

# Sami girl takes on New York

How do you sweep off her feet a singer who's already on top of the world?

*24-year old singer Sofia Jannok from Gällivare at the top of Sweden breezed into the Big Apple to do a radio show at the Sirius Radio Station. Nordic Reach sat down with the young Sami and her band, Peter Tikkanen Trio to hear about joiks, reindeer and the great white expanse of the North.*

You show her New York! 24-year old Sofia Jannok, from the northern city of Gällivare, Sweden, has been performing on stage since she was very young, but this must certainly feel like "her" year. She released her first solo album *White/Ceaskat*, she has concerts planned in France and China, and she was recently invited to give a concert at House of Sweden in Washington. From there, Jannok took a detour to New York City to give a radio show at the popular Sirius Radio Station.

"This is exciting!" she exclaims. "New York is so special. It's just a place I always wanted to visit. We were quite late driving in from Washington, but the people at Sirius were very nice and let us play six songs."

*Nordic Reach* catches up with Jannok and her band, Peter Tikkanen Trio, in midtown New York over coffee.

Jannok, although blond and tall, is pure Sami. ("You thought I'd be short with black hair, right? That's what everyone thinks of Sami," she smiles.)

Jannok's music, which she herself has a hard time trying to define, is a mix of jazz, pop, and joik. Joik, a singing style connected to the Sami, was for a long time considered heathen, and many Sami stopped joiking for fear of being cut off from society or being viewed as uncultivated. "I didn't learn to joik at home, for example. That's something

that disappeared with my grandmother. I didn't really understand the difference between joiking and singing until I was in my early teens," Jannok says. "Now I realize that with joiking you need a different technique. It's a wonderful way to express feelings for somebody, because it's very intimate. Traditionally, a joik isn't something you do on stage, but I don't really do a classic kind of joik. I like to experiment a bit with it."

And when she is on stage, she performs in a white fur coat, peaked shoes, tassels, and silver Sami brooches. Yet, she remains a bit cautious of representing the Sami people. "It's simply natural to me, it's who I am, not something I try to point out. I grew up speaking Sami, my family keeps reindeers, I went to a Sami school. For a Sami, nature is very important... and reindeer keeping. Of course it's a living culture and constantly changing. But as long as the language stays alive, the culture stays alive."

Jannok writes most of her music and lyrics herself, something she began doing very early. "I began writing when I was nine, and composing when I was thirteen or fourteen. I performed locally, doing little concerts with a friend of mine. And then TV3 (a Swedish TV channel) asked us to participate in a talent show. That's how it all began!"

Two years ago, she met Peter Tikkanen Trio in Luleå.

"I was looking for musicians..." she says. "And I said we have a trio for you," adds Johan Englund, Peter Tikkanen's drummer.

"It just worked right away!" Partly, explains the pianist Peter Tikkanen, because they speak the same musical language.

"We aren't used to having people give us chords and ready-made music. And Sofia would tell us she wanted the sound of a 'bird with sorrow' or 'like the vast expanses'. That's our way of communication and we understood each other."

Together with Peter Tikkanen Trio, Sofia started touring Sweden and the Balkan countries, to great reviews. Proof that the Sami girl is the real thing.

"Sometimes I think I prefer to sing for an audience who doesn't know anything about the Sami language and culture, because they are like a clean slate," she says. "They can just listen to my music with no expectations or preconceptions. Ultimately what every artist wants to do is to be able to touch the audience. And sometimes you do that best when they know nothing about you - from my mouth through the senses to someone's heart."

You can listen to clips of Sofia Jannok's music on her website where she also has a blog.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY HENRIK OLUND

For more info, see: [www.sofiajannok.com](http://www.sofiajannok.com)

## SAMI PEOPLE

The Sami people are indigenous of Sápmi (or Same-land) and are an ethnic minority in the northern-most parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia. Their language is related to Finnish and Hungarian. Roughly 50,000 Sami live in Norway, 20,000 live in Sweden, 6,000 in Finland and 2,000 in Russia.

Although most known for keeping reindeer, the Sami traditionally had a variety of livelihoods, like fishing and shepherding. Today, many Sami live in the cities and lead modern lives; their children learn the traditions and language at home and in Sami schools.

The Sami have been living in Scandinavia for thousands of years. Some experts maintain that Sami were present in Finnish Lapland before 8100 B.C. But the first written document to mention them is in the book *Germania* by the historical writer Tacitus, wherein he calls them Fenni and writes that they "eat herbs, dress in animal skins and sleep on the ground." The Viking sagas also mention the Sami, primarily in connection with the trading on animal skins.

The Sami culture involves joiking, pictorial art, and the wearing of a kolt or gákti, the traditional

Sami outer garment. You can identify where a person is from by the way the kolt looks. Often they are made of leather or broadcloth, in the most common colors of shades of blue or black. Kolts are decorated in red, yellow, blue and green.

Since 1986, Sápmi has its own flag with a red and blue circle in the middle. Red symbolizes the sun and the blue symbolizes the moon. The background colors, red, yellow, blue, and green, are those found in the traditional Sami garments.