and Timo Kinnunen, all of them the 1st generation academic accordionists in Finland. When I was 13, in 1981, I was "found" and started at Sibelius Academy "Departement for specially gifted children" (nowadays called Junior Academy). There my teacher was prof. Matti Rantanen.



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Bugari

After I entered solo department, in 1985, at the age of 17, I had lessons every now and then with different teachers, but nothing really long lasting. Prof. Max Bonnay was important figure to me and I studied in Paris for one year in his class after my military service. But at the Academy, I had many teachers who were not accordionists. I played organ as my 2nd instrument for several years and that was also a very productive part of my education. Listened music, read about music, lived music.

I have got very high Academic education, which itself has been

perhaps the most important teacher to me. Master's degree in 1992 and later Doctoral degree in 1997. Especially during my doctoral studies I learned a lot from best of the best music researchers and performers here.

What do You notice as the biggest problem with students who come to Your class?

I can't name any kind of biggest problem. Everybody has some problems, but reasons vary.

What was Your proudest moment as a teacher?

I don't think that way. I am happy

when people play well, learn, show interest to music and profundity to this work. I don't advertise myself with competition success of any of my students. I am proud of everybody of them - past, present and future students.

What would You advice a student that is having trouble dealing with stage fright? Is there a certain method that they can apply and lose their fear and what would that be?

There are no shortcuts. Practise as best as you can, because more sure you are in your pieces - more relaxed you will be. But no shortcuts. I have played hundreds of



concerts in my life, but is still have stage fright. Just live with it. It's the part of this work.

What would be Your advice for Young musicians who want to play and achieve the best they can be?

Time. Work. Discipline.
No shortcuts.

