

Radio HitMix Kuopio, 2018-07-19

"Kahvilavieras" (cafeteria guest) radio program:

- It is time for this week's cafeteria guest, the weather is hot and we are in the center of Kuopio having a cup of coffee. Our guest tonight is a World Record man, Anssi K. Laitinen has just broken the Guinness World Record in longest marathon playing accordion, 40 hours, 3 minutes and 10 seconds.

Congratulations, Anssi, for this huge achievement.

- Thank you and good morning to you and all the listeners, but I'd like to specify right away that although I have attained a world record, the official title was from 2010. This new title is yet unofficial, until the Guinness office inspects all documentation. Anyway, the performance was made according to the rules so it should be acceptable.

- So we shouldn't count our chickens before they're hatched, so to say.

- Well, you almost might, because the rules were followed, although there were a couple of critical moments, but they were checked from the video and it looks good.

- Tell us something about the critical moments, what happened?

- One critical moment was in the very beginning, between the first and second pieces, because according to the rules the pieces have to last for two minutes, and the pause between pieces must not exceed 30 seconds. And in the record someone had logged the duration of the first pause as 30 seconds, so that had to be checked, but I got to know that the pause actually lasted 27 seconds. In the beginning the procedure was not familiar so people were unsure, and did not notice the time briskly enough.

The second critical moment was when Cory Pesaturo's old record, 32 hours 14 minutes, was being surpassed, and the previous piece ended. I was silently counting that I should now start the record-breaking piece, and I normally got a sign, a countdown, but I just exclaimed "count down" and started to play "Säkkijärven polkka." Then the timekeepers must have been confused or something, but according to the records that piece lasted two minutes sharp. Well, video was checked again and I was relieved when the video showed that the actual duration was 2 minutes and 1.1 seconds. So that was acceptable as well.

- What was it like when there was this unclarity right in the beginning, did it affect the rest of the performance?

- Not at all, because we did not know about it at the time. We only noticed these issues afterwards while checking the records. During the performance it was just fight against the clock.

- How did you prepare for this incredible marathon performance?

- I've been a musician all my life, and I've played as a professional for way over 20 years. The repertoire comes from the gigs. But I was quite unwell after the 2010 World Record attempt, fingers and thighs and wrists and so on, so now I knew better and the producer of the event Olavi Rytönen, thanks to Olavi,

introduced me to massage therapist Janne Juvonen. He treated me few times during the previous month and we thought about how to protect wrists and thighs, and everything worked perfectly. Any painful parts were treated immediately and I got massage during the breaks. On Saturday I was already playing two gigs, with no problem at all.

- Did you at any point during the performance feel like you could not continue any longer?

- No, you actually don't think about anything else, you just play the current piece, and then you have about 20 seconds to reset your mind and kind of upload the next piece into your head and fingers, the rhythm is hectic all the time: play a piece, a few seconds' pause, play a piece, and so on. You lose the sense of time during the first 2 to 3 hours and you don't pay any attention to the world around you. You just live along the pieces you play.

- The pieces must last for 2 minutes, what other rules you had to follow?

- Yes, each piece must last at least 2 minutes or more, and the pauses may not exceed 30 seconds. The same piece cannot be played within 4 hours. And when you play one hour without interruptions you earn 5 minutes of maintenance break, which you don't have to use at once so you can save them for later. This time I played the first 13 hours without any break, so I had saved 1 hour and 5 minutes of maintenance time. During the first break I took a quick shower, Janne Juvonen gave me a massage and some other small stuff. The first break lasted about half an hour, and that was the longest break I had.

- How many pieces did you play?

- Everything has been exactly recorded. There is also a continuous video recording that must be sent to Guinness, with a compilation of about 2 min samples from every hour, and there were independent witnesses, two at the time, thanks to all witnesses. They recorded the duration of pieces and pauses and the names of pieces, so the pencils were smoking. Unofficially I counted 610 pieces but that is not yet an exact number, I haven't yet moved everything on the computer. You have to check any variances in the records from the video and report them to Guinness, so they can also verify what has actually happened.

Human beings are not perfect and errors occur, and I also told the witnesses in advance that you must not be afraid of them, but people were very diligent. Altogether there were about 35 witnesses involved.

- Did you play all 600 pieces by heart or did you have music sheets?

- I played by heart, practically. I get older, I'm in my 50s already. Back in Iisalmi I played all 536 pieces out of rote memory, but now I took precautions in case my brain would not work as well as before, so I had music sheets of about 150 pieces with me. All were pieces I know by heart but I may need a little nudge of memory in the beginning. Those were first needed after about 20 to 24 hours of playing, and I may have glanced at the start of about 100 pieces, but then the eyes were also dry although I did have eye drops, and I was tired, so after a short glance I closed my eyes and lived by the tune.

- What made you try this World Record in longest marathon playing accordion in the first place?

- It all started in the end of the 20th century, I first tried marathon playing in 1999. Then I played for 26 hours, 1 minute and 3 seconds, but one pause exceeded 30 seconds so the attempt was disqualified. After that I knew that everything must be done very precisely. Then 2009 in Iisalmi I found enthusiastic people who arranged the event and the result is history, thanks to Heikki Ahonen, RIP, and to the promoter of the

first event, my good friend Timo Mäenpää, also RIP. I hope the same fate does not fall upon Olavi Rytönen anytime soon. In Iisalmi we made the record and now it looks like I've succeeded again in Kuopio, my hometown.

- Have you received any comments from the previous record holder?

- Not yet, but I'm sure I will. Cory Pesaturo, an American accordion virtuoso, broke my record in August last year, and I noticed that in November from Guinness's official website. I immediately decided that it's my turn again now, and sent an application to Guinness, and got a positive reply in the end of January or beginning of February. Then Olavi Rytönen got the engine rolling and here we are.

- Do you know when Guinness makes the official decision?

- The documentation is being translated at the moment, although some witnesses did write their own statements in English in the first place. After the translations are ready and a cover letter is prepared, the packet will be sent to London and then the process will take 3 to 4 months. A few thousand pounds in the right place could quicken the process but a musician like me wouldn't have that kind of money. So in November or December we'll have a decision, either the desired one or else something's gone adrift.

- When did you start playing accordion?

- I was 8, it was late winter and there were some kids on the yard playing with sleighs. I went home and told my mom and dad I want a sleigh too, and then my father asked if I would like an accordion instead. I thought about it and replied that why not. And as a result, I never got a sleigh.

- Was your family musical? It sounds like it was if they suggested an accordion to an 8-year-old boy instead of a sleigh.

- My mother had played the piano since she was a child. She taught me at home and then Aarne Pasanen, a famous accordionist from Kuopio, gave me lessons once a week. Later when I was studying in Helsinki the accordion was sometimes forgotten for months, but eventually I ended up as a musician.

- What is the best part of being a musician?

- Perhaps the best part is the freedom. I can plan my own calendar as I wish. When gigs are offered I mark them in the calendar and that's it. I'm not permanently listed by any show producer.

- You play alone, but probably also with an orchestra?

- Nowadays I play about 70% of the gigs alone. Company events, private events, happenings and so on. Earlier I for example played several years in the Kolibri orchestra. Currently I have worked with Mika Lappalainen, a singer from Iisalmi, as a duo and also some gigs with an orchestra.

- You mentioned that you did not play accordion so much while you were studying, what made you return to the instrument and start a career as a professional musician?

- While I was in Helsinki I got a phone call asking if I could back somebody up on a gig, and eventually I spent more and more time on the road, and the studies gave way to music.

- Back to the World Record attempt, you were not alone during the 40 hours, 3 minutes and 10 seconds at Kuopion Klubi.

- That's correct. I had the easy part, I just sat and watched what was happening. I started playing when told and stopped when allowed. The supporting team leader Anita Jämsén made a magnificent job, she never slept during the whole performance. There were about ten people in the team, feeding, giving drink, wiping sweat and so on, and timed the pauses so that the 30 second limit was never exceeded. I asked for a notice at 15 seconds and a countdown from 5 to 1 at 20 seconds. This worked perfectly. The 35 witnesses also had an important role as official eyes and ears of Guinness. Rytkönen and other supporting supervisors managed the event so that everything went smoothly. And as I already mentioned, Janne Juvonen was really important, sometimes giving 20 second special treatments between pieces when some tendon was tight or some place was sore. Also Jussi Hevander had a big role, he also was awake the whole time, took care of all the video cameras and took photographs for the documentation. Thanks to Jussi also.

- How did you feel when you put down the accordion, having broken the record with a nice marginal?

- Without the audience we could have called it a day much earlier, thanks to all who came to spur me on. In the end I had some unused break time, we could have continued a while playing a little, having a break and playing some more, but I said that after we reach 40 hours we can finish, and so we did.