

## THE STORY OF SALAMAKANNEL

Salamakannel (Lightning Kantele) is back! On the new album IV, the band's personal sound is still born from the ringing of various stringed instruments. Salamakannel's music combines traditional Finnish *pelimanni* (folk musician) music, especially kantele music from Perho River Valley, American string band music and various rock influences. An essential part of the band's repertoire is the band members' own personal compositions.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Salamakannel's best-known lineup made three albums, which are still considered to be the front-line releases of the emerging Finnish contemporary folk music. Salamakannel's new album IV continues from where the band left off 30 years ago. The album's music contains a variety of moods, from heartbreaking lyrical melodies to ancient imitations of the church bell tunes, Chicago waltz, polska or oompah, Finnish *humppa*.



photo KMI archives

Original lineup 1984: Jussi Ala-Kuha (guitars and mandolin), Hannu Saha (electric kanteles), Carl Rahkonen (viola), Rauno Nieminen (bass).

Salamakannel was originally born in 1983, when Jussi Ala-Kuha, an instrument builder who worked in Kaustinen, created an electric kantele on the order of Hannu Saha, who worked at the Folk Music Institute. At the time, two masters of Finnish instrument building, Jussi Ala-Kuha and Rauno Nieminen, worked in Kaustinen

Soitinverstas (Kaustinen Instrument Workshop). To test Ala-Kuha's electric kantele was formed a band, which included Jussi, Rauno and Hannu. Carl Rahkonen, an American ethnomusicologist with Finnish roots, was just then collecting materials for his upcoming dissertation on kantele (The Kantele Traditions of Finland, Indiana University 1989), and Carl was asked to join the band. In honor of Carl, the band was named Kalle Rahkonen & Salamakannel. Except for Carl's viola, all instruments were made by Jussi and Rauno.

Kalle Rahkonen & Salamakannel performed rarely and mainly at Kaustinen Folk Music Festival. The band released a three-song EP *Käin minä kaunista kangasta myöten* (Bluebird BEP 1, 1984). There is a video composed by Rauno for the song *Kallen uni*, which was left off the album:

<https://www.facebook.com/rauno.nieminen/videos/10220145685618389>



photo Olli Kangas/ KMI archives

Lineup 1985–1995: Hannu Saha (kanteles, harmonica, vocals), Jussi Ala-Kuha (guitars, mandolin, Eemeli trumpet), Kimmo Käsälä (bass), Arto Järvelä (fiddle, mandolin, nyckelharpa etc.).

When Carl Rahkonen returned to America and Rauno Nieminen moved to Ikaalinen as the director of instrument building training, they were replaced by Arto Järvelä, a young outstanding folk fiddler from the Kaustinen *pelimanni* family, and Kimmo Käsälä, a pig farmer who had played with Jussi in many rock bands. The band became much more active, doing quite a lot of gigs as well. Salamakannel music was played quite a lot on Finnish radios.

Salamakannel released three LP and CD albums: *Salamakannel* (Olarin Musiikki OMLP 25, 1989), *Väinön paluu* (Kansanmusiikki-instituutti KILP 22, 1990) and *Koivunrunkorakkautta* (Amigo Finland AMFLP 2005-1, 1992). *Koivunrunkorakkautta* was produced by the great English soulmate Andrew Cronshaw.

When Jussi Ala-Kuha moved from Kaustinen to Töysä to run his own instrument workshop and Arto Järvelä moved to Helsinki to study folk music at the Sibelius Academy, Salamakannel activities became significantly more difficult during the first half of the 1990s. The band's last appearance at the Kaustinen folk music festival was in 1994.

However, Salamakannel played its supposed last gig in a good setting, at the kantele concert organized by President Martti Ahtisaari in the presidential residence of Mäntyniemi on 23 October 1997. Salamakannel's part can be found on YouTube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7\\_wBBTOFPA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q7_wBBTOFPA)



photo Kimmo Käsälä

#### Current lineup 2018:

Kimmo Käsälä (electric bass), Hannu Saha (kanteles), Antti Kettunen (acoustic guitar, electric guitar), Arto Järvelä (fiddle, mandolin, nyckelharpa)

Now Salamakannel is back. In current Salamakannel, the late Jussi Ala-Kuha (1952–2007) has replaced the band's friend and well-known player Antti Kettunen. On March 17, 2017, the first reunion trainings took place in Kaustinen. The next day there was a small appearance at a great exhibition of JAK instruments in Alavus that honored Jussi Ala-Kuha's instrument building career. In the summer of 2017, the band played several gigs at the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival, and the following summer there were visits to a few other music festivals. On May 6, 2018, during the Salamakannel reunion training, *Anteron valssi* (Waltz for Andrew) found on the Koivunrunkorakkautta album was practiced:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYZFim\\_ILSI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYZFim_ILSI)

## Band members



Antti Kettunen, Kimmo Käsälä, Hannu Saha and Arto Järvelä

photo Susanna Salokannel

*Antti Kettunen* is an elementary school teacher by training , and he has also worked as a folk music professional for a long time at the Folk Music Institute in Kaustinen. The guitarist, who also dominates the small kanteles, has been active in recent years, among other things, in numerous folk music groups in Oulu.

*Kimmo Känsälä* is a respected bass player who has been involved in numerous rock, pop and folk music bands from the late 1970s (including the Trikoo band together with Jussi Ala-Kuha) until today.

*Hannu Saha* is a folk music researcher, educator, composer and musician specializing especially in kanteles. Saha is a Doctor of Philosophy who wrote his dissertation on kantele. He has worked for a long time, e.g. as the director of the Folk Music Institute in Kaustinen, and as a professor at both the University of Tampere (ethnomusicology) and the Sibelius Academy (folk music). As a musician, he has performed in more than 20 countries and played on more than 40 records.

*Arto Järvelä* is one of the leading Finnish folk musicians of his generation, an internationally respected *pelimanni*, and the master of music graduate from the Folk Music Department of the Sibelius Academy. His main instrument is the fiddle, but besides that he masters a large number of other instruments, from the nyckelharpa to the mandolin. His bands have been or are e.g. JPP, Tallari, Koinurit, Niekku, Ampron prunni, Helsinki Mandoliners and duo Pinni pojat with accordion wizard Kimmo Pohjonen.