

## **SHORT BIO (197 words)**

**Esa Pietilä is an internationally acclaimed saxophonist and composer. Though renowned for his extensive work in both contemporary classical and jazz, he transcends genre, creating music without limits.**

Pietilä has composed extensively for orchestras, chamber ensembles and soloists. Major compositions include *Graffiti Play*, premiered with Avanti! Chamber Orchestra in 2014, *Blazing Frames*, premiered with Kamus Quartet in 2018, and *Saturn*, premiered with Pétur Sakari in 2020.

He has performed as soloist with a range of top orchestras including Kuopio Symphony, Lappeenranta City Orchestra and Saimaa Sinfonietta. He has collaborated with leading composers, conductors and musicians including Esa-Pekka Salonen (conductor), Pekka Kuusisto (violinist) and Magnus Lindberg (composer).

He also writes for and plays saxophone with a number of high-profile modern jazz groups including Sonic Decode, Liberty Ship and Esa Pietilä Trio, and presents improvised solo concerts displaying a quicksilver imagination and questing mind.

Other projects are less easy to categorize. His duo with organist Pétur Sakari presents improvisations alongside compositions by Pietilä, Bach and Astor Piazzola. His duo Kujala- Pietilä Treatment, with accordionist and composer Veli Kujala, melds live electronics, composed music and improvisation. And his work with Kamus Quartet and the Skatta Quartet combines strings and saxophone.

## **MEDIUM BIO (614 words)**

**Esa Pietilä is an internationally acclaimed saxophonist and composer renowned for his extensive work in both contemporary classical and jazz.**

**In any setting, he shows a keen interest in combining composition and improvisation, and in mixing styles and instrumentation in surprising and original ways.**

## **CONTEMPORARY CLASSICAL**

Pietilä has composed extensively for – and performed with – orchestras, chamber ensembles and soloists, and written music for film and dance projects.

### **As composer**

Through his many compositions, he is dedicated to expanding the concerto repertoire of the saxophone. Major works include:

- *Graffiti Play* – for tenor saxophone, free-jazz trio and orchestra, premiered with Avanti! Chamber Orchestra in 2014.
- *HUNT!* – for tenor saxophone and percussion quintet, premiered with Osuma Percussion Ensemble in 2016.
- *Pulses, Waves & Dialogues* – for tenor saxophone and string orchestra, premiered with St. Michel Strings in 2017.
- *Blazing Frames* – for tenor saxophone and string quartet, premiered with Kamus Quartet in 2018.
- *Saturn* – for tenor saxophone and pipe organ, premiered with Pétur Sakari in 2020.
- His latest work is *Kairos Ludus*, a composition for violin, tenor saxophone and orchestra, to be premiered in January 2024 with violinist Pekka Kuusisto and Jyväskylän Sinfonia.
- Pietilä is currently writing a concert for two saxophone soloists and orchestra.

## As soloist

Pietilä has performed as soloist with a range of top orchestras including:

- Avanti! Chamber Orchestra (conductor: Esa-Pekka Salonen)
- Kuopio Symphony (conductor: Ville Matvejeff)
- Pori Sinfonietta (conductor: Jan Söderblom)
- Lappeenranta City Orchestra (conductor: Tibor Boganuyi)
- Saimaa Sinfonietta (conductor: Erkki Lasonpalo)

He has collaborated with leading composers, conductors and musicians including:

- Esa-Pekka Salonen (conductor)
- Pekka Kuusisto (violinist)
- Santtu-Matias Rouvali (conductor)
- Magnus Lindberg (composer)
- Ville Matvejeff (conductor)
- Kalevi Aho (composer)

## JAZZ & IMPROVISED MUSIC

Pietilä's eclectic solo concerts are as likely to include free improvisation as they are variations on pieces by J.S. Bach and Luciano Berio.

Pietilä has released 12 albums including two critically acclaimed solo saxophone albums – *Karhea* (2009) and *Times & Spaces* (2017). A new solo saxophone album featuring his own original compositions is due to be released in 2024/25.

Pietilä writes for and plays saxophone with a number of high-profile groups including:

- **Sonic Decode** – a hard-hitting trio with guitarist Raoul Björkenheim and drummer Janne Tuomi influenced by Frank Zappa, Oliver Méssiaen and György Ligeti.
- **Liberty Ship** – a free-jazz-meets-classical quartet featuring Norwegians Håvard Wiik (piano), Ole-Morten Vågan (bass) and Olavi Louhivuori (drums).
- **Kujala- Pietilä Treatment** – a duo with accordionist Veli Kujala incorporating live electronics into both improvised and composed contexts.
- **Esa Pietilä Trio** – deep contemporary jazz with bassist Ulf Krokfors and drummer Markku Ounaskari (2001-2009) and bassist Ville Herrala and drummer Mika Kallio (2010-present).
- **Harvey Sorgen & Esa Pietilä** – duo with US drummer, forging new sounds both elegant and powerful.

**With an emphasis on fusing disparate styles and instrumentation, all Pietilä's work seeks to transcend genre and arrive at an essential music without limits.**

## PRAISE FOR ESA PIETILÄ

"Esa Pietilä's concerto Graffiti Play, which we premiered together, sounds like if Frank Zappa and György Ligeti got married and had a child together."

*Esa-Pekka Salonen, conductor*

"Pietilä's performance was sovereign."

*Kalevi Aho, composer*

“Esa Pietilä... is working towards the establishment of a new library for the tenor saxophone... with a sovereign technical expertise and with elegant musicianship”.

*Juha-Pekka Pelkonen, Satakunnan Kansa Magazine*

“Pietilä is known as a fearless musical visionary. His repertoire is extremely versatile, including collaborations with classical orchestras. Moreover, he has received glowing reviews from not only Finnish but also international critics.”

*Finnish Jazz Federation*

“Esa Pietilä’s Trio and Kuopio Symphony intertwined stylishly together... Pietilä’s piece Graffiti Play includes free jazz improvisation and symphony orchestra’s colorful soundscapes... Pietilä’s tenor saxophone sounded magnificently throughout the whole work.”

*Martti Koljonen, Jazzrytmit*

The music of Esa Pietilä is published by Fennica Gehrman

## **LONG BIO** (805 words)

### **PROFILE ON ESA PIETILÄ**

**By journalist, critic and author Daniel Spicer**

#### **Pinning down exactly what Finnish tenor saxophonist Esa Pietilä does is not an easy thing to do.**

The simplest thing to say is that he’s a composer and soloist working extensively in both contemporary classical and jazz. Yet he’s also more than that. By constantly interrogating the relationship between composition and improvisation – and discovering imaginative new ways of combining styles and instrumentation – he transcends genre, creating a vital music that recognises no limits. He is an essential artist, creating essential art.

#### **First of all, let’s examine his work in the field of contemporary classical music.**

As a renowned **composer**, he is tirelessly devoted to expanding the concerto repertoire of his instrument, exploring fresh and surprising settings that incorporate the tenor saxophone. In this way he is working, as *Satakunnan Kansa Magazine* has noted, “towards the establishment of a new library for the tenor saxophone.” His major works in this area have seen him composing for some of the leading orchestras, chamber ensembles and soloists in the world. Whatever the context, he is always pushing boundaries and sparking exciting new possibilities.

His major orchestral works present a restless imagination at play. *Graffiti Play* – for tenor saxophone, free-jazz trio and orchestra – was premiered with Avanti! Chamber Orchestra in 2014. *HUNT!* – for tenor saxophone and percussion quintet – was premiered with Osuma Percussion Ensemble in 2016. A piece for tenor saxophone and string orchestra – entitled *Pulses, Waves & Dialogues* – was premiered with St. Michel Strings in 2017. *Blazing Frames* – for tenor saxophone and string quartet – premiered in 2018 with Kamus Quartet. An innovative piece for tenor saxophone and pipe organ – entitled *Saturn* – premiered with Pétur Sakari in 2020.

Not content to rest on his achievements, Pietilä’s compositional work continues. His latest composition is *Kairos Ludus*, a piece for violin, tenor saxophone and orchestra, which will be premiered in January 2024 with violinist Pekka Kuusisto and Jyväskylä Sinfonia. And, right now, he is writing a concert for two saxophone soloists and orchestra. More peerless innovation and artistic discovery surely awaits.

He has also honed his craft as an instrumental **soloist** in the contemporary classical world, bringing his extraordinary technique and passionate delivery to a wide range of top orchestras including Avanti! Chamber Orchestra, Kuopio Symphony, Pori Sinfonietta, Lappeenranta City Orchestra and Saimaa Sinfonietta. Through this work, he has collaborated with a dazzling selection of leading figures in contemporary classical music. He has worked with conductors Esa-Pekka Salonen, Ville Matvejeff, Jan Söderblom, Tibor Boganuyi, Erkki Lasonpalo and Santtu-Matias Rouvali, with violinist Pekka Kuusisto, and with composers Magnus Lindberg and Kalevi Aho. In 2022 he recorded the Kalevi Aho tenor saxophone concerto for internationally acclaimed BIS Records.

**Let us also consider his ground-breaking work in jazz and improvised music.**

Pietilä has released 12 albums including two critically acclaimed solo saxophone albums – *Karhea* (2009) and *Times & Spaces* (2017). A new solo saxophone album featuring his own original compositions is due to be released in 2024/25.

He also writes for and plays saxophone with several high-profile **groups**. Sonic Decode is a hard-hitting trio with famed guitarist Raoul Björkenheim and drummer Janne Tuomi influenced by Frank Zappa, Oliver Méssiaen and György Ligeti. The internationally acclaimed and awarded Liberty Ship is a free-jazz-meets-classical quartet featuring Norwegians Håvard Wiik (piano), Ole-Morten Vågan (bass) and Olavi Louhivuori (drums). In his duo with US drummer Harvey Sorgen he is forging new sounds both elegant and powerful. And, with his long-running Esa Pietilä Trio, he has created deep contemporary jazz with bassist Ulf Krokfors and drummer Markku Ounaskari (2001-2009) and bassist Ville Herrala and drummer Mika Kallio (2010-present).

Pietilä's eclectic **solo concerts** are as likely to include free improvisation as they are variations on pieces by J.S. Bach and Luciano Berio, as well as his own compositions. His fully improvised performances push the sonic possibilities of the saxophone beyond recognised limits, conjuring diverse colours, textures and atmospheres, from delicate whispers to fierce storms, often incorporating dazzling multiphonics and daring rhythmic complexity.

**And, as we might expect from such a questing artist, some of his work simply defies easy categorisation.**

One important project is his duo with virtuoso organist Pétur Sakari, which presents composed music by Pietilä, Bach and Astor Piazzola alongside boundary-pushing, genre-blurring improvisations. Similarly, his duo Kujala- Pietilä Treatment, with accordionist and composer Veli Kujala, creates transporting landscapes and aural collages through the melding of live electronics, composed music and vital improvisation. At the same time, through his work with two cutting-edge string quartets – Kamus Quartet and the Skatta Quartet – he explores the hidden possibilities of combining strings and saxophone.

**Together, all of this diverse and uncompromising work paints a compelling portrait of a unique artist, rightly described by Finnish Jazz Federation as “a fearless musical visionary.”**

The music of Esa Pietilä is published by Fennica Gehrman