

IN MEMORIAM PROFESSOR JAAN ROSS
(5 April 1957 – 18 January 2026)

Professor Jaan Ross, the distinguished Estonian musicologist and phonetician, has died at the age of 68. He was an eminent researcher in his fields, and laid significant academic and institutional foundations to support them. In his activities, he successfully combined his broad scholarly and cultural interests into a coherent whole.

Jaan Ross defended his Candidate of Sciences dissertation, “Объективные предпосылки консонантности в музыке” (“Objective Preconditions of Consonance in Music”), in 1988 at the Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre, and his doctoral dissertation in music psychology, “Studies of Pitch, Timbre and Timing of Complex Auditory Events,” in 1992 at Åbo Akademi. He began collaborating with linguists as a young researcher in the second half of the 1970s in Tallinn, in the computational linguistics research group of the then Institute of Language and Literature, where, under the supervision of Mart Rimmel, he studied fundamental frequency and rhythm comparatively in speech and music.

From 1980 to 1993, Jaan Ross held various positions at the same Institute of Language and Literature. After its reorganisation into the Institute of the Estonian Language, he served as its Director of Research from 1993 to 1996. From this position, he was invited to the University of Tartu, where he worked as Professor of Music Psychology (1993–2015). During this time, he also served as Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy (1996–1999) and Head of the Department of Arts (2003–2006). From 1995 to 2021, Jaan Ross was also Professor at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, from which he retired, becoming Professor Emeritus in 2021. He was elected a member of the Estonian Academy of Sciences in 2003.

In linguistics, Jaan Ross’s lasting contribution was the advancement of

experimental phonetic research both at the Institute of the Estonian Language in Tallinn and at the University of Tartu. With his support, the phonetics laboratory at the University of Tartu was re-established in the late 1990s, and as dean he helped to find premises and acquire equipment for it. In his research, Jaan Ross focused on prosody, clarifying the similarities and differences between speech and music, including the realisation of Estonian quantity degrees in both archaic folk songs and more recent music. His collaboration with the renowned Estonian phonetician Professor Ilse Lehiste proved particularly fruitful. The book they co-authored, *The Temporal Structure of Estonian Runic Songs* (de Gruyter, 2001), remains one of Jaan Ross’s most frequently cited works.

Jaan Ross also left a lasting mark on the study of the Estonian language by discovering a large collection of old Estonian-language sound recordings in 2006 in the Phonogram Archive (*Phonogramm-Archiv*) of the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. These recordings had been made from Estonians who were taken as prisoners of war to Germany during the First World War. Jaan Ross made these recordings available to other researchers of Estonian language and culture and also edited the volume *Encapsulated Voices: Estonian Sound Recordings from the German Prisoner-of-War Camps in 1916–18* (Böhlau Verlag, 2012), which brings together research based on these recordings. The book offers a unique insight into the Estonian language as spoken over a hundred years ago and allows new conclusions to be drawn about linguistic changes.

Jaan Ross’s work has been recognized with numerous national awards in the fields of musicology, linguistics, and culture. Alongside his academic contributions, he was also a highly regarded translator of contemporary Russian fiction. In Estonia and elsewhere, many scholars

across various fields today consider Jaan Ross their teacher and mentor – someone whose thoughts and skilfully posed questions encouraged them to develop their ideas and find solutions. We will remember Jaan Ross as a scholar with a broad intellectual horizon and outlook on life, an inspiring and supportive mentor to his students and colleagues, and a leader in research. His interdisciplinary background and wide-ranging interests have greatly contributed to the development of a new generation of Estonian musicologists and linguists.

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