



THE FINNISH NATIONAL OPERA AND BALLET IN 2016



OOPERA  
BALETTI

This is a shortened  
version of the  
Annual Report 2016.

## Finnish National Opera and Ballet

# MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES FOR EVERYONE

The Finnish National Opera and Ballet is a national arts institution, offering opera and ballet performances and other events to Finns of all ages. Guest performances, school operas, TV broadcasts and streaming bring the FNOB to everyone all over the country and even the globe.

In terms of personnel, the Finnish National Opera and Ballet is a medium-sized opera and ballet company. In 2016, there were 538 employees on average, representing 36 nationalities. The Orchestra has 112 members, the Chorus has 50 singers, the Ballet has 78 dancers and the FNB Youth Company 12 dancers. Finnish and foreign guest artists appear alongside the FNOB's own soloists. The FNOB also employs experts from a wide range of crafts specialities, from shoemakers to metalworkers. Our aim is to create a good and inspiring workplace for all professional groups by being equitable, transparent and fair; by offering opportunities for continuing self-improvement; and by supporting wellbeing at work and work ability.

The FNOB generally stages four new opera productions and three new ballet productions each year. Added to these are revivals of old productions, resulting in a programme that is different every week and may include dozens of productions in the course of the year. The FNOB performs both established classics and contemporary opera and dance works, especially new Finnish works. All the opera performances are performed in original language and subtitled in English, Finnish and Swedish.

The FNOB is the only professional opera and ballet company in Finland. It traces its history back to 1911; the Ballet was founded in 1922. The company occupied the tiny Alexander Theatre for decades until the purpose-built Opera House was finally inaugurated in 1993. The main auditorium seats more than 1,300, and there is a studio stage too. The foyers are also used for small-scale performances and free public events.

In Finland, opera and ballet are substantially subsidised out of public funds. In 2016, 66% of our funding came from lottery funds administered by the Ministry of Education and Culture, 9% from the local authorities in the Helsinki metropolitan area and 25% from ticket revenue and corporate sponsorship. Public and private funding help us keep our ticket prices at a moderate level.

# 2016 IN A NUTSHELL



**317,000**  
people attending performances and other events

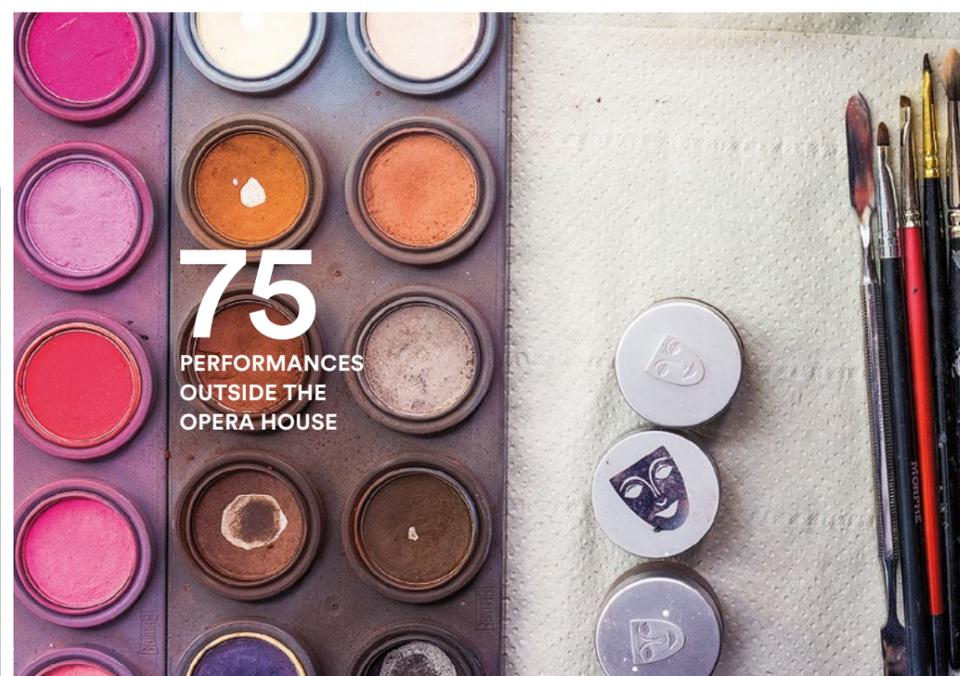


**11**  
million euros in ticket revenue

**93%**  
capacity factor in the main auditorium



**1,321,000** visits to our website



## General Director's review

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Continuous  
development  
is vital for  
an artistic  
institution such  
as the FNOB.

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## AN EXCELLENT YEAR – DEVELOPMENT CONTINUES

**THE PAST YEAR, 2016**, was a success for the Finnish National Opera and Ballet in many ways. With sold-out performances, many new audience members and an inspiring workplace atmosphere, we look forward to the future with great confidence.

**A KEY GOAL FOR THE YEAR** was to attract new listeners and viewers to our performances. To this end, we offered interesting, diverse and touching artistic experiences aimed at various audience groups through several channels. We attained this goal excellently. The capacity factor for all performances at the Opera House increased to a record-breaking 92%. I am particularly pleased that in the course of the year we involved 54,500 children and adolescents. The arts are important for the development of children and adolescents, and this is a cause that is close to my heart.

**ESA-PEKKA SALONEN** signed an Artist in Association agreement with us in the autumn, which represented an extremely important milestone. Esa-Pekka Salonen will occupy a diverse role as conductor, composer, artistic advisor and spokesperson for opera and ballet. His five-year term began with performances of the opera *Elektra* in September and will continue until the end of 2021. This partnership will have an impact on everything we do and also beyond, increasing the attractiveness of the FNOB as an artistic institution, as a partner and as a destination for top international guest performers.

**AN EXTENSIVE STRATEGY PROCESS** was launched in the autumn for the purpose of defining a shared vision of what the FNOB should be like in 2025. The new Board of Directors that took office in 2016 brings a fresh angle to this process, and our entire personnel is invited to participate in this effort, which is crucial for our future. The aim is to confirm the new strategy by the beginning of June 2017.

**UNCERTAINTY ABOUT FUTURE PUBLIC FUNDING** challenges our operational planning, as we typically plan quite far ahead. The repertoire plans made during the year under review extended as far as 2021. We have begun to explore relationships with corporate partners and private donors in order to broaden our funding base.

**THE YEAR 2017** marks the centenary of Finland's independence, and this colours our operations too: in repertoire, in international visits and in audience outreach activities. Other major tasks for us in the near future are the appointment of the next Artistic Director of the Ballet and the next General Director. We also need to focus on further development of fundraising and a customer-oriented service approach.

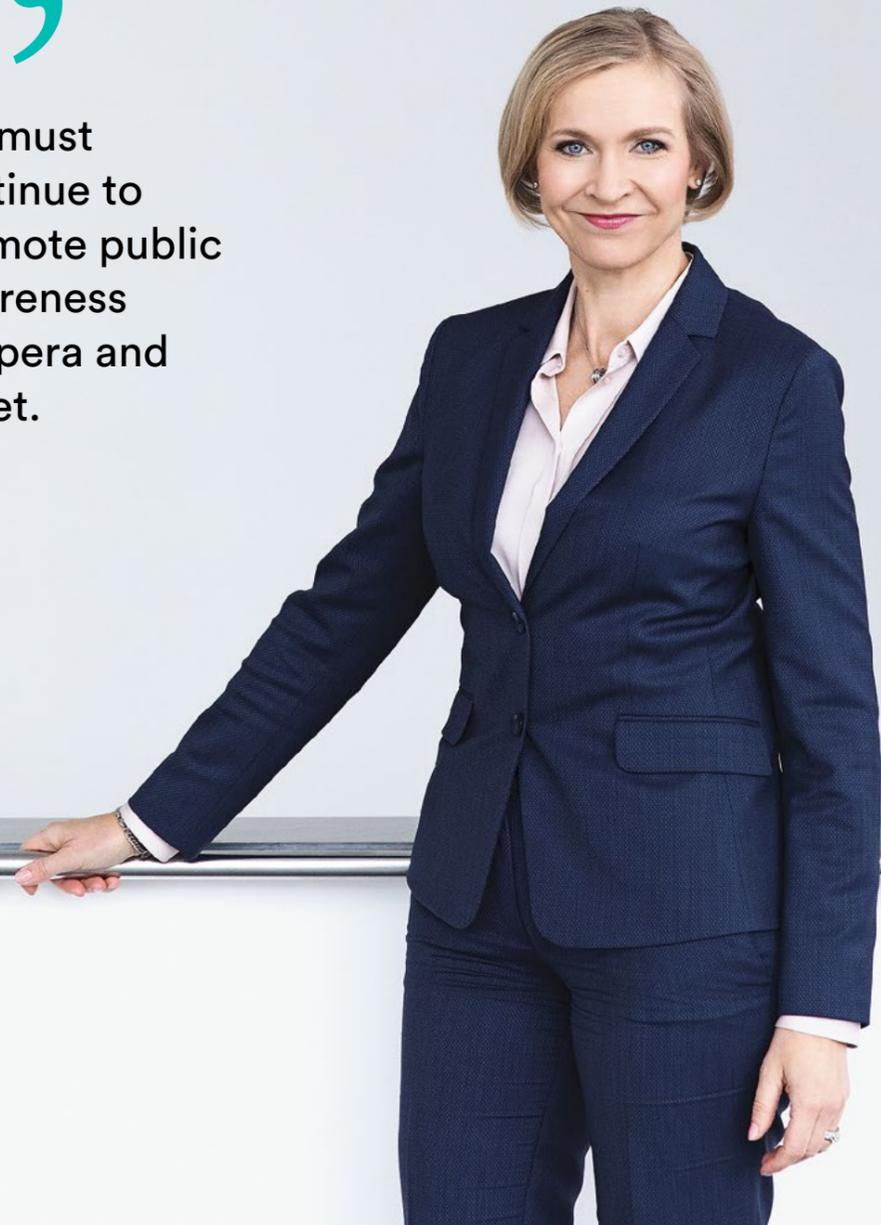
**CONTINUOUS DEVELOPMENT** is vital for an artistic institution such as the FNOB. We must constantly seek to improve ourselves in respect of the opinions of our patrons, and every now and again we have to come up with something that they did not even know to ask for. It is in this spirit of humility and improvement that we did constructive work and achieved results in 2016, for which I would like cordially to thank our Board of Directors, our Supervisory Board and our personnel. Particularly heartfelt thanks are due to our audiences, from the regulars who have been with us for years to the newcomers to the world of opera and ballet.

**Päivi Kärkkäinen**, General Director

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We must continue to promote public awareness of opera and ballet.

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Note from the  
Chairman of the  
Board of Directors

## WELCOMING INCREASINGLY BROAD AUDIENCES

**I HAVE HAD** the pleasure of observing the operations of the FNOB as a regular customer for 30 years. Although my experiences as a customer led me to have high expectations regarding the management of this organisation, I have to say that my expectations have been exceeded many times over since I was elected Chairman of the Board of Directors in spring 2016. One rarely gets to see an organisation managed as well as this. The high quality of management is reflected in everyday work as an excellent workplace atmosphere and community spirit, with everyone displaying an incredible commitment and passion for perfection in their work. I have found a similar commitment and passion in the work of the Board of Directors. Our processes are in good order thanks to the previous Board, and only minor adjustments have been needed.

**IN 2016**, the FNOB attained a brilliant level of artistic performance in my opinion, which was reflected in the capacity factor, amazingly high and exceeding the goal. Apart from the wonderful opera and ballet productions, I have taken particular delight in the wholly new kinds of experiences offered, including the combination of circus and opera arias in *CircOpera*. I hope that we will be able to come up with more such exhilarating ways of combining and colliding branches of the arts and thereby reaching new viewers and listeners.

**STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT** was the most important point on the agenda of the new Board of Directors. Our aim is to lay down the guidelines for the operations of the FNOB up to the year 2025. This process will continue through spring 2017, but it is already clear that we wish to continue to provide artistic experiences at a high level of quality for our current customers and for new audiences, irrespective of place of residence or level of income. We must continue to promote public awareness of opera and ballet. Our tasks in the near future also include significant recruitment processes, as our current General Director Päivi Kärkkäinen will be retiring in spring 2018 and the term of the Artistic Director of the Ballet, Kenneth Greve, will expire in summer 2018.

**CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF QUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF DIGITAL SERVICES** are also strategic focus areas. We have been piloting LEAN management and the continuous quality improvement model since the beginning of 2016. We will be extending use of these methods to cover the entire organisation. We have been investing heavily in digital media for a few years. We use digital solutions to offer performances to a broader domestic and international viewership and also to enhance our customer service, publicity and marketing. Our online service received the award 'Best online service aimed at consumers' in Grand One, a distinguished Finnish marketing communications competition.

**WE NEED CULTURE AND ART** not just for enjoyment and relaxation but also for improving our brains and our minds and therefore our health. As a physician, I am well aware of the health benefits of music and culture in general, which even correlate with longevity. Consequently, we invite children from an early age to embrace opera and ballet and thereby we seek to attract increasingly broader audiences to the FNOB. We want to provide experiences for all people.

**Leena Niemistö**, Chairman of the Board of Directors

## VARIETY OF PERFORMANCES TO FULL HOUSES

The Finnish National Opera is a national arts institution and an opera and ballet company of high international calibre. Our repertoire is diverse and offers something for everyone. In addition to fresh productions of the classics, we perform new works that reflect contemporary times.

In 2016, we staged 275 performances, of which 169 in the main auditorium. There were also concerts in the small auditorium, Almi Hall, and in the foyers, performances for kids and teens and free audience briefings with a chance to meet opera and ballet production team members.

During the year, a total of 294,410 people attended our paid and free performances, including 29,819 at performances outside the Opera House. Adding the participants in various audience outreach projects and other projects brings the total number of visitors up to 317,000.

The capacity factor for all performances at the Opera House increased to a record-breaking 92%. Performances of the musical *Phantom of the Opera* and of the circus-cum-opera extravaganza *CircOpera* that continued in the spring had a capacity factor of 99%, and performances of the opera *Elektra* were 100% sold out. Other productions boasted similarly high capacity factors, and more season tickets were sold than in any other year.

*Indigo*, a sci-fi opera inspired by heavy metal, opened the year and attracted new audiences. The opera was written by Perttu Kivilaakso and Eicca Toppinen from the band Apocalyptica and edited, arranged and orchestrated by Jaakko Kuusisto, who also conducted the premiere.

The dance programme for the year began with the quadruple bill *Masters of Movement* in February. Of the four choreographers featured there, Jorma Uotinen and Carolyn Carlson have had extensive, decades-long careers at home and abroad, while Demis Volpi and Alexander Ekman were visiting Finland for the first time.

Mozart's *The Magic Flute* was performed in an imported production combining animation with live singers, acclaimed abroad and a favourite with critics and audiences here too. Created by director Barrie Kosky and the 1927 group from the UK, this production was premiered at the Komische Opera in Berlin to widespread international attention.

Igor Stravinsky's opera *The Rake's Progress* was staged at the FNOB after an interval of 51 years; the premiere was in March. This Faustian tale of the descent of a young man to his doom was directed by Dmitri Bertman, known as the director of the Helikon Opera in Moscow.

*BACH. Forms of Silence and Emptiness*, a dance work by Spanish choreographer Nacho Duato focusing on the life and works of composer genius J.S. Bach, was premiered in May. Duato is the artistic director of the Berlin State Ballet and a recipient in 2000 of the Benois de la danse prize, known as the 'Oscar of the dance world'. This production was rented from the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet in Oslo.



BACH. Forms of Silence and Emptiness



Tohtori Akustiikka ja kadonnut ääni  
(Doctor of Acoustics and the Missing Tone)

## Audience outreach added compact performances for toddlers

The autumn began magnificently with Richard Strauss's opera *Elektra* in a production that was the last one directed by Patrice Chereau. All performances were conducted by our new Artist-in-Association Esa-Pekka Salonen, who also conducted a concert performance of the production at the Baltic Sea Festival in Stockholm. *Elektra* was produced jointly with the Aix-en-Provence festival, La Scala in Milan, the Metropolitan in New York, the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona and the Berlin State Opera.

The Ballet had two world premieres during the year. The autumn opened with a fresh interpretation of the classic *Romeo and Juliet* by Natália Horečná. This tale of young lovers was produced jointly with the Slovakian National Theatre. The other world premiere was an exploration of Lewis Carroll's beloved books *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* by Jorma Elo, choreographer of the Boston Ballet. The fantastic sets and costumes for the ballet *Alice in Wonderland* were designed by Robert Perdziola.

One of the highlights of the autumn was the concert performance of Ludwig van Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, with Jukka-Pekka Saraste as guest conductor. This is one of the cornerstones of the Western sacred music repertoire. The concert was given at Sibelius Hall in Lahti and at St John's Church in Helsinki by the Orchestra and Chorus of the FNO and four soloists.

Kasper Holten, artistic director of the Royal Opera House in London, returned to the FNOB to direct a production of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* set in an urban environment and the international art world, with Camilla Nylund and Johan Reuter in the star-studded cast.

Audience outreach is the third strategically important pillar in our operations alongside opera and ballet performances. Its purpose is to offer artistic experiences to people who are, for whatever reason, beyond the reach of our other operations.

In 2016, we continued our established audience outreach activities: *Art Breaks for Children*, and *Opera Teatime Dances* for senior citizens that were also streamed to dozens of nursing homes around the country.

We launched a new activity, *Art Breaks for Toddlers*, to complement our offering for children under school age. The first performance aimed at toddlers was a 30-minute version of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. We also staged the world premiere of the ballet *Bucket Man*, depicting the everyday life of a ballet dancer and aimed at children in preschool and the first years of school.

Nearly 10,000 schoolchildren participated in the dance workshops jointly held by the FNB and Ballet Finland. Also, thousands of schoolchildren, students and other members of special groups attended final runthrough rehearsals of operas and ballets and visited production-specific workshops. For the first time, these were also offered in Swedish.

In the extensive project *Hear this, I am a composer!*, which has been running since 2011, a new opera named *Time out!* written by adolescents from Finland and the USA was premiered. In previous years, the project has featured works written by young composers under the tuition of professionals. The project is based on the Very Young Composers training programme of the New York Philharmonic. The project participants are the FNOB, the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and the Helsinki Music Centre.

## Stage24 virtual stage reached a broad audience

We introduced a new streaming system in 2016 to webcast performances from the main auditorium, either live or as recordings. These performances are available for viewing at any time in Finland and abroad through our online virtual stage, Stage24. In addition to complete performances, Stage24 includes background material and opportunities to view rehearsals and peek behind the scenes.

In 2016, our streaming service had about 170,000 users in Finland and abroad; Stage24 content had 159,000 downloads. There were fewer radio and TV broadcasts than in the previous year, and they reached 511,000 viewers and listeners in Finland and abroad.

## Extensive international cooperation

As in previous years, we had numerous international guest artists in 2016. We engaged in active cooperation with other opera houses through the Opera Europa organisation and in meetings with opera and ballet directors from the other Nordic countries and from the Baltic states. We also rent, buy and co-produce entire productions in interaction with other opera and ballet companies.

In 2016, we collaborated with the Komische Oper in Berlin, with the Norwegian National Opera and Ballet and with the Slovakian National Theatre. Our production of Wagner's *Die Walküre* was staged at the New National Theatre in Tokyo.

Our opera and ballet performances are available to increasingly broad audiences in Finland and abroad through TV and radio broadcasts, streaming and webcasts. In 2016, international audiences were treated to the opera *Indigo* by Perttu Kivilaakso and Eicca Toppinen through the ARTE France, ARTE Germany and ARTE Concert websites. Also, Kenneth Greve's ballet *The Little Mermaid* was streamed live on the website of Finland's classical radio channel and in our own Stage24 online service. Streamed webcasts of the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, of CircOpera and of the concert performance of Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* were produced jointly with HSTV, the moving image division of the Helsingin Sanomat newspaper. All of the above were also streamed through our Stage24 service.

The Opera Platform, a European online service launched in 2015, continued operations. There are 15 European opera houses involved in addition to the FNOB. The participating opera houses stream selected performances online free of charge at [theoperaplatform.eu](http://theoperaplatform.eu).

## Fundraising team launched

At the beginning of 2016, we set up a fundraising team to spearhead active fundraising efforts aiming at long-term cultivation of corporate partners and private donors. The work of the fundraising team was launched with new approaches to the corporate world and other parties. The purpose of fundraising is to strengthen our own funding in the anticipation of the potential cutting of public funding in the future.

We signed a two-year continuation agreement for headline partnership with the Varma Employment Pension Insurance Company. We signed a partnership agreement with Kalevala Koru concerning the design of a necklace inspired by the *Kalevalanmaa* extravaganza to be premiered in November 2017. Finnair is our partner for the tour of the FNB to Tokyo and Osaka in April 2017.

We wish to create a unique and distinctive fundraising model where our corporate sponsors and private donors can experience being adopted into the opera and ballet family. We are represented at the Opera Europa Fundraising Forum, and we are actively seeking closer international cooperation in order to learn about best practices.





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**FRONT COVER IMAGE**

The Flying Dutchman,  
photo Heikki Tuuli

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