The making of a Latin Jazz Concert

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**Purpose**

For the purpose of this project I decided to do something that would also be suitable as the next step in my career. Being relatively new in the city of Stockholm and its musical network, I decided to get active in broadening my chances of being involved in projects where I get to play good music with good musicians. Putting together a good band that would eventually open the opportunity for new jobs seems to be an unavoidable step and a good marketing decision.

The school environment also makes the process easy. The amounts of resources available are an asset that deserves not to be diminished. There are also plenty of musicians who are ready to join and in most cases their spirit and attitude are favorable. Not to mention their level of expertise and the time they put on getting things done.

By being in control of the repertoire I get a chance to play the styles that I had been working hard to develop. Furthermore, I have an insight of what the other instruments in the band do. As the styles selected for my project are not very popular in Sweden, it’s important that I have an ear to consider whether changes need to be made or not.

Time is tight given also the fact that I’m not familiar with the academic environment and its peculiarities. I was somewhat out late in understanding what I was supposed to do.

At large, the main purpose of the project is to put together the best Latin-Jazz group that I can and to start developing a repertoire. Eventually I would like to start writing original material that can help the band and myself to get an artistic identity.
**Background**

I was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I got started in music when I was 10 years old, with the piano. I was appointed to a teacher after spontaneously showing interest in musical instruments. But although I did show interest in music, maybe the main reason for starting this journey was an over production of ceramic art pieces that held sway in my mother’s living room. The verdict was that I was to finish my career in ceramics, and with it, the production of ornaments, jars and cups. I would instead learn how to play an instrument. And hopefully a little one.

I visited a private piano teacher with my mother in my town. He had a sign outside his door and this we saw every time we walked to the train station. You could also hear a piano now and then. That piano was a Yamaha CP 70, a classic today, very used during the 80’s on pop recordings. The repertoire included songs of my choice, like My way, Do-re-mi from the musical The sound of music, and a happy 3 chord-12 bar blues that kept my fingers busy enough even though it didn’t have a melody. At the same time, I entered an introductory class that presented the student with a new instrument and a new song every 2 weeks. I tried out on the guitar, flute, singing, xylophone, and piano. The teacher enthusiastically told my mother that I would, very probably, become a musician.

At age 11 I was introduced to the contrabass and took part in the school band for students between 11 and 18 years old, where I played adaptations of classical pieces arranged for young musicians. I also played drum and later tuba when performing the marching band repertoire. With this band we played very often on public acts, festivals and popular celebrations, as well as on some congresses or sport events.

At age 14 I started playing in the school’s big band and later joined a similar band for adult amateurs. With them I discovered a vast repertoire and filled my ears with the sound of the swing Era. I was by far the youngest of the band members, and had never heard jazz till then, I didn’t even own any jazz records and didn’t recognize the songs at all. The director had confidence in me and constantly pushed me to get the beat going. This became a favorite activity and Saturday concerts replaced the usual Saturday night activities of a 14 years old boy. My social network got filled with jazz musicians that I looked up.

A year after that, I started at a conservatory of music, which is oriented in the classical tradition, both repertoire and technique. The whole curriculum took (back then) 7 years to complete, 4 of inferior level, 3 of superior with an additional 3 years for those pursuing a high performance title. I moved up on the theoretical subjects (theory and solfege) and finished the 4th year of the program during my 3 years at the conservatory. I loved to discover on the piano the sound of new chords and progressions. I tried to make sense of them. This helped me get through the theory lessons with ease and joy. I learned most of the church modes, their structure and functions, alone by the piano.

During my time at the conservatory I met musicians who showed me new music and opened my ears to new artists and styles. I discovered some music that is until today most influential and inspiring to me. Brazilian music and artists like Antonio Carlos Jobim, Ellis Regina, Hermeto Pascoal as well as jazz and fusion
heroes like Jaco Pastorius (my first cd ever, *Word of mouth*), Pat Metheny, John Patittucci, Weather report, Chick Corea and Take 6 to mention a few. I also followed and collected the work of some Argentinean pop artist. I had an album with Chopin’s waltzes and one with Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliette*, which I listened to very often. Later my mother bought me an album with some of Dizzy Gillespie’s music. At the school I used to spin a Vinyl with Ella Fitzgerald’s *Lullaby of Birdland*. But I mostly heard a lot of live music. The school had a concert almost every Saturday and I was there opening with 3 songs at the Big Band stand. And then I hanged around for the concert. I remember approaching the guest musicians with honor and profound respect and admiration, and used to proudly squeeze some words out of them. Music was at the center of my life and I was dancing to it.

I did not listen to rock. I didn’t know one tune of the Beatles or Rolling Stones. Never had heard of Kiss, AC-DC, Iron Maiden, Def Leppard, Led Zeppelin, Beach Boys or Pink Floyd. I did listen though to some of the very obvious pop that came through the radio in the early 80’s revealing hits of bands and artist like Phil Collins, David Bowie, Abba, Toto, Michael Jackson, Madonna, Wham, Queen, Cindy Lauper, Barbra Streisand, Bee-Gees and Tina Turner among others. In my house there wasn’t much music being played besides the mainstream radio hits that my sisters use to get on tape. My mother had very few albums, some of them with compilations that included *The Platters, Paul Anka, The Pretenders, Cuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis* and some Italian and Argentinean artist.

I always sung along to the music, with or without lyrics, but never in public. I always felt embarrassed when singing in the presence of other persons. I did take part in choirs and thought that it was fun and challenging to follow the arrangement.

At age 19 I received, after auditioning before a jury that travels around the world, a scholarship to enter Berklee College of music. I started school on September 1999 and graduated May 2003. In the process I learned a lot of the jazz repertoire, improvisation and harmony. I got a strong sense of professionalism and what to expect from a professional musician, the codes, do’s and deeds that make to the American music environment. I discovered a whole lot of artists and their work. I fell in love with the studio environment. I discovered Afro-Cuban music, which I adopted as my own. I learned how to play Latin, Brazilian and Indian percussion and discovered a whole world of artists and repertoires. I learned to listen to what is happening in the band and the role of each instrument.

I met lots of people during my time in college. Some friends showed me music that they considered “a must listening to”. So finally I discovered the Beatles. I started then to collect some 50’s and 60’s Blue Note jazz and learnt of Brad Mehldau, Avishai Cohen, Joshua Redman and Brandford Marsalis, D’Angelo, Guillermo Klein, Marisa Monte and Caetano Veloso, to mention a few.

I met my wife on March 2001 while working on a cruise ship as a Lounge musician and, for the mere relevance of this document, I will just describe the array of music that she showed me and which I adopted as my own. She had a great collection that included the work of Steve Wonder, Marvin Gaye, Erykah
Badu, Sarah Vaughan, Kurt Elling, Ricky Lee Jones, Tracy Chapman, Kirk Franklin, Chet Baker and some musicals and African music. At the ship’s bandstand I played a lot of music. We had a cocktail-dance repertoire that included 220 big band arrangements, and 2 Broadway-like production shows that were one hour long each. I did 3 contracts of 5, 5 and 8 months respectively, where I met lots of people that further introduced me to new music and practice material. The job helped me finance my studies in Boston and putted in my hands an electric bass, an instrument that I explored and love dearly.

Some of the most significant teachers at Berklee were: Jamey Haddad, a drummer and percussionist from Oregon, based in NYC, who showed me Indian percussion and its structure; Ed Tomasi, a be-bop master and Tenor Saxophonist, with whom I expanded my repertoire and my soloing skills; Fernando Huergo, an Argentinean 6-stringed electric bassist that was my private teacher for a while and Oscar Stagnaro, whose music and work I studied in dept. He is one of the most advanced teachers in Afro-Cuban and Brazilian bass, and has a great knowledge of the role of the other instruments in the band at playing these styles. I studied his book “The Latin Bass Book” inside out.

I learnt a lot during my time as a student in Buenos Aires, in Boston and in Stockholm. In Buenos Aires I was instructed by some good local teachers that helped me take my first few steps in music. In Boston I was guided by awarded musicians who traveled the world playing their music and had a part time teaching job. I spent lots of money during my time in Boston and received an education that, including living, local traffic and book expenses amounted (back in 2003) more than 120.000 US dollars. I personally invested half of that, the rest was granted.

Despite the reputation of the education that I received through my life, or its cost, I learnt that my best teacher is always going to be myself. And that my growth happens between me and my instrument, in the intimacy of a practice room. I understood that the investment of time and money that I did to meet a teacher of prominent reputation at the other side of the world was, at a certain level, anecdotic. In Argentina I was surrounded by people who could teach me more, meaning that there was no need for me to look for teachers abroad. But I’m glad that I did travel the world, because that gave me a greater lesson about myself.
**Inspiration**

A friend at Berklee showed me an album, or really, a copy of the master, which had not yet been edited, from an artist called Guillermo Klein, who had been his theory teacher in Buenos Aires and who had given him this copy of the album. It was called “Los Guachos IV”. Los Guachos ("the bastards") was the name of the band. “Los Guachos IV” album amazed me. It has many elements that I found to be substantial and that make it a very strong record. The repertoire contains all original compositions by Klein and some composed by the collaborating musicians. There is a Tango, a 2 part invention for 2 trumpets and drums, a rock ballad, a few chacareras (argentina’s country music in 6/8-3/4 beat), odd meter songs which excelled at having a natural flow while still being complex, and much more. I search for the Guachos I, II and III albums (since there was a IV) and a friend from Boston brought me all the way to Luleå the “Los Guachos III”. It is just as good. I concluded (or decided, like anyone coming to a conclusion) that this had to be the most advanced, sophisticated music that modern times had to offer.

Another very influential musician is Hermeto Pascoal, the Brazilian composer and multi-instrumentalist from Lagoa da Canoa, Arapicara, northeast Brazil. The melodies in his songs contain like a DNA string, all the information and elements of the style. And the execution of the melodies in his records is superb. It’s not possible to take one of his songs and “jam” over them, like one can do with a show tune like “All the things you are”. They are like symphonies, filled with complexity and beauty.

There’s another musician’s work included in my project. He is not only a great performer at the piano and a great singer, but also developed a mature, timeless and tasteful sound and is an exquisite composer who keeps things simple. Ed Motta is his name, and he is from Brazil, and he doesn't specially avoid playing samba clichés and dares to explore other styles and textures of music. His albums can be a succession of
songs that don’t seem to belong together or share a concept. They give the impression of being standard pieces, like a blues or a rhythm changes, for their natural flow and simplicity.

Is tremendously inspiring to listen to Avishai Cohen. I like to describe him as “fearless”, for making music with the prime conviction that it has to be done and delivered, regardless of neatness and careful details. He is as assisting at a ritual and manifesting it at the same time. As if he was unaware of his humanity. True music. He explores odd meter rhythms and finds the flow where no one else is looking for it. And he likes walking right by the edge of the abyss, pushing the complexity of the music to unpopular levels. This challenges me, awakens my daring self and shows me a way of growing in the ritual, in the music. He has a true voice and is a star to follow, a master to imitate, with knowledge to assimilate and inspire innovation. His work is subject of my study and is part of my repertoire.
Practice and tools

Being the father of two and living more than an hour away from the school, I am always short of time to practice. Developing a routine and being methodic about what to practice is something I have been working on for a long time.

My approach derives from some theories and philosophical thoughts. I had had days of good practice and days of bad practice and days when I thought I just couldn’t get any better and days when I thought I might as well drop everything and get another job. I think that having a good level of confidence is good, but too much can prevent me from broadening my horizons. I started to focus on being in control of the instruments, to reach the level of feeling as being one with the instrument, with no distracting pains in my body or hands and achieving precision in my intonation.

My approach is simple. I start my practice with a very slow, very easy and very repetitive routine. Is easy to be in control when you do over and over something very easy, having all the time in the world to think about details. When I was little I would slow down on the hard passages and speed up on the easy ones. But later I realized that this stops the flow of the music and I also get reminded of my incapability and soon I get bored and tired. Resisting the temptation to speed up when I had ease to play also means staying in that state where I feel totally in control and free to put attention on every detail.

I use intensively a machine that is both metronome and tuner. While playing slowly I check that every tone is perfectly in pitch. In this way, I not only get the right impression in the muscles of my arm, hand and fingers but I also listen over and over again to the right tone, developing an aural memory which serves me as a tuner while playing in real time with other musicians. This is most important for players of instruments with low register, because its more difficult to hear low frequencies than high ones. After about an hour of playing scales and looking at the tuner, I stop using it and play open strings and harmonics for a while, to get in tune with the intuitive inner pitch.

The metronome is a tool that can be used in endless ways. The typical approach is to set it at a certain speed and decide that every click is a quarter note.
Something a little more advance would be to space out the click, meaning that between clicks there is now a half note, and maybe decide that they are hitting beats 2 and 4. In any case it is clear that spacing them out and bringing them away from downbeat increases the complexity of its use, making it more difficult to follow. As a result I notice that problems like changing the tempo (speeding or dragging) during passages with syncopation, start to disappear.

I explored then using the metronome in very complex ways, while practicing really easy stuff. For example I will turn it on and decide that what I hear is a click every fourth triplet. Or I may decide that the click is the last or second 16th note of the measure. After being in control for a while, I change the metronome but not what I’m actually playing.

I also practice passages by disregarding the rhythmic values of their notes, meaning, I decide that every tone is an 8th, and I play an ostinato that not necessarily starts always on a downbeat.

If the passage is very complex both rhythmically and melodically, then I set apart this two aspects and work on them one at the time, increasing difficulty as I conquer control over the performed part.

I use the bow because it’s a great reference for intonation. It never “lies” about whether a tone is in pitch or not. If something is wrong, with the bow sounds very, very wrong. Through my time in school I worked with Jan Adefelt on some classical pieces and we worked also on expanding my register. He feels there is no excuse for not being able to play all over the fretboard. I followed his lead and today I can say that I expanded my register almost a whole octave. This is just a shy beginning; as of today I don’t really have full control playing high-pitched notes on the contrabass.

I started doing some routines in 5/4 and 7/4. I follow up some of the teachings that I received from drummer/percussionist Jamey Haddad, while attending Berklee in Boston, USA. We learnt about the “mrdanga”, an instrument from south India that consists on a cylinder with two drumheads made of hard, thick leather. It sound like a tabla, and one can say that a tabla is nothing but a mrdanga cut in half, given that the later had been around for a longer time. I practice these routines by singing them and clapping hands. I also stomp with my feet or perform a modest dance. I repeat the phrases like mantras. I chant. I feel free of intellectual interaction, making it natural for me to imagine different accentuations or variation of the original sequence. I believe that it’s after this feeling that one can start making music, because counting is not possible in music. Music is incidental, not compulsory. And here is the paradox. Practicing music is compulsory. Like a habit. We teach the body a routine, methodically and try to find out why it’s nice. Seek the emotion to react spontaneously. Intellect becomes emotion. Practicing becomes performing. Careful repetition becomes fearless reaction.
The repertoire

I realized at the early stages of this project that working on original compositions and playing them at the recital is the model that most of the people in my situation were following. I felt panic then, because when I look back in my career, composing is the one thing I never did, or trained to do. If this project was to reflect my development as a music student, then I would have to put my energy in doing what I'm best at.

Selecting a repertoire is the most critical part of this project. Depending of what songs I select, I’ll know what instruments I’ll use, which musicians to pick and how much time I would have to spend on practicing the tunes. I wanted to set the bar high, so I picked some of the songs that I had always dreamt of playing. But I would need a “dream band” to play them.

Awunism

A composition by Ed Motta, in 6/8 and 4/4 swing. Harmonically speaking, this song is more about impressions than about cadences and “turn-arounds”. It lays somewhere between Joe Henderson’s “Inner Urge” and Miles’s “So what”. In other words, a modal tune with chords from the minor jazz structure rather than the conventional church modes. This made it challenging for the soloists. But the energy of the song comes from the rhythm, rather than the harmony. It has 2 very defining sides: a “rumba” moment and a fast swing moment. The swing rhythm comes and goes in the beginning, like a premonition. It takes off at the end of the first solo and stays all the way through the Rhodes solo. I intended it to be intense from beginning to end, giving the visual impression of an old lorry rushing down hills through the narrow streets of a quiet village, as it falls apart. I thought of it as the best way to open my concert. It sets the mood and brings the level of energy high up.

Aquela Coisa

This is a composition by Hermeto Pascoal and appears on his album from 1984 “Lagoa da canoa – Município de Arapiraca”. The melody of this tune is diatonical and simple. The harmony on the contrary does everything possible to avoid matching the predictability of the melody and rhythmically is almost fighting it, with accentuation on unpredictable spots. There’s a bridge that sounds mad and asymmetrical. The solos follow a totally different chord progression. A closer analysis reveals chord substitutions that insist in using a sus4 sound, which I find to be a typical occurrence through out modern Brazilian compositions.

Latin Perspective

A latin jazz “standard” composed by Oscar Hernandez. I like the Cha-cha and I decided to include this song, partially as a tribute to the many hours I spent learning to play Afro-Cuban bass. I feel really free when I play “tumbao” (name given to the bass line played in Latin jazz, which typically avoids hitting beat 1 in the measure). This freedom gives me a chance to be more in control over what the rest of the band is doing.
Spring

This is a composition by Arnold Rodriguez, a Piano player from Colombia who had spent the last 12 years living in Uppsala, Sweden and playing with many advanced jazz and Latin musicians. My initial intention was to have a tune played in Piano Trio format. I choose for this purpose a song by Chick Corea called “Rhumba Flamenco”, from his 2001 Album “Past, present and future” where Avishai Cohen and Jeff Ballard collaborated. For years I have been fascinated with this song. I learned it and played along to the record countless times. Unfortunately, as I will later explain, there was not enough time for the drummer or pianist to learn this song, given its complexity.

At the same time, I needed a ballad to set down the mood after a hectic beginning of the concert. The drummer suggested then that the piano player could select the trio tune, which I would have to learn instead of him.

“Spring” is very much in harmony with the pre established repertoire. There are rhythmic displacements in the melody and in the harmonic rhythm. Although it’s a jazz ballad, there is space in it to grow in intensity.

Bass suite#1

This is a composition by Avishai Cohen from his first album “Adama”. When I first heard this song I set a goal. I had to be able to play it. It was like when I heard Jaco Patorius for the first time. I thought it was genius and fresh and slick and all that is hip. And it’s only 2 ostinatos and there’s not much more to it. Still, it brings up in the audience the same impression that I got when I first heard it and it is certainly flattering to the bass player and therefore included it in a concert.

De sábados pra dominguihios

This is another tune by Hermeto Pascoal. It is probably the most complex one in the whole repertoire. I decided to play the song in my concert almost without realizing how hard I would have to work to make it happen. I used to sing along to the tune when I was 14 or 15 and the intellectual and emotional stimulus that I received from it still tickles in my brain and soul. I spent maybe 10 hours trying to avoid transcribing it. I made phone calls and sent out mails to musicians who might have a transcription, searched on the web and bookstores and music notation sites. Finally I sat down and after 5 hours I had it transcribed. Later I transcribed the whole drum part and the bass part. Needless to say, I’m glad I did it and like every time I transcribe something, some of the magic or mysticism in the song goes away. For this song I rushed and asked a singer if she could sing on it, thinking that I would never be able to sing and play on it at the same time. I trained anyway to be able to do it and I succeeded somewhat, with exception of a few passages where my brain gets torn between the singer and the bassist.
Song for Chano

A tune by Ray Barreto (Conga player, New York 1929-2006). At least, that’s what the publisher says. Barreto’s pianist Hector Martignon, a piano player from Colombia gets credit for the arrangement of the piece. As it turns out, Martignon had given some lesson to Arnold Rodriguez, the piano player involved in my project. Arnold explained that Hector, following Barreto’s initial idea, had probably composed the song. Anyway, the genius of it lays in it arrangement, far too complex for Barreto to come up with himself.

The tune contains many elements that are exciting and beautiful. Its bass ostinato in the beginning is very complex and almost too close to the typical Cuban circus where the point is to show off skills rather than putting the skills at the service of the music and its beauty. We come very close to the Argentinean chacarera style during a passage. This tune and the first one, Awunism, are both in 6/8 and I selected them among many things because they give me the chance to try elements from the chacarera. I take a long solo in this tune.

E muita gig vei!

This song is a fast samba, from Ed Motta’s album “Aystelum”. Its harmony is simple, featuring the concurrent sus4 chords that many Brazilian musicians use so much. I decided to sing the melody in this song. There are no lyrics on the original. Instead, Ed sings syllables that seem to be English words. The keyboard is my favorite instrument in this song. It’s a clavinet sound with wah-wah. We will use the popular Nord Electro 73, a light keyboard that includes very good sample of two different Rhode pianos, a Yamaha CP-70, a Grand Piano, a clavinet, a Wurlitzer and a B-3 organ. It also has many effects and a Leslie rotary cabinet simulator.
Finding the right musicians to play in this project was the most difficult task of all involved in the project. I started early during the fall of 2009, scouting out for new musicians. I didn’t have a lot of time to hang out and jam, like the rest of the students at the school, given that most of them are 20+ years old and live alone, if not with a classmate, near by the city. In my case I live an hour from the city with my 3 year old son and my (back then) very pregnant wife.

My goal was to get to know all of the musicians in the school and my approach was never to play twice with the same one until I played with most of them. That is, in the cases were we gathered to play just for the joy of it, or when I had small project that required the involvement of some collaborators.

I’ll open a parenthesis here just to mention that there’s a whole lot that I missed from my time at the school. And that would be the socialization and casual happenings. I simply didn’t have the time to take part in them. In the music branch it is very important (much more important that some would like it to be) to develop a good relationship with the colleagues. Creating a bound can be decisive in getting to play with some people or to get into a band. And one accomplishes this by assisting to parties, by staying late sitting around in the school cafeteria "hanging out", going out for dinners or lunch or to just have a beer, etc. I missed totally on such occasions and missing the first few, where everyone gets to know each other, means also missing the rest of them. This meant that if I wanted to play with somebody, I would have had to pick up the phone and start calling around people myself.

I played with Hector Romo Aravena, a Tenor sax player during a clinic visit by Bob Brookmeyer. I got a call the night before his visit from Bertil Strandberg, who was calling to check if I had an ensemble ready to play in front of Bob. I hadn’t met any other tenor player that I liked more, so I thought I would ask him to join me on my project.
I knew exactly who would do an excellent job at the drums in my band. But he was not a student, but a professional working musician. Ola Bothzén and I met at a gig on November 2008. I met him again around March 2010 and he said that he wanted people to pop by and work on stuff just for fun. I said that if he felt like playing for fun, he should join my super-dooper-new-Latin-jazz-all-stars-sexet, which so far included 4 musicians. He agreed and I couldn’t be happier.

I called immediately my friend and colleague from my days in Haparanda Paulo Murga. He is a very good percussionist and specializes on the congas. He studied at "ISA" (Instituto Superior de Arte) in La Havana, Cuba. He had recently moved into the city and had a lot of time to spare. We meet regularly and I discussed everything ongoing my project, repertoire, musicians, etc. He started to practice and was very excited to be in the band.

I’ve been chasing around the school a few trumpet players but, to tell the truth, I wished I didn’t have to. The trumpet is what I consider one of the most difficult instruments to play, and it’s very easy to sound bad. I decided then to go for an alto sax instead, although I’m not crazy about the instrument’s tone. I thought of asking Pontus Pohl. When I asked him to join the band, he asked me if I wanted him to play alto or soprano. I was thrilled to hear that he plays soprano saxophone and decided for that instrument. He has a nice tone and spends lots of time working on it. And he plays very fast be-bop too.

After the first rehearsal, I was at Paulo’s apartment listening to some music and deciding whether or not I was going to perform a song called "De sábados pra domingoinhos", which features a soprano female voice. Paulo’s wife Olga was there and we asked her if she liked the song and if she thought that she could sing it. She started jumping up and down and said she would do it.

After the 3rd rehearsal I decided to change pianist. The previous one hadn’t had time to practice because he had an important project of his own. I talked to a friend and showed him the recording of the rehearsals. He said he knew a piano player in Uppsala who would be perfect for the job. We talked about the sensitive issue of having to ask somebody out of a group and he encouraged me to take action upon what was best for the project. I decided to first ask this piano player in Uppsala first. His name is Arnold Rodriguez and he is a Colombian pianist who came 12 years ago to Sweden as a music student. I talked to him and given that that weekend was Easter weekend, I got on a train and brought him all the material that would have taken a week to get there by post. I talked later to the previous pianist and this was the first time in my life I asked someone out of a group. He understood and I can imagine that he was somewhat relieved, taking in consideration his busy schedule and active career.
But before I contacted Arnold, I talked to Homero Avarez. Homero play Brazilian guitar beautifully and knows the repertoire and the tradition. We played together on many occasions and made good friends. He made a great contribution to the band and truly found his place in it. He is kind to receive instructions and critic.
The Rehearsals

I decided to rehearse 4 times. My plan was to introduce 3 songs on each one of the first 3 rehearsals and go through the whole repertoire on the last one. We gathered for the first rehearsal on March 10th, 2010, in room A363 at KMH. At the rehearsal we had people on drums, percussion, piano, bass and tenor sax. The 3 pieces we worked on were “Latin Perspective”, “Aquela Coisa” and “Song for Chano”. I knew that this last one was going to take the longest time to get through. I had given the pianist the sheets with the music a month earlier because his part was especially difficult and I thought he could find the time to get familiar with the style. Everybody else have had the material for at least 2 weeks. The intro of the song (see example 5) consists of a bass line played by both piano and bass. The pianist (The first one. Arnold didn’t come in until the 4th rehearsal) had great difficulties getting through it and as it turned out he was also sight-reading it. The way it was written was very distracting he said and I decided to go on with it and leave the hard bits for later. But he wasn’t the only one sight-reading. Adding the fact that the lead voice (the soprano saxophone) was not at the rehearsal, I decided to concentrate on the other songs.

We played “Latin Perspective”, a fairly simple cha-cha which most controversial passage was played by the horns. One can say that the tempo was limited by the speed that they were able to perform the melody. It wasn’t “happening” really and although I was somewhat concerned I figured that everybody in the band would get an idea of the level of difficulty of the repertoire. In this song there’s also a crucial piano solo, typical to the style, called “montuno” (see example 6).

Example 5: Intro of “Song for Chano”.

Example 6: Piano montuno during “Latin Perspective”.

I soon noticed that there was a lot of sight-reading going on and had a talk with everybody. Ola Bothzén was very well prepared and this struck me as a sign of professionalism. He was probably the most proficient musician in the band, but he also worked on the stuff at home. He had lots of observations and made positive and constructive comments that were very valued by everyone in the band.

We kept on working and played “Aquela Coisa”. There were some difficulties playing the kicks over time, which make use of rhythmic displacement. Apart from this, the song is pretty straightforward, with exception of the bridge, a crazy passage proper of a composition by Hermeto. (see example 7)

Example 7: Bridge on “Aquela Coisa”.

We finished the rehearsal and discussed the dates for the following meetings. I also asked everybody to be brutally honest and openly criticize my performance and explained that I consider this as a great gift and would never take offense by anyone’s comment.

Second Rehearsal – 10/03/27

Horn section rehearsal. We met at room A452 at KMH on a Saturday. As opposed to my plan of introducing 3 songs every rehearsal, we dedicated the date to go through every song. We listened also to the original versions of the songs. We analyzed them together and I pointed out what was to be kept of the original material and eventual peculiarities that make the songs special in one or another way.

We discussed also the role of the piano and I showed the piano player some Brazilian rhythmic patterns to play on the piano while backing a solo. He didn’t like very much to be singled out and didn’t appreciate my spontaneous lesson in front of others. At the end of the rehearsal I apologized and he said that there was nothing to worry about and that he would very much like to meet later just with me to go over the material.
A day or two after that, him and I met. We looked in detail at “Song for Chano” and had little time left to talk about the previously mentioned Brazilian piano patterns. I had written down some of them on the last rehearsal and he said he would work on them on his own. I was very positive about his attitude and thanked him for it.

Third rehearsal – 10/03/31

We started with “Song for Chano”. I started to get the idea that we would never be able to play this song. Its complexity was overwhelming for the pianist and I was getting utterly frustrated. I dropped the case to avoid making anyone feel uncomfortable. We were making some progress on keeping the form and I took the time to play some solos to hear later on the recordings. I discovered while listening to these recordings that my timing was very poor and that I was not concentrating.

We worked intensively on “De sabados pra dominguinhos”. It didn’t sound good but everyone was taking notes about the things that had to be enhanced. We decided that Pontus would take the only solo on the song and we arranged the background vocals. It was tremendously challenging for me to play and sing at the same time. We got stuck on the coda and again I ended up singling out the pianist. I noticed that the sight-reading kept on happening and with only two weeks left before the concert, this was now worrying me. We worked also on “Latin Perspective” and “Aquela Coisa”. Later I went home and listen to the material. I didn't like what I was hearing. I started to think that maybe I had too high expectations on this project. I called a friend and sent him some of the recordings so that I could have his feedback. He agreed with me, but heard a lot of potential. He recommended me a pianist who is already very familiar with all the styles we were covering and promise to give him a call. The next day I spoke to Arnold Rodriguez, who mentioned having a lots of free time and a strong will to play. I brought him the material and met him briefly in Uppsala.

Example 8: Intro of “De sabados pra dominguinhos”, By Hermeto Pascoal.
Fourth Rehearsal – 10/04/07

We met in room A452 at KMH. We started of by going through “Bass Suite #1”. I liked the results very much and only made notes on things that I had to improve myself.

We kept on working on “Awunism”. This was the second rehearsal with the complete rhythm section and the first one with Arnold at the piano. Everything went smoothly and we moved on to the next song, “De sabados...”. Arnold had some difficulties given the short time he had to practice the songs. But he showed dexterity when backing the solos, he obviously knows the style, I thought to myself. This felt like a great relief and the energy level of the whole band was lifted. I instructed Arnold to play Rhodes on “Awunism”, piano on “Aquela Coisa”, which we played next and clavinet with an auto wah-wah effect on “E muita gig veil!”. Arnold is not used to play on synthesizer, so I showed him around this keyboard and he immediately liked it and started to work very well with it.

The rest of the rehearsal went very well. I gave intrucions constantly, marked errors and made notes on both mine and others papers. We agreed to meet again after 4 days, on a Saturday. I'm always afraid that people involved in my projects
won’t feel like rehearsing, but this was not the case. Everybody seemed eager to play at the concert and this lifted my spirit.

Listening to the recording later I was glad to hear the improvement of the whole group. I managed also to focus more on my part and this was showing.

Fifth rehearsal 10/04/10

The whole group met. This was going to be the last rehearsal before the show. I felt that we had to concentrate on “De sabados...” and “Song for Chano”. I proposed an order for the songs to be played at the rehearsal and this was it:

1- Awunism
2- E muita gig vei
3- Aquela Coisa
4- Latin Perspective
5- Bass suite #1
6- Trio tune
7- De sabados...
8- Song for Chano

Everybody agreed on that “E muita gig vei” was the strongest song and that therefore we should finish the concert with it. We kept then the order as described above, and moved that song to the end.

I wanted to include a piano trio song in the repertoire. I had been working on a tune by Chick Corea, from his album “Past present and future”. The song is called “Rhumba flamenco”, and is a latin tune with the typical Phrygian flavor that Corea plays so much. But the piano part is extremely challenging and there was no time for Arnold to learn it. Ola recommended
then that instead we should ask Arnold to bring a tune. Arnold brought “Spring”, a beautiful composition of his own. We spent almost an hour working on it while everyone else took a break from the rehearsal. We decided that I would play the melody at the beginning and the piano would repeat it later. I worked on it during the week and felt comfortable. The rest of the rehearsal went very good. Everything was falling into place. I felt that we were ready to play. We finished the rehearsal and agree to meet the day of the concert at an early time, to go one last time over the whole repertoire and look a bit more in detail at “Spring”.
Planning and logistics

I booked *Nya Salen* in the beginning of March. I was to get the room only after 18.00 and this gave me little time to prepare the stage before the concert. I had to plan everything in detail so that no surprises would hinder the initial plan. I also wanted to record the concert on video and with multiple microphones, so that I could get a good document to preserve the project and to show people who couldn’t attend.

I talked to Joel Hilme, a saxophone student who works at the studio 2 in the school, and asked him if he would be interested in taking care of the sound and record the show. I made a rider and a stage plot for Joel to study. I recommended microphones for each application and gave him two plans of work: a more dedicated one, which described the use of 15 mics and 4 DI boxes (*Direct Input Boxes* convert the impedance of electric instruments such as electric guitar in order to avoid “hum” and static noise.), and a simpler one, in case the resources were not available, which listed 10 mics and 2 DI boxes. I have spent some time learning about audio and wanted to be as influential as I could with the procedures involving the recording of the concert. At the same time I know that sound engineers don’t like to be told what to do and would rather skip or ignore suggestions.

I was prepared to record it myself on the computer with my portable sound card (sound cards transform electrical signals or voltage into digital signals or zeros and ones, which can be handle by DAWs, digital audio workstations, or computers. Is the link between a microphone
and a computer.), but I would have been limited to 8 mics and 2 s/pdif (Sony/Panasonic Digital Interface is a RCA-type connector that sends digital signals, developed to allow compatibilities between this 2 product manufacturers and adopted by the sound industry, often found on piano keyboards and synthesizers) channels for the keyboard, but I had a plan ready with the assignment of each channel.

I contacted the service centrum and booked all the elements that I needed in good time. I booked as well a modest light equipment that didn't really serve me because I found it half broken and I had to improvise to set it up. I arranged to get the drum set that Ola wanted and I also booked a video camera.

As far as advertisement goes, I designed a poster and had some fun doing it too. I ordered copies and hung them all over the school. I invited everyone I met during the whole week preview to the recital, and made a so-called “event” at the popular spot Facebook. I visited Södra Latins School and posted there. I also posted at the local ICA market in my neighborhood, just in case.

I designed a poster for the concert, using Adobe Illustrator.
The day of the recital we met with the band to run a last rehearsal. We had a lot of fun playing and Pablo Donaldo, a friend who plays guitar and sings, showed up to play the melodica on “De sabados pra dominguinhos”. We had talked earlier about it and it wasn’t until 2 days before the recital that he confirmed that he was coming. Homero Alvarez was also there. He had just come back from a tour in Argentina and Uruguay. I had contacted him after the second rehearsal, to provide the band with a solid background for solos, and to inspire the guys with some fine Brazilian guitar comping. Homero has many years of experience playing with Latin groups and is a good friend of mine. He promised to look at the material during his trip and kept his promise. He performed beautifully and did not interfere with the piano, adding only constructive lines and reinforcing the melodies stylistically.

We had dinner together and at 18.00 we went to Nya Salen, where Joel had been setting up for the last 2 hours. As it turns out, the people who were supposed to use the room until 18.00, was unable to take a plane to Stockholm because a cloud of ashes from a Vulcan in Iceland stopped air traffic all across Europe. This played in my favor, and not only in this way. Two teachers close to this project, Ragnhild Sjögren and Jan Adefelt were not able to leave Stockholm, as they had planned, and showed up at the concert, which was a very pleasant surprise.

We set up as planned. Joel had forgotten to book microphones for the piano, but we worked our way around it. We let people in and we hid until it was time to play. I had a paper with the plan and a few reminders and it was very helpful, given the nervousness that overtook me when I spoke at the microphone for the first time. But I was focused and enjoyed the ride. I was very aware of everything happening around me and had fun with my friends. The people responded very warmly to every song and after the last song we were applauded enthusiastically.
I felt, after listening a few times to the recording of the concert, that there are many things that can be neater. But given the relative short amount of time invested on rehearsals, I’m more than happy with the results. I felt that I could have spent more time getting familiarizing with the harmony of Arnolds song, Spring. I got to play a few of his compositions and have great respect for his music. I like the sound and I think that it’s fun to play it with him, there is a whole extension to the song that he invites to when he plays it live. His language is definitively more mature than mine, but I feel that I hear what he is proposing with it. But I need to work a lot on soloing. As of today, it feels that I get through them with a bit of struggle and during the performance I tense a bit and try to concentrate and this comes up in the music. I over react to mistakes and my mind drifts away from the “ritual”.

About the band, I think that everybody did a great job. There was a bit of chaos here and there, but for the most part, everybody got to the finish line with elegance. The gross mistakes are usually section that are missed altogether. But this absence of sections is hardly destructive and one only notices them if one knows the music from earlier.

As the day goes by, the relevance of the mistakes seems to diminish, and it’s the good parts that counts. I need to make peace with the failures in my performance and really let myself be proud for the good job done.
**After the Recital**

Everybody in the band wants to continue with the project. It gave me the chance to meet Arnold and we have plans to play together again with a trio. We already rehearsed and have a date in Uppsala. Paulo’s comment after the concert was: “We have to keep on playing. I feel that we have the soldiers, but no war to go to.” Everybody in the band likes each others playing and I plan to start writing music for the ensemble. Using great songs to develop a bound was only the first step. We now have to develop an identity through a repertoire. I believe that there’s place for this group in many festivals, concert halls, clubs and theaters. I kept the booked date on *New Sound Made*, and for the date we will be having Micke Nilsson on drums, a ductile drummer that masters the Brazilian style. Ola had a previous engagement, but will further take part on the project.

I’m already developing an extension of the repertoire and hopefully the band will live on for the next 2 years at least, as I plan to base my Masters project on its foundations. I’m very positive about it and I strongly believe that the band can get some attention if pursued.
Here I list a few books that accompanied me during my days of preparation.


“Bille: Nuovo Metodo per Contrabbasso” – Parte 1 III Corso pratico


“Past, present and futures song book” – Chick Corea

“12 Classical Duets for Double-bass” – Bernard Salles

“Duet for two string basses” – Zimmermann – International music company N.Y.

“Sonata av Romberg i tre delar – Duett för två kontrabassar” – Simandl

“Music of many cultures: An introduction” – Elizabeth May

“Slumpen är ingen tillfällighet” – Jan Cederquist

“The power of now” – Ekhart Tolle

“Free Play” – Stephen Nachmanovitch

“Effortless Mastery” – Kenny Werner

“The essence of afro-cuban percussion and drumset” – Ed Uribe

“The Salsa guidebook” – Rebeca Mauleón

“The Latin Real Book” – Sher Music

“Patterns for Jazz” – Jerry Coker

“I Ching – Book of mutations” – Ancient Chinese Tradition – Oracle