

unspoken songs

Comments on, and Free Associations from the tracks of UNSPOKEN SONGS,
by Tobias Sjögren.

1 HIDDEN DANCE

I somewhat had the sensation of a dance while writing this piece, almost with some baroque dignity. Therefore the name of the song. I think to some extent, that the title did serve as a starting point for Per and his vocal improvisation for the middle section. Although our interests is within instrumental music, we're open to influences from "outside".

Sometimes it's good to have something like a hidden agenda behind the tunes that you want to put forward. Since I believe in the power of instrumental music, I think a distinct content/message, or whatever I should call it, can be even stronger when it's not openly displayed (in words). The receivers have find out for themselves what it actually is about.

After the main sections comes a long ending section, which is for Per and his muted trumpet, to reflect on and improvise from the melody, in a new context and mode, gradually moving towards the next song.

2 TWICE UNTOLD

At the recording session for Unspoken Songs, being the guitar player, the composer, the arranger, the engineer and the producer at the same time was a lot of pressure. Not that I don't like it, but sometimes it can be tough to be in a situation like that — especially if there's a time pressure on top as well.

When we recorded this track, I said to Per that the loud section that starts the vocal solo should be something like "the storm before the calm" which is obviously the reverse of how you normally put it. Sometimes (not to often) I manage to trigg my fellow musicians with some short general (but at the same time specific) instruction of my tune.

That's a special quality that I long to have more of — to be able to inspire and instruct at the same time, maintaining things open and specific in parallel. I guess that's why you can really benefit from having a good producer around. I must try it at some point...

3 EVER SINCE THAT DAY

When forming the material for this album I was mainly composing on my new hybrid guitar/bass instrument. At some point I thought I should use another instrument to get some timbre variety from the guitar as well above Per alternating between the trumpet and the vocal.

This song is composed on and for the vg8 guitar and a special synthish sound on it. All the guitaristic gestures comes through intact though, which is the main quality of the vg8. Playing this instrument and especially with this sound is a lot of fun for me. It's almost as if I take on a different, more anonym identity playing that guitar, with a sound that most people does not at all connect to a guitar. Probably not a very wise career move, but very effective for musical results.

The way the trumpet and the guitar blends here on this song is really nice, going into each other.

This track is in the shorter songs category, and we're pretty much just making a distilled statement of what the song essentially is all about.

4 DISTANT LULLABY

When recording this song we cranked up the reverb a lot in our headphones, both in length and volume, and we really played out from that sound, with our eyes shut we could almost sense being inside a big cathedral. That's really a fun thing to experiment with — adjusting your playing to a special sonic situation. This is something that I think Per really feels comfortable with as well. You should always adapt to the current situation in every possible regard, and this (a sonic situation) is just one of them, often overlooked though. I've all my musical life been very concentrated on the sound itself — how I play the guitar is equally important to what I play. It should be a matter of course I think, but it's often not. Anyway, I guess it just reflects what I, as a listener, values in music.

5 I WILL DO IT

Looking back on this album project it's foremost about investigating the area of ballads or calm modes. It has a lot to do with the volume limits of the nylon string guitar, which being played throughout, in the way that I can't play too loud and have it sound decent. Yet I wanted to have some contrast in this regard on the album, so I tried to go for something more uptempo and a little louder here.

Again, it's composed on my new guitar, and it actually, maybe more than any other song, utilizes the possibilities of the divided bass/guitar instrument. I treat the instrument as two, almost creating an illusion of two separate instruments. It's got a feel of that I think, not being totally obvious though.

Per is featured here playing an extensive solo on the trumpet, going into changing harmonic terrains, and as always in attempt to create something fresh. To try to create drama with the form is something I really aspire to — we're always trying to tell an absorbing story, trying to maintain the interest throughout.

I guess that's the mission that I have as a musician playing foremost instrumental music; to try to reveal the qualities coming from telling a story non-verbally (hence unspoken songs). It can really be about something specific all the same. I find myself returning to this point of view, that it can be very specific, and yet very open at the same time. In these dynamics, there's a lot to explore, on a never-ending subject. Due to the inherent paradox, it's a construction which can be investigated over and over again.

6 UNDERNEATH

In the context of a duo album I wanted to come up with ways of playing a solo by myself where I could simultaneously be both the accompanist and the soloist, certainly a challenging quest for any guitar player to put on. Here's my take on it. The tune consists of the framework from the melody, and the guitar solo.

The idea of comping and soloing at the same time is not at all something unusual for a pianist, but for a guitar player it for sure is. It's something that I would like to search into a lot more in the future — to try to play like an orchestra on the guitar, with multiple lines involved at the same time etc. In a way it's actually good that it is so damn hard...

7 ALWAYS HERE

Back to featuring Per playing his trumpet. This one has quite a lot of orchestration added to it; strings, vibraphone, woodwind etc. And we're back to the shorter format, where the composition itself contains the complete story. I think this song will stick with me for sometime.

Another thing to mention here about this album, guitar-wise, is that it's a return to what was my starting point as a guitarist, which was to play with my finger nails exclusively. I started out playing classical guitar around age 12, so I got this technical foundation early on, which I can benefit from playing like I do here.

8 FROM ABOVE

Here we have two highly contrasting sections that stands side-by-side to form the composition. After the first section the tune says "And now to something completely different" — and we're going into to "jazz section". The composition dictated itself... No, but of course you have to listen carefully to your baby to hear where it wants to go. We tried not to make her go to the pub but she really wanted so... we had to adapt. Then we got her back to the cinema. And so is the ABA form completed.

That's a universal form, the ABA form. You can find it everywhere. To me, form wise, the main question is when you come back to the final A (of the ABA form); how much new substance and how much old should you use? The balance of having enough of new material/ingredients so that it won't be just a repeat of the first A, and enough of old and already used ingredients (from the first A section) to have it coherent and connected, is important (the proportions will indeed vary from situation to situation though). The linear vs. the cyclic.

Per and I struggled with the jazz section for a long time to get it right, until we played back one of the recorded rehearsals from the day before, and there it was — quite long, but without doubt the take to use. That's a good practise in the studio to say; "Let's just practise, but with the recorder on — then after that we can record the real take". Often the test take is more relaxed and just better. So you have to learn to fool yourself and put it into your head that this is not the real take, even though you might know that there's a high probability of that it actually is.

Even more evident than on "I Will Do It" is the

illusion of two guitars playing, which was the starting point for this composition.

This song is for my son, Julian. He first heard, and reacted to it about 4 years ago. He's now 3 1/2 years old. Think about that.

9 ONCE UPON A TIME

This melody came to me one afternoon saying that it had something to tell me, something about the past. It was really important and urgent. It (the melody) wanted me to tell it's short story and to put some chords to go along. So I did.

10 LET ME TELL YOU

Another one showing up one day, eager to be heard. Also, I wanted Per and me to have something simple to jam on, more like a rock tune with just 3 chords to it — there was the solo section. It's really something else to improvise together with Per because he's such a good listener. It's as if he thinks that the single most important aspect of music making is the listening ability. He has the willingness to really interact and play off each other. I think the middle solo section of this tune is one of the most fresh things we recorded together.

Per has such a tremendous range of expression and dynamics in his singing. It can be so soft and smooth, and suddenly he explodes into this minaret-like singing that only he can do. One cannot help but surrender to that strong and singular expression.

During the writing of Unspoken Songs I have in parallel been exploring the new guitar instrument, with questions like: What can it do? How can it be used? This tune is another of these small research projects where the aim was to experiment in having certain melody notes ringing inside the next melody note. This creates a special kind of web of interfering notes, forming harmony from melody.

11 WHAT'S LEFT IS RIGHT

This one serves as an overture to the next track, with the feel of narrowing down into something. This was the first piece we recorded, an overture in that sense as well.

12 NEARBY THE END OF THE ROAD

Look out for the hidden 2.30 minute long intro (on minus time on the CD player)! The goal of this introduction is to forebode or herald the coming main theme. It's the sort of soundscape that we naturally are close to. I guess the album at some point needs to calm down in terms of presenting new material, and here it is.

On this track I'm returning to my vg8 guitar instrument. The main theme is an eight bar section which repeats and builds up. We're staying in the same spot for a long time for a change, enjoying ourselves. This is a highly orchestrated tune blending the vg8 with the after-treatment orchestration from the synths. We're nearby the end of the album now, moving towards the final station.

13 ARRIVAL

Well, it's not a cover of the Abba tune, that's for sure. Concludes the whole album and puts the other tunes in retrospective.

Please also read the UNSPOKEN SONGS press release, click [HERE](#) to do so.

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