**COMPLAINTS CHOIRS**

On a winter day in Finland, artists Tellervo Kalleinen and Oli
er Korch Kalleinen, pondered the Finnish word suultakoö, meaning a chorus of complaints from lots of people at once.

What if they actually formed a choir to sing out their complaints? Could they use the energy of complaining in an ex-

ressive way? As well as creating a new form of community art, the rise of youtube.com has spread the choir’s complaints far

beyond the art galleries they were originally commissioned for.

Living in a traditional red-painted wooden house on an isla-
dic island in the suburbs of Helsinki, you wouldn’t think Teller-
vo and Oliver have much to complain about. Their young son Vaino gymples delightfully and their house receives a steady

stream of visitors, despite being accessible only by row boat.

Oliver grew up under communist rule in East Germany and

first went to Finland in 1996. After meeting and eventually

marrning Tellervo, they began working together in 2003.

Their first choir started in 2005 in Birmingham, England,

and since then complaints choirs have sprang up around the

globe, taking the duo to Helsinki, Hamburg, and St. Petersburg.

Last November they produced a song with the citizens of Chi-
cago, as part of the Museum of Contemporary Art’s Element-
ary Festival. January 2008 sees Tellervo and Oliver heading

to Singapore for the first Asian choir. Some choruses have also been produced independently – with choirs in America, Can-
dada, Australia and Israel, Tellervo and Oliver can’t reach all of

them but want the idea to spread.

In each city, the couple uses leaflets and local press articles to recruit singers, who all contribute their own complaints. These

are woven into a song which is rehearsed and then perform-

ed by the group in locations around the city, creating a

film several minutes long. It is essential to the concept that the complaints are written by the singers themselves, so each

song is specific to its city. In Helsinki the choir sang that “it’s number 3 smells of pee” and that they didn’t like their neigh-

bors arriving earlier than scheduled for the communal sauna.

In Birmingham the chorus was “I want my money back, my jeans like a cul-de-sac.” The complaints of diverse individuals in each choir create a portrait of their city, though not one most tourists would want to promote. For Oliver the result is a song that expresses, “This is really our song, this is our city. People have different complaints but they sing together and identify with it.”

Common themes occur in different cities: unreliable pub-

lic transport, intrasistent computers, personal rudeness, and
tiredness – “I wanna go to sleep but I gotta get up,” as they sang in Jerusalem. On the subject of noise, Budapest’s singers complained about a folk dancer practicing upstairs, whereas in Chicago they objected to a jetben TuTu tribute band. The children of Pookkaalasco Elementary School in Finland chored

that, “Girls are stupid! Boys are stupid! Santa Claus is stupid!” On a more tragic note, in St. Petersburg the singers bemoaned, “Why do we keep on loving when love is so painful?”

As Tellervo points out, “Complaining can be positive, too – somebody wanting to make a change, noticing problems. It can be the starting point for something important.” The com-

plaints in the songs range from “small irritations to existential

problems.” She continues, “People do put a lot of energy into complaining and in most cases that energy could be put into doing something.” The most serious cases don’t join in. People

identify with it.”

written by anna watson

For more info, see: www.complaintschoir.org