Marti Tärn

Making of the album “Pimedas on Valge”

Handledare: Ragnhild Sjögren

Musikerprogram, konstnärlig kandidat examen, profil Jazz

Institutionen för jazz
Table of Contents:

1. Musical Background .......................................................... 3
   1.1. Childrens Music School/ High School .................. 3
   1.2. Tartu University Viljandi Culture Academy ....... 3
   1.3. Finland, Ammattikorkeakoulu Stadia ............... 5
   1.4. Teaching in Estonia ............................................... 6
   1.5. Skurups Folkhögskola ......................................... 7
   1.6. Kungliga Musikhögskola i Stockholm ............. 8
   1.7. Folk Music ......................................................... 8

2. Goal ...................................................................................... 9

3. General description of the music ..................................... 11
   3.1 Description by song ........................................... 11

4. Arranging and rehearsals .................................................. 14

5. Musicians and recording session ...................................... 15

6. Production ........................................................................... 16
   6.1 Recording ............................................................. 17
   6.2 CD-Cover ............................................................. 17
   6.3 CD-Production ..................................................... 18
   6.4 Release ................................................................. 18

7. Conclusion ............................................................................ 19

8. Collaborators ....................................................................... 20

9. Picture material .................................................................... 21
1. Musical Background

1.1 Childrens Music School/ High School

I started my studies in music more seriously when I was 8 years old. Before that I was singing in a music pre-school for children. The teacher, Ave Kumpas, was very friendly but that's the only thing I remember of that time. Under my parents guidance I was enrolled to Tallinn Music School for children, piano major. In that school I was introduced for the first time to music theory and history. I studied classical piano there for 8 years. For information, at that time (in the 1990’s) it was impossible in Estonia (where I’m from) to get teaching on an elementary level in pop or jazz music. It was all classical. I can't say that I really enjoyed it so much, in my youth music was just something that I was used to do because it was quite easy for me. Also the classical way of thinking and teaching didn’t appeal to me too much. I have to thank my piano teacher Heli Taar for being very understanding. She tried to bring me some piano music that was not so common maybe at the time and more fun to play. But still being a part of a classical piano education, I had my share of Czerny etudes and J.S.Bach preludes and fugues.

Looking back now I realize that I managed to graduate my elementary studies in music only because of my parents. I almost hated it back then. My personal goal was actually becoming a basketball player. I was very serious about sports and went to practice it 4-5 times a week. Later on I discovered that sports and music have a number of similarities. They both teach creativity, setting goals, achieving goals, practicing, discipline.

Besides music school and sports I was also singing in a boys choir called Tallinn Boys Choir, conducted by Lydia Rahula. That was more to my liking because we had many interesting trips to international choir competitions and festivals. The choir was touring quite a lot and places like Tokyo Japan, Middle-West part of the United States of America or Portugal and Scandinavian countries made singing kind of a cool thing to do!

After finishing children’s music school and singing in the choir I had nothing to do with music for almost 4-5 years, throughout my studies in gymnasium where I was in an art history class. I was a normal teenager and I listened to a lot of music that came from the hip-hop culture, artists like Lauryn Hill for example. In the end of high school I was sure that an alternative rock group Incubus was the best thing that had happened to the world.

In general my crossings with music started and ended with turning the radio on and off. I never actually thought about me being a musician or having anything to do with music.

1.2 Tartu University Viljandi Culture Academy

The reason why I started to learn bass is close to unbelievable. After graduating gymnasium, everybody surrounding me started to apply to different universities. I, at
the same time, had no clear goals or desires in my life, so to speak. I had two alternatives, enroll myself to an army service or try to find a school to go to.

I signed up to a school called Viljandi Culture Academy (VCA) in Estonia which had a jazz music department. I tried to get in to a music teacher programme. The reason why I did so was because they were holding their entrance exams the latest. It turned out that on that particular year there were not so many applicants at the time of the entrance exams and they decided they would have an extra audition in order to bring students to school.

I quickly went through the basics and tried to get in with piano. At that time I had never played an instrument in a band or any kind of ensemble in my life. So it was a big surprise when they called me back after the audition, wanting to have a chat with me. The surprise grew even more when it turned out that they would offer me a chance to start learning jazz double-bass from zero. Later on teachers explained that they had confidence in me because my theory part of the exam went very well and also they were one bass player short. I asked for a minute to think and agreed. Anything seemed better than the army service.

Up to that point I had never even thought about music in a particular way, imagining myself being a musician or living out of it or teaching maybe. Even more abstract seemed the idea of me playing bass. The fact that all of a sudden I had to play jazz standards and learn scales and play solos, was very confusing. It was even hard to hear the bass when some band was playing, I just wasn’t used to listening to music that way, up to that point music had been something irrelevant. To be honest it felt strange almost the whole first year.

My teacher in VCA was Taavo Remmel, an established double-bass player in Estonia who besides jazz, had been playing classical music and since his family has a strong religious background, he felt comfortable in church music. He probably had the strongest influence on me during my first couple of years of studying bass. And maybe not with the technical aspects of the instrument but in a more general way. We talked a lot in the lessons and he challenged me to think and question about the meaning of a song or a scale or music in general. He has enormous knowledge and sense of harmony. Through that I started to pay attention to the different relationships between musicians in a band. I think I have a very melodic way of thinking when it comes to composing, playing solos or arranging. That was probably established already back then.

Many times I felt when talking to the students in my school, that they didn’t really like or enjoy what they were doing. They were more concentrated on how bad they were. I didn’t really understand that kind of attitude. In the end of my first year in Viljandi, I met three other young musicians from Tallinn, a drummer(Reigo Ahven) and two guitar players(Erki Pärnoja, Virgo Sillamaa). We formed a band called 4tune Quartet and started to play more groovier jazz songs by J. Scofield amongst others and shortly after that, compose our own music. I realized that the most important thing is to find people or musicians around you who are interested in similar things as yourself. My band mates lived in Tallinn and I in Viljandi. We had some quite funny motivational phone calls to each other, for example at 8 in the morning to ask if the
other one is already practicing. We started to look for student festivals in Estonia and also just places to play. With 4Tune Quartet, I had my first concert experiences being part of a band. Usually jazz bass players start with the electric bass and move on to double-bass, with me it happened the other way around. I played mainly double-bass for two years and then changed to electric. The reason was quite practical, I couldn’t afford my own contrabass and in the school I was sharing one instrument with many students. At some point it was impossible to organize and plan your playing because the instrument was always booked. I bought an electric bass and started to play it more. 4tune Quartet was the turning point for me, not only because of changing instruments, but also thinking and learning about playing together and ask questions. My questions led me to the understanding that I have to go away from Estonia to study some more.

1.3. Finland, Ammattikorkeakoulu Stadia

Jazz to my mind is a part of a very urbanized culture. If we take a moment to look at the history, we see that jazz came from and has been around big cities, where different cultures and members of society meet. First in United States and later on all around the world. It doesn’t strike as a surprise to anybody that we find jazz music from New York, Chicago or Berlin or London. In Estonia, Tallinn is as big as it gets and it wasn’t enough for me at the time. I don’t mean that jazz music can exist only in big cities but there has to be a type of energy-flow that usually comes from when different cultures and social groups meet. My objective wasn’t only going to a big city but also to take myself away from my comfort zone and to spend my study period in a different environment. Another important thing was to meet new musicians and to build contacts. So far, during the 5 years of studying abroad, I have managed to organize 2 successful concert-tours in Estonia with Scandinavian musicians and attended some more similar concerts as a musician.

Practical reason, why I chose to go to Finland, was very simple. During my studies in Viljandi we had a number of workshops with teachers from Helsinki. Also many Estonian musicians had already attended the school there and I could easily ask them for some information. In a way I knew what to expect and what are the demands for students. By that time I had only played bass for two-three years and when I analyzed my own abilities I figured that I had to learn a lot more. I was accepted to a school called Ammattikorkeakoulu Stadia, to a Music Performance program with bass.

I had great teachers, Hannu Rantanen, Ulf Kroksfors on double-bass and Timo Hirvonen on electric bass. Also there, I was using the school’s instrument to take contrabass lessons. Jazz education in Finland, at the time I went there, was quite different from the one in Estonia. Older European countries have a longer tradition in teaching jazz and improvisation. There has been years of pedagogical development and the whole system is 20-30 years ahead, so to speak. More systematic approach in teaching was something new and exiting. The school also offered a broader range of study material, different kind of books, records, there were more jazz clubs in Helsinki compared to Tallinn or Viljandi and it was easier to get inspiration outside of
the classroom. Also a good thing was that another school in Helsinki, Sibelius Academy, was holding a lot of high level workshops with great musicians from all around the world and students from Stadia were allowed to attend them for free.

It was my first time living in a foreign country and even though geographically Estonia and Finland are close, the cultures turned out to be quite different. I understood that the feeling of communicating with people from other countries is extremely educating. It was the main thing I learned from my stay there, in a way music is the same wherever you go but you can easily notice a slight difference in some sort of attitude or general understanding of a nation. An interesting observation was that when living there and trying to learn the Finnish culture and way of doing things, I ended up learning a lot about Estonia. Living outside your own country gave a new perspective and helped to appreciate the things that are good in Estonia.

1.4. Teaching in Estonia

After a year in Finland I went to live in Viljandi, re-entered VCA and continued my studies there. I was given an opportunity to teach theory and ensemble in two different children’s music schools, one of them in Viljandi(Viljandi Music School), other one in a small town called Saue near Tallinn(Saue Music School). Every week, for a year I took a two and a half hour drive to Saue and back. It turned out to be very exhausting. At some point it seemed that I spend more time on driving than teaching and I had big motivational problems. Then again during that period I felt that I learned and developed myself. There were many times when students showed up unprepared or didn’t show up at all so I had to improvise. When the piano player or a drummer didn’t come, I was filling in and played their part. It forced me to think more about the role of different instruments in an ensemble. Fortunately I wasn’t a total rookie during my previous studies in Viljandi, I had passed some basic courses about pedagogic and teaching.

To my opinion, my teaching in Estonia, was not the typical kind. I remembered my own lessons as a student in Viljandi and comparing them to the lessons I had in Finland for example, made me think of something new. Maybe something in between. I put more effort into developing ear training skills and also trying to teach children through games. Often I felt that children in general are afraid of the teacher and even if they don’t understand what is being taught, they wouldn’t ask for explanation. I think it comes from the times when Estonia was part of Soviet Union. Even nowadays there are a lot of “old school” teachers who are extremely strict. Demanding results doesn’t have to be a bad thing but I’m questioning the methods here. Every music student in local music schools all around Estonia were/are brought up in the spirit of becoming the best. Clearly I’m exaggerating but in general I feel that the most important thing is being forgotten. Music should be something that makes your life better and more valuable. Teaching music should leave a positive emotion, that it's something fun to do and to understand.

The teaching experience probably gave me another push to go abroad again. During my year back in Estonia, I understood something important. If you teach, you really
have to know the material inside and out, especially when dealing with children because the responsibility is huge.

1.5. Skurups Folkhögskola

I started to look after schools in the internet, also asking around, where other musicians in Estonia had been. I decided that I would not go back to Finland. My first choice between different schools in Europe turned out to be the Rhythmic Conservatory in Copenhagen. At the time, one of my friends (Erki Pärnoja) was going to Skurups Folkhögskola and since it was close to Copenhagen I stayed at his place before and after the entrance exams in Copenhagen. Things didn’t go my way in Denmark, I reached the final round but was never accepted. During my short stay in Skurup I met some of the students, we jammed a little, had a few conversations and I started to like the idea of me going there instead. I signed up for the entrance exams there and luckily enough I was accepted.

In Sweden people are used to the possibility of going to a Folkhögskola, for an Estonian guy it’s something extraordinary. Concept of having only music classes, your main instrument lesson, 3-4 band lessons a week, history and harmony, seems unreal and close to perfect for a music student. In Viljandi I had a number of general education subjects that are part of a university program. I had classes in psychology, anthropology, philosophy. Eventually it took too much energy and time and it was almost impossible to develop your skills as a musician at the same time. In Skurup, on the other hand, you have about 40 music lovers in a small area living together, jamming, talking about music, having classes that are designed for only making progress on your instrument. Also Malmö and Copenhagen were just a train ride away if I needed some city life or to go listen to some good concerts.

My teacher there was Daniel Franck. He is a great piano player as well as bass player and that was perfect for me. Since I started to learn bass I’ve considered piano to be my second instrument. I feel that knowing a little piano gives some kind of different aspect to playing bass. To me bass playing is a mixture of rhythm, harmony and melody, a good bass player should have great skills in all of the three. Having a teacher who could really relate to me on that same level, was very inspiring. We had a lot of talks about life and music and once again it brought up many questions and answers about myself as a musician.

Before Skurup I didn’t know so much about European or Swedish jazz music. I knew some artists like Rigmor Gustafsson and Nils Landgren for example. I think up to that point my eyes were more looking in the mainstream American way of playing and thinking. I’m not saying that one is better from the other but they are definately different. One of the great things that happened to me in Skurup was that I listened to enormous amounts of different music. One could almost feel how the creativity sensors would go to the max. At times it was even overwhelming but still I consider it to be a positive thing. The same thing happened with playing music. All of the teachers were quite different and they all had their own approach. Some of the students there were not so interested in learning the be-bop language or for example playing free music but to me that was the best part. That one could really try to find
out what he or she likes. Everybody had the time and the facilities and possibility for proper coaching in various music styles.

1.6. Kungliga Musikhögskola i Stockholm

After a year of practicing and playing a lot in Skurup, I applied to the Royal Academy of Music (KMH) in Stockholm. Many times I’ve heard people talking and asking each other about which school is the best. I believe that one can’t really ask that. A more accurate question would be maybe which school is the best for me right now. I really enjoyed the time in Skurup and I felt that I learned a lot during my stay there. I practiced like crazy, jammed with a lot of musicians, wrote a lot of music. One could say that it was the perfect school. Still I wouldn’t want to go back there now. I think it really depends on what do people want or where they stand on their level of playing.

I have to admit that it was scary at first to start in KMH. The reputation of the school travels way ahead and I felt proud that I was accepted. After a while I understood again that by communicating to new and different people you end up learning most about yourself. The way you react to some situations or your decision-making develops a wider perspective and especially in the world we live in today, I think it’s a valuable quality to have.

From Stockholm I was looking for more detailed and systemized information. By that time I had been going to different jazz schools for 5 years already. All three of them very different. The thing I love about Stockholm is when looking at the programme from a distance it seems very traditional, I mean the obligatory courses contain very basic knowledge about jazz harmony, ear training, arranging, ensemble etc. One could have the impression that it is very dry and conservative jazz education. When I started, it turned out to be the opposite. Since the school is big, there are lots of choices. Inside that fixed programme you have a lot of freedom. The emphasis is more on how you can use those traditional methods and ways in your own music. And of course the key ingredients are the students. I used to joke amongst friends that the school is very traditional and the students are nothing but that. For me it was perfect and I feel that I have grown a lot during the years I’ve spent here, both musically and as a person.

1.7. Folk Music

While in Viljandi, I met a lot of folk musicians because there was a folk music department there as well. I started to play in an Estonian folk band called Vägilased and communicating with folk musicians taught me a lot about life in general, music’s social role in life and also to enjoy playing. Usually music has an important place in traditional cultures. From the beginning of time wherever we look there has been music in one way or the another. It was, is and will be a part of humanity. It has been escorting people through life. You have music in weddings, funerals, birthdays, parties and I think it’s the same actually nowadays. The difference is that there used to be more ordinary people engaged in it. I want to be a professional musician but
through folk music somehow I have realized that it would be ok to be an amateur as well. When looking at or talking to some folk musicians I feel that the mere joy of playing can be very powerful.

Two years ago I started to play in an international folk group called Ethno in Transit. We are 7 musicians all from different countries, learning from and teaching to each other about our music. Being part of that setup has really opened my eyes and mind to a more general way of thinking and understanding. With Ethno in Transit I’ve had a chance of touring around Europe, playing in very different types of settings and places. Playing in a nice concert hall one day and on the street the next. I believe that being surrounded by folk musicians in those two bands, has left a mark to my way of seeing things and musical preferences.

2. Goal

For some years already I have had a desire to work with a string quartet, either compose or arrange some music for it. Another idea was to put up a bigger ensemble with strings and a jazz band. Two years ago (2009) I was approached and given an opportunity to arrange a couple of songs for a string quartet backing up a singer. It was part of a christmas concert tour and it didn’t take long to say yes to the offer.

A week after that tour the same singer (Hanna-Liina Võsa) came to me and proposed to continue our co-operation. During brainstorming and meetings we decided to put together a new project for winter 2010 that consisted of:
1. putting together a new band (vocals, jazz trio drums/bass/piano + classical string quartet).
2. producing, arranging, playing and releasing her new album “Pimedas on Valge”.

Although jazz is a very global and open-minded style in a way, I sometimes feel that jazz musicians in Estonia are quite narrow minded when dealing with other styles. I haven’t noticed the same kind of attitude here in Sweden. By saying narrow minded, I mean that of course everybody has freedom of choice and everybody should stand for what they believe in. A passionate jazz musician should do what he or she does best but sometimes when commenting others or talking about other styles I think they forget really simple facts. For example a big part of what is called jazz nowadays (all the Afro-Cuban or Brazilian styles ) is actually folk music in its’ origin. Obviously I refer to connections with traditional music here but in general I feel that the gap between different music styles or esthetics is not so big actually. I mean all music has some common features that can be recognized. I’ve attended a number of folk, pop and jazz concerts (unfortunately not to so many classical ones) both as a musician and just a listener. Whenever a good artist/ensemble is on stage they are able to produce kind of a “flow of energy” or strong emotions that are being delivered from the stage to the audience.
I feel that it has nothing to do with a certain style. A great solo artist has to know one’s instrument well enough technically, has to be strong mentally, has to have the
desire to be on stage (if we’re talking about a concert musician). In a good ensemble or orchestra, people must be able to listen to one another in order to play together. I believe that a good folk guitar player can create as powerful emotion as a good jazz guitar player. One can only imagine what could happen if those two great players should unite under a common goal.

I had two goals, derived from the idea mentioned before. First one was to unite musicians coming from very different styles: a singer who has a strong musical theater background, classical string quartet (2 violins, viola and violoncello) and a jazz trio (drums, piano, double-bass). The idea was to try to add jazz sounds and elements to a classical way of playing and the other way around. And trying to do it in a way that it would all together be supportive to the lead singer.

The final destination was to create an ensemble sound that is “beyond” styles and all the arrangements and new-composed music is being recorded and performed in a way that it would leave an impression of one whole. I wasn’t living in an illusion and I understood that my goal exceeded my abilities and knowledge for now. But I felt that if you think big it’s easier to work towards it.

Second goal was to try in any way possible meet the demands of the lead singer. The singer’s previous album was made in a rush and there was basically no communication between her and the producer. I figured that some things should be agreed upon before the working process started. For example, I didn’t take part in choosing the songs for the album.

In recent years there has been a lot of discussions and debates about where music business is going and the role of a musician in it. Music is accessible now to more people than ever before. I mean that from both the listeners and performers viewpoint. It’s easy to make music using all kinds of computer software programs, to study it because there are lots of schools that provide the education, the availability of study books, music instruments. Also the requirements to musicians have maybe loosened up. From listeners point of view it’s great. Stores are full of music from all around the world, different styles, bands. Internet, public libraries, radios have made music available for everybody. Usually if you have a lot of something it’s as much harder to stick out from all that, so that people would notice you. So no matter what my goals were I, as the producer, had to make the overall package presentable and appealing to as many listeners as possible.

My role in this project was to be co-responsible of everything. At first arranging the music (and composing), being the band leader, including setting up all the logistic part of rehearsing, booking the studio and sound engineers, playing both double-bass, piano and percussion on the album (and piano at the concerts), helping with the design and CD production, communication with copyright institutions, dealers, booking the venues including sound and light crew, ticket sales. Being a producer also meant that I had to attract money and possibilities to market the project and make it happen.

In a way the general third goal was trying to find out if all that was possible to do on my own. I had a fair chance in succeeding because our project was to be released
only in Estonia and already knowing a lot of people working in the business, gave me confidence. Still there was no way of knowing what might happen.

3. General description of the music

I wanted listener to have a picture of the singer standing in the middle, the string quartet and the jazz trio taking turns comping her. At some point working separately, working against each other and at some point of course working together. It sounds strange for me to say that they should work against each other but I did want exactly that. Our stage plan during concerts was supporting the idea of confronting the two worlds (classical and jazz) and then in the end coming together. Kind of to show that eventually they are very alike in the long run.

The music on the album is a mixture of well-known christmas and winter standards like “Silent Night”, “Let it Snow”, What Child is This” and some new-made original compositions like “November”, “Ööviul” and the title song of the album “Pimedas on Valge”. Since the band was quite big, there was a lot of room to try out different sounds and settings. Also we decided that there shouldn’t be any restrictions by style. A pre-decided common line was to try to keep the music as melodic as possible. In spite of setting our goal not to concentrate on the stylistic problems, it is quite easy to recognize different styles or at least where do the ideas come from. For example New Orleans groove in “Let it Snow”, even-eight or bossa feel in “Väljas on Külm Sel Õöl”.

3.1. Description by song

1. “On Üks Rada”(There was a path..) /J. Tätte/- While discussing the selection of songs that would be on the album there was a problem how to glue all of the material together. I had an idea that maybe a short story or a narrative would be appropriate. I decided that the first track would be a story. Like a small fairy tale, something that would be understandable to everybody, that would have a general meaning or some words of wisdom in it. Luckily I happened to know a great Estonian playwright who is very popular and well-known after his simple way of writing. I asked him to think about it and he agreed to write a story that was perfect to the album. It creates a certain mood and lets people know to relax, sit back and enjoy the album. The story is about a conversation between an older lady and a young man where they talk about happiness, loyalty and of course - love.

2. “Pimedas on Valge” (In the Darkness There is Light) /H-L. Võsa/- The title song of the album, an original composition by the singer. A beautiful love song, it was very easy to find the mood of the song because the lyrics are very strong and give a lot of emotion. It was the very first piece of music that I started to work with and it was the most time consuming. Also because it’s a song where everybody is playing and there was a lot of material to write through. In the song there are number of uneven
periods. It is because I felt that I needed to stress some places in the text. A funny fact about the creation of that song was that we never met during the process. I was in Stockholm and the author was in New York and she was singing the melody to me through Skype and I transcribed it. I tried to find a nice balance between pedals and movement. The chorus is based on a three chord loop, maybe the change of key in the bridge is a little unexpected. That song is one of the tracks where the whole band is playing.

3. “Ööviul” (Night Violin) /E. Niit/D. Vaarandi/ An original composition by a friend of mine, Erko Niit, who used the words of a beautiful poem by Debora Vaarandi. I had to make a string arrangement to it. The first plan was to do it only with strings and vocal but during the recording we all felt that it needed some light percussion and bass to boost it up a little. On many occasions I’ve noticed that music composers sometimes “kill the words” by pushing the text into un-natural rhythms. When writing the arrangement to that song, I was really concentrated on the rhythm of Estonian language. I tried to adjust the melody when necessary and all the accents or syncopes came from the natural way of saying those words. I had the string quartet record it with a metronome and on top of that I played bass and some percussion.

4. “November” /M. Tärn/M. Tärn/ - My original composition. I decided it would sound best with only the jazz trio comping. During the studio session I felt that something was missing and I changed the solo background into a double-time “country” feel, it gave another dimension to the overall sound and musicians started to play the slow parts differently. It is also a love song, very personal. When explaining the music to the musicians I found that it’s very important for them to know what he song is about. It’s easier to relate to the material and the outcome sounds more natural in many ways. When recording I had to play the bass first together with drums and on top of that piano. At first I tried the other way around but I automatically started to play bass notes with my left hand and it didn’t sound good. Once again I learned a lot about functionality of instruments in an ensemble. Writing the lyrics was a real challenge in the beginning. Before that song, I had basically no experience in writing lyrics. The song is dedicated to my girlfriend and after a while, all of the lines came naturally. I just needed to relax and think of what do I want to say to her.

5. “Kaitseingel” (Where You can Dream) /M.Cheong/K.Lai/ - It’s a song from the musical “Angels” translated by Leelo Tungal. A song only with the string quartet and vocals. Always, when releasing an album in Estonia, one has to take under consideration the language issue. Majority of people in Estonia like their music in estonian but when an artist wants to go abroad it’s very difficult to break through. My goal was not to conquer international markets, some of the songs on the album are in their original language - english and I knew that some of the listeners would not like it. But my reason for that was because I feel that many of the translations are just not good enough. The essence and the subtle details in the meaning are very often lost in translation. With this song I felt that it is not the case, translation was brilliant and all the nuances were kept, hence our version is in estonian. When recording, we could have had as many takes as we wanted but to my mind that particular piece of music is very sensitive. I wanted to leave in those little “mistakes” that if you listen
close enough it’s possible to imagine how the bows are flying and the singer is giving everything she’s got.

6. “Let it Snow” /J.Styne/S.Cahn/ - A very well-known winter classic, I gave it a fresh New-Orleans type of groove that was perfect for the jazz trio again. The arrangement is based on a clave loop played in a swing feel, also some of the chords were left out which gives a bigger variation effect between verse and chorus. That arrangement was necessary also because the overall mood and sound is very mellow and slow and a bit more energetic groove helps to balance. Originally I planned a trombone solo and fills for that song but it didn’t work out. That’s the sad thing about Estonia, since it’s a small country there are not so many good players. If the few, who are good are busy, it’s impossible to find a musician who could come and fill in quickly. That’s what happened and eventually I had to play a piano solo instead. On the other hand it was very exiting, I wasn’t prepared for that and I had to really pull myself together.

7. “Minu Lemnikud” (My Favourite Things) /R.Rodgers/O. Hammerstein/ - A very well-known musical-theatre song and just as well-known amongst all jazz musicians. Translation by Leelo Tungal, once again caught the true meaning of the song. The first half of the song is more rubato and there is no fixed pulse. The second half is based on a repetitive piano loop in four/four time signature. Once again I realized how important the words are. At first I had another arrangement in mind but when decided that the song would be in estonian, I had to make a new one and again the idea of the groove came from the rhythm of the lyrics. Since I played both bass and piano it was extremely hard to get the first half together, I recorded bass at first with vocals and then on top of that the piano. I treated it as an exercise, an Aebersold track if you like, only without pulse. It took some time but eventually I was satisfied and the outcome seemed more or less natural to me.

8. “What Child is This” /English traditional/ - It’s an old English folk song “Greensleeves” from the 16th century. It became known as a christmas song in the 19th century when W. Dix wrote the lyrics “What Child is This” on top of “Greensleeves”. The long history of the song gave me inspiration for that arrangement, I tried to create a little medieval sounding intro and outro using a long pedal bass or a drone with chords changing on top. My objective was to have clearly recognizable A and B parts. The A part was supposed to be wondering around or asking questions and the B part was supposed to be more powerful and victorious. I felt that the melody dictated everything and I didn’t have to think too much while working with that song.

9. “Väljas on Külm Sel Ööl” (Baby it’s Cold Outside) /F. Loesser/ - Translation by Mart Sander, the only duet of the album. The male part is being sung by a very talented young singer Arno Tamm, known in Estonia more in the folk music scene. I needed to create a little flirtatious atmosphere between singers to get the meaning out of the song. We tried to loosen up the melody and add some narrative elements to make it sound more natural. It has a straight eight bossa feel, my concentration
with that song was on the singers. I felt that I didn’t have to write anything special, more just a comfortable foundation on top of where the singers could sing. That song was used intensively in our marketing plan. It was released as a singel in the radios and I pushed it to a couple of TV shows to promote the album. On that track there are no strings. I invited a good friend of mine, a great musician Virgo Sillamaa, to play some nylon string guitar besides drums, bass and piano.

10. “Christmas Song” /M. Torme/B. Wells/ - A very famous christmas standard, usually people know it from Nat King Cole’s repertoire. It’s always hard to make a new arrangement to a song that is extremely well-known and “sacred” to a lot of people. I decided to have only the strings behind vocals. It was the very first song we recorded and it took more time than usual because of tuning issues. All members of the string quartet work daily at the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and their standard tuning is A = 442 Hz, where as on the album they had to play 440 Hz. After some playing the song through with the piano(tuned in 440) the problem solved and they adjusted like true professionals. I tried to create a big sound for the strings, composed a part for them where they could play with a lot of expression and dynamics.

11. “Püha Öö” (Silent Night) /F. Gruber/F. Mohr/ -Translation by K.A. Hermann. Again very well-known christmas song. I extended the period in some places because I wanted to give room to the words to take effect. Also I composed some middle parts to demolish the feel of verse after verse till the end. My goal was not to add something completely new but to use more of the material that is already in the song. Both, jazz trio and string quartet, are playing on the track.

4. Arranging and rehearsals

All of the arranging for that CD took place between January 1 till May 1 2010. I used Sibelius 6 program both in the school’s computer rooms as well as on my own computer. Often the computer room was busy, closed or the computers were not working properly due to previous misuse. In the end I used only my personal computer.

Since I had no previous experience in such work I did some research before I started. I bought many CD’s with string quartet music and also I have good friends in Estonia who are professional classical musicians. Many of them play or have played in a string quartet. I met with them several times during my arranging process to ask about expression and technique markings as well as some suggestions about things that were comfortable to play on their instruments. In many places I used the knowledge I had about jazz arranging for horns. Especially block chords method. I started out with writing something with that technique and surprisingly out of that came many very interesting ideas. For example the song “Christmas Song”, I was really struggling with an interlude for the quartet. I decided to write out some bars in block chord method as an exercise and see if that would give me any ideas. It did, eventually I left one bar of that exercise in the final version.
During that time period I tried very different working schedules. In the beginning I was sort of waiting the inspiration to come and then run to work and do it as long I had the energy. I understood after few weeks that it wasn’t the most productive way of doing things. Next step was to make myself a strict schedule, every day I would work minimum 2 hours with the project. Whenever I didn’t have so many ideas I worked with other things related to the project. For example I would already prepare the score for the next song. Usually it helped and my work became more efficient. Most of my playing, practicing and also arranging takes place at the piano. I had a routine of working out some ideas. Harmonies or rhythms in the mornings, during my bass practice time, and then after lunch I would go and try to write them down. Of course I couldn’t follow my schedule at all times perfectly because sometimes the practice rooms were busy, but in general it made things progress more steadily and I had my arranging part of the work done before the deadline.

An important thing I learned, when putting together a project, was that it’s good to learn the history of the song and where it comes from before you start arranging it. Maybe it’s not really necessary to do a research about every song and who has been playing it but in general I think it will broaden your view as arranger. Often you end up learning music from a sheet and pay no deeper attention to it. I can imagine that once in a while it comes in handy because then you are free from the history so to speak. You can arrange the music however you like and the result might be something fresh. But for me if I put myself into the position of an arranger I’d like to do some research on the material and so I did.

Another part of arranging took place during the rehearsals. Usually when you work with jazz musicians you almost expect them to take part with their ideas in the creation process whereas working with classical musicians it is generally a different story. If there was a question or a mistake in the score, or maybe some bars of the song just didn’t sound so good, I was supposed to make executive decisions on the spot. The first rehearsal was like a small disaster. I couldn’t react quickly enough and give easy solutions for the musicians. I had left a number of small mistakes in the scores and all of them together caught me off guard. Also, as a band leader, dealing with social problems was hard. Musicians were late to the rehearsal, during practicing they made a lot of jokes and basically didn’t take the whole thing seriously enough. Sometimes Estonia’s problem is that it’s very small. If you are an active player you end up knowing almost everybody who are active in the same line of work. So everybody becomes friends and working with friends could create some tensions. In some situations people take things personally when they should take them professionally. After our first rehearsal, I learned my lesson and eventually we developed a mutual trust between each other. I wrote them a very honest e-mail, about how I thought we should proceed. We were not to mix up our work time with our leisure time. We had limited amount of time for the rehearsals and being late or not prepared to work, was not an option. Music wise, we agreed that if I couldn’t provide the solutions, the quartet would offer their version and I would follow. In other cases it was vice-versa, they had never tried some of the things I suggested and then they would trust me and follow my ideas. In the end we always found a solution that was acceptable for all of us.

I learned that if you write an arrangement you really must know it inside out, before you can send it to musicians. Also, that it’s always good to double-check the whole
score a couple of times. When working with a big group, time becomes more valuable. In my project there was all together eight people and it’s hard to maintain the concentration during rehearsals when there are mistakes in the score and you have to stop the music to correct them.

5. Musicians and recording session

Starting a new ensemble is quite challenging. It might seem easy, you call some musicians, write some music, rehearse and play. In my experience the human factor plays an extremely big role. You could have the best musicians in the world but together it will not sound natural and comfortable. At the same time you could take maybe not so technically advanced players but putting them together makes the band sound perfect. Another important factor is psychology, how people get along with each other. I was lucky enough to get both, members of the string quartet Prezioso, work in Estonia’s National Symphony Orchestra and the rhythm section consists of great Estonian pop/jazz musicians. We were friends already before the project and during the process our relationship grew stronger.

Musicians in the string quartet represent the young generation in estonian classical music. They are about my age (I’m 27 years old) and they share, more or less, my views about music. All of them very active in estonian music scene, they play in various projects as much as possible outside their everyday work in the symphony orchestra. Other musicians on the CD are part of younger generation in estonian pop/jazz scene. They work as freelance musicians. Main reason for choosing them was my personal connection. All of them are good friends with me and I knew that I could count on their dedication and advice. We set the rules in the beginning that we wouldn’t confuse our friendship to our professional relationship and everything worked out fine.

6. Production

I started planning everything more or less at the same time when I started to arrange the music. In the very beginning I decided that a project of that size and only one person ahead of it, needed a very carefully planned schedule. Since it was my first time doing that kind of work I deliberately left some “buffer” zones in that schedule. I wanted to have some extra time in case something went wrong.

My plan was:
- January-April, arrange and compose and have the music ready for playing.
- May-August, rehearsals, recording
- August-October, mixing, mastering and details concerning design and artwork.
- Beginning of November, CD production
- 18th of November, official press release
If I think back at the whole process I see that every step was progressively a little more challenging and more difficult to achieve. Everything started according to my plans, I had some minor difficulties and motivational problems when arranging but nothing that I couldn’t overcome. I was responsible only for myself.

The second stage, involving playing the music, was already a little more challenging. Not even the playing part of it, but I was also responsible for all the logistics. I had to book the rehearsal rooms, the studio. Besides, dealing with eight different personalities during organizing takes some extra effort. Especially when people come from different musical background, one must be careful not to step on any toes. I learned that even a small thing like providing some drinking water, coffee or a piece of chocolate would make everybody relaxed and more focused on our mutual goal! I also discovered that the line between, when to push hard and when to take a break, is quite thin. The overall impression was still very enjoyable.

6.1 Recording

When choosing the studio where to record, I wanted to make everybody feel comfortable. We needed a big room in order to make the acoustic instruments sound good. I chose the Estonian National Radio studios. It’s the biggest studio space in Estonia and it’s the place where they usually record orchestras and Big Bands. Since I’ve recorded there before, I already knew the engineers and I knew about the possibilities. With my piano background I can appreciate a good piano. It is the one thing that is really longed for amongst Estonia’s pop and jazz musicians. To my knowledge there is no studio in Estonia that has a great piano. We used the one they had and it was good enough.

People working at radio studios are used to record string orchestras and one of my general goals was to keep that sound also in our project. I had the material mixed in the same place, mainly due to financial restrictions. I know that it’s not maybe the most common thing to do but I insisted on taking part of the process. Mainly due to educational purposes. We agreed with the sound engineer that I would have a lot to say about the outcome. The mastering took place in another studio.

6.2 CD Cover

The cover photo of the album was actually taken in the beginning of the process, in February 2010. It was done so because the weather conditions were really extreme in Estonia that winter and there was just enormous amount of snow everywhere. The cover and other pictures were supposed to produce a calm winter vibe and the photo shooting took place in a forest in North-Estonia and at the photographers home studio. The idea for the general design of the album came from postcards. Every year people send Christmas greetings to each other and I decided it’s good to use the same idea on the CD. We had our designer make a few different versions of the album cover. I asked one of them to be similar to a postcard. It turned out nice, when you open the CD, people would see an imitation of an envelope with a signature of the singer. Also it served a purpose of marketing the product better. People could buy
the album, write their own christmas wishes inside and under that would be the
signature of the singer.
The amount of the e-mails concerning design details and everything else too of
course, was enormous. It was normal for me to get 30-50 e-mails a day during
October/November and all of them had to be answered so there would not be any
delays. Before that I had no idea about the details of design work. Our designer
asked me a lot of questions about font sizes and color intensity and things I had
never heard about before. Very often before answering an e-mail I had to do some
research in the internet about the things I was asked because I didn’t have a clue
what they were saying.

6.3 CD Production

CD production took a little more effort as I expected. In order to send the master files
to the printing/pressing company one must show them the confirmation from the
Authors Union. So that all of the rights are reserved and all the fees are payed. The
album had a couple of internationally well-known winter and christmas standards and
to some of them we had new translations made. I didn’t imagine that handling all of
the paperwork would take so much time. For example with one track (Baby it’s Cold
Outside) we had it translated into estonian and to get the copyright cleared out I sent
e-mails to a copyright office in L.A. who said I should write to London and they
forwarded me to Riga. Then it turned out I should call to Amsterdam. Finally when I
reached the right person she went off to take a holiday for a week. Everything worked
out but it shows clearly just how unexpected and time consuming these small details
could turn out to be. And it was very good that I had left some extra time to work
them out. After getting all the copyrights and paying all the necessary fees I sent the
material to the printing/pressing company and everything was ready in 2 weeks.

I had a fixed release date so my obligation was to make sure that the CD’s would be
in the hands of the dealer and through them in stores all around Estonia at the right
time. I used one of three big dealer companies and to a couple of small stores I sold
directly. At first the plan was to try to do everything on my own but many of the big
stores and markets don’t communicate directly with the musicians but take all of their
music from the dealers. So I had to change my plan, otherwise I would have lost
considerable amount of potential buyers and income because I would have had only
a small number of small music shops where the album would have been available.

Finding financial cover to fund a project that size, is challenging. We decided that we
would try to avoid sponsors. If you accept money from a sponsor one must be very
careful about agreeing on terms. Usually sponsors are companies and they have to
look after their own best interest. Goals of the sponsors may not always match the
goals of the artist. The costs of making that album were between 70 000-90 000.-
EEK. 80% of that came from my private funds and savings. Other 20% came from
co-producer Hanna-Liina Võsa. On the year of making that album, I was constantly
saving money from everywhere. I managed to cover all of the investments by the end
of december.
6.4 Release

For the presentation I booked a nice piano lounge bar in the centre of Tallinn, rented some lights and the PA system and we did a small 25 minute concert for selected guests. I invited friends and families of the musicians, everybody else who was involved in our project, 5-10 journalists and a couple of TV networks. Some of my friends agreed to bake cakes and cookies and all kinds of different snacks so I didn’t have to order catering. Another friend of mine, who owns a sound and light rental company, gave me all of the necessary equipment for free. It helped a lot since by that time I had spent all of my money.

Our official press release was on the 18th of November 2010. The event got some coverage from Estonian newspapers but not a lot. I decided immediately that I have to work hard for a couple of weeks to promote it. I was able to fix some TV and magazine interviews where Hanna-Liina could talk about her new album. I had limited time because the CD is very seasonal and it sells only around Christmas. By the end of November we reached a point where financially half of the investment had paid off.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion I must admit that I have never in my life learned so much out of one project. I understand that usually all that work is being done by a team or at least a couple of people but my goal was to try to make it on my own as much as possible. And I had the freedom to do so. Every single step towards the final destination was extremely educational and through that experience my knowledge and understanding about music business grew extensively. The project was a success in terms of the amount of questions asked and answers answered.

The singer was satisfied too. For her it was the first time being involved in that kind of a project. She is a professional musical theatre singer/actress and usually works in musical theatre shows. That project was like a jump to an unknown territory for both of us. After recording the material she confessed that it was one of the most difficult sessions in her life. Mainly because it was hard to fit in naturally into new soundscapes. Also because the material was very new. She would have liked to have some more time for rehearsals.

Thinking back now I’m not sure if I would do it again all by myself. It was very exiting at times and very frustrating at other times. The one thing that I think I learned most is that it is important to surround yourself with good people. By good people I mean musicians because I can’t say that I did my project because of the money. Before we started, after all the calculations, it was clear that there was a risk of not earning anything. Projects of that size are not very common in Estonia, especially without sponsors.
I realized that all of that business around music is actually supposed to serve the interest of music and musicians. On many occasions some managers and promoters seem to forget it and everything transforms into a pointless song and dance around money. I can say that I was lucky and I was able to gather a number of great musicians and great personalities around the project and everybody did their best. I plan to continue my work with that ensemble because it was one of the most inspiring project I have been involved with.

8. Collaborators

Hanna-Liina Võsa - vocals
Marti Tärn - double-bass, piano, percussion
Ahto Abner - drums
Virgo Sillamaa - guitars

String quartet Prezioso:
Hanna-Liis Nahkur - I violin
Mari-Katrina Suss - II violin
Anne Ilves - Viola
Andreas Lend - violincello

Recorded/mixed at “Eesti Raadio” Studio by Tanel Klesment
Mastered by Glen Pilvre

Cover photo by Maris Ojasuu
Designed by Kristiina Koger

All arrangements by Marti Tärn
Produced by Marti Tärn and Hanna-Liina Võsa
9. Picture material

**PIMEDAS ON VALGE**

**Keelge siht: olen läsnud lumel räkskel jaljel maas käs ei keeli teda näinud vool kui jalle salaja**

**Vaiksele, vaiksete maapend hindab mets om üttu üppunud tõuel on väik - Lind ei lendda Köök kui unine suukunud...**

---

**Let it snow! Let it snow!**

**Hanna-Liisa Vissilaid**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Liisa Vissilaid, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Valjas on kivism all õis**

**Hanna-Liisa Vissilaid**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Spetsialne laulu: Jõulualett**

**Hanna-Liisa Vissilaid**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Liisa Vissilaid, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Raudpinnad**

**Hanna-Liisa Vissilaid**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Liisa Vissilaid, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Kõik lood saadud Marti Tarnil:**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Koos Marti Tarni:**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Koos Marti Tarni:**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Koos Marti Tarni:**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Keetleli laiuvarjele**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Kasserol**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Klaidiga**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**

---

**Sültil**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa**

**Koos Marti Tarni**

**Hanna-Leen Vosa, Marti Tarn, klaver, kontrabas, perkussioonid, Tomi Pentelik**