



SIMON SAYS...

On a recent trip to Tallinn for its annual Music Week event, **Simon Broughton** makes some new Estonian music discoveries

Tallinn has many things going for it – a picturesque old city, free public transport (for residents) and the vibrant Tallinn Music Week. But in addition to all of these, it has the best black bread in the world. With a hard crust on the outside and a heavy core full of seeds, the *must leib* should be Estonia's next bid for UNESCO intangible heritage status now they've got the smoke sauna. But *must leib* is hardly intangible. It is heavy, chewy and a meal in itself. I am hoping Mari Kalkun (see p40) can pack some alongside her *kannel* (large Estonian zither) in May.

Mari Kalkun and accordionist Tuulikki Bartosik were just two Estonians among 170 artists at Tallinn Music Week in and around the 'creative city' of Telliskivi last month. They both did superb shows, but I was struck by two Estonian duos new to me that really stood out.

Duo Ruut (right) are recently formed so new to everyone. Ann-Lisett Rebane and Kateriina Kivi sit on stage either side of a *kannel*. They sing at each other, not the audience, and pluck the *kannel* while one of them taps it with a stick. Sometimes they bow it. At first it seems very minimal, but then it becomes transfixing. They have ethereal voices and slowly draw you into their world. There was a real buzz among the delegates afterwards.

The other group riding high in Estonia now is Puuluup, whose name means 'wood loop.' Not only is it a cool palindrome, but it suits their music which uses loops and pedals and is ancient and modern at the same time. Ramo Teder and Marko Veisson sing and play the *hiuu kannel*, a bowed lyre, the Estonian version of the Finnish *jouhikko*. It's an instrument that



This image: Puuluup aka Ramo Teder and Marko Veisson (right) at Tallinn Music Week
Left: Duo Ruut

Ken Mink



pretty much disappeared in both Finland

and Estonia but has been revived in recent years. "This is the unofficial album of zombie folk," says Marko Veisson as they launch their set. "This is where you hear instruments that died out long ago but are now alive again and look like this..." He lifts up the unpromising-looking four-string lyre, but their plucking and sinewy bowing make a perfect backdrop to their songs.

In Finland there was the extraordinary Jouhiorkesteri, a quartet of jouhikko players, but it's Pekko Käppi (one of Jouhiorkesteri) who's come to be the most prominent name

behind the instrument. Käppi's music is pretty wild. What's interesting about Puuluup is that they've created a sound that appeals to a wide audience. All the Estonians I spoke to – aficionados or otherwise – liked their music. Their album *Süüta Mu Lumi* (Light My Snow), reached the Estonian critics prize shortlist for 2018. Unusual for a folk album.

Puuluup have a popular identity that clearly works in Estonia and could succeed abroad. Their music is inventive and appealing enough to defy language barriers and they have a sense of humour too. After each song, they do a co-ordinated bow and twirl their bows round their fingers. The music is good, but the presentation is also super cool. ♦

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