

Opisto Students Thankful for Music Offerings at Jämsä

One of the lines of study at Jämsä Opisto is the Language and Music Line. North American students who attend the opisto study in this line. Many of the students take advantage of the abundance of music options available and are thankful for the opportunity to participate in lessons and instruction according to their individual skills and interests. Students at the opisto this 2008-2009 school year share thoughts on these youth pages about how the opisto's music program has impacted their lives, and their year at opisto. English language teacher, Matt Keranen, helped to coordinate these pages.

Jamsa Opisto Offers Foreigners Music Options

A year at opisto is full of opportunities. Here one can meet new friends, study Finnish, take up new hobbies, or refine old ones. At Jamsa Opisto a person especially has the chance to learn and refine his music skills and interests, because music is infused into almost every part of daily life. The program or "line" in which we North Americans study is called the Language and Music Line.

It's possible to be in several choirs, which are either classes taught by Eero Kukko, or smaller groups taught by other students. In these choirs we sing a variety of sacred and patriotic music. Of the two choir classes, the larger is *Isokuoro*, or large choir. Almost all of the opisto students belong to it. Through auditions at the beginning of the year, a small group of students is chosen to be in the opisto *kamarikuoro*, or chamber choir. In the chamber choir we sing more challenging pieces and are required to take the class seriously. The choir sings at a variety of events throughout the year, including special trips to neighboring cities. I haven't often had the opportunity to sing in a choir, so it has meant a lot to me to be in these choirs.

Other classes that I've enjoyed are the organist and song leader courses. In addition to bettering my skills in accompanying congregational singing, I also had a chance to be a song leader. I feel better prepared to face the musical duties that I have in my home congregation, and perhaps I can also help others who are learning these skills.

All students can take organ and piano lessons. A large benefit of these lessons is the guidance and the chance to practice organ and piano as often as we please.

We're also able to use music to support the school through fundraising efforts. For example, "request concerts" are held at the opisto bazaars, in which customers select from a list of pieces to be performed for a small fee. This year four of us North Americans formed a quartet and sang at these events. We also made a Christmas recording as a fundraiser. Various groups of students performed on it, and it helped tremendously in paying for our class trip.

Opisto is a special place, when all of the music that is worked on and performed is wholesome and good for a believer. Songs of Zion are sung and played every day. Many times in the evenings, groups of students will sing around a piano or organ. Being a long ways from home, I have found comfort when I can sing together with others. It also draws us students closer together.

Here at opisto, I've had so many possibilities to improve myself in my favorite hobby, music. I really don't notice how much I've learned until I look back to the beginning of the year and count how many new songs and techniques I've learned. I've acquired skills not only through actual teaching, but also by observing others. I've also formed many strong friendships and have gathered a lot of knowledge that I can bring home with me.

Ian Hendrickson

SPRING DAY AT JÄMSÄ

After a long, dark winter in Finland, it's a wonderful feeling to wake up to the sun streaming through my window. Instantly my tiredness is dispelled, and I'm filled with energy. I'm going to need it, too—our first class is English Discussion. We North Americans are supposed to act as tutors in this class, helping the Finnish students to discuss in English, but at times they're reluctant to speak. Today, however, it seems as though everyone's been affected by the beautiful weather and is in a good mood, eager to talk. Our topic for this hour is "friendship." Our discussion turns to life at opisto and how we've made so many new friends since we came.

During the break between our first and second classes, we have morning devotion in the cafeteria. Today Eero talks about one of his favorite hymns, *Kirkasta Oi Kristus Meille*. We learn about the hymn's author and composer and talk about the meaning of the words. We're also reminded how music is a good way of connecting with God.

After morning worship, it's time for Finnish class. Everyone's awake and ready to work. There's a lot of joking and laughing as we play Finnish word games and attempt to talk only in Finnish. By now, we actually know enough Finnish to be able to understand some jokes and even make them ourselves. We're learning and having fun while we're at it.

In the afternoon, we have chamber choir. Today, everyone seems distracted by the sun beaming through the gym windows and has a hard time paying attention. Our teacher appears frustrated as we blunder our way through the songs. Every so often he points emphatically at his right hand, which is leading the group, as if to say, "Follow the Rhythm!" Finally, he decides we've struggled enough and lets us go outside to enjoy the weather.

In the evening, there are two discussions scheduled, one for the girls and one for the boys. The girls' discussion starts out with everyone saying what they're planning to do next year, but soon the conversation turns to faith matters and other issues, such as not fitting in or worrying about the future. I feel again the wonder of begin able to share my worries and struggles with others at opisto, to take care of matters, and to have my sins preached forgiven.

After evening snack, we go to our dorm, *Onnela*. The opisto just received a box of new LLC hymnals from America, and we foreigners confiscated a few books. Now we gather in *Onnela's* living room, singing and learning new songs in English. It's great to understand every word for a change. I love it when some of our Finnish friends, join us in singing, even when they don't understand the words. It really underlines the uniting faith we share. Along with an increased appreciation for our songs and hymns of Zion, I've been surrounded by wonderful choir, piano, organ, and orchestra music all day, every day. I've had opportunity to improve my music skills, in singing, playing piano and organ, and accompanying the congregation at services. Even the music I listen to be myself has changed. If this is the only thing I take out of my opisto year, it was more than worth it to come.

Janna Ylioja

PERSPECTIVES ON MUSIC SHAPED AT JAMSA

In Finland, I've encountered a different perspective on studying music than what I'm used to in America. It seems that believers in America often wonder how and where a person can apply his or her musical skills. This guarded view of music studies may stem from the fact that professional options for a learned, believing musician are more limited.

In Finland, the situation is different, which means that attitudes toward music studies differ as well. The existence of a music line or program of study at opisto is an example of that. It is directed towards those who wish to either major in music, or further their skills in making music for their own employment. To more closely examine this difference, I asked Eero Kukko, our line-leader, questions about studying music at opisto; the benefits, the outcomes, the concerns.

Eero says the music instruction at opisto is intended for those who plan to pursue studies in the music field as well as for those who view music as a hobby. Each year, five to ten students pursue further music studies after attending opisto. Some continue directly on to music school, while others go to the Finnish high school first. In either case, Opisto's instruction gives a comprehensive foundation. It builds a base for studying church music, as well as for studying to become a teacher of a particular instrument. For the music hobbyists, opisto provides a good opportunity to complete various certificate levels, to deepen knowledge and skills, and to prepare for serving as an organist or song leader.

Eero has noticed that the instruction in public school music classes emphasizes "Light" music. This can lead to difficult situations for believing youth who want to study music and maintain a clean conscience. Opisto is a very secure place in that respect, since the instruction emphasizes music based on Christian values, suitable to believers. This, however, doesn't mean that only spiritual music is studied. The students also look in music's core essence, its structure and forms, and some classical music.

During the opisto year, a student's taste in music often improves and respect for the songs of Zion deepens. Eero says, "I believe that through music, many young people become rooted in God's kingdom during the opisto year." For those who plan to study music, this grounding in faith is very important. In music studies, it's easy to experience the pull of the world. This is especially true when one knows he or she is good in some musical skill. The person may feel the need to perform in concerts or competitions, and personal glory may become too important. Music is a gift from God, and at opisto, thankfully, few such temptations arise.

When there are temptations that can come with studying music, why, then, would a person want to study it? Eero had some insight in this matter. In his instruction, there are two main goals. The first is that music supports and nourishes a young one in their faith. The other goal is learning, as Eero explains: "(By learning) I mean an increase in skills and knowledge, understanding and remembering musical concepts, and changes in one's way of thinking, imagining, and developing as a human being overall."

It may seem amazing that music could accomplish such a thing, yet through the opisto year I've noticed that I enjoy congregational singing CD's a lot more. It's wonderful to know I'm singing the same song with so many other believers. It's nice here in Finland, as well, to have the bond of faith that is audible through song even when the language isn't the same.

Eero also views it as important, and says, "Here at the opisto, the North American students are enough older than the Finns that their ideas and perceptions of music have already been shaped more towards how believers think. I hope that they as well as the older Finnish students would have the strength to be examples to the younger students."

Karen Hillukka

“YOU DON’T NEED TO BE MUSICALLY INCLINED TO FIT IN”

I came to Jamsa Opisto knowing that this school has a strong emphasis on music studies. Three of my siblings had also been students here, and they told me that there’s room for all types of people. After I came, I found that despite the wealth of music opportunities available, you don’t need to be musically inclined to fit in.

Wandering around the opisto, I hear music nearly all the time. There are many organs and pianos, and there’s almost always someone playing them. It’s nice to hear music so often. When songs of Zion are being played, it’s easy to just go in and sing along. Occasionally, I enjoy listening to the choir practice.

Music has never really been my hobby, so I haven’t taken part in music lessons here. I guess the musical theme has affected me, though, because I’ve started playing the guitar, and I really enjoy it. There are many people who are very knowledgeable in music from whom I can ask for help when necessary. I’ve take advantage of begin able to learn from my friends.

I often end up doing things that have nothing to do with music. The gym has basketball hoops, floor ball nets, and a volleyball net. The gym is always open when there’s not a discussion or a church service going on. Sitting in the commons and visiting with friends is an option, too. I’ve found opisto life to be very fulfilling.

David Muhonen