

Saxophonist Esa Pietilä's music is heavily influenced by visual arts and poetry. When he plays, Pietilä blends his fantasy world with the real world.

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Fiction from a saxophone

'Music must also wake you up, shake you and make you think – it must pose problems, and question the nature of reality. That is how art progresses. The more original bands and powerful soloists there are, the better it is for the development of jazz, globally speaking.'

Esa Pietilä says that he began to play the clarinet and to take lessons at Pori Music Institute at the age of nine. Esa Pietilä was born two years before the first Pori Jazz Festival was organised in 1966.

Already at a young age his playlist included a lot of advanced and free jazz, and people like Eric Dolphy, Albert Ayler and of course John Coltrane. The conventional route would be to begin with mainstream jazz and only later graduate to the more esoteric avant-garde sub-genres. But Pietilä was immediately taken by the nuanced performances of these wonderful musicians. Dolphy's sax playing blew Pietilä's mind at the age of twelve, and he switched to the saxophone.

Pietilä's uncompromising approach, search for new angles and refusal to walk the trodden path betray his lofty ambitions, which come across wonderfully in his two most recent discs, the trio discs *Direct* (2003) and *Travel of Fulica atra* (2007).

'You have to set goals for yourself; it is easier when you have a direction in which to go in your music.'

Finds his own path

Today, Pietilä's copy of Coltrane's *Interstellar Space* is almost worn through, just like Jan Garbarek's *Triptycon* and the discs of works by György Ligeti.

Pietilä likes music which operates on several levels and which has a clear and accessible expressive flavour or colour. He listens to contemporary classical music a lot, composers like Witold Lutoslawski and Magnus Lindberg, whose music has a striking and recognisable character. He does not discriminate by genre.

'It would be great to write something for symphony orchestra and jazz trio, but what kind of music would it be – classical, jazz or crossover? I don't care. For me, it's just music, and in that case it would simply be music written for that kind of ensemble, and that would be enough of a description for me.'

Pori Big Band was a good school for sight-reading and ensemble playing for Pietilä when he was in his teens. He joined the band at the age of fourteen.

He migrated through the Helsinki Conservatory to the Sibelius Academy, where he stayed for nine years. At the restaurant named Groovy – Helsinki's 'in' place for jazz at the time – Pietilä sneaked in although he was not yet eighteen to listen to live jazz performed by Juhani Aaltonen and Edward Vesala, Finnish jazz musi-