

Interview with Tanya Stanaway
Ishpeming, MI
May 5, 2010

Subject: Finnish music and the Aura Jamboree

START OF INTERVIEW

Kathryn Johnson (KJ): Okay, today is May 5th, 2010. I'm with Tanya Stanaway and we're in Ishpeming, MI. Tanya, can you tell me: what is your full name and what is your birthday and where were you born?

Tanya Stanaway (TS): I was in born in _____, Finland, on October 4, 1950 and my full name is Tanya Maria Stanaway.

KJ: Is that your maiden name?

TS: Nope, that's my married name. My maiden name is Paasikas.

KJ: Will you spell that please?

TS: P-A-A-S-I-K-A-S, Paasikas.

KJ: Thank you. So, you are a musician. Will you tell me a little bit about what instruments you play, how you learned them and who taught you?

TS: How many days do you have time to do this because I have so many things that I would tell. So, I would probably just say about the main ones that I do. Well, it's probably easier if I say I can't play the trumpet or sax or any of those that need a lot of wind. I do play the clarinet and the recorder but just about anything that has a keyboard on it and a violin or cello, harmonica, recorder, accordion of course, piano and what else is there. There are a lot of instruments that have the keyboard, so if there's a keyboard, I'm in.

KJ: And who taught you how to play all these instruments?

TS: Different teachers. I started—I first touched a piano when I was ten years old and I got lessons from the school at that time in _____ and then I took some guitar lessons here in Marquette at the music school there, a couple years from a guy called Tony _____ but he's not around anymore and then I just teach myself. You know, if I have some questions I can ask someone, how do you get this one and how do you get that chord and whatever. And they would show me and I pick it up and then my accordion teacher was Bill Kippela from Marquette. I was his apprentice for two years.

KJ: Do you remember which years those were?

TS: Oh, off hand, it's been a few years now. They were in, _____, I should have looked that up early but I don't remember right off hand but it's been a few years since I was his apprentice.

KJ: And as his apprentice, how often would you meet?

TS: Well, he came once a week to my house and had a lesson. Then sometimes when we went to Marquette to save him the trip to come in town here and I went there. When I go into my singings, he many times would accompany me when I sing and he plays the accordion because we know the songs. So, we don't really need to practice ahead of time, we go cold turkey and there it is.

KJ: It always sounds great. It sounds like you've practiced together for years.

TS: We really don't practice, we just go and perform.

KJ: So, when you were a youngster and you were growing up in Finland, did you listen to folk music. Were you listening to songs with the accordion in them or did you become more familiar with that as an adult?

TS: More when I moved here. When I was in Finland, my dad played the banjo and I sang. So, I did not—I wasn't interested in any of the folk songs. I did the tangos and fox trots and all those type of songs that my dad played the banjo for and it wasn't until I came here when I took the accordion and the guitar and started to do that because I found out there was so many Finnish people here who like the Finnish music, so I thought I'm going to try it and I've been doing it ever since and I'm still doing it.

KJ: I guess we should establish when did you come to the Marquette area?

TS: To Negaunee, I came first in 1971 to Gwinn. I was there for four months in the summer and then I went back to Finland for the winter. And then June of 1972, that's when I came and stayed.

KJ: Okay, so you've been familiar with folk music here in the area since 1972 then?

TS: Pretty much, yeah.

KJ: That's great.

TS: I found out so many Finnish were singing them old songs and I said I know them songs. So, then I picked up a guitar and I thought oh, I can play them too.

KJ: Have you seen any changes in folk music over the last you know, 30 some years?

TS: The Finnish folk music?

KJ: Yes, here in the U.P.

TS: Not really, when the song is out you should not change that if it's a Finnish folk song. You're not allowed to change it either; you have to sing it the way it's composed. So, if somebody's goofing off and making their own words and use the melody and makes up his own lshpeming words or something like that but in my mind, they should be left the way they are written.

KJ: What do you think about using new instruments or say plugging in an electric guitar or something along those lines to then play folk music?

TS: It takes away from the feeling of the folk music. I know a lot of people do that and even they have accordions that one person can play and if you don't see it, you'd think it's the whole band because the accordion, because it's all the instruments and to me that takes away from the accordion altogether. I'm all for fashion, I want accordion alone to sound like an accordion.

KJ: So, were you familiar with Viola Terppanen's music?

TS: Not until I came here.

KJ: And what did you think of it?

TS: Oh, I like it. I like her a lot. I have her songs in my CD coming up now because I like her and I do a couple of songs that she sings also. Something somebody has asked me or told me that you sound just like Viola Terppanen because I also have a low voice like she did. Yeah, I sing the same songs that she did. So, I listen to her. I have her 5 CDs and I listen to her a lot because I like her, I like her real playing.

KJ: I've heard wonderful stories about her music playing here in the U.P. and how she would draw the biggest crowds and everybody loved her.

TS: Yes.

KJ: What do you think about folk music and the younger generations? Do you think the younger generations today are learning to play any folk music or do you think it's dying out? Do you think people are making an effort to share with the youngsters and how can they better do that?

TS: Well, there are some Finnish people who play and try to attract the younger people to do that but they had too much rap and all that that's all over the place to hear all the time and perhaps they don't have time to concentrate on. And then the Finnish folk music is at a small area, it's a certain area just that if there are no young people in there it's not going to go anywhere but that's why the ___ Finnish

American Societies like to address the fact that when we have any of our programs we always say the children are admitted free to give them the opportunity to listen to these songs and perhaps, they might like them.

KJ: I think so. Can I ask you a couple questions about the Aura Jamboree?

TS: Sure, I played there a few times.

KJ: I see from this collage of buttons here on the table you have been there quite a few times.

TS: 1991.

KJ: Wow and you haven't missed one since 1991?

TS: Haven't missed one since 1991, nope.

KJ: Wonderful.

TS: I've been there every year and I always try to wear my Finnish dress because I'm trying to bring the particular Finnish part of it because I do sing the Finnish songs but the stage time is only fifteen minutes and you can't ram too many songs into that time period. So, usually three songs or four at the most I can do. So, then why I get on stage, oh there's the Finnish dress, we know we're going to get Finnish songs.

KJ: They love it too.

TS: They like that, yeah.

KJ: What do you think about the musicians that play outside of the hall, out on the ground, mix around and jam with each other? Have you participated in that at all?

TS: Oh yeah, before I go out on stage I'm playing and then after I get done with my fifteen minutes, I go back out and play and we just gather around, anyone who wants to join. Just tell them, ____.

KJ: That's great. Have you played at other, you know, community events or festivals where that happens frequently? Or do you think that's something that's special to the Jamboree?

TS: No, not just the Jamboree because when you have a Finn fest you have outside and grass and if you have enough musicians or even two or three people stand there and play and they start playing and I've done that at other Finn fests that I've been to. So, it's really nice that you can just stop and play.

KJ: That is wonderful. Do you have any special memories of the Jamboree, anything funny, any special stories?

TS: Yeah, this one really good story only a few people know.

KJ: You should share.

TS: Every time I think of it, I just have to get a chuckle. I always sing this one song because it is the song that most, not most, but quite familiar with a lot of people and they like the song. It's only three verses and it's a nice Finnish folk song and I always sing it. I know it by heart. I could probably when I sleep I can sing it. I always say, I don't need any music in front of me; I don't need the words to anything. So, I started to play and after the first verse, in my mind I was thinking, how does the second verse go and I didn't have my words in front of me to look. So, I made up the second verse on the spot, I know the theme of the song was about this nice, young girl that was growing up in her father's house. So, I made up this verse and then I caught on to the actual second verse and I finished the song with the last two, somehow they came back and it was fine. I just thought, oh good I made it. Then, outside this old lady comes to me and she said, I really like that song you sang, I know that song so well because I sang it when I was a little girl but I never heard the second verse before. What is that second verse? And I said, well the folk song is written by people from mouth to mouth, that maybe somebody changed something and if areas of Finland have a different version of the song and maybe this version was the one that you haven't heard before. Oh, that's nice. It was a nice song then. I was hoping and I said, oh thank goodness she did not ask, "Would you mind writing down the second verse for me?" And I would not have remembered because I made it up on the spot and there's no way I'd remember how it went. So, that was a funny.

KJ: One of the hazards of your trade.

TS: From then on, I always have my music with me and I have increased the print of all the words in every song so when I have them in front of me I don't have to look at it because I pretty much all of it but they are there just in case. I know how it's not bad to do that because I talked to Victor _____, he's the world famous singer and he's stayed with us for three times now when he was concert touring here and I've asked him the same question, what do you think bad, you're a bad singer because you have to look at the words. He said, did you look at when I go on singing and do my concerts, I always have a sheet of music in front of me with the words and big letters. I said, yeah I know. So, you also can have them. No matter where you go keep your words in front of you. So I said okeydokey.

KJ: With your experiences at the Jamboree, have there been any kids, any children, any teenagers or any young adults who've been playing there that you've noticed?

TS: Yeah, even one of my—I have a piano student and a guitar student that their mom and dad are involved with the Jamboree all the time and they went on during my fifteen minutes. They both camp on and played a piece. So, we got young people also interested in this Jamboree.

KJ: That's very nice. Are their parent's musicians or are they Aura residents?

TS: No, no I think they live in L'Anse now but they are from Ishpeming and lived in Ishpeming for many years and now they built a house by the lake there and they live there but they always go to the Jamboree and the girls always in the kitchen serving hamburgers or whatever they serve.

KJ: That's very nice. Do you think there's anything about the Jamboree that makes it's unique? That sets it apart from other you know, mentioned Finn Fest, I know here in Marquette there's the Hiawatha Festival which is a music event. Do you think there is anything special about the Aura Jamboree?

TS: I guess it's the just the location. It's ideal being in the middle of nowhere and you have all that space there and I've noticed that during these years that I've been there, it gets bigger by the year and more people know about it and it gets—people are more interested and they are adding more things on it. Like there have been violin workshops now there by the Whitewater which I have also partaken and that's really nice. There is not just the fiddling thing, all kinds of instruments are being brought out now.

KJ: That is wonderful. Do you plan to participate in the Jamboree again this year and in the future?

TS: Well, this year is a little iffy because I'm going to Finland and I'll be returning the 16th, which is Friday night, and this is the Saturday so I'm probably going to sign up "yes, I will be there." I'll put a little notation to say that if my flight is delayed I won't be able to make it but then again it won't be really a problem because there will be so many musicians. Someone can easily take my spot for the fifteen minutes on stage. I don't want to lose the chance not to be there if I'm here Friday and then want to go anyways the next day because it's fun outside. The jamming parties really nice, I like that.

KJ: I think everybody there who listens to the music likes it too. That hall can get pretty crowded in there.

TS: And hot. If it's a very warm day out there, they have fans and windows open but when you put that hall full of people, it's hot.

KJ: Yeah it is. Were there any jamborees you attended where it was raining outside and you weren't able to have that jamming?

TS: There was and it was sort of but you just waited until the rain cloud went away and you went under the awning and sit in the car for a while or something. As far as I remember, it wasn't cancelled just because it was raining. You had to be careful of your instrument. You can't get them wet, so if it's raining you have to go in.

KJ: Yeah, for sure. Have you noticed any changes other than the Aura Jamboree growing bigger and bigger with more musicians and more people attending? Have you noticed any other changes?

TS: Just the food and drinks, what they offer there. They have increased the variety. I think they used to just offer brats and hamburgers to stand by _____ but now they have bean soup and pasties and of course, the beer. Spirits and that have increased a lot. It was just soft drinks first but now the beer has come into a big thing there and you buy the beer buttons but I guess that's the U.P. lifestyle.

KJ: It is for some. Well, if you had to speculate about the future of Finnish folk music in the Upper Peninsula, where do you think it's headed?

TS: Well, the people who are playing it, if it's not the younger people it's going to be gone after a while because it gets older. I noticed now at the Aura—maybe the last 5 years, it's not all Finn anymore, it's a lot of Cajun stuff there, a lot of country, so much country. I'm surprised how much country is at those jam sessions under the trees and tents, that is taken away but then there is always a small group here and then that you can hear the _____ and jamming right there because I don't know those country songs that they play.

KJ: Alright, is there anything else you would like to add?

TS: About the Aura?

KJ: About the Jamboree, about folk music about your experiences?

TS: It's always been a positive thing being always invited to come and play and then they also have all kinds of sales there now. T-shirts and of course all the musicians are allowed to sell their CDs because they don't get paid for being there, so they sell the CD. They are allowed to sell that. Of course, they have their raffles and 50/50 and things like that to raise funds to make that hall better and improve it and they have done a lot of improvements on it since I think 1991. I look at it now and what it looks like today they have done a lot, very much.

KJ: Do you know, was that playground out there in the back for the kids?

TS: Not in the beginning, there was nothing. They had built all that up and it's nice because now you can bring your kids and they can play there hours and hours and you can play for hours and hours.

KJ: And then maybe the kids will maybe hear some music, even if they're not paying attention to it.

TS: Oh yeah. The parking lot is always the problem because there are so many people who come on boats way out there and the car _____ on top and they have ropes in the fields so you can put them in the filled and stuff but musicians get to park in a special spot.

KJ: Oh, you guys are lucky.

TS: So, you have to try and get there early so you can get a spot. One time all the musicians spots were taken and I was like now where am I going to go and as I said it one guy pulled out and I took his spot.

KJ: It was meant to be.

TS: It was meant to be.

KJ: Well thank you so much for sharing this information with me today, I really appreciate it.

TS: You're welcome, anytime.

END OF INTERVIEW