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# Keep A Lid On It

Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt, konstnärligt arbete

Det självständiga, konstnärliga arbetet finns  
dokumenterat på inspelning



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## Foreword

I began playing music at about 13 or 14 years of age. Initially, I was a guitarist and vocalist, with the intent of being the frontman of a group I had helped put together, at the time consisting of a drummer, another guitar player, and myself. Like many others before and after, I searched for a bassist, and came up short, so before long (at around 15 years old) I found myself taking up the position. I didn't mind, though, and while at first it was intended as a temporary measure, and I still thought of myself as a guitarist, it didn't take long for me to realize that I greatly preferred the new instrument to the old. The band itself didn't get much done outside of playing in the drummer's basement, practicing different rock covers, and trying to write some of our own tunes, but we had a great time getting to know the music and how to play with each other. It was, however, a very formative time that created within me a deep passion for the art, and I would spend hours upon hours jamming with them, followed by more hours practicing at home.

While the music I had been drawn to as a guitarist tended to be classic rock and blues, especially from artists such as Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton, when I picked up the bass I became immediately enamored with funk and r&b. My first couple of years on the instrument consisted largely of learning as many Red Hot Chili Peppers, Bootsy Collins, and Stanley Clarke tunes I could handle, even touching on some Mike Stern and Danny Gatton. After about two years of that, I was introduced to Victor Wooten, which of course introduced to me to a whole new world of playing, eventually leading me to jazz and fusion through a kind of sideways avenue, at which point I largely dropped any focus on the guitar, devoting myself almost exclusively to playing bass.

It wasn't long after I became obsessed with Wooten that I decided that music was, indeed, what I wanted to spend the rest of my life doing, and after a year and a half of bass I ended up applying for (and was accepted to) the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, in Washington DC, a specialized magnet school where I would spend the remainder of my highschool time learning much more about jazz and music in general than I had ever been exposed to. These were some of my most useful years in helping me concentrate my focus on becoming a more complete musician, and developing my basic musical knowledge and ability. While there, in addition to learning more about jazz, classical, and general music theory, I was also exposed to styles and settings I otherwise wouldn't have, playing in a variety of hip-hop, go-go, and r&b groups, gaining the opportunity to further explore fusion, latin jazz, and even delving into a bit of gospel and spoken-word. While at Duke Ellington I also began playing upright bass and taking lessons, something completely new to me at that point, and I became even more enamored with fusion, jazz, latin and funk, familiarizing myself

with groups and musicians like Return to Forever, John Patitucci, Marcus Miller, Michael Manring, Tower of Power, Miles Davis, Michel Camilo, and more.

Towards the end of this period I performed a number of auditions for different universities in the US, eventually deciding to attend Loyola University New Orleans. Admittedly, this choice had more to do with a fascination with the city and its culture than anything else, a place that I had become instantly enamored with soon I had set foot there on my audition day. While I don't regret this choice, and I learned much about both life and music while there, I still wonder how my life would have been different had I made the choice of school more dependent on actual educational considerations, rather than excitement. Perhaps I would have graduated sooner, among other things, but I'm not sure I would have been able to have the same vital experiences anywhere else.

My first year at Loyola was a rather big change, musically. While I had gigged relatively often throughout highschool, when moved to New Orleans it became a fairly regular thing. That first year at university I would gig two, sometimes three times per week, quite a bit more than my previous experience. The main group was a twelve-piece funk/hip-hop/soul ensemble consisting of several horns, organ, drums, percussion, guitar, bass, and vocalists, an incredibly fun and valuable experience. Other times I would play small standard trio gigs, as well as sit in with random group salong Frenchmen street. It was a whole new world, to say the least. The strict educational aspect of my stay there seemed less important at the time, and my academics suffered because of this attitude, but I still feel as if the introduction to the scene was in and of itself a wonderful learning experience.

When hurrican Katrina hit, I was affected more emotionally than I could have anticipated. Luckily, I was with my family in Washington DC at the time, and was not caught in the storm, but to see a place that you have grown to love be devastated in such a way is... painful. I took that year off, worked and gigged in the DC/Virginia area, doing mostly hip-hop and neosoul. It was also a useful experience, but there was nothing I looked forward to more than returning to New Orleans the following year, once the school had been repaired and the city had sufficiently rebuilt their infrastructure. Even after I returned, however, it was never quite the same.

After I returned to Loyola, I decided I wanted to try something other than schooling, and withdrew at the end of the first semester. Truth be told, the school and I were not the best match, and I was quite miserable there for a number of reasons, and I wanted to get into the scene to a more full extent. This led to one of the most intensely productive and creative periods in my life, and for about two or three years after that I lived and gigged in New Orleans. I still had to have a day job, because despite the fact that I would sometimes gig five or six times per week, the work was often

seasonal, and each gig would not pay much in the first place. But the need, the *necessity*, drove me to better myself in a way I had never experienced before, and it was exhilarating, but exhausting. There was a constant fear, a feeling that I was hanging by a thread, and as a consequence I learned more and developed more quickly. The time did come, unfortunately, when I realized that if I wanted to move forward with my life, I would have to become more qualified, and I would have to move on to a different scene.

During this two- or three-year period, the bulk of my musical experience happened with a latin jazz/dance band led by a guy named Fredy Omar, and a trip-hop/funk group called Jealous Monk. Towards the end of this period I also created an incredibly intense experiment with a drummer friend of mine, which while not financially viable in any way, greatly enhanced our personal understanding of creative expression. I was taught some very different lessons from these three examples, not just musically, but professionally, even applicable to personal life choices.

While the time I spent in New Orleans was invaluable, it became apparent that the scene in New Orleans was a largely static one, and if I wanted not just to develop artistically but to secure myself financially, I would have to leave. I needed more; more schooling, more experiences, and to stay would most likely mean that I would wallow in a perpetually haphazard state of economic insecurity, spending more than I was likely to get back, as I witnessed the large majority of musicians doing in the city. Even the most successful local musicians struggled in a way one does not see in other cities, and to break out of this they would branch out beyond the limits, often resettling in places such as New York.

New Orleans was a place to learn and experience, but one had to move on to fulfill oneself. I also understood that my development was lopsided, and that I had much to learn that would be exceedingly to achieve "on the street", so to speak. If I wanted to reach the next level, and if I wanted to grow as an artist and musician, and be qualified to secure my position in life, I would have to return to school, and experience a new environment. While all this was something I slowly grew to notice over time, it all came to a head when I experienced somewhat of a financial meltdown towards what would become the end of my period there. Despite working both in music and my day job, at what oftentimes felt like a constant pace, the money simply wasn't keeping up with my cost of living, and I was forced to admit that I needed to try a different approach.

So I left New Orleans, this time for good (so far). It was a turbulent time, and I wasn't sure how I would handle it. At first, I returned to Washington DC, with some vague idea that I would

attempt to insert myself in the scene there, as I already had a number of contacts that I would periodically play with when I would visit, but I was in quite a bad state. The circumstances of leaving New Orleans had left me feeling dejected and powerless, and while I knew I needed to do something to elevate myself, I was unsure of where to turn, and was not of sound mind to formulate an actionable plan. To make matters worse, my family, at the time, was not residing in DC, but in Beijing, China, due to work. So I was essentially alone and broke.

After spending a few months trying to figure things out and not really getting anywhere, I took up my parents' offer to come stay in Beijing for a while, to regroup. It was a good decision, and helped me put things in perspective. I ended up staying there for three months, and while there actually got the opportunity to gig and record. I somehow ended up running into a friend from New Orleans in one of the jazz clubs there, a stunning coincidence to say the least, and he spoke to me about his considerations to study in Sweden or Denmark. This inspired me to look into the matter myself, which led me to spend a year at Kulturama in Stockholm, then ultimately to KMH. It was a lifechanging, though difficult, time of my life, which through a sequence of eerily serendipitous events has taken me to where I am now.

The time at KMH has consisted of ups and downs as well, but with a steady upward climb, I believe. When I first began attending KMH it was a bit jarring. I felt almost as if I didn't *deserve* to be there, as if I was in over my head, with so many other fantastic musicians that I felt, and sometimes still feel, far outclass my own abilities. Over the years I grew to adapt, and re-developed a stronger sense of self as a musician, through learning, playing in this new environment, and creating more of my own new music on projects with the other musicians at the school. It has been a struggle, though, both musically and personally, but one that I feel has been a benefit.

### **The Project**

The project I am doing aims to capture some of this emotional and psychological turmoil, as well my state of mind at various points of my life here, during my time at KMH. I intend to convey, through each individual piece, these certain moments and periods of my life in a very emotionally heightened sense, both to describe myself and my experiences and to attempt to induce those emotions. I will write and record an album of original songs to accomplish this, and will write alongside this a description of the intent of each song, what they describe, their significance and some of the process I went through to create them. This album has seven completely original songs written mostly over the past year, with one a few years prior.

Many of the events I will be portraying are of course highly personal, but fit within the framework of my musical and artistic development, and will be included in the description of the creative process. The purpose is to create music through an intensely personal method, to express myself in a way that reaches inside more deeply than I am accustomed to. To achieve a more pure and true form of personal expression, never the less presented in a somewhat abstract, instrumental fashion; a concept album, one could say, of certain segments of my own life. The album will consist of six or seven songs, with a variety of instruments to fit the need of the message, though they will of course have the basic combinations of bass, drums, and keys. The arrangement of each piece will also reflect the nature of the message, with an intentional variety of atypical structures I will experiment with to more effectively express myself at an artistic level, though each tune will follow a different theme, and require something distinct to set it apart.

### **The Musicians and the Process**

The musicians involved in this project are: Joel Svensson on guitar, Örjan Carlsson on keys, and Pontus Häggblom on drums. Joel and Örjan were both chosen with absolutely no afterthought. Even before I formulated any coherent plans on what I would actually be doing, I knew that wanted the two of them involved. Their level of skill, their enthusiasm, and the fact I have worked with them on a variety of efforts before made them my top choice, and they have both worked with me on my own two previous projects, as well. I was also extremely happy with Pontus, and very glad that he was both available to work with, and adapted well to styles of music that are outside of his typical comfort zone. It became a bit of a battle to try to land a drummer for this project, as several other possible players bowed out for various reasons, mostly having to do with time constraints. Pontus *literally* saved the day, and this project.

While I wrote the songs on my own before meeting with the musicians, there was a deal of adjustments and rearrangement that had to occur when I did meet with them, as well as some discussion and experimentation with the chords. Before actually getting the whole group together to rehearse, I met with both Joel and Örjan on several separate occasions to go over each song, explain them, and practice a little bit one-on-one. I didn't have any rough recordings for them to listen to, and I had never played any of the songs with them (with the exception of "Your Pulse"), so I all I had to give them were the charts to shed on their own. This required that I go over the songs several times



with them prior to rehearsals, taking notes on changes and parts that needed clarification, before we were ready to tackle the pieces as a group. When I was finally able to land Pontus as a drummer and we began rehearsing (five rehearsals as a group in total), we continued clarify and adjust details even as we played. The unusual nature of the songs made it a rather challenging process to get the tunes into recording shape, and most of them weren't completely settled in structure and arrangement until the third or fourth rehearsal. I did of course already have arrangements ready before this, but I wanted to give the other musicians a chance to voice their input and preferences in a more organic, democratic way, which made it a slower process, but a more rewarding one, I think, musically.

### **Nebulous**

This piece represents an over-arching, ineffable uncertainty, above all else. The open, floating, semi-rubatto style is meant to signify my hesitation and unease, the frequent repetition of the fairly simple head is my own uncertain insistence to go forward with my chosen field. The B-section is meant to punctuate that uncertainty with periods of a stronger resolve, a deliberate projection of the hope of understanding. The song is written with the intent of conveying a sad beauty, as it reflects my own feeling on my chosen passion: the inherently beautiful pursuit of art in general, but instilled with my own self-doubts and sense of loss.

I chose to feature the piano as the "skeleton" of the tune, because I felt it would strike the best balance in tone for the feel I was aiming for. Even though the guitar carries most of the melody, the piano is what actually sets up the atmosphere, and provides the "nebula" itself, over and under which the other instruments weave. It also provides much of the stability, the chords being the basis of the melodies and rhythms as I wrote them. I found it fitting to make the piano-part both the source of the unease and openness, as well as acting as the backbone of the tune. It reinforces the entire concept rather nicely.

The piano plays the role of this "nebula" of uncertainty, representing both the path and the obstacle, so to speak. It is meant to be very free, and in that way unstable or unsure, yet it is also the foundation. When writing it, the chords and the concept came first, not the melody, so the harmony and unorthodox chords and intervals was a very deliberate choice, one that I think works well to generate a sound of flawed beauty, especially combined with the melody.

The melody itself, played by the guitar, is a hesitant, pretty, but oddly broken thing. It goes through the most written changes of the parts, but still clings to the essential core. This was done to convey the sense of unease and pained hopefulness that I feel during these periods. The melody takes liberties with the rhythm, even the harmony at times, but fits within the framework of the song, until it intentionally stumbles. There are notes that sound terribly ugly, but they are there for a reason: to play the part of mistakes and tired frustration, amidst the struggle to see the way.

When the song enters the B-section, it reaches a rhythmically stronger and more determined point, though not completely at first. This is where the tune expresses its resolve, my resolve, to push through the struggle, yet it is also not without a tone of anger and frustration. It certainly isn't an elated feeling, but as if the song is telling itself to be strong, despite itself. The rhythms take on a slightly latin-feel, but as a cohesive unit, rather than through polyrhythms (so derived may be a better description). Again, the melody comes straight from the chords and rhythm here, and there is an emphasized repetition. This is to represent a forced unification of thought and desire, a purposeful direction of action in order to achieve my desired goals, but it is slow, and arduous, and at times even unpleasant.

The bass takes on a very basic role throughout the song. It is played as a support, with only minimal harmonic grounding, rather than a fully developed and dependable bass-line, outside of the B-section. It is only there to give a reference to the other instruments, and to fill out the bottom end of the harmonies. I felt that what was played by the other musicians had so much of the character that I was looking for when writing it, that I didn't want to intrude too much on the sound.

The desire not to intrude was also the main reason I chose not to contribute my own solo; regardless of how a bass solo might have been played, it would not have fit into the overall sense of the tune, at least the version we ended up recording. Bass is not a feature in this piece. It takes most rhythmic and tempo-cues from the piano, though the line has a stronger presence during the B-section: set and static, to give the part a sense of decisiveness, and a clear unity.

As I was writing this piece, I did so with the intention of limiting the complexity, at least as a whole. I didn't want a tune with many different parts, complex melodies, or any over-playing. I wanted simplicity, but with strangely beautiful interplay and harmony, and much repetition so as to create an atmosphere, rather than a distinct structure. I wanted the emotion to come through, in the *manner* of playing, more so than *what* was played. Though of course I wanted *what* was played to easily be able to convey the feelings, as well.

I limited the structure to two basic, simple parts, an A- and B-section, with an emphasis on the space, and relaxed interpretation of the notes. I wanted the song to feature an insistence of repeats, with an earnest building of expression as it did, analogous to a person repeating a point or a mantra to themselves, or to convince others. Changing it very slightly as it goes along but repeating the main issue with a heightened sense of emotion, until it runs itself out.

Describing how it should be played turned out to be rather easy, though of course I didn't go through the entire metaphysical description of the emotion behind the song! The piano turned out so beautifully almost immediately, even without the rest of the instruments, that I almost considered recording it as a duo piece with just bass and piano, but the nature of the unusual melodic choices over the already atypical chords would have made that difficult to pull off, satisfactorily. I would have been put in the position of playing the melody, in that case, and I didn't feel that it would have conveyed the appropriate tone if I did. On the whole, the piece as it was recorded does a very good job of characterizing the emotional and spacial state the name itself describes.

### **Stabilizer**

The intent here was to capture what is almost the opposite of the state of mind described in the previous tune. Rather than a frustrated uncertainty, "Stabilizer" is a fast, enthusiastic, almost manically aggressive feature. In fact, the apparently inspired this feeling a little too well, and the version recorded was played far faster than we rehearsed, nearly faster than I was able to handle! This turned out to be a good thing, though, and gave the song a significant boost in energy, endowing it with a gratifyingly frenetic character. Ironically, while this song was partly meant as an opposite to "Nebulous", it took the longest for me actually settle on a definite feel, out of any of the songs, beyond "fast, funky, and jarring". So I was in truth much more uncertain about this song than I was about the song meant to convey uncertainty!

This tune grew out of what was initially a much simpler snippet of melody and chords, which had somehow organically grown side-by-side from each other. The process I used to write this can be compared to how I wrote "Nebulous", more than anything else, but with a pushing feeling, an aggressive feeling, something that I feel on my best days, yet because too forceful, and is difficult to maintain consistently. It can indeed be called manic, and creates a sort of feed-back loop that feels

fantastic while it is happening, but is apt to burn itself out. It seemed fitting that my fingers felt ready to fall off after a few takes of this blistering version.

While I have experienced periods like these many times, and they all seem beneficial to a certain degree, despite the drawbacks, when I think of this state of mind I always first think of a specific period in New Orleans of about two years. An incredibly hyper-focused time, and an especially productive one.

During that time I found myself writing a lot of music like this, almost spitting it out, often over-reaching myself and producing jarring, unpleasant music, but I was really trying to stretch myself. That is why this song contains what I consider many curt rhythmic phrases, with an emphasis on odd, stilted melodic choices devided by identifiably strong parts.

The fact that I was unable to settle on a specific feel to this tune is written into it in very direct way. Originally, I had planned to play this as a latin-fusion tune, and those roots can be indentified most clearly in the B-section. The rhythmic setup for the melodic resembles something you would find in that genre because I had initially set that section up as a series of breaks, with brief improvisation in between each phrase. Eventaully I decided that I wanted to do a more straight-forward fusion, so I de-emphasized many of the unison lines I had intended to have, in order to make it sound less latin. The B-section was also altered rather severely, structure-wise. Much space was added in to give more breathing room, and to redirect focus back to the main melody. The melodic phrases were stretched and placed farther apart, simplified to what extent was required.

There was also a great deal of stream-lining involved with the A-section, especially in the chords, which used to be more numerous and needlessly complex. I concluded that achieving the high-paced, wild sound that I desired would be easier if the musicians, myself included, were not mired in a mess of chords and harmonies that did not need to be there. Other parts of the song were also treated this way, with a great deal of simplification, as much for my own benefit as the other musicians.

The guitar takes the lead here, playing the melody over a rather busy and tricky set of chords. While speed is certainly a factor in this melody, the main focus was on the rhyimic elements and the strange intervals, a combined development from the chords and the intent of the song. The business of the frenetic push was left mostly to the rhythm section, outside of the guitar solo. The idea was to create a song that was both a reflection of the busy, energized state of mind I had during that

time in New Orleans (a product of necessity and excitement), and a more cohesive, developed version of the music I was writing at that time. The guitar's jagged, brazen notes are good approximation of just that.

The bass part and drums are, of course, very important in pushing the feeling, essential even. The intention was to create a prominent rhythm section overwrought with syncopation and interplay, though the extent to which this was possible became limited. It ended up being a trade-off between speed and complexity, but pushing our capacity did well for the overall style of playing, and accurately represented the expression of the piece. The problem came down to choosing the most fitting syncopations to focus on, while working in cooperation the melody, and not blowing a fuse before the song was done.

### **Keep a Lid On It**

The title track of the project/album, time-period-wise, is somewhat representative of a period about eight years ago, when I was particularly keen on both groove-centered music and odd time-signatures. It is less focused on expressing certain emotions or states of mind, and more on actual musical elements. The name itself, "Keep a Lid On It", is meant as a reminder to "stay in the pocket", to not get away from oneself in the musical sense; I toyed with calling it "Let It Cook", as well, as description of how despite the compulsion to push it forward and get lost in the structure, that urge needs to be resisted in order to maintain a stable groove. That mindset can be loosely extrapolated to my entire bass-playing career, of course, or anyone's for that matter, but is much more specific in this tune. It is particularly important in a song with so many switches in time, but with a quasi-reggae feel that requires a constant, steady pocket in which to "simmer".

The tune had been floating about in my head for quite some time, and was actually the first song I had considered writing for the project. It went through many stages of possible development, though I had to make sure that it didn't come out with an overt amount of complexity. I knew I wanted something with switching odd time-signatures, and a groove-based feel, and it went from latin jazz, to dark jazz, to fusion, and finally to this. I had wanted to incorporate reggae into the project in some fashion, and the unusual combination of the odd times with that style of music seemed very appealing.

Melodically, I chose to keep it as simple as I could, while creating a line that caused clever shifts within the structure so as to adapt to the changing time-signatures. I wanted to emulate the feel and rhythms one tends to find in a reggae tune, with repeats and some variation, a tune that one could easily latch on to and even hum along if one felt so inclined. I wanted a song that was a simplistic expression over a complex concept, something that would force the players to always keep a measured stance, and ensure that they had the correct balance despite the unorthodox circumstances of the setting itself. I think this was accomplished well, with the actual note choices in the phrases not being overly complicated, while it is the *placement* of the notes and rhythms within each phrase that brings in the complexity, the division within the bars along with the time, all the while as the accompaniment holds the fort. It works well, because each part as it is written *depends* upon the others to get it right, more so than in most cases due to the different established lines as the time-signatures change, and the musicians need to pay attention in order to recognize and feel comfortable in the rhythmic interchange. However, once the group became accustomed to the pocket, it was surprisingly easy to feel truly relaxed playing it, despite these elements, as was the intention. It did take a bit of rehearsal, though.

The actual act of keeping a lid on it is most clear in the rhythm section, epitomized by the bass line. The bass, while engaging in some improvised differences, is mostly played according to a very specific written line with a recognizable melody of its own. This was written deliberately as an homage to the reggae style and groove music in general, but also as an anchor for the rest of the parts. The melody of the song contains many shifts in placement along the varied time-signatures, and unusual rhythmic interplay that would have made it rather difficult to play, had the anchoring bass line not been present. I also wrote it in this way because I wanted it to be a groove-tune, first and foremost, rather than just an odd-time fusion piece, and I wanted it to feel natural but grounded.

A great deal of focus was spent getting the tone just right for the bass, as well, especially in the mixing process. It was done for the intention of further establishing the bass line as anchor of the piece. What I really wanted was a sound almost devoid of brightness or treble, something that sit at the very bottom of the spectrum, almost only making its presence known at a vibrational level. This became trickier to accomplish than it seemed, and the result was admittedly not exactly what I had envisioned, but never the less functioned, in the greater whole of the piece, like it was meant to.

An anchor becomes especially important as the time-signature shifts lead to necessarily strange measure counts. The tune can basically be described as switching between nine-four, eleven-

four, and four-four, but is written, for the sake of practicality, with short measure divisions. As a consequence, the B-section ends up with a very unusual eleven measures, shifting from the primary eleven-four feel of that section, back into the nine-four in the last two bars, in anticipation of the return to A. This makes for some very interesting but sticky rhythmic and melodic adjustments, something that I attempted to alleviate by creating a very clear unision line to indicate the shift, and make it feel more natural for both the listener and musicians. The switch to a steady four-four during the solos was done in order to relieve the players of some of the responsibility to constantly keep the lid on it within such a specific time setting, but also to open up new harmonic and melodic options instead of being tied down (hence the alternate chord changes).

### **Imputation**

”Imputation” is a song I wrote in honor of my early influences and introductions to fusion, mainly Mike Stern, John Scofield and Vital Information, though it is also a representative piece of my own state of mind when I am at my most relaxed and self-assured. It is actually a specific type of song that I have wanted to write and record since I first heard live fusion, a style I have lightheartedly dubbed as ”detective fusion”, a sort of non-distinct, abstract tune that has been floating around in the back of my mind for years. I have often utilized elements of this abstract tune when creating a variety of songs, but have never actually expressly written down a song entirely in this style, or with this intent. It is straight-forward, stripped down, with a heavy focus on the groove and the merits of the melody itself rather than any very complicated additions and structures; the song is simple form with minimal pre-determined fluff. It seeks to be an emulation/interpretation of the swaggering, bombastic tunes that inspired me to love fusion, and does so as much with what is written, as with the freedom I intentionally left for the piano and guitar to play out.

This type of “detective fusion” as I see it is characterized by a relaxed, swung groove, infused with elements of blues and jazz, with a simple but solid rhythm section. The guitar takes the lead, at least in the this case and in the examples I would point out as ideal, and adds it’s own elements of showboating and expressiveness. The goal is to create a tune that oozes an aggressive sort of cool, that makes you want to strut and bob your head, while feeling very good about yourself in an almost arrogant manner. This is also where the name of the song comes from; it is an imputation of cockyness, an accusation of possibly having an over-inflated opinion of oneself, though it is simply an expression of satisfied self-confidence.

The writing process began with nothing but a simple bassline. I knew exactly the type of sound I was going for, and the melody had already practically written itself (in my head), at least to an approximate degree. I wanted to have a concise bass part that acted like as much of a hook as the melody would, and served the purpose of laying down the “cool”, without worrying about stretching out too much. I wanted it to play the part of the “strutting”, the undercurrent over which the other parts were free to show off and break loose.

This type of line and playing draws heavily from approaches I remember Baron Brown of Vital Information making use of, and from one of my favorite Mike Stern tunes “Showbiz” (from the 1994 album *Is What It Is*) with Will Lee on bass, at least in spirit. The way the bass has such a powerful, essential presence, while simply holding it’s own as a backbone within the music is something that I have always admired, and wanted to attempt in one of my own musical creations. It does nothing more or less than establish and maintain the groove, but with the distinct presence of a line that carries throughout the piece, in order that the other parts are primed to shred and express themselves with a solid support.

The melody, though already fairly settled in my head, developed from there, as an elaboration on the basic groove. The development of groove into melody is rather obvious from the rhythmic phrase at the beginning of the head, shared by both the bass and guitar (also the rest of the group), and by the phrasing of the melody in the B-section, which was born from my own instinctual rhythmic fill choices on that particular line, as I was writing it. To further express the aggressive-but-relaxed nature of the head, I chose to implement many passing tones, avoid-notes and blue tones as I could, while still creating a comprehensive, listenable tune.

At times I was forced to check myself, as much of the writing process I chose to disregard any theoretical rules I was paying attention to, and much of the *manner* of playing had to be vocally explained to the players in order to get it right, since attitude is tricky to notate. This was done in favor of conveying the brash attitude I desired to express, but my habit tends to be one of easily outpacing myself, and I wanted to make sure that I was still creating a clear, distinct, somehow *relatable* melody, even if not in an exactly mainstream way. The main idea was of course to approach the tune with a blatantly audacious temperament anyway, and the melody I was hearing inside required a bit of rule bending, though it was for the sake taste, sound, and specifics, not for being “out” just for the sake of being out.



This became an unintentional problem when it came to asking for advice on how to structure certain sections, and particularly when I was considering different options for chords, as the song was apparently very difficult to understand stylistically for those attempting to read it. In fact, one could say that for anyone outside of myself, it didn't really come together until it all finally came together, meaning that until all the musicians eventually processed and properly played all their parts, the greater whole was nearly incomprehensible! It was rather poetically fitting, again, considering that those who attempted to understand the whole of the song on paper interpreted it as confusing, when on the whole it is actually one of the more straight-forward and simplistic pieces of the project.

### **Minefield**

While "Nebulous" references the overall atmosphere of doubt, uncertainty, and so on that I have felt during certain periods, "Minefield" is a direct reference to the obstacles and personal shortcomings that have led to those feelings. Whether they be financial, such as when I was forced to rethink my choices towards the end of my time in New Orleans, organizational, regarding my own difficulties in handling many factors at once (leading to disarray and falling behind), or musical, and my own at times uneven grasp of all it's facets, or simply mental, this piece represents what I see as the minefield of obstacles and problems I have had to navigate, and continue to do so. This metaphor is presented throughout the piece, from its taxing tempo, atypical chordal and melodic choices, variety of sections, and its generally foreboding and dark tone. The melody is sweet, but on edge, and while it rests, the rhythms never do, always pushing forward.

This applies just as much to my move from New Orleans as it does to my time as a student at KMH, or any other school. In New Orleans I took on too much at once, and it seemed to be working quite well. I had a part-time job during the day, of course, but in the evenings I would gig, and gig often. The typical workload was about three gigs per week, for two or three sets each. Sometimes it went up to as many as six gigs in one week, though that was unusual, and while it was jarring at first and quite a change of pace from what I was used, I adapted myself in good time, and came to really enjoy the personal and musical challenge it presented. The problems arose when I gave too much attention to the musical aspects of my life, and lost track of my other responsibilities, namely the financial ones.

I suppose some of it can be attributed to the fact that I was partnered and living with someone who did not understand my way of life, and so I was reasonably compelled to make

concessions that put us beyond our actual budget, and opted to take a vacation with my significant other to visit my father's side of the family in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. It probably wasn't the best decision, and I knew it at the time, but I didn't know just how bad it would turn out, especially when the financial support my family had offered did not come through, leaving me in a lurch.

This wouldn't have been a problem in and of itself, but when we returned after two weeks I found out that I no longer had my day-job, even though I had been guaranteed the vacation time. We had no savings, because despite all the work I did the money was only ever enough to cover us as long as I kept working, and when we came back it also happened to be in a lull of gigging opportunities. If had I been more vigilant, or set up a reliable fallback, or had the necessary qualifications for a job with more security, I wouldn't have been put in the position where I had to make drastic changes. I was too busy keeping my eye on one ball that I didn't notice the rock flying straight for my nose. Admittedly, I had been considering moving before this point due to the limitations and inherently unchanging nature of the city (both charming and frustrating), but the way that circumstances shoved the lack of choice about the matter into my lap was not how I would have preferred to go about it.

The need to be wary of many different factors translates to schooling as well, though perhaps with less brutality. I have never been the most organized individual, nor the best at taking instruction, even when I want to be. I have to be nearly bludgeoned to death with the information in order for it to stick, or to be put in a veritable life-or-death situation where my very livelihood is at stake. As a consequence, my time at school has often felt like a juggling act, with drops and misses, often feeling like I am out of my league. I have no choice but to barrel through, as with most things, but it does become disheartening at times, as I am consistently faced with my shortcomings, and as a result of previous cataclysmic consequences I have become constantly paranoid that I am missing vital details. That paranoia unfortunately does not prevent me from still missing them, though.

One of the main elements I wanted to convey is that there is always *something* happening, there is always some issue to keep track of. The accompaniment is always moving forward, constantly percolating beneath the melody, even when the melody instrument seems to be relaxed and laid back, or when the rhythm section lays into the groove under the solos. One must constantly be paying attention in order not to be caught off guard or lose the flow, and when one

thinks they have a grasp of the fundamentals, the doubled piano and bass phrase comes in to remind you not to get too comfortable.

The “shout chorus”-like section at the end of the piece becomes the full realization of the idea that while I have been enjoying myself, seemingly confident that I have my eye on the ball, the full weight of my various issues has crept up on me, and I find myself overwhelmed. The growing aggression of the outro represents my own efforts to adjust, as I attempted to adjust my own position in New Orleans, by fixing new living arrangements, attempting to find a new day-job, etc. As the difficulties continue mounting I react with more and more distress, almost panic. Everything starts falling apart, and before I am able to compose myself the song ends.

### **Your Pulse**

This piece was actually written a few years ago, but it fits nicely into the theme of the project, and up until it was recorded with this group I had never been able to create a remotely satisfactory rendition. It was written as a dedication to my partner (one of a few different songs I have dedicated to her over the years), and is probably one of my favorite compositions I have ever created. It believe it perfectly captures a feeling of appreciative sensuality, a combination of seduction and the frank sense of longing, emotional and physical, that I felt when I wrote it. In that way, it expresses exactly what I was deliberately attempting to express, and is only limited by the elements of what I was able to work with on the recording.

I first wrote this nearly five years ago, while on a stay in Beijing, China that lasted for about three months, not long after I had moved from New Orleans but before I decided to move to Sweden. Since then it has gone through several rewrites and rearrangements, but for the most part it has largely stayed the same, because I was very happy with its key parts. The rendition and recording was done during that stay in Beijing, but the playing failed to capture the feeling of the song, and had terrible recording quality at that.

The second rendition came a few years later, at KMH in fact, when I attempted to use it on my first project, but it was only partially successful. The feeling was right on, the playing was great, but due to another organizational failure on my part, the recording setup was less than ideal. While it certainly sounded good for what it was, and turned out to be a true learning experience, I was bent on making sure that I would create a definitive recording at some point in the future. That

opportunity, of course, came this year, and I was able to utilize two of the same musicians that I used on the second go, so it was only a simple matter of a refresher course for them.

The reasons for writing the song and dedicating it to my partner were just as important as the feeling of the tune itself. This was perhaps six months after the events that forced us to move from New Orleans, and while she had thankfully been able to move in with her family in the Virginia/Washington DC area while sorting out new living situations and jobs, my own family (the ones I could depend on) lived in China. I was having a difficult time adjusting to the change, it was slow to find a job, and the fact that I was temporarily obliged to sleep on the couches of friends, or in my car, made it difficult for me to get my mind on track to improve my situation. Eventually I realized that I needed to get away for a while and reorganize, so I went to stay with my family for a few months. While I was there, I wrote “Your Pulse” as a dedication to my appreciation to my partner as a woman and presence in my life, but also as a reassurance that I was still with her, and that even though we had recently gone through a tough period she was still very much a priority in my life, and always would be.

When I wrote the tune I wanted it be as deeply sensual as I could make it. I wanted to convey not just lust, but a whole range of personal emotions relating to the subject, and intelligent seduction. The strongest inspiration for the actual content of the song is without a doubt Marcus Miller. Miller was my biggest overall inspiration for several years, and is still the first musician I think of when I consider what “sexy” should sound like on bass, and while the song is certainly a wholly original creation, I would be lying if I tried to say that I wasn’t sometimes channeling his style when I wrote it.

The tune isn’t entirely based on the one musical inspiration, though. I attempted to bring forth a wide variety of influences from R&B, neo-soul, and so on, in order create the most intimate expression of sensuality, in instrumental form, I could muster (in this style). I may even give this song another shot at recording at some future date, because I still want to feel as if I have done it a complete justice, and I am never quite sure that I have. Then there is a bit of irony in the situation; I’m not quite sure that my partner could ever really understand the extent of the meaning behind the piece, given that she is not a musician. I’m sure she could and does appreciate the song for what it is on the surface, but she is not one who is inclined to listen to this type of music on her own, so she is unable to grasp the deliberation and emotion I have put into it. Perhaps that is only natural, or perhaps it speaks more about my own work than I would care to consider!

## Bubbles

The name “Bubbles” is a reference to the compartmentalization that tends to occur with musicians, and people in general in regards their chosen career field or passion. Whether you are a musician, painter, engineer, lawyer, or what-have-you, whenever you base your life around a specialization you form these bubbles of knowledge, expertise, even friends and acquaintances. This is of course almost unavoidable, even necessary, if you have dedicated your life to a cause, and wish achieve any level of mastery in it, but it can be good to be aware this fact and make an effort to reach outside of your zone in order have a broader understanding. To be effective, specilization within your field is a must, but to truly appreciate yourself and all life has to offer, it is important to at least take a peek into other bubbles every once in a while, and take from it what you can.

Being a musician is already a giant bubble in and of itself, issues that don’t intersect with this bubble are often disregarded or left unnoticed, and within the music bubble there are yet smaller bubbles: the trad bubble, the bluegrass bubble, the latin bubble, and countless other examples. While I have my own specializations within music, genres I am more familiar with, that am better at playing either due to nature or experience, I do desire to be able to play as many kinds of music as possible in order to enrich myself and my sound. Some of the most fantastic examples of music have come from the intersection of two or more of these bubbles, giving rise to entirely new sounds and traditions. In fact, one could say that musical development in general is nothing but a result of this constant and steady effect, birthing genre after genre.

“Bubbles” was at first my own attempt to break *out* of my own tendencies, to try to write a song that wasn’t necessarily tied down to any of my typical styles, but... it may have ended up being a self-defeating prospect. It is very obviously a fusion tune, but luckily even in defeat it can serve as an example of the subject matter. One could say that it might be more difficult to break out of your own bubble than you would expect, maybe even especially so if you are trying to do it on purpose!

Structurally, “Bubbles” is by far the simplest tune of the set. A one-part melody, repeated once with only a variation in the groove on the repeat. The real variation comes during the solo section, when the chord changes and rhythm section switch to new parts. This was done with the intention of letting the style of the piece define itself, rather than structuring out the feel. This was not originally the case, however. The song began as a much more complex piece, with several sections

that were eventually cut in favor of a more free approach. I will also admit that in the original version I went overboard without at first realizing it, presenting to the band a monstrosity that would have taken weeks to learn, and probably would not have translated well as a whole piece.

While I did have a vague sound in mind when I wrote it, I did want most of the interpretation to come from the group. Other than what became the one and only written melodic section, I written the song melody first, with only a passing, conceptual regard for a set of changes. I *did* write it in a way that followed certain *possible* changes, and even outlined some of those chords in a way that seemed very clear as I was writing it, but left it mostly very open to choice and desire.

I soon realized how difficult this effort would be, because prior to cutting it down to workable size, there were two additional complicated sections that contained only partial chord changes, or none at all. I had intended to do some kind of “group input” on these parts, and initially felt very confident in this attempt, but when I brought it to the rest of the guys, I understood that I had, once again, gotten ahead of myself! Even I felt at a loss when trying to recall just what my intentions were, if any, and the only clear section was the A-part, which became the song. The rest of it I ended up cutting off, and actually went back to it after completing the recording, added new set changes and created an entirely new, more complete piece for future use.

### **Afterword**

The process was grueling, and at times nerve-wracking, but the end result turned out better than I allowed myself to hope for. Particularly in regards to the difficulties I had with bagging a drummer, combined with just how deceptively complex some of the tunes ended up being, I was very worried that it wouldn't pull together. Fortunately, it came out closer to how *wanted* it to be, rather than how I feared it would.

Prior to really kicking this project into high gear, I had found myself in a bit of a personally creative rut, but this was rather effectively turned around when began to simply force myself to write. While I had still been writing sporadically, making myself work towards the goal of making this complete album, with all of the tunes but one being brand new compositions, was invigorating, to say the least. Even so, until I met up with my group and actually played my tunes, and

then finally heard the complete renditions of the recording, let me know that I may be doing something right after all.

The process itself, in retrospect, may have benefitted from a more standard, strict band-leading approach. The result was wonderful, the music over-all conveying what I wanted it to, emotionally and technically, but it may have been easier to accomplish if I had all elements of the compositions settled prior to engaging the other musicians. My desire to receive more personal touches and inputs from the people I worked with ended up with some very good tunes, very much as I envisioned them for the most part, but I feel that I could have taken a more commanding role in order to centralize the process of settling on arrangements, learning the songs as a group, and allowing the musicians to feel more comfortable more quickly with the material.

I may be the type of person who is never quite satisfied with their own work, but with the musicians I worked with I would say that I am as satisfied as I could want. This is especially true given the amount of deliberate introspection I engaged in to create the album. It made it both easier and more difficult at the same time. It was easier because it forced me to stay true to my own intentions with the music, to best of my abilities, and more difficult because of the heavy amount of personalization. I suppose it can be boiled down to: the more skin you have in the game, the harder you take it if you fail, and the more intent you are to succeed.