

Kreeta Haapasalo – Her Music Lives On

Kreeta Haapasalo (1813–1893) was born in the village of Järvelä in Kaustinen. She lived for many years in Veteli and spent the final years of her life in Jyväskylä, where she is buried.

She became Finland's best-known folk singer and kantele player of the nineteenth century. As the mother of a large family, she earned a living for her eleven children by touring and performing throughout Finland, as well as in St Petersburg and Stockholm. Her performances brought Finnish folk music to peasant homes, vicarages and manor houses, and even to the Imperial Court. Contemporary newspapers wrote about her, while both Zachris Topelius and Johan Ludvig Runeberg helped make her famous throughout the country.

Although Kreeta lived in Veteli, she frequently visited her relatives in Kaustinen. She is known to have travelled along the road to Kokkola and stayed in several homes in Kaustinen. During her visits, people would gather in crowded farmhouses to listen to her singing and kantele playing. One song, remembered as particularly moving, began with the words:

"My children are left at home, with too little care; I must wander across the land like this."

The song expressed the hardships of a mother's life, while also conveying resilience and hope for the future.

Kreeta Haapasalo's artistry had a profound influence on the kantele tradition of Central Ostrobothnia. Her performances inspired many people to build their own kantele instruments and learn to play them. Her exceptional musicianship and warm, expressive performances remained in people's memories for decades after her death.

In the year it was founded, 1950, the Kaustinen Local Heritage Association launched a project to erect a memorial to Kreeta Haapasalo. The project was completed in 1954, when the granite monument, designed by Ilmari Wirkkala and sculpted by Tauno Wirkkala, was unveiled on Kappelinmäki before a large audience. The memorial stands as a lasting tribute to Kreeta Haapasalo's enduring importance in Finnish folk music and in preserving the cultural heritage of Kaustinen.

Captions:

Statue of Kreeta Haapasalo and a newspaper clipping from the unveiling ceremony.

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