

## **Hardcore heritage: consecrating the northern anxiety of Terveet Kädet**

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### **Summary**

The process of punk-hardcore heritagisation is examined here through a band named Terveet Kädet, formed in the town of Tornio in northern Finland in 1980.

It outlines the process whereby the band was transformed after 2010 from internationally recognised but regionally unknown oddity to having significant local heritage status. Heritage manifestations include a statue and a lavish presence of the band in the renewed permanent exhibition of a regional museum.

While such accolades are a logical by-product of a punk career spanning four decades, the related formats and practices of heritagisation are both conventional and predictable. This chapter examines the cultural processes by which the band's change in cultural status came about.

### **Introduction**

Over recent decades popular music and the material culture associated with it have been increasingly viewed as a form of collective heritage. First, the baby boomers made their own past more significant through the application of heritage discourses to popular music (Bennett 2009: 2015), while today the baby busters seek to proclaim the importance of their own generational experiences (Le Guern 2015: 29) during the punk-hardcore era of the late 1970s and early 1980s. New public institution types, such as popular music museums and music halls of fame, are the most direct and obvious manifestations of this tendency (Fairchild 2018: 477). Ordinary cultural history museums may also incorporate a section devoted to local popular music, thus making the individuals operating within or related to these institutions the gatekeepers of this

particular form of societal memory (Schwartz and Cook 2002: 2–4).

But, what about the heritagisation of popular music that was not “popular” in the traditional meaning of the word, was mainly distributed through do-it-yourself efforts and was delivered in such auditory and material form that most consumers found brutal if not straightforwardly offensive? Hardcore – born as a more aggressive, harder and faster counter reaction to the commercialization of punk rock in the early 1980s – is such a sub-genre of popular music. Characterised by a strong DIY-ethos, bands of the hardcore scene rarely reached commercial success or captured the attention of the general public. The material culture of hardcore has therefore been preserved mainly by enthusiasts operating within the scene and is rarely exhibited in museums. The relationship between authorised heritage discourse and hardcore heritage therefore merits attention as it likely involves negotiations and interpretations between the various agents operating at the intersection of these two regimes.

This chapter examines how hardcore has been heritagised and how this heritage is presented through a case study focusing on a legendary Finnish hardcore band named Terveet Kädet (en. Healthy Hands). This band formed in January 1980 evolving from a national oddity to gain local heritage status after 2010. Attention will be paid not only to the process of heritagisation and its results, but also to the actors influencing it. The methods used in this study include on-site documentation visits to the places of heritagisation as well as informal interviews conducted with the people who have participated in the process. In addition, newspaper and on-line articles as well as messages posted to various online message boards have been examined in order to understand both the official and public response to this process.

It will be shown that during the still-ongoing formative stage of processes related to the heritagisation of popular music, its inherent conceptual instability gives room for an unproportioned input by strong individuals who can influence both what is heritagised and how the subject of heritagisation is presented. The chapter also shows how the accolades coined to honour and remember the subject are heavily on the traditional side, in spite of the hardcore movement's inherent support of ideas like anarchism, anti-commercialism and the loathing of bourgeoisie lifestyles.

### **“Piss and Shit!!!” – Introducing Terveet Kädet**

Terveet Kädet hailed from the town of Tornio located in remote Lapland, yet they reached a global audience. The band was always built around its singer and only permanent member Veli-Matti "Läjä" Äijälä, the rest of the line-up changing several times over the years before disbanding in January 2016. Läjä has also explored other genres of popular music ranging from straightforward rockabilly to ambient and industrial noise, establishing his position as an auteur in the Finnish music scene. It is difficult to find an album review of Terveet Kädet or Läjä's many side projects that would have received less than three stars.

As a lyricist, Läjä's self-expression channelled through Terveet Kädet differed considerably from his contemporaries in the punk-hardcore scene, who encouraged people to fight the system. Although themes related to war and anarchy are also found in their music, often expressed through utopic or dystopic visions, the rest is so completely different that many hardcore fans found it hard to recognise as hardcore (Similä and Vuorela 2015: 40–41). In fact, Terveet Kädet is famous for its sado-

masochistic-fecal fantasies with original song titles such as “Rubber and Blood” (fi. “Kumia ja verta”) and “Piss and Shit” (fi. ”Pissaa ja paskaa”).

The epitome of this expression is the “Infinite Christmas” (fi. “Ääretön Joulu”) EP released in 1982, which has entered the global canon as one of the greatest ever hardcore releases (Similä and Vuorela 2015: 41). The EP has an offensive front cover taken from a German S/M porn magazine with a handcuffed, bare male torso being hung upside down from the ceiling with a lit candle stuck into his rectum. One of its songs named “Springtime in Tornio” (fi. “Tornion Kevät”) describes accurately with eight words – “Tornioans shit stinks, spring has arrived to Tornio” – the local smellscape after a long winter characterised by darkness, snow and sub-zero temperatures.

Yet, the town of Tornio located in the south-western fringes of Finnish Lapland, was essential as a place in the making of this band. In spite of its relatively remote location in the north, as the sole border town to Sweden, Tornio was probably the best place in Finland to keep up with the international beat in music, comics, horror movies and hardcore porn (Vuori 2018: 13). Radio Sweden with its more open-minded programming compared to the Finnish national broadcasting company YLE was also an important influence (Vuori 2018: 14) in a country, where commercial radio stations remained non-existent.

As far as lyrics are concerned, the aforementioned sources of musical inspiration were mixed by Läjä with his personal history including the alternative civilian service at the Keropudas mental asylum and, above all, the state of mind often defined as northern

anxiety (Vuori 2018: 243–244). Northern anxiety is said to stem from the harsh climate characterised by dark and cold winters, and is manifested in high suicide rates and widespread alcoholism. Another of its effects is an inward-looking society characterised by *laestadianism* – the omnipresent conservative Lutheran revival movement in the Tornio valley – that is considered oppressive by most non-believers. The echoes of northern anxiety can be heard in the music of Terveet Kädet, which is undeniably barbarous, but also fairly unique and - one might suggest - strangely appealing.

The global and local influences were forged together in Tornio as contemporary popular music by Terveet Kädet with DIY-practices. For the early releases, the band had neither a record nor a distribution deal, and had to rely on the intensive tape-trading that characterized the hardcore scene. Through this channel Läjä was also able to obtain rare recorded music and live music videos that further influenced his own expression (Vuori 2008: 75, 96). By slowly building up the fan base through this channel, Terveet Kädet became among the best known Finnish bands internationally (Bruun et al. 1998: 423).

### **Transforming hardcore into heritage**

The process whereby the band was turned from an oddity into local heritage took place through a mechanism Schmutz (2005) has defined as retrospective cultural consecration. Although this process had started earlier, all its tangible manifestations date to the period after 2010. While representing a logical by-product of a long and versatile career, these accolades merit close attention from the viewpoint of heritagisation regarding both their content and public reception.

First, in November 2013 the band was honoured with a statue raised in Tornio. The idea about this “marker of performative memory that populates the built environment (Brandellero and Jansen 2014: 235)” was first spelled out in 2009 in an aptly named Facebook-group "Tornio should raise a Terveet Kädet statue" (Vuori 2018: 250). The initiative resulted in a 9-meter high steel-framed glass obelisk named “Särkynyt Lyhty” (en. Broken Lantern, Figure 1), raised for the remembrance of notable odd figures hailing from the Tornio area. Although the band-related content is limited to its first album cover reproduced on the obelisk, the statue is commonly known as “Terveet Kädet statue”. On the opposite side is a picture of the Priest of Kalkkimaa, a mythical late 19th century village idiot named Pietari Aapo Herajärvi (1830–1885) famed for his poems and songs mocking the local authorities. The two remaining sides are embellished with local steel artefacts.

While the outcome of this initiative is a prime example of how heritage values are today expressed in a more democratised way through digital interaction in social media, (Silberman and Purser 2012: 16; Taylor and Gibson 2017: 409, 412), the obelisk itself represents a conceptual compromise as statues such as these are seldom, if ever, raised to honour living persons or entities in Finland. The Priest of Kalkkimaa is an essential component needed to justify the monument by establishing a linkage to local history (see also Leonard 2007: 155) and to build up a narrative about a tradition of eccentric people hailing from the Tornio area. As a monument located in a public park, the obelisk is the only freely accessible place in Tornio to which townspeople and visitors can position their memories regarding the band (see also Roberts and Cohen 2014: 252).

Whether the obelisk actually performs and enacts its role as a marker and reminder of local musical heritage in the social world (see Roberts and Cohen 2014: 258) is a difficult question to answer, but at least it seems to be quite liked as a public monument judging from opinions expressed in various on-line discussion boards. It has also provoked deeper thoughts, as exemplified by jazz musician Jukka Piironen's ponderings in his blog "Valon kuvia" (24.11.2013): "Its message is ambiguous in a positive way; the public funds of the dominant culture have been utilized to bring marginalized things into the limelight, as the rebellion of punk rock is transformed into the property of the whole town".

The band is also lavishly featured in the renewed permanent exhibition opened in May 2015 at The Museum of Tornio Valley, where a small confined space located in the upper floor of the museum has been reserved for local popular music. While the Populappi-database that contains information on popular music acts pertaining to the administrative region of Lapland enlists some 230 bands formed in Tornio since the 1960s, the majority of the objects displayed in the exhibition –posters, photographs, and vinyl records – relate to Terveet Kädet. The only video monitor loops an interview with Läjä, while the band's music is blasted out from headphones in a small listening area that consists of a countertop and a few barstools (Figure 2).

A remarkable feature of this exhibition is the absence of interpretative texts that would either convey a mediated message or, alternatively, present a piece of local social history by focusing on the evolution of popular music in westernmost Finnish Lapland. The objects displayed are therefore not "museum artefacts whose meaning is meant to be expressed through their careful placement and contextualization within larger

encompassing narrative (Fairchild 2018: 479, see also Leonard 2018: 264)”. In the absence of mediated content, the patron is left alone to respond to the visual and auditory offerings in relation to his or her own musical memories and tastes (Leonard 2018: 261).

The driver behind the exhibition was Mr. Seppo Oförsagd, the band’s former producer-manager and a prominent music-activist in the area, who apparently not only compiled the objects (Vuori 2018: 307) but was solely responsible for the exhibit’s design. One might describe the exhibit as a haphazard collection of memorabilia with no content or message. Alternatively, the exhibition can be interpreted as a fine example of multivocality and DIY-spirit that is characteristic of the genre. It hands the burden of interpretation to the patrons who can use it in ways that correspond with the motivation(s) of their visits. This option is suggested in the exhibition by a stack of post-it-notes available for the visitors to post their own comments about the music of Terveet Kädet for others to see (Figure 2).

When Finland celebrated its hundredth year of independence in December 2017, Läjä Äijälä won the public vote for the title of the greatest Laplander of the century organised by regional newspaper *Lapin Kansa*. This was a powerful demonstration of machination and networking, although the on-line community behind the win was a very loosely organised one and consisted of domestic fans, supporters and sympathisers of TK. Läjä received nearly 40 % of the votes, many of which were cast from outside the administrative region of Lapland. This detail was strongly underlined by *Lapin Kansa* thus indicating its own uneasiness with the outcome. Unsurprisingly, after the



news broke out, the discussion board of *Lapin Kansa* was immediately filled with opinions either praising the result or calling for a re-vote.

The title produced an interesting reaction at the Museum of Tornio Valley. Now, a visitor entering the section of popular music is faced with a gilded frame decorated with Christmas lights and carrying the portrait of a young prince (Figure 2). The picture is overpainted with a circle-A and carries a newspaper clipping announcing the win and a text “The King. Läjä I”. Unless this new museum object reflects the more nuanced approach to pop-rock heritage as suggested by Mortensen and Madsen (2014: 259), which includes “both the myth and the reality of pop/rock culture, perhaps even juxtaposing the two in a form of postmodernist parody by simultaneously stating and subverting the nostalgic narrative”, its message is a rather sarcastic one. Nevertheless, it coincidentally anticipated the following stages in the heritagisation and canonization of Terveet Kädet.

The 60th birthday of Läjä Äijälä in September 2018 was eulogised with a biography (Vuori 2018). The book portrays an artist who has pushed his vision through decades despite social and financial difficulties. This is, of course, a very common way to turn the career of an appraised artist into a hagiography. For fans, the story can be officially told only through a printed book (Kärjä 2006: 18). Presenting the history of Terveet Kädet through the biography of Läjä Äijälä may also have been a strategic choice regarding the presentation of narrative, while the importance and the input of other band members with associated contributors also comes through in the book.

The most recent stage in the process of heritagisation of Terveet Kädet was reached in February 2019, when Svart record company released a 5-vinyl set containing the full discography of the band from its “golden era” of 1980–1989. The box was virtually sold out in pre-sales. Läjä also expressed his desire to celebrate the release by performing a full set of Terveet Kädet songs under his current hardcore line-up named Lapin Helvetti (Lapland’s Hell) with several performances scheduled for September 2019. This was a surprise because during the last years of its existence Terveet Kädet was being turned into a heritage rock act expected to always perform a set list filled with its most popular hardcore anthems from the 1980s. By late 2015 these expectations seem to have developed into a burden and the easiest way to get rid of them was to produce and perform new hardcore music with a new band under a different name.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

The overall heritagisation process of Terveet Kädet outlined in the previous section can be defined as retrospective cultural consecration (see Schmutz 2005). As a process, it has been very conventional and predictable both in terms of formats and practices: a statue has been raised and material culture related to the band is now on display at the local museum. Brandellero and Jansen (2014: 236) have previously pointed out the importance of this type of tangible heritage for the culture of popular music. At the same time, the lead singer Läjä has been canonised as an individual possessing an exceptional artistic talent in music (cf. Kärjä 2006: 5): his biography has been published and he has also won a title comparable to the election in a music hall of fame. In addition, reputational entrepreneurs (see Fine 1996) active in the fields of music journalism and other cultural industries, “have drawn on their institutional power and status” (Bennett 2009: 478) and played a significant role by keeping the band and

especially its front man in the limelight as an artist worthy of admiration and respect.

The process of heritagisation also shows how its subject maybe considered old-fashioned by the younger generations or just something they have never heard of. When contrasted to music genres like rap and hip-hop, hardcore is still today irrelevant to many, thus making it a perfect relic to be stored and observed in a museum. Terveet Kädet fans are perhaps also eager to see their collective past being heritagised as it renders their own past more relevant and meaningful.

When it comes to the museum exhibition itself, bottom-up involvement has provoked top-down action, but the resulting mix is perhaps not satisfactory to anyone. Generally speaking, the presentation of Terveet Kädet shows the difficulty of presenting popular music, or any music, in a museum environment (Leonard 2018: 267), as sound as the primary artefact is highly prone to bleed between exhibits. For this reason, the sound of northern hardcore has been silenced and tamed and the music of Terveet Kädet can be experienced only with headphones and without disturbing other visitors (Figure 2).

Therefore, it is like any other museum object, to be examined only at will. The use of loudspeakers would give more temporal freedom to experience the exhibition (Baker et al. 2016: 74-75), but could also expose the visitor involuntarily to an unconventional and potentially offensive auditory experience.

Thus, the section on popular music relies heavily on the most traditional way of communication in museums: the visuals provided by the objects and photographs on display. What it lacks is a communicative content in the form of band or music genre biography (Baker et al. 2016: 76–77). This lack of communication makes the history

accessible only on its own terms (see Stevens et al. 2010: 60). But, to identify a band as culturally significant and worth remembering can be seen as subjectively constituted practice that does not necessarily resonate – contrary to the claims often put forward by heritage institutions themselves – with the imaginary collective understanding about the importance of things (see, Lloyd 2007: 54–55; Bennett 2015: 15).

While the Museum of Tornio Valley must be given credit for its efforts to exhibit this segment of contemporary popular culture, other entities have found it rather difficult due to a phenomenon best characterised as institutional bias (e.g. Brandellero et al. 2014: 220). Thus, an informed museum visitor might ask, why Terveet Kädet has been raised on the pedestal, as it is not the only famous rock band from Tornio. As we have seen, this is due to the strong involvement of Seppo Oförsagd, the band’s former manager, thus confirming the observation of Leonard (2015: 23), that projects can be:

“initiated because of a discrepancy between the public recognition of popular music heritage by official city institutions such as museums, libraries and city council authorities and the social importance given to popular music by individuals, for whom it was significant in terms of memory, emotion, social history, identity and place.”

The relations between popular music, identity and place are also worth taking into consideration here, as the music and lyrics of Terveet Kädet may well have been influenced by local political, socio-economical and geographic context, including both the influence of local nature and the built environment (Connell and Gibson 2001: 90–91). Specifically, the “credibility of some musical styles and genres arises from their origins, their sites of production, (these being) evident in a number of possible ways: smaller locations, places ‘off the beaten track’, isolation and remoteness from hearths of industrial production or working-class communities (Connell and Gibson 2001: 90–91)”. But even alternative-rock scenes tend to be replicative on continental and

international level in spite of claims underlining regional uniqueness and authentic origins (Connell and Gibson 2001: 108, citing Straw 1991: 108).

Therefore, the urge to underline the uniqueness of Terveet Kädet's cultural products can also be comprehended as fetishisation of place (see Connell and Gibson 2001: 111) rather than an evidence-based fact. For example, the mythology regarding the originality of Terveet Kädet does not stand closer scrutiny when set into wider context. The influence of Discharge, the English pioneers of hardcore, is evident in their early releases, and the band openly admits this in early fanzine interviews.

The potential influence of the environment also has its parallels. The harsh living conditions of northern Russia, for example, have been fertile ground for hardcore bands and the scene has developed into a specific sub-genre recognised as Siberian hardcore (Pilkington 2014). While it might be somewhat exaggerative to define Terveet Kädet as the westernmost outpost of Siberian hardcore, the similarities of the environment and the reactions to it are too similar to be dismissed as coincidence. Thus, it might be that the "hardness" stemming from the "fucking harsh conditions" is hardcore punk's natural habitat (Pilkington 2014: 180). Brandellero and Janssen (2014: 226) have formulated this observation into a generalization:

"the practices of popular music heritage denote the interplay between the global and the local, where the former provides an aesthetic frame of reference of remembered transnational stars and music styles; whereas the latter provides the nurturing environment for home-grown talent, as well as the context in which personal and collective sonic memories are shaped and fixed in time and place".

Still, as indicated by the case of the Sex Pistols and the graffiti found at 6 Denmark Street in London (Graves-Brown and Schofield 2011; 2016), the process of punk-

hardcore heritagisation is about prominent individuals voicing their supportive opinions whereas the opinion of the general public has generally been negative. Some of this negativity stems from a lack of awareness, as the importance or even the existence of this band has escaped many. Apparently some of the custodians of authorised heritage discourse in Tornio fall into this category. A member of the Culture Committee of Tornio admitted that they had no idea who Läjä or Terveet Kädet was by the time their commemoration with a statue was proposed to this governing body.

But at least some of the proponents of punk-hardcore heritagisation seem to occupy various heritage-related positions in institutions and academia (see also Bennett 2015: 20–21, 22). The bands they now push forward as an important aspect of heritage pertain to a time when they were young and most probably also devoted fans of these bands (see also Baker et al. 2016: 12). The music of growing up strongly influences later life and may produce a sense of affiliation with the aging music stars as well as with persons belonging to the same musical preference group(s) (Leaver and Schmidt 2010: 111). Thus, one can add that as with any other heritage, the so-called punk-hardcore heritage is also and perhaps largely about making sense of one's own experienced past in the present (see also Roberts and Cohen 2014: 255–256; Leaver and Schmidt 2014: 120).

Heritage is not therefore always defined by the needs and demands of societies (Graham 2002: 1004), but of individuals seeking a deeper meaning for their personal memories. Highly personal narratives of youth and aging are often aligned with materiality of music's physical extensions (Bennett and Rogers 2016: 39), and the sense of power stemming from the possibility to determine culturally significant bands and artefacts is

apparently one of the affective properties related to this process (Long et al. 2017: 65). In the end (and after Bennett 2015: 20), the cliché about every generation writing its own history and determining its own heritage prevails.

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Figure 1. The Broken Lantern obelisk celebrates notable odd figures hailing from the Tornio area (Source: Author).

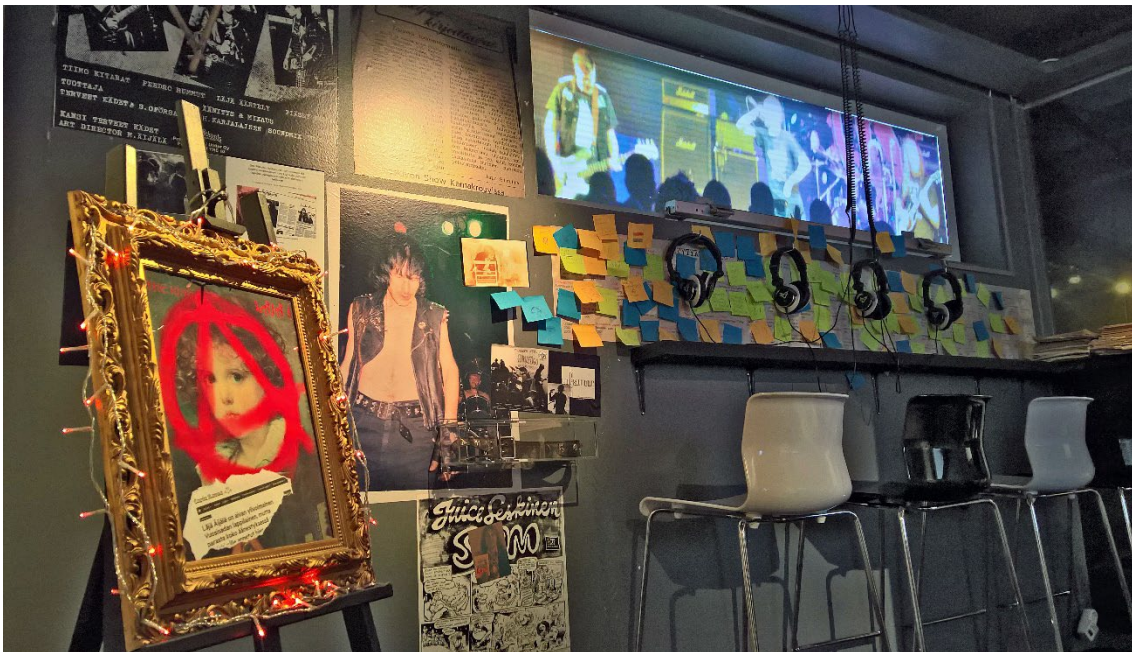


Figure 2. Hardcore music transformed into a museum object with headphones and post-it notes at the Museum of Tornio Valley. A recently installed portrait of a young prince represents Lajā Äijälä's 2017 success in the greatest Laplander of the century poll (Source: Author).