

COMMENTS ON THE TRACKS, BY TOBIAS SJÖGREN

Introduction

“My focus for these accompanying texts that follow below about each track of the album has been on the more technical side of the music. I won’t begin to describe or discuss what could be the more spiritual or emotional content of the music, although the overall goal, always or often, is to find some spiritual meaning to it. What I’m dealing with here is rather about the construction of the pieces and the available tools to use as a musician and composer in order to try to reach this something — let’s call it «quality».

“For me, a big part of the idea of instrumental music is that it’s very open. You should be able to find your own story and meaning to go with the music. At its best it invites you to do so. There doesn’t have to, or maybe even cannot, exist a preconceived notion of what the music really «is about». At the same time, when I hear something truly great, I recurrently identify it as being somehow very specific (yet hidden). Open and specific at the same time! Let this wonderful paradox be there.”

AVGÅNG (*“DEPARTURE”*)

“This tune functions as a short introduction for the album to set the tone and make the listener ready for what’s coming, before everything connects into (more or less) one long suite. It revolves around an AM Radio sample sound to which I’ve added a few synth and sampler sounds to make it my own «song». Originally this piece is a section from a longer piece of music written for a light & sound performance that I was a part of a couple of years ago.”

I FÖRVÄNTAN (*“IN EXPECTATION”*)

“A ballad to feature the nylon string acoustic guitar for the A sections. After the quiet opening A section — a guitar and bass duo — it moves further and we enter into a new world of sounds for the B section. This section is like a collage of many different sounds over a base of orchestral chords, forming a dense web. Instead of having one single soloist, there are various soloistic components active simultaneously. More often than not, I want to use elements of contrast in my music, much for the sake of variation. That’s what I frequently want to have more of in jazz music; a variety of sounds. My ear seems to get tired when hearing the same few instruments and timbres for too long. This is where synths and electronics can help a lot. The use of all kinds of effect synth sounds is noticeable throughout the CD, at times to a degree where it’s one of the key features. Göran (Kroon, the drummer) has an unusual role here playing almost nothing pulse-related, instead he provides colour with his cymbals. The B section also introduces an essential part of the album sound; the acoustic string orchestra. The tune concludes with another A section giving it the usual ABA form.”

BORTOM BERGEN (*"BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS"*)

"This one started with an inviting patch/sound from my vg-8 guitar with the strings pitched octaves up and down to produce this rich 12-string-guitar-like sound, which seemed to insist on the weird opening chords. Often, it's an exciting challenge to try to go beyond what the guitar usually sounds like, and the vg-8 is the perfect tool for this purpose. The vg-8 guitar workstation instrument (or whatever I should call it — it's kind of an instrument in it's own new category) is an ingredient used on many of the tracks. Mads (Lumholt, the singer) is featured as the soloist for this tune, delivering multiple layers of improvisation — a studio technique always fun to explore. The string orchestra is left out for this tune, allowing the brass section to take charge.

"This song may have a few more different sections than the more common song, which demonstrates my ambition of trying to create tunes with lots of different sections (with more or less obvious borders) that organically unfold into each other. Closely connected to this is the recurrent quest to find a good balance between the linear and the cyclic way of composing which means: How big a portion of new musical material should I add for the continuation of my composition, and how much of repetition of already used material should I use? To me, this is one of the bigger questions and tasks to tackle whenever you're seriously trying to compose."

SVENSKA SKOGAR (*"SWEDISH FORESTS"*)

"Begins with solo piano (which plays on minus time* on the CD) playing a condensed and vertical version of the coming melody. This tune has a harmonic language that I feel particularly close to, one that I can identify as being somewhat derived from the Nordic, the Scandinavian. It may also connect to a harmonic style used by some romantic composers. This song has the obvious aim to show this plain melody in varying moods and instrumentations. It has no improvised solo, in contrary to most of the songs. The purpose of the music I write is not always to be a vehicle for an improviser.

"This tune is designed to give many of the musicians room to be featured: The nylon string acoustic guitar plays the opening melody. Mads is in front with his delightful voice to perform the second one. After that, the string orchestra comes through into the foreground, taking the lead and initiates a harmonic extension of the main chords, while Göran and Mikael (Nilsson, the percussionist) deliver a soundscape of metallic sounds giving the music colour and energy. Everyone joins in for the next melody chorus, the peak of the track, and this time the theme is backed up by a steady backbeat. Everything calms down when Stefan (Wingefors, the pianist) presents the ending theme, so beautifully filtered through his lyrical sensitivity.

"This track is a good example of what often is my wish; to cover the whole spectrum of overall dynamics, from the softest to the loudest. Dynamics, on different levels, keep the attention and alertness of the listener. And during the course of a whole album it can be crucial, I would say. In my opinion, the lack of dynamics is what makes many albums (rather often pop ones) boring towards halfway through them."

MÅNEN UR MOLNEN (*"THE MOON OUT OF THE CLOUDS"*)

"Written in 1993 during the two year period working on my first solo album *Hymn*. The main melody establishes the basic clave and calls for the powerful, bombastic environment.

The idea of having contrasting and commenting passages is especially evident here. Mads speaks and tells his brief haiku-like story in his native Greenlandic language in the gentle interludes surrounding the middle section. This section contains a solo with a longer arc to feature Christian (Vuust, the saxophonist) on tenor sax playing a great epic type of solo. It has those harmonic modulations built into it that I like so much (also used on *I Förväntan* and *Omen*) that keeps the more modal milieu from becoming harmonically stagnant, and adds freshness and intensity to the solo. The solo section is a good example of the band's ensemble playing in which the interaction within the rhythm section shines through clearly.

"On an album like this with so much emphasis on the arrangements and the production process and its many stages — preparation, editing, overdubbing etc. — it's a challenge to try to incorporate this thing with the main aim; having this great group of musicians to really play together to get the quality of the real-time interplay between them — the jazz factor. The attempt of having these both divergent but complementary qualities working side by side is an important one for me. My approach is that they should be able to co-exist without diminishing each other. Much too often these are seen as incompatible opposites. This tune ends the suite of the last four tracks. An effective tune to play live."

INNAN DEN FLYGER HEM (*"BEFORE IT FLIES HOME"*)

"A happy melody, and in a major key for a change. After it's first presentations, a free acoustic guitar solo follows, accompanied by Mikael playing the frame drum, and later also strings to go with it. Eventually things build up into the next solo which calls for Stefan playing the piano in a new section, that eventually leads back to the main theme with full arrangement that heralds the ending vamp jam section. This track is not so much about composition as it is about supplying space for the band to play in a loose way and to stretch out, which is the main priority here. This is the only tune that doesn't directly connect to either the following or the preceding tune. Mikael has an important role here, providing many layers of his precise percussion playing."

OMEN (*"OMEN"*)

"Based on a traditional Inuit drum-song melody. In 1995 Christian Vuust and I made a trip to visit Thule, Greenland, to record the Inuit people's melodies as sung by different local so-called drum-singers, in this case Sofie Eipe, a lovely 60+ year old woman. We came home and made a CD, *The Thule Spirit*, with music based around these simple, yet very strong melodies. This song finally found its home on this record.

"From the opening sections it jumps into an extended guitar solo with a long and slow build-up that eventually leads to set off the distorted guitar. The solo is followed by a passage for everything to settle down, featuring the strings in a style reminiscent of Arvo Pärt (Estonian composer), one of my favorites. For the ending repeating sections the Greenlandic melody is accompanied by the massive sound of the string orchestra playing the chords. And when the climatic last chorus of the melody arrives, I think a certain quality from the mix and fusion of the old folk melody and its modern treatment can be found. Again, there's contrasting sections in between the melodies to give some perspective and context. The synth effect sounds are used to create atmosphere and feel, which is particularly prominent in the beginning of the guitar solo.

“The idea of blending acoustic and electronic instruments together may not be thought of as being a very unusual one, but I don’t see too many successful examples around — which on the other hand could have to do with my personal taste. Anyway, to me, it seems as if most synths and electronic instruments want to sound bad — in contrary to the acoustic. So, first you have to work hard to get away from that, and then simply just try to bring forth sounds well worth hearing. As much as the electronic instruments are inferior to the acoustic ones, they certainly can serve an useful purpose. It actually can be a very rewarding course to enter upon, the thing of combining these two instrumental groups — they surely are capable of enhancing each other.

“Kaspar (Vadsholt, the bassist) is on electric bass for the only time on the record, but as always, supporting the music.”

INGEN VET DET MER *(“NOONE KNOWS IT ANY MORE”)*

“Composed with a specific sound from the vg-8 guitar as the starting-point, a sound featured especially in the intro (again on minus time* on the CD) and a real favorite of mine, really inspiring to play, which is always a good start. It may not be perceived as being played on the guitar — an excitement and an opportunity in itself. The clarinet (played by Christian) and the vg-8 forms a nice blend for the first theme. That is something that I often strive for; good blends of instruments, in this case to execute a melody. It’s interesting to ask yourself when having your hip melody there on paper; What is the best timbre and instrument for this melody? However, this song is an example of the other way around; it started with the sound. The timbre aspect is, more than ever, important on this tune. The brass section is used instead of the string orchestra, and a bunch of the more spacy effect synth sounds finds their home here too.

“The chord progression, the manner in which the chords move forward from one to the next, is made in a sort of chorale-like way. Technically, most of the chords don’t have their root note as the bass note. Sometimes you’ll get away from the usual sound of common chords just by having another chord-note than the root note to be the bass note. I often gravitate towards using step-wise bass line movements, so this is a good technique for me.”

“The center section of the piece, as almost always is the case, consists of an improvised solo. Here, Kaspar proves his lyrical abilities with a thoughtful acoustic bass solo. One central ambition about most of the songs, like this one, is to try to combine and integrate composition with its equal; improvisation. This is not a thing to take for granted, at least not for me. At times this balancing act between the two can be extremely hard, almost impossible, but every now and then it can really work out well. It is indeed something to try to find solutions for on an continuing basis. It’s one of those never-ending projects.”

ÖDEGÅRDSSTIGEN *(“THE PATH OF THE DESERTED FARM”)*

“To continue describing the more technical aspects of the music, this is a tune mostly about composition and arrangement, with a long form and a cinematic scope to it. Built around a simple, stubborn and highly repetitive ostinato, which together with the marching drum and the swelling brass makes the tune’s engine, giving it a sense of forward motion. I very much enjoy this extended format of a twelve minute long tune and the epic feel it can evoke — you really have some time for development.

“Sometimes a specific time length format can inspire you to try new things. For example, in 1995 we, bass player Johannes Lundberg, saxophonist Joakim Milder and myself, did a CD called *Ord På Golvet* (Words On The Floor) which was totally improvised music (yet highly edited) based around short poem fragments from Swedish poet Gunnar Ekelöf. We could set up a simple form rule for ourselves like for instance “this piece is going to be one minute long”. It’s almost like a paradox; a limitation can make you feel free and creative — embrace one on a given parameter, and it can be quite refreshing, sometimes even necessary.

“The solo section, with the ostinato excluded, and its melody is originally all improvised on the guitar, performed real-time as a solo and not until afterwards given it’s chords, suggested by the solo melody. This process of composing an improvised solo is something that I’ve done a lot on previous records (like on *Zenith* from *The Thule Spirit*) and a method to search into more in the future. Mads’ voice and the vg-8 guitar blends together to form the sound of the solo melody here. The solo melody is very linear in its nature, due to the way it was created; there’s no repetition. The ostinato is left alone for a moment, to precede the five-minute long last part of the piece — which is one long build towards celebrating the ending melody in its full splendour, including a fat backbeat to go with it. The accordion, played by Stefan, is used to form the sound of the melody together with the vg-8 from where the ending theme starts. It’s the culmination of not only this song but of the entire album. To me, music is often about euphoria and enthusiasm, and this last section of the track is kind of a personal reflection over these concepts. *Ödegårdsstigen* was really the soundtrack of my life during a certain period of time.”



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** the CD player counts on «minus time» in the gap located after the ending of one track and before the start of the following one. If you start playing this CD from track 4 (Svenska Skogar) or track 8 (Ingen Vet Det Mer) you won't hear the intro that plays on minus time before the track's start ID. The only way to hear the intro is to play from before these track and listen through, or to rewind from where the track starts. Got it?*