Heli REIMANN

"Spatialized" Musical Biography of Estonian Music Popularizer and Historian Valter Ojakäär

„Erdvinė" muzikinė estų muzikos populiarintojo ir istoriko Valterio Ojakääro biografija

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Abstract
This music-biographical study uncovers the wide range of activities of Estonian music historian and popularizer of *levimuusika*[1] Valter Ojakäär. By asking questions about Ojakäär's life trajectory, the aim of the article is to discuss the formation of his musical and intellectual legacy as a process in which the personal, social, and cultural intermingle. The meaning of Ojakäär's contribution will be analyzed through an interpretive map of three cultural spaces, referring to local, regional, and global dimensions.
Keywords: musical biography, Estonia, history of *levimuusika* (popular music), meaning-making.

Anotacija
Ši muzikinė biografinė studija atskleidžia platų Estijos muzikos istoriko ir *levimuusika* populiarintojo Valterio Ojakääro veiklos spektrą. Keliant klausimą, koks buvo Ojakääro gyvenimo kelias, straipsnyje siekiama aptarti muzikinio ir intelektualinio muzikos istoriko palikimo formavimąsi kaip procesą, kuriame susipina asmeninis, socialinis ir kultūrinis aspektai. Ojakäärio indėlis analizuojamas remiantis interpretaciniu trijų kultūrinių erdvių žemėlapiu, atsižvelgiant į vietinę, regioninę ir globaliąją dimensijas.
Reikšminiai žodžiai: muzikinė biografija, Estija, *levimuusika* (populiariosios muzikos) istorija, prasmės kūrimas.

Introduction[2]

Valter Ojakäär has gone down in the history of Estonian culture as a chronicler whose monumental four-volume series records over 2,000 pages of Estonian jazz and popular music history, or *levimuusika*, following Ojakäär's own definition of the genre. This recording of music history was made possible thanks to the extraordinary, almost encyclopedic memory that Ojakäär possessed, about which there is a saying: "In Soviet times, instead of the internet, we had Valter Ojakäär."[3] In addition to his work as a chronicler, Ojakäär's ninety-three years of life were filled with a myriad of activities, the sheer number of which suggests that there is no limit to human capability. Alongside writing books, Ojakäär composed and performed music. He also brought music and its meaning closer to the public as a radio host, journalist, and lecturer at the Tallinn Folk High School and the Tallinn State Conservatoire. His long life was shaped by political upheavals in Estonia, witnessing four changes of government, which required him to always adapt to new situations. The longest and most productive period of his life was during the Soviet era, the early years of which brought many dramatic events. Yet behind Ojakäär's many activities and dramatic life events was a level-headed person described by acquaintances as delicate and refined, with a gentlemanly demeanor in every sense of the word,[4] or as an attentive, tactful, witty, forthcoming, and polite man with a keen intuition for the origins and meanings of words. In short, he was the kind of person one does not often meet.[5]

This music-biographical study uncovers the wide range of activities of Valter Ojakäär through a biographical narrative. According to Christopher Wiley's (2008) three-type division of musical biographies, the essay qualifies as a historical biography using traditional methods of historiography, such as relying on primary and secondary sources and combining them to create a reliable picture of past events and people. Hermione Lee (2009) goes further in confirming the relatedness of history and biography, claiming that biography is already a form of history. By asking questions about Ojakäär's life trajectory, the article aims to discuss the formation of his musical and intellectual legacy as a process in which the personal, social, and cultural intermingle. The meaning of Ojakäär's contribution will be analyzed through an interpretive map of three cultural spaces that refer to the local, regional, and global dimensions of his activities, presenting therefore a form of "spatialized biography."

This refers here to Setha Low's (2017) term of spatializing culture, a conceptualization of space that encompasses, in this case, memories of the past, cultural territories, and interpretative and narrative strategies. Reflecting on Ojakäär's activities from a local perspective means taking the Estonian cultural context as the basis for interpreting his legacy. The regional perspective situates Ojakäär's pursuits within the framework of the former Soviet cultural space, while the global aspect reveals their broader, worldwide significance. Furthermore, Ojakäär's life can also be interpreted through his personality, which was a key factor in his aspiration toward self-realization.

This essay provides an overview of Valter Ojakäär's activities in three areas based on records from his biography: his chronicling, his musical activities, and his popularization of music. The final two chapters examine Ojakäär as a person and aim to give meaning to his work by interpreting its various details in local, regional, and global contexts. The primary sources include documents from the Estonian History Museum's archive of Ojakäär, radio and television broadcasts, and newspaper articles. Secondary sources include books written by Ojakäär.

Ojakäär as a Chronicler

Ojakäär's most important contributions to Estonian cultural history undoubtedly relate to his chronicling of Estonian popular music in a monumental four-volume series published over ten years between 2000 and 2010 (Ojakäär 2000; 2003; 2008; 2010). The series provides insight into Estonian popular music from its first steps in the early 1900s to the beginning of the twenty-first century. Its information-dense pages contain a wealth of detail about the bands and musicians who performed and the events that took place. In addition, Ojakäär published three biographies of Estonian popular music greats: the first, about Uno Naissoo (Ojakäär and Ojakäär 2011), written in collaboration with his son Jaak Ojakäär; the second, an autobiography (Ojakäär 2013); and the third, about the composer Arne Oit (Ojakäär 2014).

Ojakäär's first work on jazz history was published in 1966. He described how the idea of writing the book came about, as well as the availability of information on jazz during the Soviet period:

> The Estonian musicians of my youth had been listening to and playing jazz for a quarter of a century without knowing the origins of their favorite music, its Afro-American roots. Of course, we were well behind the times because of three periods of foreign occupation. After more than seven years of drought in the Soviet jazz scene (1948–1955), a freer time arrived. The saxophone was no longer seen as something as dangerous as a Finnish dagger, and the sentiment of "Today you play jazz, tomorrow you betray your country" was receding. I received my first book on jazz theory in 1958 from an American friend with whom I had been in correspondence for over twenty years. This book was *The Story of Jazz* by Marshall W. Stearns. (...) After reading that book, the sometimes derogatory term "negro music", which I heard in my youth, took on a whole new meaning. In the sixties, jazz literature gradually appeared in our shops, the first being Alfons M. Dauer's very comprehensive study *Der Jazz; Knaurs Jazz Lexikon*. People also began making more acquaintances abroad, which made it possible to obtain literature from the USA, England, Germany, and Finland, not to mention the then-socialist world, where jazz was particularly popular in Czechoslovakia and Poland. Upon seeing books about jazz by Finnish and Czechoslovakian authors, I got the idea to write something in Estonian. The sad experiences of our Leningrad colleagues Vladimir Feiertag and Valery Mysovsky made us wary. They had managed to publish a brief fifty-page overview of jazz in 1960, including two dozen photographs. The brochure sold out at lightning speed, but the authors were outright vilified in an authoritative (or rather authoritarian) publication for their objective and promotive work. Once again, the illusion that jazz music could lead to more freedom was shattered.
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> A year later, Valentina Konen released her book *The Ways of American Music* (...) Konen's book dealt with the history and development of Afro-American music in a thorough and expert manner, without repeating the mistake of the writers from Leningrad – she did not introduce the most prominent American jazz artists in detail in her work. Her work gave me the courage to start writing my own book, "Jazz Music". [6]

In the mid-1960s, publishing a book on jazz would have been unthinkable without ideological accommodation, or an appeasement tactic known colloquially as padding the writing with a "fat percentage." "In the language of the musicians, they used to talk about a fat percentage," recalls Ojakäär (2008, 250–251). "In order to create something, to sing or play, following the voice of one's heart, it was necessary to silence that voice for a while and to dedicate something to the altar of party and government. The fat percentage depended on the abundance or lack of this 'something.'" In Ojakäär's book on jazz, the "fat percentage" appears on the first page of the introduction, where he included lines by Patrice Lumumba[7], to make an ideologically appropriate critique of capitalism through a reference to racism:

> Your concern crossed continents
> the upbeat jazz admired everywhere
> made even white people respect your music

The book's "fat percentage" also appears in the chapter titled "The Nature of Jazz Music," which quotes ideologically correct authors who held left-wing views of jazz. One

of them was Francis Newton (alias Eric Hobsbawm), a British historian and lifelong member of the Communist Party. Due to his Marxist stance, Hobsbawm stressed the social aspects of jazz, viewing it as working-class music that expressed the plight of impoverished black people. For him, jazz was revolutionary music that protested against social conditions at every stage of its development. From his perspective, jazz was more handicraft than romantic art. Similar ideas run like a red thread throughout the chapter. The donations to the "altar of the party" proved sufficient. After five months, from late December 1965 to early June 1966, under intense scrutiny from the Glavlit, the main censorship organ of the Soviet Union, *Jazz Music* was published in 10,000 copies, without cuts, and sold for 80 kopeks each. Ojakäär's own comment on the censorship was as follows:

> Thanks to the favorable jazz climate in Estonia and, no doubt, the temporary sobering of Moscow's watchful eye, it was published in 1966 without any changes. Thus, the book became the first comprehensive overview of jazz music to appear in the Soviet Union. What is certain is that it could not have been published in Russian. A Russian edition was considered in Kiev and a Latvian edition in Riga, but both plans were eventually scrapped. Shortly afterwards, Alexei Batashev's book on Soviet jazz was published, but he had to extensively rewrite the manuscript before he could get permission to publish it. So my book is a small example of how, in the total censorship of the time, it was still possible to breathe a little more freely on the periphery.[8]

Ojakäär's second book, *About Pop Music*, once called the "bible of popular music," was an extraordinary success. The first edition of 10,000 copies, published in 1978, sold out in a few days, and a second edition of 40,000 copies was published in 1983. There was interest in translating the book in both Russia and Latvia, but no permission was granted. Ojakäär also did not get permission to use a picture of Elvis Presley on the cover.[9] The book's popularity is vividly described in a recollection from Mart Juur,[10] a devoted fan of popular music:

> I remember that in the autumn of 1983, Tartu was full of news about the second edition of Ojakäär's book on pop music being about to arrive in a bookshop. I woke up early the next morning – eight was really early for me – and headed to the Akord bookstore in Town Hall Square to join the pop music fanatics already waiting there. The store opened at nine. Eventually I got the book, went back home and started devouring it, starting with the famous first words "We are all light music experts."

Ojakäär's literary activities also include numerous journalistic articles, ranging from music reviews to historical overviews, written with his often critical pen. One of his first articles was published in the newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar* in 1946 and was titled "On Present Day American Jazz Music,"[11] which Ojakäär later commented on self-critically:

> To be honest, I've also written some nonsense. One of my first attempts was my attempt at writing an introductory article on jazz. Both the persecution of the bourgeois nationalists and the Cold War had began, and the once cordial relations with the Americans ended. I was playing in a jazz orchestra at the time.
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> I wrote the first article, sent it to *Sirp ja Vasar*. I was called in for an interview and it turned out that the article was ideologically slanted. I requested to take it back. But the editor said we would rework and publish it. He asked if I knew any comical facts. Jazz was ridiculed at the time. I said there were some funny song titles like "Avocado Seed Soup Symphony". He picked up a couple of titles, rewrote the story and told me now it was good.
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> My orchestra mates laughed at me, saying they had never read such nonsense before. But some were really annoyed. I said only the beginning of the article was mine. So my entry into journalism at the time was a complete failure. I don't think any of the journalists who started out at that time can say that everything they wrote was published unchanged. Things were always changed.[12]

Composing

Despite his extensive creative catalog, Ojakäär's assessment as a composer was modest:

> There is so much good music in the world, why should I write more of it. Eller [Ojakäär's composition teacher] said to imagine writing eight bars of music every day... how much that would add up to in your lifetime... that would have been an enormous number of opuses. But I don't regret that they were not written, because obviously what was not written was not worth writing. [...] I don't feel like I'm on the same level as other songwriters and that's why I'm a chronicler.[13]

Despite his modesty, Ojakäär's roughly 150 songs, influenced by American pop and schlager music, have secured him a lasting place in the legacy of Estonian popular music. His first song, the balladesque mood piece "Õhtu rannal" ("Evening on the Beach"), composed in 1946 and dedicated to his beloved Heljo Sepp, achieved unexpected popularity, despite the composer himself later dismissing it as an inexpertly conducted experiment.[14] One of the most emotional songs in Ojakäär's oeuvre is "Olematu laul" ("Nonexistent Song"), based on the words of Leelo Tungal and sung by Helgi Sallo, a popular Estonian singer at the time.[15] The song is a masterpiece of emotional lyricism, showing exceptional sensitivity and depth: the mystery of the lyrics, the tenderness of emotions, and the tension between inaccessibility and perishability are interwoven

Figure 1. Valter Ojakäär (right) and Uno Naissoo in February 1961. Author J. Rosenfeld. Estonian National Archive EFA.357.0.85638

with Ojakäär's beautiful melodies, where fragile, sad, and sober expressions alternate with powerful waves of emotion. Ojakäär's greatest hits undoubtedly include the humorous "Tihemetsa Tiina," the first verses of which became part of everyday speech during its time of popularity, replacing a regular greeting: "Do you know 'Tihemetsa Tiina'?" — "I know her very well!" — "There are many good things to say about her, but she also has her little faults..." This verse was then followed by a list of Tiina's faults.

Ojakäär's songwriting also included works with the social themes typical of the era, including titles that may sound unusual today, such as "Keep the Fire-fighting Equipment in Order" ("Pea korras tuletõrjevahendid"), "Men and Machines" ("Mehed ja masinad"), "Football Match" ("Jalgpallivõistlus"), "Juice Makers' Song" ("Mahlameistrite laul"), and "Song of Work" ("Laul tööst"). The song "One Ruble Round" ("Rublane ring"), seemingly about drinking and made famous by the Estonian singer Ivo Linna, also serves as a critical allegory. Ojakäär's songs did not go unnoticed at the all-Union level either. In the 1950s, "At the Seaside Kolkhoz" ("Rannakolhoosis") became the best-selling Estonian pop song, published in forty editions.[16] Sung by Georg Ots, who had achieved fame throughout the Soviet Union, the song was also performed in Russian and broadcast widely over the radio. This success prompted hundreds of song texts to be sent to Ojakäär from Russians: "They were probably hoping they could be included in Ots's repertoire. I wrote melodies for some of the lyrics just to be polite, without being interested in what would become of them," recalls Ojakäär (2013, 251). "At the Seaside Kolkhoz" also gained popularity in Finland, where Ots's performance of the song became known as "Fisherman's Song" ("Kalastajan laulu"). It was released on record with Raimond Valgre's "Saaremaa Waltz" ("Saaremaa valss") on the other side. At first, Finns regarded "Fisherman's Song" as a folk tune until Erik Lindström, a well-known Finnish

musician, clarified that its author was his good friend Valter Ojakäär, successfully demanding a fee for the song's creator. Thus, Ojakäär belatedly received 500 Finnish marks in payment.[17] "At the Seaside Kolkhoz" was written to Deboora Vaarandi's lyrics, also known as "This Boat is not Made of Bird Bones." Despite its Soviet-sounding title, Ojakäär's version is ideologically neutral, with a humorous undertone about hardy fishermen bringing home "beautiful eels" from the sea for their youngsters at home.

To Ojakäär's credit, he wrote almost no songs for the Communist Party or government to fulfill the "fat percentage"; there is only one overtly ideological title in the list of songs, and that is "Kremlin Stars" ("Kremli tähed"). The story behind the song's creation links to Ojakäär's politeness in writing melodies for strangers' lyrics after the huge success of "At the Seaside Kolkhoz": "I was a polite person, I couldn't say no. I wrote something uninspired, but it didn't become anything. I think 'Kremlin stars' was left unrecorded in the first place."[18] In those days, songs with ideological content were produced at a great rate. As Ojakäär noted (2013, 251), there are nineteen songs with Lenin or Stalin in the title in the collection *Soviet Estonian Sheet Music 1940–1960*. Among their composers were both respected masters and talented young people who understood that, despite their songs being published and performed by well-known singers, their efforts were futile because their songs would never achieve popularity among ordinary people.

Ojakäär's work was not limited to popular music. His education in classical composition also enabled him to create more complex works. His compositions include tracks for eight films, eleven theater productions, and works for both symphony and wind orchestras.[19] Among the works that received recognition at the all-Union level is the opera *The King Is Cold* (*Kuningal on külm*), based on the satirical play of the same name by the well-known Estonian writer Anton Hansen Tammsaare, which won third prize at a national review of theater arts dedicated to the fiftieth anniversary of the October Revolution.[20] The opera has only been staged once, on September 23, 1967, when the Vanemuine Theatre opened its season with the production.

The review in the newspaper *Sirp ja Vasar* considered the opera a success.[21] "The opera and its production give a very powerful and thought-provoking image of how a 'good' monarchist-bourgeoisie order survives in power and how its attempt to maintain power threatens to turn into something even more terrible – a fascist dictatorship," wrote Vidrik Kivilo, the author of the review. Asked about the opera's intended audience, he replied that it is certainly not for "those who love only the old and 'beautiful ways' of opera. It's not the kind of opera that makes you feel like you're floating in a warm bath of familiar melodies." Indeed, Ojakäär himself stated that he was not oriented toward absolute values in music; this was not an opera that could be listened to on a record. "I wanted to write as popularly as possible, while at the same time not falling behind the times, applying contemporary intonations." Although some sought to interpret the opera's content ideologically as a criticism of capitalism, Ojakäär viewed it as timeless: "I have no reason to be ashamed of this work, it's a completely timeless opera – all the horse trading and political profiteering never goes away."[22] For Ojakäär, Tammsaare was a writer whose profound works offered many opportunities for reflection on life and thought. "In his work, the writer sees first and foremost the human being as he is – with all his virtues and weaknesses."[23]

Playing the Clarinet and Saxophone

Ojakäär's career as a musician was shaped primarily by two instruments—the clarinet and the saxophone—although his experience as a musician was not limited to these. During primary school, which he later described as a period of non-professional music making, his instruments were the ocarina, the harmonica, and a line drum he played during military exercises. More serious music-making began with a school band led by violinist Leon Lindau, who advised Ojakäär to choose a 'proper instrument' instead of the harmonica. As Benny Goodman was popular at the time, he chose the clarinet. Fortunately, purchasing one was not prohibitively expensive: a clarinet could be bought for 80–85 roubles, the equivalent of a modest monthly salary. Playing with a band of schoolboys at dance parties earned the musicians two roubles an hour, which was a substantial sum for students. "We played for three or four hours and had six or eight kroons in our pockets," recalls Ojakäär, noting that the earnings were comparable to the price of a kilo of butter, which also cost two kroons. He was also able to attend free piano lessons at school, on the condition that he play in the symphony orchestra. Later, Ojakäär performed alongside his teacher in the Endla Theatre orchestra, "So I became a professional theater orchestra player very early on," he admitted. In the 40s, after much persuasion from his father, Ojakäär finally became the proud owner of a saxophone. "Later I heard that I would otherwise never have gotten that instrument, but my father had enough life experience to know it was not worth saving money during a war," says Ojakäär. "My brother got a motorbike and I got a saxophone. A proper Selmer instrument cost 600 kroons. I got the cheaper 400-kroon German Majestic." With his new instrument, Ojakäär's career continued in 1941 at the Pärnu Beach Salon, where his bandmate was the renowned songwriter Raimond Valgre.[24]

The most important milestones of Ojakäär's musical career were playing in two of the top jazz ensembles of

his time, Rütmikud and Kuldne Seitse. For a full quarter of a century (1945–1970), Ojakäär was also a member of the Estonian Radio Variety Orchestra. Although playing in the orchestra was, in his words, "mostly a tedious job" compared to jazz ensembles, the steady income encouraged him to keep going (Ojakäär 2013, 181). By "tedious job," Ojakäär referred to the orchestra's reliance on a repertoire of "crowning songs": "from programme to programme and from concert to concert, our repertoire was dominated by songs from fraternal nations, mass-produced pieces in praise of Stalin, songs in defence of peace and other similar performances." Nonetheless, Ojakäär's amusing recollections of his years in the orchestra testify that "life in the orchestra was by no means monotonously grey—in spite of all the prohibitions, you could party when the mood took you." His vivid descriptions (Ojakäär 2013, 182–185) recount adventures in a bus called the Silver Grey, humorous incidents involving strong alcohol, and the resulting breaches of work discipline and written reprimands. After twenty-five years with the orchestra, Ojakäär decided to leave in 1970, as a generational shift meant that all of his old friends had already departed.

Ojakäär's last activity as a musician was with the Kalev big band. His eleven years of activity in the band (1983–1994) were motivated by the opportunity to experiment—fifty scores from Robert Share in America were waiting to be discovered—and by the chance to enjoy the company of fellow musicians.

Correspondences

Thanks to his knowledge of foreign languages, Ojakäär's sphere of communication extended beyond Estonia—a good example of how the closed conditions of the Soviet Union were not a barrier to global correspondence for someone with his caliber of curiosity and talent. Hundreds of letters were exchanged in German, English, Russian, and Finnish. At a crucial moment in his career, Ojakäär even considered the possibility of studying English philology at the University of Tartu to put his talent for foreign languages into practice. The idea was inspired by his American pen pal Joseph Walsh, with whom Ojakäär exchanged letters for thirty years. The correspondences also served a practical purpose: the sheet music, records, and literature sent by friends helped alleviate shortages within the Soviet Union. In his characteristically humorous way, Ojakäär (2013, 212) recalled his correspondence with nearly fifty people: "Thinking back to a time when there was no internet, I remember hundreds and hundreds of envelopes where, in disregard of hygiene, Estonian, Soviet or German stamps were pasted on with my tongue, regardless of regime differences between these countries."

Much of Ojakäär's jazz correspondence took place with Americans. His pen pals included, for example, the record producer John Hammond, whose address he found in Leonard Feather's encyclopaedia and to whom Ojakäär sent several recordings of Estonian classical music in the 1960s; the renowned jazz writer James Lincoln Collier,[25] who stayed at Ojakäär's house during a visit to Tallinn in 1985; and Frederic Starr, the first English-language author of Soviet jazz history, whose groundbreaking book *Red and Hot. The fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union* was inspired by information from Ojakäär's work. Other notable literary friends included the jazz historian Barry Kernfeld, whose *Grove Dictionary of Jazz* contains twenty-six articles on Soviet jazz written by Ojakäär.

Ojakäär also corresponded for over twenty-two years with Robert Share, administrator and later rector of Berklee College of Music, the most prestigious American jazz school. The correspondence was initiated by Ojakäär, who sent a letter to the college in 1962, requesting jazz teaching material. It developed into a deep friendship, through which they shared not only musical information but also personal joys and sorrows. One of the greatest favors Share did for Ojakäär was subscribing to the jazz magazine *Down Beat* on his behalf—an arrangement that lasted not just a few months, but many years. Share also invited Ojakäär to join Berklee's International Advisory Board and to lecture at the college. Both proposals were politely declined on the grounds of a lack of competence on Ojakäär's part. In response, Share wrote an understanding letter regarding the situation (Ojakäär 2013, 216): "I fully understand the reasons that prevent you from being an official member of the International Council." Share was more aware than the average American of the situation in Estonia, partly because Berklee had an Estonian librarian.

Ojakäär's European correspondences spanned both sides of the political dividing line. Ojakäär came into contact with the left-wing British saxophonist Bruce Turner, who, incidentally, performed at the 1957 Moscow International Youth Festival, through the British communist newspaper *Daily Worker*. In response to Ojakäär's letter, which included, among other musical examples, Uno Naissoo's piece "Improvisation on Estonia," Turner praised the piece and announced its performance on the BBC. Ojakäär suggested that this may have been the only Estonian jazz song ever broadcast on the BBC. His list of pen pals also included Finnish bassist, composer, and vibraphonist Erik Lindström; Pekka Gronow, head of the Finnish National Sound Archive, who kindly helped Ojakäär expand his music collection; Pawel Brodowski, editor of the *Jazz Forum* magazine in Poland; Gerd Natschinski, a GDR composer who invited Ojakäär to appear on his TV show; German jazz composer and producer Joachim-Ernst Berenth; and GDR clarinetist Friedrich Sternberg. Correspondence with

Soviet jazz musicians and fans was self-evident, among them renowned band leaders Oleg Lundström, Jossiph Vainchtein, and Vadim Ludvikovski.

Popularizing Music for the Masses

Ojakäär is best known to a wide audience as a radio presenter, his moderate voice having been on air for more than sixty years. His interest in radio was sparked in the spring of 1940, when he made his first broadcast with three music records at Pärnu Boys' Gymnasium. Ojakäär crossed into a real radio station for the first time in 1945 to take part in a competition for radio announcers. After a successful test, which included the correct pronunciation of the word "Massachusetts," he was confirmed in his post. But a week later, Ojakäär's name disappeared from the radio waves, as his ideologically incorrect personal agenda proved unsuitable for broadcast.

The first jazz show on Estonian Radio, "What do you think?", was broadcast in the late 1950s. The show was based on a poll designed to discover what listeners thought about jazz. As anticipated, it generated excitement among listeners, and, as Ojakäär recalls, many letters were received:

> The questions had to be worded in such a way as to leave them open-ended and generate discussion. There were very few examples of jazz music for us to showcase on the show. I went to people I knew from here and there to borrow records or tapes. The response was mixed: some listeners said they didn't need what they called "jungle music," which they said had no melody or anything. On the other hand, younger listeners mocked the social dances that had been promoted and demanded more jazz and good dance music.[26]

The first surviving jazz program in the Estonian Radio's archives is the 1961 concert "Negroes, Jazz and Racial Politics." To characterize the program's style, its last paragraph is given here as an example: "Fighting the injustices of this

Figure 2. Valter Ojakäär in the studio of Estonian Radio in March 1983. Author Verner Puhm. Estonian National Archive: EFA.251.0.112905

world was the life's work of the great Negro artist Paul Robeson. There are still few of his kind in the United States, but a huge continent has awakened—the ancient homeland of all Negroes, Africa. The days of racism are numbered!" [27]

Between 1965 and 1970, the first long-running series, *For Friends of Jazz Music*, was broadcast, in which Ojakäär's "jazz informative" activities included news from Estonia and abroad, interviews with musicians, and an introduction to the history of jazz music. Listening to these programs today, Ojakäär's voice-over style may strike listeners as monotonous. His seemingly emotionless delivery was primarily due to the requirement that all texts be prescribed before the show, since everything had to be written out word for word for prior review by the authorities. Over the years, a total of fourteen shows were broadcast, three of which—"Jazz for Jazz Lovers," "Reflections of Jazz Over the Century," and "Jazz Through the Ages"—were devoted entirely to jazz music. Ojakäär's longest-running radio series, *Ringing Chronicle*, which celebrated the anniversaries of singers, composers, and musicians, began in 1971 and ended on September 3, 2009, lasting almost forty years (Ojakäär 2013, 236).

In addition, Ojakäär popularized *levimuusika* through teaching. "I went to the Conservatoire to teach without any particular enthusiasm, but I left with no regrets," Ojakäär (2008, 460) recalled of his work at what used to be the Tallinn State Conservatoire. The first attempt was in 1960, when an optional course—History of Jazz—was introduced, which only a handful of students attended (Ojakäär 2008, 456). A second attempt to introduce jazz education at the Conservatoire in the 1974/75 academic year also proved unsuccessful. This time, Ojakäär's departure was due to the fact that his wife, Vice Rector of the Conservatoire Heljo Sepp, had introduced jazz without the Party's consent. Sepp was punished for the offence: a written reprimand was issued by the rector (Ojakäär 2008, 460).

Ojakäär's educational activities also included mentoring students at the Seminar of Amateur Composers of the Union of Soviet Composers. He later taught at Tallinn University of Culture at the invitation of its director, Luule Mikk, in the mid-1960s. "From the very beginning, my aim was not to impose the music I was introducing," Ojakäär explained:

> There's a lot in light music that's not for everyone, it depends on the age of the listener, previous musical experience, and in many ways just their character. A person of serious nature is often not fond of frivolous pieces. So I tried to objectively show the pros and cons of any genre. I may even have gone overboard in the beginning with too much neutrality, by hiding my taste. Anyway, one of the older listeners in my first group once asked, 'Comrade Ojakäär, do you like this music?' and later on, I learned to analyse my own tastes more, and defend them in an argumentative way when necessary.[28]

A kind of ideological-educational activity also took place through the so-called "oratory genre," which Ojakäär cultivated as a delegate to congresses. A long and particularly "high in fat percentage" congressional speech from 1953, preserved in Ojakäär's archives, illustrates his ability to master the politically correct rhetoric of the Soviet Union.[29] It contained all the expected elements: copious quotations from Stalin, attacks on capitalism—the greatest ideological enemy—and appeals to Soviet "naive optimism." The thirty-five-page presentation focused on mass song, considered the most operational and effective ideological weapon among Soviet art forms. "The scope of mass songs is limitless," says Ojakäär, "They penetrate into the consciousness of listeners through radio and word of mouth, becoming memorable after just a few listens and turning into a national treasure." The lecture concluded with a reference to Comrade Stalin, according to whom the basic economic law of socialism was to ensure the maximum satisfaction of the ever-increasing material and cultural needs of society as a whole. In this respect, Ojakäär reminded mass songwriters of their responsibility to the people. Thus appealed Ojakäär to the consciences of the creators.

An example of a much less ideologically slanted article appears in the records of the first meeting of the Soviet Union's Ministry of Culture's art council of popular music, of which Ojakäär was a member. The council's discussion focused on the state of Soviet jazz music and the problems in its development.[30] The document is not dated, but its contents suggest that it was written in the second half of the 1960s. The need for original compositions was stressed, especially in the so-called national schools of thought. Criticism was also levelled at the term Soviet jazz, which often included music with indirect links to jazz, and it was suggested that more orchestral arrangements of popular Soviet songs should be used in jazz music. In this respect, Ojakäär considered Estonia to be in a relatively good position compared to other Soviet republics, as there were many active songwriters there. Unfortunately, Estonia lacked professional collectives specializing in jazz music. The reflections of the council's chairman, J. Dmitriev, who summarized the results of the first meeting, illustrate the changed status of jazz in society:

> It was not right to ever convince people that jazz music was something that only belongs in the pub. Jazz is a unique form of music that can be good and bad. Clarifying this is a societal task. To further develop the genre, young jazz orchestras should be created, music schools should train specialists in the field, literature should be published, and jazz orchestras should organize competitions to identify talented young musicians with the objective of taking part in future international jazz competitions.

In addition to the local press, Ojakäär's name also appeared in the columns of Union-wide publications. For example, in the November 1972 issue of the music magazine *Sovetskaya Myzyka* (*Советская мызыка*), Ojakäär published a short article[31] in light of the next Party congress on "Literature and Art Criticism." In it, he complained about the lack of information available to a radio editor. The only way to find out about Soviet light music was to call acquaintances at Moscow radio every week and ask, "What's new?" But that was not the right method. What was needed, he argued, was a Union-wide song contest, which could become a stage where "the music of Latvians and Armenians and Chuvashs and Estonians and Uzbeks and all our other peoples can be heard, to show us that their songs are good and beautiful, that they have the right to be heard." Two years later,[32] Ojakäär engaged readers in his creative plans, mentioning that his creative work was then almost entirely theater-related. He spoke of his desire to write an opera about Vassily Ivanovich Chapayev, whom he called "one of the most beloved characters of the Soviet youth [...] I have thought of it as a romantic and heroic work without a tragic ending. Young people need an optimistic and jolly hero. [...] My mission is to express the complexity of our times in a simple and clear way." Although Kulno Süvalep had begun work on a libretto, this opera, with its rather high "fat percentage," remained unwritten for unknown reasons. Ojakäär's two other articles, one reminiscing about Uno Naissoo and the other providing a brief survey of Estonian jazz, were published in 1989 in a voluminous collection on Soviet jazz entitled *Soviet Jazz*.

Personality

One important personality trait of Ojakäär was his sense of moderation, meaning that his tactics for navigating the political turmoil of the time were not based on choosing sides between powers and their ideologies, but on survival, or how to cope with the circumstances of the moment. His tactic became one of surrendering to circumstances rather than fighting them. This kind of cross-political approach was also employed by many others involved in jazz who used similar maneuvering tactics to achieve their music-driven goals. Nonetheless, upholding ethics and human values were the ultimate yardsticks of their daily behavior. In fact, during the Soviet era, the roles of morality, ethics, and inner conviction at the individual level were far more decisive than those who emphasize the repressive nature of political power would like to admit. As noted by anthropologist and Soviet history researcher Alexei Yurchak (2006, 10), the socialist reality was one in which control, coercion, alienation, fear, and moral quandaries were irreducibly mixed with ideals, communal ethics, dignity, creativity, and care for the future. The same was true of those in power: Soviet society as a whole was not only regulated at the political-ideological level but also at the executive level, which in turn bestowed a decisive role to those in power and their values.

In spite of difficulties, Ojakäär never resorted to the popular tactics employed by composers who wrote songs of praise to the Soviet government and its cult figures:

> But this much I can say, as someone whose mother and sister were deported and whose father was in a prison camp, I did not dedicate a single song to Lenin, Stalin or the Party. But I had colleagues who did. Their motive wasn't fame or money, but the desire to secure their backs in case someone came to accuse them of hiding a skeleton in their closet. In the Middle Ages, there was the practice of indulgence. These songs were also indulgence.[33]

As a consequence of inadequate indulgence and dirty papers, Ojakäär was deprived of high national honors. Among the honors he did receive were awards from the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR (1957, 1965, 1973), but in terms of merit, Ojakäär should have been considered an Honored Artist of the Estonian SSR, as referenced by the name of an honorary title given by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Estonian SSR to creative workers during the Soviet era. Ojakäär himself recounted the story of how he finally received an honorary title in a humorous tone characteristic of him:

> It was an anecdote in itself when it finally came. Sometime in the sixties, I remember Lidia Auster was the artistic director of the radio, and she put me forward for the nomination for an honorary title. When the proposal was rejected, I admit I was a little disappointed. Later I was put forward a couple of more times, and by then I knew I was going to be rejected anyway. It was like water off a duck's back for me. And in the end, I was even a little proud that actors Eino Baskin and Eino Mandri and I were the three still without honors... well, they did receive them in the end... they had to be sent abroad. It was kind of a political game. But my story went like this: we had a meeting of the Composers' Union around '88, when blue-black-white flags were already beginning to appear, and they no longer asked permission from that gloomy house, so the Union's board could nominate candidates as they pleased. There was a board meeting, I was also on the board at the time, and Jaan Rääts told me that we have a whole bunch of people here, for example Leo Normet and Ingrid Rüütel, without an honorary title. [...] I remember Ingrid Rüütel categorically refused the title. And I also told them if I hadn't gotten one yet, I didn't need it. Hugo Lepnurm said very nicely that we could all give our titles back now. And perhaps it would have been the right move to do so at the time. That was the end of it for now. Later on, Peeter Vähi came up to me on the street and said, 'I heard they want to give you an honorary title.' 'How so?' I said, 'I told Rääts I don't want the title.' So I asked Jaan Rääts himself, and reminded him that we had talked about

> this thing not happening. Rääts started laughing, and said, 'Yes, we were talking about titles, but we'll make you a People's Artist of the Estonia SSR.' It was a promotion, like jumping from being a lieutenant to the major in an army.

However, Ojakäär's past, which included regrets such as seeing his father and sister deported to Siberia and his own time in the German army, did not become an obstacle to eventually crossing the border. The first offer to go abroad came in 1966 from the Deputy Radio Director Ülo Koidu. Ojakäär refused to travel because filling in the necessary forms seemed insurmountably unpleasant. Koit then exclaimed in surprise that this must have been the first time someone had canceled a trip abroad. However, Koit later persuadedOjakäär , and the trip to Helsinki for the Finnish-Estonian joint show *Sävelsilta* went ahead.[34] Among the countries he later visited were the Polish People's Republic, the German Democratic Republic, Sweden, and France. However, throughout this time, Ojakäär was haunted by the trip to America that never materialized. His American friends had arranged free on-site accommodation and transport with the help of the United States Information Agency, but the trip was canceled because there was no money for a return ticket.[35]

Despite the difficult circumstances in the Soviet Union, Ojakäär never complained. He did not make aggressive accusations against the authorities, nor did he assume the role of victim, as is often done when looking back at the era. Nor was he one of those heroic-minded storytellers whose memoirs depict grand resistance to power. Ojakäär chose a third option—using humor, irony, and a good sense of the absurd, without which it is almost impossible to talk about the Soviet era. As a mature personality, he avoided "what if" reflections on the choices he made during difficult periods and instead learned to accept whatever fate had to offer. As he argued, "This whole period was a symbiosis of luck and misfortune. Chance played a huge role."[36]

Ojakäär's politically distanced attitude continued even during Estonia's regained independence, as he did not become an active nationalist like many other cultural figures. He did not join those who, after the country regained its independence, denigrated the entire Soviet-era cultural heritage, condemned the people associated with it, accused them of betraying the Estonian nation, and collaborating with the Soviet authorities. A telling example is his statement about the "father of Estonian song," Gustav Ernesaks, who was unacceptable to many people, especially those with radical nationalist views:

> It saddens me to hear Ernesaks being reproached. I understand it very well, because Naissoo and I had to present the same kinds of 'gifts to the ruler'... song festivals were for Ernesaks what jazz festivals were for us. They had to be squeezed through somehow, and to do that, composers had to highlight their friendship towards the authorities. And now, afterwards, to bark at Ernesaks that people sang these songs for Stalin... My understanding is that this is offensive to the people who came together in the song festival grounds and sang 'My Fatherland is my Love', but not those Lenin and Stalin songs. No one sang these with passion.[37]

Summary

Through his activities, Ojakäär is undoubtedly one of those passionate figures who made an invaluable contribution to the altar of Estonian cultural history. A testament to this is his record of the entire history of Estonian popular music in four sizable volumes. Aware of his responsibility, Ojakäär remarked before the publication of his first book that if he did not write it, he did not know another writer who could, because "unfortunately, there are not many left of the generation who remember the music scene of the 1930s. I knew it all from the radio, because I've been a radio listener since I was five."[38] This argument should certainly be extended to the entire history of Estonian popular music—it is impossible to find anyone else whose memory is so extensive in both time and context. Growing up with music as early as the 1930s, his life developed alongside Estonian popular music, which he also actively shaped. As the pages of his books reveal, Ojakäär's great passion was jazz, which he first encountered during the emergence of swing music at a time when the swing icon Count Basie was making his first recording sessions with producer John Hammond in 1936, and Benny Goodman signed a successful contract with the prestigious Palomar Ballroom in Los Angeles. The non-linear narrative of his books focuses primarily on the preservation of historical data: information on musical collectives and individuals, events, and dates in the musical landscape. Interestingly, Ojakäär did not write the story of Estonian levimuusika as a local narrative. The otherwise one-sided national perspective is occasionally broadened by introducing both Soviet and global contexts. In this way, Ojakäär partly managed to avoid the heritage-research tendency of Estonian historiography,[39] which cultivates a sense of ownership and prioritizes Estonian-ness (Tamm 2009, 64). At the same time, he did not shy away from taking a clear stance on both music and society, alongside his abundant personal recollections. This is particularly evident in his approach to writing about the Soviet era, where humor and vibrant irony replace the often harsh narratives of criticism or suffering. What is also noteworthy about Ojakäär's books is that he approached both jazz and popular music together, which is by no means common in the traditions of music history writing. Ojakäär certainly had personal reasons for this, related to his experiences with

different musical styles, but the cross-stylistic approach was also characteristic of Estonian music culture more broadly, where composers and musicians often felt no stylistic constraints. Whether this was simply a matter of getting by in Estonia's vast cultural landscape or a matter of stylistic neutrality is difficult to decide, but the fact remains that both jazz and popular music fit under a common approach. The situation is the opposite in most music historiography traditions, where jazz and popular music—though sharing common roots—have been clearly distinguished from each other. One of the reasons, for example, has been the desire to protect jazz in the face of the growing popularity of pop and rock (Frith 2007).

The meaning behind Ojakäär's first collection, *Jazz Music*, can also be analyzed in a global context, where the publication of the book in the 1960s coincided with the emergence of a new generation of jazz writers, both musicians and music critics. These included Gunther Schuller, Andre Hodeir, Max Harrison, and Martin Williams, who sought to legitimize jazz through classicizing (Tucker 1998, 147). Ojakäär was also engaged in legitimization, though not in relation to classical music, but rather against ideology, which considered jazz a Western phenomenon inappropriate in the Soviet context. His position was shared by two other authors who published books on jazz during the Soviet era—Alexei Batashev and Vladimir Feiertag. All three contributed to the emergence of the Soviet jazz discourse in slightly different ways, but together they hold the honor of being the first in this field within the Soviet Union. Chronologically, the first was Feiertag, with his pamphlet-sized work *Jazz: A Short Essay* (Feiertag 1960), followed by Ojakäär's review in 1966. In 1972, Batachev (1972) published a book entirely devoted to Soviet jazz, in which he praised Ojakäär's book:

> This is a real book, not a booklet or a chapter in a book, as it has been until recently. The book should be translated into Russian, and I intend to emphasize this in my review. It is a serious work, it seems to me, through the language barrier, and such an original piece of work cannot be ignored. It's nice that our jazz is now at a stage where we can write a whole chapter about it. [...] It's a pity we don't have a book like this in Russian. [40]

Ojakäär's longest-lasting field of activity was in "musical enlightenment," or the promotion of jazz and popular music, which he carried out through various media such as journalism, television, and radio, and by giving lectures at the Tallinn Folk High School and Conservatoire. Over the course of his long radio career, fourteen music series were broadcast. With the first jazz broadcasts in the late 1950s, Ojakäär earned the title of jazz pioneer in the Soviet Union. For comparison, in Moscow, the first jazz broadcast aired on the Yunost radio station on December 16, 1963, led by devoted jazz fan Arkady Petrov.[41] It has sometimes been speculated whether Ojakäär's radio career of more than sixty years is one of the longest of its kind in Europe. As a journalist, Ojakäär, together with Uno Naissoo, was a central music author during the Soviet era, whose often critical pen was used to write about popular music —reviews, concert introductions, and discussions of music—which helped shape the way popular music was spoken about in Estonian, even though it often had to be done with a certain "fat percentage" during the Soviet era. At the national level, Ojakäär also released articles in various publications. His writings reached beyond the Soviet border when they were included in *The New Grove Dictionary of Jazz*, edited by Barry Kernfeld (1988), and when information he shared with Frederic Starr was published in the pages of the first English-language Soviet jazz history book (Starr, 1983).

It is true that Ojakäär's compositions are modest in scope and significance compared to his work as chronicler and educator, but this does not diminish their value. His songs found a place in the repertoire of Estonian singers of multiple generations and have shaped the musical memory of Estonian listeners for more than half a century. Even though Ojakäär did not like to consider himself a writer of music, his creations were part of his legacy for six decades. His last song, "Miniood Pärnule" ("A Mini-Ode to Pärnu"), was written before his eighty-eighth birthday in 2011. His song "At the Seaside Kolkhoz" (1950) achieved nationwide fame, thanks primarily to its singer, Georg Ots. The song likely resonated with the mood of the time. Beyond this, Ojakäär was also active in what could be called social-organizational activities. As a member of the Estonian Composers' Union, he often spoke at its congresses, represented Estonia as a delegate at the organization's international congresses, and participated in the juries of festivals and reviews. He was a frequent guest in the corridors of cultural institutions in Moscow and well-known among professional musicians nationwide. As was the case with many of his contemporaries, Ojakäär had to use ideological adaptation as a tactic, whether in a book, newspaper article, conference presentation, or song lyric.

Even though Ojakäär was confined to the small Estonian-language cultural sphere and spent most of his life in the closed-off Soviet Union, his activities had a global dimension, which, admittedly, were mostly symbolic. He was undeniably part of an older generation of jazz popularizers, historians, and publicists whose lives and activities paralleled the development of the genre and who sought ways to converse about it, especially in the 1960s. The critique of capitalism and the emphasis on pointing out racism, which Ojakäär called the "fat percentage," coincided with the ideas of Western jazz writers with left-wing views. His global reach is also evidenced by his extensive correspondence,

which, thanks to his knowledge of several languages, allowed him to expand his communication beyond Estonia. In addition to practicing a foreign language, the benefit of correspondence during Soviet times was the possibility of obtaining specialist information in the form of books, notes, and recordings. Thus, for a man as curious and committed as Ojakäär, the Soviet regime was no obstacle to self-realization. In addition to everything else, Ojakäär was supported on his journey of self-fulfillment by his traits of level-headedness and pragmatism, which helped him cope with difficult situations.

The answer to the question of why he undertook so many things in his life was given by Ojakäär in a show dedicated to his ninetieth birthday, in his characteristically humorous style. "Curiosity is a trait of my cat and me, because we always want to know what's inside or behind things. I wrote more for myself than for others."[42]

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1 The term *levimuusika* was coined by Valter Ojakäär. The first part of the expression, *levi-*, comes from the Estonian word *levima*, meaning "to spread," and *muusika* means "music." Thus, *levimuusika* refers to mass-disseminated music, which in Ojakäär's original sense encompassed both jazz and popular music.

2 The article is part of the project "The "Soviet West" Revisited: Individual and Collective Agency in the Contact Zones of Everyday Life in the Estonian SSR," funded by Estonian Research Council (number PRG2140).

3 Teemaõhtu kommentaarid: 49, Valter Ojakäär 90 [*Theme Night Comments: 49, Valter Ojakäär 90*]. TV broadcast, March 10, 2013. ERR archive. https://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/teemaohtu-kommentaarid-valter-ojakaar-90.

4 Estraadisangarid: Valter Ojakäär, Heli Lääts [*Heroes of Popular Music: Valter Ojakäär, Heli Lääts*]. TV broadcast, March 24, 2017. ERR archive. https://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/estraadisangarid-valter-ojakaar.

5 Järjehoidja Valter Ojakäär [*Radio Host Valter Ojakäär*]. Radio broadcast, November 6, 2016. ERR archive. https://arhiiv.err.ee/vaata/jarjehoidja-valter-ojakaar-10-03-1923-27-10-2016.

6 Mõned meenutused eilsest džässist tänase valguses [*Thinking Back on Yesterday's Jazz in Today's Light*]. Estonian History Museum (EHM), Valter Ojakäär Collection, M216-136.

7 Patrice Lumumba was the leader of the Congolese independence movement, the first prime minister of the Democratic Republic of Congo, and a close ally of the Soviet Union in Africa, after whom Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow was named. His assassination in 1961 was allegedly planned by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (Ojakäär 2008, 252).

8 Mõned meenutused eilsest džässist tänase valguses [Thinking Back on Yesterday's Jazz in Today's Light]. Estonian History Museum (EHM), Valter Ojakäär Collection, M216-136.

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15 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dHBrCRLAfk

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17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Estonian Music Information Centre. https://www.emic.ee/?sisu=heliloojad&mid=58&lang=eng&action=view&id=60&method=teosed

20 Духовенное богатство наших народов всеобщее достояние, *Советская мызыка*, 1969, 1.

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje pateikiama „erdvinė" estų muzikos istoriko, populiarintojo ir kompozitoriaus Valterio Ojakääro muzikinė biografija, iš kurios matyti reikšmingas indėlis į Estijos muziką ir kultūrą, pabrėžiamos kompozitoriaus asmeninio gyvenimo, socialinės aplinkos ir kultūrinio poveikio sąsajos. Tyrime pasitelkiami tradiciniai istoriniai metodai ir nagrinėjama jo veikla vietiniame, regioniniame ir globaliame kontekstuose.

Svarbiausias Ojakääro darbas yra jo monumentali keturių tomų estų *levimuusika* (terminas, kurį jis sukūrė muzikai, apimančiai džiazą ir populiariąją muziką, apibūdinti) istorija. Ši knygų serija, išleista 2000–2010 m., dokumentuoja estų populiariosios muzikos raidą nuo ištakų iki XXI a. pradžios. Jo knygų tikslas – išsaugoti istorinius duomenis apie muzikos grupes, asmenybes, įvykius ir datas. Jis įtraukė Estijos džiazo istoriją į sovietinį ir pasaulinį kontekstą, atsiribodamas nuo siauro lokalaus požiūrio, būdingo Estijos istoriografijai. Pirmasis didelis Ojakääro leidinys buvo „Džässiraamat" („Džiazo knyga"), pasirodęs 1966 m. Tai viena iš trijų pirmųjų knygų apie džiazą, išleistų Sovietų Sąjungoje.

Ojakääras taip pat aktyviai populiarino džiazą ir populiariąją muziką įvairiose žiniasklaidos priemonėse, tokiose kaip žurnalistika, televizija ir radijas. Estijos radijuje vedė 14 muzikos laidų ciklų. Jis laikomas džiazo radijo laidų Sovietų Sąjungoje pradininku. Ojakääras buvo svarbi figūra Estijos muzikos žurnalistikoje, jo tekstai prisidėjo prie diskusijų apie džiazą ir populiariąją muziką Estijoje formavimo. Šio

asmens veikla peržengė Sovietų Sąjungos sienas, Ojakääras taip pat prisidėjo ir prie tarptautinių džiazo leidinių.

Nors muzikinė kūryba antraeilė, palyginti su Ojakääro veikla kronikininkystės ir švietimo srityse, ji vis dėlto yra reikšminga. Kompozitoriaus sukurtos populiariosios muzikos dainos rado vietą įvairių kartų Estijos dainininkų repertuare ir daugiau nei pusę amžiaus formavo Estijos klausytojų muzikinę atmintį. Dainininko Georgo Otso atliekama Ojakääro 1950 m. parašyta daina „Pajūrio kolūkyje“ tapo žinoma visoje Sovietų Sąjungoje.

Ojakääras taip pat aktyviai dalyvavo socialinėje ir organizacinėje veikloje. Kaip Kompozitorių sąjungos narys, jis dažnai kalbėdavo jos suvažiavimuose, atstovavo Estijai SSRS kompozitorių sąjungų suvažiavimuose ir dalyvavo festivalių žiuri. Buvo dažnas svečias Maskvos kultūros institucijų koridoriuose ir gerai žinomas SSRS profesionalių muzikantų sluoksniuose.

Nors buvo kalbiškai apribotas estų kalbos ir didžiąją dalį gyvenimo praleido niekur neišvykdamas iš Sovietų Sąjungos, jo veikla turėjo nors ir simbolinį, bet globalų matmenį. Jis priklausė vyresniajai džiazo muzikos populiarintojų, istorikų ir publicistų kartai, kurių gyvenimas ir veikla vyko lygiagrečiai su šio muzikos žanro plėtra ir kurie ieškojo būdų kalbėti apie šią muziką, ypač 7 deš. Kapitalizmo kritika ir rasizmo akcentavimas nors ir buvo Ojakääro vadinamasis „riebalų procentas“ – duoklė partijai ir vyriausybei, tai sutapo su kairiųjų pažiūrų Vakarų džiazo autorių idėjomis. Ojakääro pasaulinį lygmenį taip pat liudija jo gausi korespondencija keliomis kalbomis, siekianti toli už Estijos ribų. Sovietinėmis sąlygomis toks susirašinėjimas teikė galimybę gauti profesinės informacijos knygų, natų ir įrašų pavidalu. Taigi smalsiam ir darbščiam žmogui sovietinis režimas netapo savirealizacijos kliūtimi. Kryptinga veikla ir pragmatizmas padėjo Ojakäärui susidoroti su sudėtingomis situacijomis kelyje į savirealizaciją.

Laidoje, skirtoje jo 90-mečiui, Ojakääras šmaikščiai atsakė į klausimą, kodėl savo gyvenime ėmėsi tiek daug dalykų: „Mano smalsumas primena man maniškį katiną: aš irgi visuomet noriu žinoti, kas slypi ko nors viduje arba už ribų. Visuomet rašiau labiau sau negu kitiems.“

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