



Popular Music from Vittula

Mikael Niemi, Laurie Thompson (Translator)

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Popular Music from Vittula tells the fantastical story of a young boy's unordinary existence, peopled by a visiting African priest, a witch in the heart of the forest, cousins from Missouri, an old Nazi, a beautiful girl with a black Volvo, silent men and tough women, a champion-bicyclist music teacher with a thumb in the middle of his hand—and, not least, on a shiny vinyl disk, the Beatles.

The story unfolds in sweltering wood saunas, amidst chain thrashings and gang warfare, learning to play the guitar in the garage, over a traditional wedding meal, on the way to China, during drinking competitions, while learning secret languages, playing ice hockey surrounded by snow drifts, outsmarting mice, discovering girls, staging a first rock concert, peeing in the snow, skiing under a sparkling midnight sky. In the manner of David Mitchell's *Black Swan Green*, Mikael Niemi tells a story of a rural Sweden at once foreign and familiar, as a magical childhood slowly fades with the seasons into adult reality.

Popular Music from Vittula Details

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Author : Mikael Niemi , Laurie Thompson (Translator)

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From Reader Review Popular Music from Vittula for online ebook

Manny says

Matti is a regular teen in 60s Pajala up in the extreme north of Sweden, where they think of themselves as Finns and speak Finnish by preference. These are guys who know how to hold their liquor, laugh at temperatures that go down to forty below zero, handle a gun, an axe or a snowmobile, build a house, butcher a reindeer and treat women the way they really want to be treated. Though it's true, Matti has also discovered rock 'n' roll. Maybe that makes him *knapsu* (gay), but he doesn't care. A real Finn can take care of himself if anyone's dumb enough to call him *knapsu*.

He also turns out to be a natural writer: his voice is sort of like Huck Finn crossed with a Viking saga. Out of consideration to the guys further south, he's been kind enough to write his book in Swedish, which at least is a half-respectable language. I understand that there's an English translation too, though I'm not sure I can recommend it. Here's what Matti thinks of English:

Engelska, detta språk med alldeles för svagt tuggmotstånd för hårda finska käftar, så sladdrigt att bara flickor kunde få femmor i det, denna snigelaktiga rotvälkska, dallrande och fuktig, uppfunden av gyttjetrampande kustläningar som aldrig behövt kämpa, som aldrig svultit eller frusit, ett språk för lättingar, gräsätare, soffpruttare, så helt utan spänst att tungan sladdrade som en avskuren förhud i munnen.

[English, a language which doesn't offer enough resistance to hard Finnish jaws, so slippery that only girls can get As in it, this damp, wobbly, snail-like gobbledegook, invented by muddy southerners who've never needed to fight, never been frozen or hungry, a language for lazy vegetarians who fart on their sofas, so completely lacking in texture that you feel your tongue sliding around in your mouth like a cut-off foreskin.]

Unfortunately, we can't all be Finns. Girls, the quickest way to Pajala is fly to Kiruna via Stockholm, then take the bus north. But don't get your hopes up.

Consulting the Swedish wikipedia page about this book, I'm pleased to see that it's been translated into both the dialect of Finnish spoken here and standard Finnish, "together with some other languages". It also correctly describes the book as a *skröna* (roughly, bragging or lying as an art-form) masquerading as an autobiography. I'm afraid to say that some other reviewers have called it "magical realist". They are so *knapsu* that they probably enjoy the taste of wine.

Katerina says

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Julie says

This one turned out surprisingly good actually. Even tho I've been complaining about it ever since we started reading it at school, I've never laughed so much, nor as hard, while reading something ever before. I think I might even read it again one day, as long as I find a copy with a better looking cover ;)

I also think I need to do some research on the whole Finland-Sweden situation, 'cause I felt like I had to be touched in the head sometimes since nothing made sense. AND I have to warn ya'll about the ending. It is so depressing.

It's weird. The book is super duper crazy weird, so if you're not up to reading about how this boy was reborn by an kiln; get on your bike. Period.

Karen says

brilliant. i read it in swedish and i just love the language so much. i usually say i hate swedish, but this swedish is so..weird... it must be dialect or something and there's finnish words mixed in and it's just so wonderful.

the book is good too. really it is. it left me with a feeling of melancholy but also peace...it's such a warm and heartfelt narrative, yet brutal and harsh and just.. so full of life and truths.

Karl Lehtinen says

Best Finnish book ever.

Well, OK, I haven't read any others.

But this is what I imagine my childhood may have been like if my father had never left Finland.

Some of the most endearing scenes and stories I have ever read. Too god damned cute to put down. Nothing life-changing in here, but it shouldn't be missed.

Mary Overton says

On the link of literature to madness -

Excerpt from a lecture delivered in the sauna by Dad; he explicates the facts of life for 14 year old Mattie so his son will know how to be a man:

"Then [Dad] started going through a list of all the family idiots. I'd already met some of them: one was in the psychiatric hospital in Gallivare, and another in Pitea. In medical jargon it was called schizophrenia, and it seemed to run in the family. It would appear when you reached the age of eighteen or so, and was due to certain causes. Frustrated love was one, and Dad begged me to be very wary of getting involved with complicated women who were scared of sex. Dad urged me never to be too persistent with the fair sex if they declined to open their legs, but rather to follow his own example and find myself an unabashed peasant girl with a big ass.

"The other cause of lunacy was brooding. Dad strongly advised me never to start thinking too much, but to

do as little as possible of it, since thinking was a menace that only got worse the more of it you did. He could recommend hard manual labor as an antidote: shoveling snow, chopping firewood, skiing cross-country, and that kind of thing, because thinking usually affected people when they were lolling about on the sofa or sitting back to rest in some other way. Getting up early was also recommended, especially on weekends and when you had a hangover, because all kinds of nasty thought could worm their way into your mind then.

"It was particularly important not to brood about religion. God and death and the meaning of life were all extremely dangerous topics for a young and vulnerable mind, a dense forest in which you could easily get lost and end up with acute attacks of madness. You could confidently leave that kind of stuff until your old age, because by then you would be hardened and tougher, and wouldn't have much else to do. Confirmation classes should be regarded as a purely theoretical exercise: a few texts and rituals to memorize, but certainly not anything to start worrying about.

"The most dangerous thing of all, and something he wanted to warn me about above all else, the one thing that had consigned whole regiments of unfortunate young people to the twilight world of insanity, was reading books. This objectionable practice had increased among the younger generation, and Dad was more pleased than he could say to note that I had not yet displayed any such tendencies. Lunatic asylums were overflowing with folk who'd been reading too much. Once upon a time they'd been just like you and me, physically strong, straightforward, cheerful, and well balanced. Then they'd started reading. Most often by chance. A bout of flu perhaps, with a few days in bed. An attractive book cover that had aroused some curiosity. And suddenly the bad habit had taken hold. The first book had led to another. Then another, and another, all links in a chain that led straight down into the eternal night of mental illness. It was impossible to stop. It was worse than drugs.

"It might just be possible, if you were very careful, to look at the occasional book that could teach you something, such as encyclopedias or repair manuals. The most dangerous kind of book was fiction - that's where all the brooding was sparked and encouraged. Damnit all! Addictive and risky products like that should only be available in state-regulated monopoly stores, rationed and sold only to those with a license, and mature in age."

Kindle location 2712-2741

In the oral tradition of hyperbolic tall-tales -

Chapter 10 tells the most frightening ghost story of all time.

Chapter 12 tells the darkest, most evil story of all time.

Chapter 13 tells the funniest mentor story of all time.

Each chapter is the self-contained narrative of an event during the journey from innocence to experience.

Bob Newman says

growing up as a huckleberry Finn

Growing up anyplace isn't smooth, it isn't describable exactly. If you search your memories later, trying to ask why you did something, you can't, for the life of you, remember why. You just did it. Things happened. You tried to get to China. You mimicked the rock stars when you thought you were alone. You might even have licked cold locks---if you grew up in northern climes--- and got your tongue stuck. You were never the hero of your own legend. Well, folks, this novel captures that confusion perfectly. I've never set foot in Sweden, let alone in its far north by the Finnish border, where all the growing up takes place. But now I feel I know what it was like. Niemi's description, magical realism and all, gives you such joy, such interest, that I assure you, you will read POPULAR MUSIC IN VITTULA as quickly as you can. I haven't laughed out loud over a book so much for years. Hey, I even laughed in the Boston subway like some kind of weird,

public transport cackler. But I didn't care. Kids fight in the woods with B-B guns, try to start rock bands to impress girls, experiment with sex and alcohol, get up the teacher's nose, visit scary old healers, watch the grownups pass out at huge drinkups, and dream of fast cars. In the very end, things turn out quite differently, but that's really familiar too. Most of the themes are hardly unique to the area, but it's Niemi's genius that he makes you feel it exotic and familiar at the same time. It's contemporary writing at its best and I think all readers in English owe a vote of thanks to the translator too.

You've got to have a strong stomach for a couple sections, say for example, if large piles of dead mice are not your forte. If you have ever seen Kaurismaki films like "Leningrad Cowboys Go America" or "The Man without a Past", you will recognize the same deadpan Finnish humor in Niemi's novel, whose characters are mainly from the Finnish minority in Sweden's rural north. I could recount a scene or two for the surfing reader, try to "deconstruct" whatever, go literary if I could, but your best bet would be to read the book. You will not regret it.

Lorenzo Berardi says

I've got a kind of obsession for Scandinavian literature, having lived for a little while in Norway.

And yet I have to say that Swedish literature has more to offer than Norwegian one with such great novelists like Stig Dagerman, Lars Gustafsson and Torgny Lindgren.

Mikael Niemi belongs to a new generation of Swedish authors and -as I suppose from his surname, he has finnish roots.-

This book is a funny and easy reading which takes place in an exotic northern land, that part of Sweden on the Bothnia gulf. It's here, among creeks and forests and not much more, that a bunch of local young guys decide to play rock 'n roll.

They listen to old vynils by Elvis and Beatles trying to play the same chords and mispronouncing the same words, building their instruments by themselves and so on.

It's the kind of novel about music as an interpretation of life that you can really appreciate if you have read The Commitments by Roddy Doyle or The James Dean Garage Band by Rick Moody.

Moreover you will surely learn something on how people used to live in Sweden during the 60s and the 70s far from the big cities, apparently in the Middle of a Nowhere Land.

Tea Jovanović says

Dovoljno je pročitati ovaj sjajan prikaz knjige koji je Teofil Pančić napisao te davne 2005.

<http://www.vreme.rs/cms/view.php?id=4...>

Ovo je jedna od "onih" knjiga koje mi najviše znači kao uredniku... :)

Rusalka says

I distinctly remember starting this book. I was on a plane home from Japan, finally from our sudden month in the UK. They had just turned the lights out after meals and drinks so that people could sleep. It was about 12am at night Japanese time, so 1am Aussie time. I was already feeling self conscious as my light was on, but Lexx and my brother were on either side of me. Lexx had taken a sleeping tablet and my brother still hadn't got the hang of sleeping on planes. And I was desperately trying not to piss myself laughing at this book.

This book isn't really a book of short stories, but it kind of is. It's probably better described as a collection of vignettes of the author's childhood. How many of them are true? God knows. He probably doesn't know entirely himself. This is what is the most gripping part of this book. It tells stories of his childhood growing up on the far northern border of Sweden and Finland above the Arctic Circle, where they speak their own language which isn't quiet Swedish, but not quite Finnish, and considered a bastard kind of area by both Finland and Sweden. With all this in the background, he tells you these stories as absolute truths that just sort of get carried away on a child's imagination until they are fantastical in nature and far too big to be true. But you can imagine little Mikael swearing black and blue that's exactly what happened.

This element diminishes slightly as he gets older, and the fantastic, almost magical realism of the book settles back into a more measured reality. But was it is replaced by is a humour and a heartbreakingly assessment of the reality of the town that only teenagers can really give.

That's the thing that sucks you in really. It's the brutal honesty of this book. Whether it's him telling you a story at 5 or 15 or 25. You believe his complete sincerity. In a world that undervalues honesty so much, this is a very rare gift.

For more reviews visit <http://rusalkii.blogspot.com.au/>

Loreley says

??? ??? <3 ????. ????? ?????? ??? ?? ??????? :D

Amorfnia says

Popularna muzika iz Vitule, predstavlja prvi roman Švedskog pisca Mikaela Niemia poznatog do tada po svojim zbirkama poezije kao i pozorišnim komadima.

Prvi roman, sjajan roman! Prljav, dirljiv, nostalgi?an, duhovit.

Radnja prati odrastanje dva de?aka, Mattija i Nile, na samom izolovanom severu Švedske, bogu iza nogu, u maloj zabitici Pajali, u kraljevstvu leda gde vikinzi još uvek predstavljaju prototip idealnog muškarca, gde se sve važne odluke donose u sauni i gde bi se svaka poštena srpska pijandura postidela svojih alko-kapaciteta. A kao kontrast hladnoj zatucanosti Pajale, 60e su, vreme kada ceo svet slavi tehni?ki napredak, seksualnu revoluciju i rock'n'roll.

U svom tom metežu, Matti i Nila imaju jedan drugog, muziku i jednu plo?u Beatlesa koja je za njih ceo svet.

Knjiga predstavlja predivan spoj maštovitog, bizarnog, vulgarnog i naivnog uvijen u magični realizam i fikciju. Vrlo živopisni likovi, tečan i šarmantan stil, suptilni humor.

Posebna pohvala ide Niemu za nešto što piscima 'esto ne polazi za rukom a to je prilagođavanje stila pisanja uzrastu malog Mattija kao naratora. Kako se menja Matti, menja i se i percepcija i stil pisanja a pritom se ne gubi suština i lični perečat karaktera.

Negde pročitah ovu preporuku
'Preporučujem – svim ljudima koje volim'.
Ne bih mogla to bolje da srećim.

Veronika Sebechlebská says

Sto rokov ticha alebo fínsko-švédska verzia magického realizmu

(niekočokrát som sa smiala nahlas)

Jeremy says

This one has it all. Humanity, humour up the wazoo, insight, high emotional stakes, great use of language (it must be amazing in the Swedish but oh well), magic, and morals. Anyone who grew up in an isolated place will relate to this.

Spoiler alert, if you already know you're going to read this book, stop now:
seriously, why ruin it...
ok here goes

the scene where Niila's abusive father gets his ass kicked, then, while convalescing, finds heaven while walking the landscape in the cracks of the ceiling was one of the most...believable portrayals of a religious experience that I have read in a long time. Ever. So beautiful. And the rest of the chapter is amazing as well. It's almost biblical in it's archetypal weight. To me this chapter is the beating heart of the book. Not funny like the rest, but the lynchpin, the keystone of a magnificent, humble novel.

Maria says

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Gail Francis says

The narrator in this self-deprecating Swedish coming-of-age story does a great job at capturing a child's view of things. Author Mikael Niemi keeps the reader guessing at time as to the reliability of the narrator as he winds his way through the story of the friendship of two boys, their families, and eventually their band. The story reminded me of *A Christmas Story* with its wry depiction of working class families in a snowy climate. The chapter in which two families engage in a drinking contest followed by a sauna contest is one of the all-time great depictions of stubbornness and stoicism.

The story bogged down for me when the boys reach puberty. Call me a stereotypical female, but there are only so many times I can maintain an interest in reading about boys discovering their sexuality. In fact, I think one reading of John Updike twenty years ago had me pretty much set for life in this regard. The average teenager's sexual thoughts and actions (to say nothing of those belonging to the adult male) really just aren't that interesting.

Even so, Niemi ends the book with a final sentence of such beauty that it perfectly caps the uneven preceding chapters.

Katherine Furman says

Popular Music from Vittula is an ingenious blend of memoir, folklore, magical realism, and talented story telling. Who knew growing up in the Arctic Circle would be so enchanting? (I thought it would be too frigid to do anything but shiver.) But Niemi forms a beautiful landscape where men half a step away from Vikings raise kids who listen to The Beatles. The modern age quite literally steam rolls into an edge of the world village where citizens are treading the waters between the religions and myths of their ancestors and the consumerism of the modern age.

Modern marvels meets old world is not, however, what makes this book so captivating. Instead it's the subtleties of being young that Niemi portrays so perfectly. The nuances of grade school hierarchies, the machismo of the adolescent male, the intricate blends of fantasy and reality that compound to make the world that all little kids live in—Niemi calls them up perfectly without an air of adult pandering. He doesn't look back and think 'we were so silly then,' if anything he pays homage to the often vicious forces at work in the world of children and how tricky it is to move from the stage of innocence into the thrilling, taboo

busting realm of adolescence.

Nanou says

My friend who studied Swedish gave me this book to read and one evening we were reading it together and laughing like crazy hyenas. That time we lived on campus, three girls in one room, and the third girl desperately tried to study while we two were making such a noise!

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Fredrik says

På nippet til å gi denne 4 stjerner, men må være litt streng. Den tok seg endel opp på slutten. Boken handler altså om et par gutter som vokser opp i nord-Sverige på 60-70-tallet en gang. Stedet de vokser opp på heter Vittulajänkä, som betyr "Fittemyra".

Boken er egentlig en samling med morsomme episoder fra oppveksten til disse to. Artig lite innblikk i bygdetrodden også i andre land.
