Examination Work
2008

Jonathan Fritzén
”Love Birds”

Piano + All instruments and vocals

Supervisor: Ragnhild Sjögren
Masters Degree In Music
Department of Jazz Music

Kungl. Musikhögskolan i Stockholm
# Part 1 - PREPARATIONS

**Introduction:**

**Practicing The Instruments:**
- Drums: .................................................. 4
- Bass: ............................................................ 5
- Vocals: .......................................................... 6
- Other instruments: ........................................... 7

**The Songs:** .......................................................... 7

**Songwriting Routines:** ............................................. 9

**4 Songs In Focus:** ..................................................... 10

**Choosing Equipment:** ............................................. 12
- Computer: Mac ibook ........................................ 12
- Firewire interface: Apogee Ensemble .................. 14
- Instruments: .................................................... 14
- Microphones: .................................................... 15

# Part 2 – RECORDING THE ALBUM

**Piano** ................................................................ 16

**Everything Else:** ...................................................... 18

# Part 3 – GETTING THE ALBUM READY

**Mixing/Producing:** ................................................. 19

**Piano Sound:** .......................................................... 19

**Psychological ”problems” with mixing:** ................. 20

**Track order:** ............................................................ 21

**Mastering:** ............................................................. 22

**Artwork:** ................................................................. 23

**Conclusion:** ............................................................. 24

**Bibliography/References** ........................................... 27

**Appendix** ................................................................. 28
- A1 Temple Of Dreams ............................................. 29
- A2 One Night With You ........................................... 30
- A3 Lovebirds .......................................................... 31
- A4 Always Be My Lover ........................................... 32
Part 1 - PREPARATIONS

Introduction:

After four years at the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm, I was up for a choice. I could either finish and leave with a Bachelor degree in Music, or I could continue for two years more to take a Masters degree. At the present time, I had a dream that I wanted to make a CD playing all the instruments myself on it, and music that would probably be categorized as "Smooth Jazz". First a little brief information about "Smooth Jazz":

Smooth jazz is also sometimes referred to as new adult contemporary music, and is generally described as a genre of music that uses instruments traditionally associated with jazz, and stylistic influences drawn from pop, soul and R&B. Since the late 1980s and into the 1990s, it has become successful as a radio format. Despite its apparently large following, there has been something of a backlash against the genre, mostly from “jazz purist” who consider its recordings bland, overly commercial and not jazz. In my opinion, I am not sure if it can be called jazz, because to me jazz is about interacting in real time with other musicians, but in one sense I am interacting with myself (the pre-recorded material), and responding to that in “real time” while recording, but it is still to the extent that I would not call it “jazz”. Though there is quite a lot of improvisation on the album, and I will talk more about this later, and about my term to describe this way of working, which I call “Layered Improvisation”.

The average smooth jazz track is on the "down tempo" (most widely played tracks are in the 90–105 BPM range) side, layering a lead, melody-playing instrument (saxophones and guitar are usually the most popular) over a backdrop that tends to consist of programmed rhythms and various synthesizers.

Smooth jazz is generally considered background music, whereas "serious" jazz is seen as demanding the listener's undivided attention.
For my own sake, I wanted to make an album that would be interesting listening to from the beginning until the end, but I wanted to make it simple in terms of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic content, but focusing on working with other details (such as small melody variations, subtle synth effects) that would always keep the music interesting, and have a high artistic quality to it.

Smooth jazz artist are among others, Kenny G and David Sanborn (sax), George Benson and Peter White (guitar), Nathan East, Gary Grainger (bass), female performers are Keiko Matsui, Candy Dulfer, Sade and Brenda Russell.

Two of my main influences have been young contemporary artists saxophone player Jimmy Sommers, and pianist Brian Culbertson. I will talk more about how they influenced me later in this work.

Anyway, I was determined to make this album, and I thought that if I had the possibilities to spend my time at school, taking courses in piano, bass and vocal, and also in sound engineering, learning how to mix, how record good sound etc, that would be a perfect opportunity for me to learn a lot, and also giving me a chance to make this record.

Since I am a multi instrumentalist, this was a chance for me to do something creative, taking advantage of my skills. I really enjoyed getting a chance to really focus on playing these different instruments, and really focusing on the specific parts that they where going to play. One of the reasons I decided to play everything myself, was because I was always hearing different instruments “playing” inside my head, like specific bass melodies or drum patterns, and I felt that it would be easier and more accurate for me to get these parts done myself, than to bring in other musicians.

The main reason I am making this album is for my own sake, but I also really hope that it might become a hit, and sell lots of albums! Since this music has it’s biggest number of followers in the USA, I hope to get it released there, but it would also be fun if I could help expand the “Smooth Jazz listening circuit” in Europe.
Practicing The Instruments:

I really had to make a good long term plan how I was going to spend my time practicing each instrument, because I had to understand that I was not going to become such a good bass player or drummer as I am a piano player in two years time (perhaps if I did nothing else but practiced), so I had to decide early on what I was going to focus on. I really wanted to album to have some good grooves between the bass and drums, and this was difficult in the sense that I could only play one instrument at a time, so if I was playing bass and trying to write a good bass part to go with the drums, I maybe needed to go back and redo the drums to fit with the new bass part. And then when I was sitting at the drums, I maybe felt that I needed to change the bass once again to fit with the changes I was doing while playing drums. This would have been easier if I had done it with a real person playing the other instrument, but I used my sequencer program Logic that helped me a lot with this.

Drums:

I play the drums on two of the album tracks. Getting the chance to record drums was really fun for me, because drums was my first instrument, and was still my main instrument when I was attending Sodra Latin’s high school for music in Stockholm, and since then I haven’t really got a chance playing so much. I decided to record with my digital drum kit instead of my acoustic one, because I was hearing different kind of sounds in my head, that I wouldn’t be able to get with my acoustic kit. But it was interesting getting back to practicing again, because surprisingly all the coordination and basic technique was still there, but I had to work on getting the "flow" back again. But since I have gotten the chance to play with so many great drummers over the years, I had developed an ear how I want a drummer to play, and took this knowledge with me when I now was doing it again myself. In my opinion, the main job of a drummer is to lay down a good groove, which has the intended emotional feeling the
song needs. It is crucial to follow the rhythmic flow of the melody, and compliment it in every possible way, so the music is always flowing forward.

**Bass:**

When I was 13 years old, I heard the bass legend Marcus Miller for the first time, and after hearing him I immediately decided I wanted to learn how to play bass, mainly wanting to know how to play so called "slap bass". Soon after this, we had a spring break from school, and my mom got a hold of an electric bass for me. I literally did nothing else for a week than practiced bass, and after a week I could play a little "slap bass". After about two weeks of bass playing, I got a gig at one of the clubs in Stockholm called "Mosebacke", playing with some flute players, and except for playing slap bass, I could barely play at all, so this was an interesting experience! I did not continue playing as much as I did the first week, but some years later I got a chance to do a few gigs with the bass at places like Jazz Club Fasching, and at the City Hall in Stockholm.

When it got time to start preparing for the record, I decided I wanted to buy a really good bass, which I could use for a long time, and also could deliver the smooth kind of bass sound I wanted to have for this record. Nathan East is one of my favorite bass players, and watching a video with him showed me he was using Yamaha basses. I have always liked Yamaha products when it has come to keyboards, and when I was cruising around on the internet I saw that he had designed his own basses for Yamaha. I decided to order one of them without even trying it out, being sure that this was the kind of sound I wanted. I came to this conclusion, partly because I had tried out dozens of basses at music shops, and feeling disappointed after every time I was there. When the bass finally arrived from Germany, I plugged it in, and it was almost exactly the sound I had in my mind! Lucky for me, because it wasn’t exactly cheap…

I realized quickly, that if I was going to play bass on an entire album, playing many different grooves and using different techniques, there was only one thing to do – practice. So I stared practicing 30-60 minutes almost every day in the week, for about 1.5 years. This ended up being a wise choice, because the bass is so important in this
kind of music, and it needs to sound solid, have almost perfect timing and the right feeling. Hopefully I will get a chance to play more bass in the future, now that I have spent so much time learning it thoroughly.

Vocals:

Learning how to sing was probably the only event in the project that was completely new to me. Growing up, it felt totally natural to sit and play whichever instrument was available at the time, but singing has always felt very distant to me. Even after I started taking vocal lessons for about a year ago, it still felt very uncomfortable singing, but eventually as I developed, I started to enjoy it more and more, because I was starting to feel I could (in my limited world) express something.

It was exactly this thing that took quite some time for me to realize during the process of learning how to sing, that I needed to put some emotion in my practicing, in order for me to develop in a right way. The main buffer for me that I had to overcome, was not to focus so much on technique, but more relying on my inner musical sensibility. The reason I got so focused on the technical part was due to my deep knowledge of technique on other instruments. I know that if you develop a good understanding for how an instrument works and gain control over it, you have the possibilities of being very expressive if you want. So what I was trying to do initially, was applying advanced vocal techniques without basically never sung a note in my life, and this resulted in frustration, because mentally I could understand the theory behind it, but due to so little experience, nothing was happening in a noticeable developing way.

So what I ended up doing, was putting on some songs I like in my studio, and started singing to them, and intentionally trying to forget everything I had learned about vocal technique. After I few weeks I had developed much quicker than I had done before, and soon the things I had learned from my teacher became clear to me, NOT because I had theoretically understood them, but because I had FELT them in my body, and HEARD the results from a musical standpoint. This was a big difference, and very reliving.
I ended up doing vocals on more tracks on the album than I had planned from the beginning, partly because I have found much joy in singing!

Other instruments:

I also ended up doing a few guitar parts and a flute part. I had not really played these instruments so much before, but I could get done pretty good anyway. I ended up using a similar technique while playing guitar as I would play bass, using two fingers to pluck the strings instead of using a pick. The flute I had played as a child, so I just remembered a few notes, and this was perfect for one of the songs I had with a real simple melody, that worked out good with the flute.

The Songs:

The songs have really been the basic material for how the arrangements and the improvisations evolved. During the process, I have probably written over forty songs, more or less finished, until I really found the way how I wanted to write music in this “genre”. The songs I wrote in the beginning, where more complex in terms of choice of harmonies and song structure. Of the songs that are on the album, most of them have very diatonic chords, but sometimes contain several key changes in the same song. Eventually, I ended up writing most of the songs using the traditional pop song format: Vers, Chorus, Vers, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus, Piano solo till fade. Of these forty songs, I ended up having 11 on the album. The most important thing though was to write strong melodies, which easily could be understood, but without being monatonic. Figuring out when to repeat an idea, and when it is time to move on is extremely difficult, but looking at the final result, I feel I succeeded pretty well with this.

One thing which I had to develop, was writing songs that would work with only me performing them. This may sound simple, but in the beginning when I was writing stuff for this album, I realized after I had wrote a song, the tune maybe would have sounded better if the melody was played by a trumpet, or a saxophone, and because I
do not play these horns and had made up my mind that I was going to play all the instruments myself, I had to discard these. So after that, I would always make sure that whatever I was writing, I would always have a clear idea which instrument would be playing a particular melody, if it was the piano, guitar or a synthesizer and so on. I also made sure not to write anything that would be way too difficult for me to play. I also wanted lyrics on a few of the songs, but very few, to avoid "telling a story". The lyrics I wrote are basically "one liner" sentences that repeat themselves, which leaves it very open to interpretation and creating your own fantasy.

In terms of improvisation, the idea I had from the beginning of the project changed pretty much from the end result. My first plan was to have long solos, featuring different instruments, like piano, guitar, even bass and drums. The further I came in the process, the more I realized I wanted a different approach to this. I ended up focusing on the melodies of the song, and doing subtle and small improvisational variations on these, and the parts that are actually "only solo parts", ended up being much shorter, because I didn’t want to steal too much attention from the melodies. The interesting thing is though, that I think people who listen to the album for the first time, will not experience that there is so much spontaneity going on, but compared to other more "traditional" jazz albums I have done, there is probably more improvisation on Love Birds, because I am doing these small improvisational things on every instrument! Even some of the synthesizers that sound really programmed and fixed, where created in real time, because I was reacting with synthesis effects (such as cutoff and resonance) against what was already recorded. Using my own words, in terms of spontaneity, I would called the technique I applied as "Layered Improvisation" (Always reacting on what was previously recorded, and developing it from there).

The Master of doing these subtle changes is pianist, and multi instrumentalist Brian Culbertson. His music sounds so simple at first, but the more you listen to his work, the more finer details you hear, and how he adds instruments and sounds at just the "right" time, to keep you interested all the way from the start of the song until the end. He is also the master of writing simple and good melodies, and when he plays the
same melody a second time, he will play it with one or two changes, keeping to the original idea, but making a change so it does not sound static in a wrong way.

He said once (Radio Interview 2004) "I like concept albums". This really got to me. It made me feel the importance of having the piano in focus throughout the album; even though there are other instruments or vocals doing something, you should always get the feeling that the piano is in the center. This way of thinking made me eliminate some Rhodes solos, and other keyboard stuff and place the piano more in the center.

As mentioned earlier, saxophonist Jimmy Sommers has been a big influence on me. He is a good player, and I admire his ability to make records, that are very diverse and varied, bringing in a lot of different musicians to participate on his albums. This was something that I was not going to do, but I kind of had that idea in mind; to try and make a CD with a high level of variation. This included being really careful about choosing tempos (I could literally sit for hours, changing the tempo up and down 1 bpm, sometimes even a half, to find where the song feels the best) because depending on which tempo a song goes in, it gives a very different artistic expression in my opinion.

**Songwriting Routines:**

Some of the songs on the album I basically wrote in "realtime", while others took more than a year before they reached their finished version. Looking back at the end result, I would not say that the quality of the songs had anything to do with how long time they took to write. During my years at school, I have studied the art of composition, that has given me tools to develop my songwriting, and help me out when I feel I am "stuck". This made it very easy to pick up a song that had been lying around for a long time, and continue from where I last was. This is also basically easy for me to do, because most of the songs are written in a "intelligent" way, partly due to the fact that I have studied things like counterpoint, motiv development, form structure etc. Sometimes I had to struggle, but I could always find a way to fix the "problem". I feel it is important that you don’t let anything pass you by, just because you can’t find a solution to the problem. There is a very interesting book called "Songwriters On Songwriting" (1991), where different songwriters talk about their
composing routines. It is interesting seeing how different everybody is in terms of how they look on "inspiration", and on how and when you can compose music. This book really clarified the idea I already had, that there are very different ways of writing songs, and that no way is necessarily better than the other. Some of them would sit everyday and write, no matter if they were in the mood for it or not, while some others only wrote when they felt "inspired". If you look at two of the great composers of classical music, Beethoven could sit and struggle for endless hours on how he wanted a measure to be written, while Mozart had a much more quicker tempo, and had a different "easier" approach to composing.

4 Songs In Focus
(Concerning songwriting routines, and general song writing techniques described earlier in this work, they apply to all of the described songs mentioned in this chapter)

Temple Of Dreams (See Appendix A1)

Temple Of Dreams starts out with a figure played by a rhodes. It’s an eight-note figure, and covers the chord structure, that is basically the same through the entire song. The figure come in the intro, and is also played when every chorus comes. After 8 bars, the verse comes, and it is a piano melody, leaving a lot of space for the drums and bass groove to shine through. After another 8 bars comes the chorus, and it is a piano "melody riff" that kind of repeats itself during the entire chorus. The chorus with the piano melody combined with the rhodes part, really are the essentials in this song. It’s a funky song all the way thorough! The bass on the CD is me playing on my Yamaha Bass, the drums are from Stylux RMX, and most of the sounds are from Logics build it sounds. Here the EV88 rhodes piano played a major part in the song. After reading the "Logic Studio (2007)" manual, I realized there were a lot of functions that I wasn’t aware, that you could use to alter the rhodes sound, such as Bell tone, Decay and Release and Stereo Intensity.
One Night With You (See Appendix A2)

This Song used a different intro than the one notated here. The chorus is the hooky part in this song (from bar 9). It’s a strong melody, with a very syncopated rhythm. The entire chorus took basically one minute to write, and after about six months I added a verse, which cannot be seen here. The verse follows the same 10 bar form as the chorus, and after a while a bridge enters, which is completely different from the rest of the song, in terms of melody and chords, but after that the first melody comes back, and gets transposed twice in the end for a powerful effect. This song has a very USA, west coast sounding touch to it. On this song I used my digital drumset, played electric bass, guitar, piano and some vocals. Once again the "Logic Studio” manual became very helpful, especially helping me learn about one of the built in plug-ins in Logic that I used on the vocals called "Stereo Spread”. What it does basically, is that it help you alter sound so that the perceived stereo image is wider than before. I could hear the differences it made, but could not understand what it was doing until I read the "Logic Studio” manual. What is does, is that it takes frequencies bands from middle frequency and sends then to the left and right channels. This is done alternately – middle frequencies to the left channel, middle frequencies to the right channel, and so on. This really helps the vocals to sound "bigger” and more filling sounding.

Love Birds (See Appendix A3)

This song might have been the first song I wrote, that made it on to the album. If you analyze many of my songs, you find very often that a lot of the main melody notes are either the 7, 9, or 11 in the chord. This is no exception in this song. It lands very often on these notes, and after "hitting” them, I leave space so they can "ring". This melody basically started out only with the interval in bar 6, and after that I started moving it around, and adding to it, expanding the interval etc. There is a bridge to the song that comes a few minutes in that is different in terms of melody, but except for that part the entire song is based around this first building block. It’s a very soft, smooth ballad type av song. On this song there are lots of delay effects on certain instruments. Once
again, I used the "Logic Studio” manual to learn about how the built-in delays work, because adding delay to sounds can really be a creative way of forming musical expression, on all types of instruments and sounds.

**Always Be Me Lover** *(See Appendix A4)*

Since I was so into "Slap Bass”, I felt like I wanted a song featuring the bass where it slaps. So the first thing I wrote in this song was the bassline, and after that I started to add chords and figuring out the drum part afterwards. This song has a little different approach in dynamics and intensity than most of the other ones: Instead of the chorus (bar 10 –17) being the most hooky and energetic part, I wanted the chorus to feel softer, and almost like it was leading back to the bass groove (bar 2-9). This is also a very funky song. On this song I of course play "Slap Bass”, along with my digital drum kit, and also piano and vocals. On the vocals I used a vocoder effect, that I learned to use from reading the "Logic Studio” manual. A vocoder drastically changes the sound of a voice, by using different filters, and this type of sound can be heard on lots of tracks of music from the last 40 years. It has also been used in many films, like on the voice of "Darth Vader” from the Star Wars movie’s.

**Choosing Equipment:**

How was I going to get the kind of stuff, to express myself with the kind of sound I heard in my head? This was an extremely time demanding part, because I needed to find everything from reverbs, to which electric bass I preferred. I spend a lot of time on the website harmonycentral.com where they review lots of products, and have user discussions where people from all over the world talked about specific products, and their experience with them. I will go through what I ended up using:

**Computer: Mac ibook.**

I made the entire album on my little Mac book! This was a big mistake in one way. I would never imagined how much computer process power was needed to do
something like this. After time when the songs were getting more filled up with different instruments and effects, the computer would crash, or work very slowly, taking several minutes just to open some of the songs. If I had known before that it would have gone so slow, I would have bought a faster computer. Though having a laptop was extremely great, and almost a necessity, because I ended up working with the project on so many different places. When I recorded piano for example, I just brought my computer along, and put it right next to the piano. Also, when I occasionally mixed with somebody else, mostly Erik Metall who works at the school, I would just bring my laptop, and we could mix directly in my computer, having all the settings and everything stored right in my hard disk.

**Software:** Logic Pro 8, Waves plug-ins, Melodyne Studio, Stylus RMX, Atmosphere, Easy Drummer with Claustrophobic expansion pack, Strings Essentials.

The software played an important roll in shaping the sound of the album. I had never worked with Logic before, because I had always been using it’s rival Cubase even before I was a teenager. So it took some time learning Logic, because even though they are similar, there are certain differences that had to be relearned. I spend a lot of time “hanging around” on the forum [http://logicprohelp.com/](http://logicprohelp.com/) where you can learn a lot just by reading what other people have written about specific problems, or just general tips they feeling like sharing with the rest of the world. People on the forum helped me out with such things as “how to cut and paste music the best way”, “organizing tracks in Logic”, and “saving memory”. The Waves plug-ins I used mainly for eq, reverb and compression. They are very good sounding plug-ins compared to Logic’s built in ones, and I used them on a lot of the instruments, especially instruments that are more in focus, like piano, drums etc Meloyne Studio I used to work with audio, mainly fixing up tuning on the bass and vocals. Stylus RMX I used almost on every track for adding drums and percussion stuff. It is very easy to work with, and I had full control over every little sound that I could need to modify. Atmosphere I used to create synth pads, effects and similar stuff. It is a very good sounding program, but the problem I had was the it did not run very good on my new computer, so on a few of the tracks where Atmosphere played a heavy part the music, I would make a stereo track on my new computer, bring it to my old computer where
Atmosphere was running better, make the sounds there, and then transfer everything back once again to my new computer, where I could further work on the track from that point. Easy Drummer with Claustrophobic expansion pack I used with my digital drum kit. Stylus RMX has more synth type sounding drums, while the Claustrophobic expansion pack has a more natural sounding drum tone to it, but still with a modern sound to it (very compressed sounding drums). Strings Essentials I used for strings. It has incredible sounding acoustic strings, where you can control everything from the particular strings instrument you want to use, to articulations, dynamics, attack and release time, tremolos, basically everything that a string player can do. I ended up using the strings quite a lot, because I felt they sounded so good!

**Firewire interface:** Apogee Ensemble

I bought the Ensemble because I heard it was the best quality Firewire interface on the market at the present time, and because it was exclusively designed for Mac computers, and digitally controllable with Logic. This was partly true, because the quality of the mic preamps and the A/D converter sounded incredible, but I was having problems getting it to run properly at times on my Mac. It was crashing, making harsh noises and felt very unreliable. This was a disappointment, because I spend the extra money on hoping that I would get a good product, that would run smoothly, and something that would let me focus on the music, and not on technical problems. I ended up using it anyway, even though it had its problems.

**Instruments:**


The instruments I used felt good. I did not spend so much time finding the "right" guitar and flute (one of the reasons to this was that I decided to add a flute line in the last second, so I did not have time to experiment with different models) because these instruments did not play such a major part in the recording. For all the synthesizer
sounds, I ended up using a lot of software sounds that were built in Logic and the software I purchased, but I ended up using my hardware synths for a few of the sounds, that I did feel I could find in Logic. I was also planning on using my Nord Stage synth for a lot of the Rhodes and organ parts, but due to lack of time, I ended up using Logics own Rhodes and Organ sounds, which can sound pretty good after a bit of editing.

Microphones:

2. B&K 4011 condenser microphones, 1 B&K 4006 condenser microphone, 1 Neumann U87 condenser microphone.

I did not know all that much about microphones before working on this project, and I can’t say that I know all that much now that it is finished either, but before I was to record piano, me and sound engineer Erik Metall took a half day and went to the large concert hall at school, and tried different microphones, and different placements, and we also discussed how much we were going to isolate the sound using dampers, because the concert hall is fairly large in size, and I wanted a distinct piano sound. We ended up using 3 mics on the piano – the two B&K 4011 as the main pair (using x/y technique) and the U87 as a more ambient bass microphone. In the end, I ended up using very little of the U87 in the mix, and the reason for that was of two reasons; the first because I rarely play anything in the lower registers of the piano, and the second reason was because I felt that the mic added a more blurry feeling to the sound instead of adding warmth. The sound from the U87 felt like it was time wise a little bit behind the beat, maybe because the sound wasn’t as “direct” as the stereo pair, and maybe I could have spend time using delay functions to sync them better, but I ended up not quite using it as much as initially planned.
Part 2 – RECORDING THE ALBUM

Piano

I spent five weekends totally during these two years, recording piano for the album. This was a very interesting process. On the CD, you can’t here anything from the first two times, 2 songs made it from the third time, and the rest is from the fourth and fifth session. I almost never get nervous playing or recording for that matter, that the first to times especially, I was so nervous I could barely play! And it is interesting because here I had a situation – no audience, no people around, no stress with time. I could take as many takes as I wanted. External conditions where so say, very relaxed. But nothing out of the 500 or more takes I did in the beginning turned out any good. I had a major problem that where stopping me from making music:

I wanted this to be the best album I have ever made in my life! No other time have I felt that I wanted something to be at a so ”high level”. I wanted every note to be ”expressive”, and at a perfect dynamic level, and have the perfect rhythmic placement etc Thoughts like these, made me THINK very much while recording, trying to count every single subdivision, looking at my arms to make sure they where at the correct height to get a ”perfect” sound on every note etc. I wasn’t ”feeling” the music at all, hoping that if I did 80 takes on a song, there must be at least one take which would be good. But of course, nothing from these sessions ended up on the CD. Piano player Keith Jarrett (Keith Jarrett, The Man And His Music 1992, page 134) said something good about this when talking about classical musicians: ”So for me, I can get into the pulse and say, That’s it! Here we are! And they’ll say, well, that’s just the tempo. But I might say – Yes, that’s just the tempo if you play it like this, but it’s not just the tempo if you’re in the tempo when you’re playing it”.

After doing a few of these weekend sessions, I was more relaxed, realizing that I needed a more ”musical” approach to recording if it was going to turn out any good.
(Also to mention is, I got more relaxed being my own sound engineer, trusting that everything was working, and I was getting a good sound recorded. So the last couple times I recorded, I didn’t practice for the sessions, and didn’t worry or bother so much, and it ended up great! (In terms of better timing, sound and phrasing).

I believe that in order to make good music you have to have an "effortless" approach to music, both if you are writing or performing, and I "knew" this, but because I wanted SO badly that this was going to be a masterpiece, that philosophy was totally "blocked out" the first few times of recording piano.

It is a nice feeling in one sense, not having a sound engineer around that you have to wait or take consideration to. But a few of the times I was having some sound technical problems, or couldn’t find the right mic placements and so on, and this was very time and energy consuming having to try do this all by myself. I also had to bring all my recording stuff with me, setting up everything, getting the acoustics right in the room, moving things, using sound softeners etc.

It had also been good to have a piano technician there, tuning certain notes that would easily go out of tune and other problems that had to do with the actual piano. I had to make up my own solutions sometimes, like applying tape to some of the notes in the higher register that where giving away some kind of metallic ring sound that I didn’t like.

Another major thing was finding the right tuning on the album. This was very dependent (if not exclusively) on which pitch the piano was tuned to on that particular day, and song. My hope was to make the entire album in 440 Hz (for example the electric bass sounds very warm when tuned to that frequencies), but this was not the case because the piano tuner was tuning the piano a little different each time I recorded, so I could not be sure about the exact frequencies until I came home and could play it back running it through my physical tuner. I would then check each song with the piano recorded, and tune the rest of the instruments according to the piano.
I also had to take consideration to what dynamic level I was going to be performing on. There was several things to take consideration to: The way the instrument is built, which song I was recording, and what the instrument sounded like on that particular day.

**Everything Else:**

Alot of the same principals that I mentioned in the piano chapter applies to the reocordning of bass, drums, guitar and so forth. Generally I was much more relaxed recording the other instruments, perhaps because I am more limited in what I can do, and have not really developed as good of an ear as I have with my pianoplaying, hearing an instruments full potential. The recordnings turned out good, in terms of me playing at the level I am at the present moment.
Part 3 – GETTING THE ALBUM READY

Mixing/Producing:

I decided to talk about these two things together, because it can sometimes be hard to separate them, because depending on how I mix something, it gives the sound a different musical quality, which effects the way I think about the production of the track.

This was the area that was most new to me. I had to spend a lot of time, mastering basic mixing techniques such as eq, reverb, compressor etc. I learned a lot of stuff from reading on homepages connected with magazines like “studio” (http://studio.idg.se/), where they talk about these kind of things quite much, and there were a lot of general things about learning how to handle the basic tools for sound sculpting, like how a compressor works, how to “gate” a reverb, and how synth filters work. The mixing is an extremely creative process, where I really can control HOW the album is going to feel in the end. Basically I wanted the album to have a nice high, crystal clear sound, but with a fat, and warm bottom at the same time. This meant lowering a lot of the mid frequencies.

Piano Sound:

The piano was one of the few things I had a very clear mental picture of how I wanted it to sound, but also one of the instruments I worked hardest on finding the ”right” sound. Even though the piano isn’t playing all the melodies on the album, I still wanted the feeling that it is the piano that kind of ties it all together, like a specific pop singer would, even though the music behind him/her could be very different. And as you also hear on a lot of modern pop productions, they use a lot of different effects on each track. For example, I used different types of reverbs on different tracks, also applying delay and some filter effects. The basic sound without effects was pretty much the same; pretty heavy on the high end, to get clarity and that kind of ”floating on top of everything” else effect. Because I recorded piano during different periods of
time, I got slightly different sound each time, so I couldn’t use the same eq for all the piano tracks. Also, I would make the piano a little more or less brighter, depending on which type of song it was. If it was a faster up-tempo song with a "clubbeat", I would have a brighter and dryer piano sound, and for the mystic ballads, I would add delay and a lot of reverb.

Working with reverbs was something I spend time learning, because as I mentioned earlier, I used different reverbs for each sound, depending on how loud the piano was in the mix, if I was playing fast or slow, or high and low on the piano. I studied the “Logic Studio” manual very hard, because it goes through very much in detail how to use the different reverbs that are included with Logic. One of the functions that I got hooked on was working with predelay. Predelay is the amount of time it takes before the reverb starts to work. On the funkier songs where I play more notes and faster, I would have the predelay set pretty high, because it will makes the reverb sound less muddy. On the more ballad type of songs, where I play pretty little, I would have the predelay very short, if not totally off, to make every single note feel “bigger” and perhaps even more legato.

**Psychological ”problems” with mixing.**

Generally, there were two major psychological phenomenon that where always around affecting me.

The first thing was: "For every little thing I change, it will have a consequence for something else". This to me was generally a negative producing thought. For example, if I was removing too much bass in the mix, it would make the piano sound sharp, or if I added to much reverb on the piano, suddenly a synth would be more dominant, and not give the intended result it should. Or if I raised the volume on a hihiat that was very much ”ahead” of the beat, it would make the melody sound too laidback.

After I started realizing this philosophy, I became much more careful changing things, without trying to have in mind what the consequences would be from the particular change.
The second thing that was actually in one sense very inspiring, but also created a lot of stress and disturbance was, that because I was working so intensely mixing everyday, and was extremely interested and evolved in it, I could easily feel a rapid sense of development. At first, you would probably think this is a positive thing, but the problem for me was that it gave me too many possibilities, and the further I came in completing the album, I would feel that there would be things I would like to change, because my ears had gotten better, or I had learned to deal with a new type of sound editing tool that could be used on something I did three weeks earlier.

So this thing created a spiral of ”endless possibilities of mixing stress”, which wasn’t good for me for my ”average level of well being”.

**Track order:**

Choosing which order to put the songs in was very difficult. The order of songs on a CD is extremely important, because depending on which song came before the previous one, it is psychologically going to affect the way the next song is perceived. There is also different ways of looking at the total placement of songs: Is it better to place the best songs in the beginning, and not bother so much about the rest, to give a really good first impression, or is it to prefer to make the entire album feel balanced, and perhaps having the compromise on making the album start (the first few tracks) a little weaker.

I felt that the first four songs are very important, because if I listen to some new music, and don’t feel ”the vibe” after about 5 seconds, I am not going to be listening to the rest of the album probably at all. This line of thinking made me try to find the tracks that really start ”happening” after just a few seconds, and placing them first on the album, even if there might have been some tracks that I preferred sounded better, but might demand that you listen through the entire track to get the idea. I think it turned out pretty good the way the songs blend in to each other.
Mastering:

I ended up mastering with the mastering legend Björn Engelmann at Cutting Room. This was a great day, in terms of what the results ended up being after we had worked together. It was also an experience for me mastering music that I had delivered directly to the Mastering Engineer, in terms of having everything in place before the arrival. I spend the week before mastering working around the clock, fixing details in the mix until the last second (except for three hours that I used for sleep the night before), and didn’t take the time to listen through every song, to make sure everything was ok. This resulted in a few minor problems at the mastering session. I discovered for example, that there was a tambourine that entered in a “wrong” place in a song, so luckily I brought my computer with me, and I could open the songs and save a new version with the corrections.

Another thing I discovered was that a few instruments would sound very sharp and harsh in certain types of listening media. When I was sitting in a taxi the same morning on my way to Björn, I listened through a song with some cheap, crappy headphones (that were pretty heavy on the high frequencies) and found that there was a shaker that was bugging me, because it sounded to dominant in the mix. So in the taxi, I quickly mixed a new version of the song, saved it on my little portable USB hard disk key, and this was the version with the lower shaker we ended up using!

Björn was a genius working with. His ears are incredible, having a very musical approach to mastering. Without a doubt, he has developed (in my own words) “perfect frequency”, and has total control over how you can work with sound, but the reason I choose to work with him compared to other mastering engineers, was that I got the impression of that he know what he needs to do to make the music he gets to sound as good as possible. He spent no more than 2-3 minutes on some of the songs, listening through different parts, and then would leave the room, telling me “it sounds good now”, but wanted me to listen through the entire song to make sure I liked it. There were basically only two times where I had opinions on what he had done (this is extremely little for being me). One time I felt that there was a little to much “sub” on the mix (Sounds below 90Hz), so he “fixed” this, and the other time I felt that
something’s did not feel good between the kick drum and the electric bass on a particular song. So for a second I felt that he might have missed this, and I felt “good” that I could hear this thing. But then when I told him about this situation, he said that the problem was not how he had mastered it, but how I had mixed it (He said that I had mixed the bass too loud). I didn’t really believe him (or I didn’t want to believe him), so we tried a few different versions, but ended up doing it the way he suggested from the beginning. He was always talking about how important it is to ”feel” the music, and not try to listen so specific to technical details like ”does this song have less bass than the previous one”, “is this song 1 db louder than the rest of the album” etc, but come to all the conclusions based on what emotional feelings you get when you hear the tracks, and what you should do from there. He said it is important to find what elements are important in each particular song, and try to emphasize these in the mastering. Some songs may be better off with a lot of compression, and some may need for example a lot of eq at certain frequencies, to make the piano feel more direct, or more aggressive, or more locked with the snare drum etc.

So one thing I really learned after this day, was to really make sure that everything is in perfect place, before arriving to the mastering session.

Artwork:

I ended up using two different designers for the album artwork. Pelle Piano and Rickard Favati. Pelle did the front and back, and Rickard did the inside and the label. It was important that the album design gives a good idea of what the music can be. So me and Pelle spend some time trying different ideas, until he came up with the genius idea of having me ”sit” at a piano, and instead of the regular ”Yamaha”, or ”Steinway” logo, we would replace it with my name instead. You can see the album cover on the first page of this work. I also liked the idea of having a piano visible, or something that indicates that I might be a piano player. If people see the album and just see my name and don’t know who I am, they could never guess what kind of music it would be. Now with the piano visible, you might guess that I am a piano player, and I also told Pelle that I wanted a modern look, because I feel that the music has a very ”modern” sound to it. So I am very happy the way the album cover turned out.
Conclusion:

I can feel that the finished album, gives a pretty good reflection over how much time I spent on the different parts.

For example, I spent a lot of time on writing the songs, perfecting the song structure, melody shaping, choosing good sounding keys, etc. This part I feel pretty satisfied with.

I am also happy with my performance. I practiced hard on each instrument, figuring out the right parts for each song. I spend a lot of time on working on the drum patterns, good bass note lengths etc.

The part I wish I had started working on earlier, was getting the productions done for each song. It takes so much time getting it to sound the way you want it, and I am happy with some of the songs, and less happy with some others because I did not have enough time to work on all of them as thorough as I had wished.

The same goes for mixing. I don’t think I realized before I was getting closer to the end how much time it takes to mix an album like this, where each song may contain over 50 tracks, where each phrase and note colors the total result.

The word DEADLINE had a great effect on me. I had two deadlines to look over: The first one was the day I was going to master the album, and the second one was getting my examination from the Royal College of Music. This deadline unfortunately caused more stress than it did good. The nice part about a deadline is that after it has passed, you are finished with something. The other part in it, which is the part that I did not like, is that you have to put an end to something, that you perhaps don’t feel is completed.

I worked so hard until the last minute, so I can feel that overall I achieved a lot of results that I had in mind from the day I decided to make this album, but there is
always that feeling in me that "Maybe I could have done this bass part a little bit groovier, or maybe this syntpad could have been a little bit thicker in it’s sound". But I have to realized (so I can stop thinking about this for awhile), that the solution is not going to be solved by working even more on each song, but on making up my mind that now this is "finished", and it turned out the way it did.

A very interesting consequence from the making of this album, has been an incredible development for me as a pianist, and very much as a pianist in an ensemble. There are two major aspects of this development:

1. An ear for ensemble playing.

Since I really spend time developing bass, drums and vocals, it has really helped me understand how these kind of musicians think when they play, and what kind of decisions they face, and which musical path they choose depending on there instruments limitations etc. I can really understand why a vocalist can be so picky if a song goes half a tone step to high or low, and why a bass player prefers different keys depending on what type of song it is. This helps me knowing how I can relate to different instruments in a different way, now that I have a deeper understanding of each instrument.

2. An ear for sound.

My ear for hearing dynamics in tone color and sound in general has increased very much. This has affected my piano playing very much, and also my approach to playing on different pianos, taking more consideration on what the piano sounds like on that particular day.

I have also gotten a few reactions on the music. The general opinions have been very positive, both from family and friends, and other musicians. They have been impressed with the high quality of the album sound, and also of me performing all the instruments on such a high level.
When I look back on everything, there is one word that concludes it all: KNOWLEDGE.

I have never experienced a time in my life, where I have learned so much as I have these last two years. Sometimes, I have felt that I must be out of my mind, trying to do this entire thing myself, but I feel that I have built up a lot of knowledge, that is going to make it possible for me to make my next CD, without all the help I have gotten from the Royal College of Music (almost). Even though I feel a need a break, from working around the clock for as long as I can remember, I am already looking forward to this fall, when I am planning on getting going with my next CD, because this has been one of the most inspiring years of my life.
Bibliography/References


Culbertson Brian. Radio Interview 2005, NPR  
(soulfiles.podomatic.com/entry/T02_17_28-07_00)

“Logic Studio” (Apple) 2007


www.jimmysommers.com

www.harmonycentral.com

http://studio.idg.se/

http://logicprohelp.com/

www.brianculbertson.com
Appendix
Temple Of Dreams

J. Britten/Jay 2007

\[ r = 82 \]

\[ \text{Verse} \]

\[ \text{Chorus} \]

\[ \text{Bridge} \]

Copyright © Jonathan Britten 2007

(Repeat 8 bars in Coda over and over till end)
One Night With You

\( \text{\textcopyright Jonathan Fritzeln 2007} \)