



# Finlandia Foundation® National

Inspiring, celebrating and connecting the Finnish-American community since 1953

A close-up photograph of a woman with reddish-brown hair, wearing a dark top and a blue beaded necklace. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. A saxophone is positioned in front of her, partially obscuring her face. The background is dark and out of focus.

**2018  
PERFORMER  
OF THE YEAR  
JULI WOOD**

# 2018 Performer of the Year: Juli Wood

In 1996 Finlandia Foundation National (FFN), the premier network of Finnish-American organizations in the United States, initiated its Performer of the Year (POY) program to showcase a variety of talents related to the culture and traditions of Finland and Finnish America at live performances at FFN chapters across the U.S.

Music has always been important to FFN, and all but two of its POY have been musicians, from singers to traditional folk, jazz and classical instrumental artists.

Current POY, saxophonist Juli Wood, interprets Finnish folks songs with a jazzy twist. Of her CD *Synkkä Metsä* (*Dark Forest*) by the Julie Wood Quartet, a reviewer wrote that it

“evokes a shadowy world of deep greens and cold, moist earth, a place of thick and resilient mosses and icy water dripping from high branches denuded of leaves with the coming of the long winter. An outstanding set with a compellingly beautiful cohesion.”

All four of Wood’s grandparents immigrated from Ostrobothnia in the early 20th century, and ended up on Minnesota’s Iron Range and in Duluth. Juli grew up in the Milwaukee area, where her parents---members of the Finnish American Society of Milwaukee---steeped her in her Finnish heritage. She fell in love with Finland’s culture and countryside on her first trip there in 1977, following her high school graduation. Since the 1990s, Juli has returned to Finland nearly every summer.

A resident of Chicago for more than two decades, Juli has been playing jazz for 25 years in the Windy City and elsewhere in the Midwest, as well as overseas, including at Finland’s Pori Jazz Festival

and Storyville jazz club in Helsinki. She studied jazz at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music and has been mentored by jazz artists she admires. In addition to performing on tenor and baritone sax, Juli is a vocalist and composer.

Hear Juli’s music at her website: [juliwoodsax.com](http://juliwoodsax.com)  
Find more about Finlandia Foundation, the Performer of the Year and its other programs at the website: [FinlandiaFoundation.org](http://FinlandiaFoundation.org)

## PAST PERFORMERS OF THE YEAR:

**2016-17** Pirjo Polari-Khan, children’s author, poet and storyteller, San Jose, California

**2015** Sara Pajunen, violinist and composer, Minnesota

**2014** Olli Hirvonen, jazz guitarist, New York City

**2013** Marja Kaisla, classical pianist, Philadelphia

**2012** Maria Kizirian, singer and songwriter, Los Angeles

**2011** Wilho Saari, tradition bearer of the Finnish kantele, Naselle, Washington

**2010** Finn Hall, folk band, Oakdale, Minnesota

**2009** Terhi Miikki-Broersma, multi-instrumentalist, Lyndon, Washington

**2008** Brent Buswell and Bert Stromholm, accordion duo from Donegal, Pennsylvania and Pompton Plains, New Jersey

**2007** Maria Männistö, soprano, Seattle

**2006** Kaiku, female vocal duo from New York City

**2005** Richard Koski, two-row diatonic button accordionist, Trumansburg, New York

**2003-04** Maarit Vaga, soprano, Albion, New York

**2002** Ulla Suokko, flutist, New York City

*continued*

**2001** Vicki Gornick, organist,  
Chisholm, Minnesota

**2000** Diane Jarvi, singer, poet  
and songwriter, Minneapolis

**1999** Craig Randal Johnson,  
pianist, string bassist and  
conductor, Minneapolis

**1998** Bernhard Hillila, comedic  
lecturer, Valparaiso, Indiana

**1997** Koivun Kaiku, kantele  
ensemble, Minneapolis

**1996** Merja Soria, kantele  
artist and vocalist, San Diego

**T**he Performer of the Year  
term begins September 1  
and runs through August 31.

Interested in being a Performer  
of the Year? POY application  
deadline is in mid-February.  
For information:  
[FinlandiaFoundation.org](http://FinlandiaFoundation.org)

**F**inlandia Foundation  
National, founded in  
Pasadena, California in  
1953, administers grants,  
scholarships and programs  
supporting and celebrating  
Finnish heritage and  
Finnish-American culture  
and traditions.



FFN is a 501(c)(3) organization.  
For more information:  
[FinlandiaFoundation.org](http://FinlandiaFoundation.org)

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