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Felix’ Exam Essay

Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt, konstnärligt arbete

Det självständiga, konstnärliga arbetet finns
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Musical background

I grew up in Bergen, Norway, with a lot of music around me, especially since both of my parents are cellists in the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. I used to conduct along to classical music at an early age, and was frequently taken to my parents’ concerts from around the age of three. Looking back, I can recall having listened to classical music only until the age of five. Edvard Grieg were among my favorites. During my first four years in primary school, I listened mostly to boy bands and pop artists. Among these, Michael Jackson is the only one that I still listen to. Discovering The Beatles around the age of ten took my music interest to a new level and led me into rock music from the fifties up until today. For the next nine years, I gradually started listening to heavier rock, starting with Jimi Hendrix to AC/DC to Iron Maiden to Slipknot to Norwegian black metal band Mayhem. I played classical piano for four years until I was twelve, but never gained any particular interest in it. It was not until I acquired a drum set that I got passionate about practicing, and my parents let me quit playing the piano. My first drum teacher was a classical percussionist named Torbjorn Ottersen; a colleague of my parents. He guided me through basic technical exercises and provided me with written rudiments. I have had quite a few teachers since I started playing in 2004 with a variety of quality. Snorre Svenningsen, Craig Farr, Terje Isungset and Frank Jakobsen are probably the teachers I have had for over a year each that have contributed most to my development. I had a single lesson with Swedish drummer Marcus Lewin who made a big impact on me. Being quite young at the time, I could only grasp the surface of his philosophy, but looking back and remembering how he talked to me about drummers, music and listening, I finally see the depth in the things he said. I still think about how he told me that I should be so confident in my playing that I would not need to listen for how it sounded, so that I could envision putting my ears in front of my drums to hear the other musicians only.

Most importantly, classical percussionist Peter Adam Kates is the one who has contributed the most to my drum education. Since the very beginning, my parents asked him for advice on who I should have as a teacher in Bergen, and he led me to all of the aforementioned teachers, except for Isungset. He has known me ever since I was a baby and has shown a genuine interest in my career for as long as I can remember. I am forever grateful for all the cymbals and books he has lend me and including me as the drummer when he set up a Frank Zappa project with the contemporary ensemble BIT 20 where I got to play "The Black Page". I cannot think of any other teacher or mentor I have had that has been as present and supportive as Peter Adam Kates.

Up until university level, I spent a lot of time playing along to music in my basement. I always searched for technical challenges and tried to imitate drummers like Dennis Chambers, Vinnie Colaiuta, Nicko McBrain, Jan Axel Blomberg ("Hellhammer") and Jack DeJohnette. I find that most of my development has come through this practice, plus investigating different techniques and approaches on the Internet. More than YouTube, www.drummerworld.com is the web site that
has been the most important to me. I truly believe that the majority of my knowledge and skills in drumming come from that particular web page.

It was not until I enrolled in the Jazz Bachelor program at the Grieg Academy in Bergen, Norway, that I started surrounding myself with musicians on a daily basis and actually studied music full time. Ever since the age of twelve I had attended schools with a broader academic approach, not musically oriented. My high school years where spent at Bergen Katedralskole, where I majored in subjects like physics, chemistry and mathematics. At this point I did not have any friends in school that were as serious about playing music as I was - most of them did not even attend concerts or other cultural events. Needless to say, I felt pretty unstimulated musically in an environment like this, but I did not mind that much really, since I was used to keeping my practice regiment and niche music to myself. Looking back at those three years in high school, I am somewhat surprised that I dedicated myself so religiously to music whereas none of my friends did. I would go home and check out new drummers, find new music, play along to it on the drums and constantly try to challenge myself with technically demanding music. I worked through drum books such as Future Sounds¹ by David Garibaldi, Rick Latham’s Advanced Funk Studies², Jungle/Drum ’n’ Bass for the Acoustic Drum Set³ by Johnny Rabb and Jack DeJohnette’s The Art of Modern Jazz Drumming⁴. For technical practice, I glued in separate papers in my third grade music book with drum rudiments and etudes I had acquired from my first teachers. At the age of fourteen I wrote out six stroke paradiddles, simply because I figured it could be useful, not knowing these would be among the most useful rudiments for drummers. One thing I started doing at an early stage was practicing on pillows to get a stronger technique. Usually most drummers practice technique on drum pads that allow the stick to rebound, while on a pillow you have to work harder, simulating the head on a larger drum. One summer I would sit for three hours each day for a week in a sandbox in my grandparents garden in Denmark playing single strokes on a pillow. My technique improved vastly.

During my high school years, I was fortunate to be chosen to perform a solo drum set piece at a youth jazz contest were I was the youngest among almost only older full time jazz students. Later I won a 5.500 NOK prize as winner of single stroke roll contest at the local drum store and was interviewed by regional television about it. The greatest experience was being chosen as one out of four young musicians from Bergen go to Maputo, Mozambique for a two-week music residency. Despite all this I was anxious to seek a career in music, as everybody told me it would be a hard and unpredictable way of life. I ended up commencing a bachelor in physics in Copenhagen, but dropped out after only three weeks. Those three weeks were the time I realized that I had to become a musician; because it was the one thing I actually wanted. I could not compromise my passion for

¹ Future Sounds, Alfred Music (1992)
² Advanced Funk Studies, Alfred Music 2009
³ Jungle/Drum ’n’ Bass for the Acoustic Drum Set, Alfred Music (2001)
playing full time anymore and decided to apply for the jazz bachelor program in my hometown Bergen.

At university level, I have developed a passion for playing piano again and focus quite a bit on that. I had singing lessons for one semester and try to stay persistent in my vocal practice, although I find that challenging.

A topic I have not covered at all is how a muscular imbalance in my body has kept me from playing as much as I would want and forced me to reduce my practice routine drastically for several years. Without going into physiological detail, I figured it would be relevant to mention as my general health and state of mind has been greatly affected by this issue. Ever since I felt pain for the first time in my left wrist back April 2011, I have undergone chiropractic, medical and physiotherapeutic treatment, largely with very limited success. As the inflammation of muscles spread to my right arm also, I was incapable of using my arms for any repetitive activities. Since my teens I have been lifting weights, mostly without any professional guidance, just following a program I put together myself. For a long time I exercised only the front of my torso, gradually leading to an imbalance where my chest muscles pulled my shoulders forward, causing my back muscles to be overstretched which lead to poorer blood flow into my arms. It seems that is why I suffered from inflammations and muscle fatigue. Not only was my upper body out of balance, but also the entire right hand side of my body was tighter than the left. The big muscle going from our thigh, connecting the pelvis and back, had somehow suffered overuse. I can only suspect what happened, but I believe it could come from having played the bass drum repetitively for hours each day - especially during the time I focused on playing fast and spent two hours each day playing single strokes with the feet, constantly pushing the envelope. It was not until a year ago that I started a rehabilitation program based on the theory that I had to strengthen my core muscles, especially the weaker ones on the left hand side and focus on exercising my back, that I felt substantial progress. Until then, I had been treated with dry needling⁵, cortisone injections in my arms, massage and other exercise regimes - all of these being symptomatic treatments with minimal long term effect. At this point I am happy to say that I have progressed more the last year than the three years before, hopefully seeing the light at the end of the tunnel.

⁵ Dry needling. Needles used for treatment against muscle pain
Project description

My exam project primarily focuses on a concert containing my original compositions played by my quintet "Felix Fraternity", whilst another smaller part will be a piece I have written for solo piano that I recorded myself in the studio.

My aim with this exam project is to further develop my band that I started last year and work more in depth with some of the tunes we have already played, but also adding new repertoire. Being the musical director in Felix Fraternity makes the band my biggest passion since I can shape the compositions and performance the way I believe serves the music best. I found it inevitable to use this band for my exam since it is the most personal and my musical visions for it stand very clear to me. As I started composing music and getting the band together, I wanted to write songs that I really believed in myself. Melody and harmony are two parameters that have always been of great importance to me, so I spent a lot of time searching for these. Additionally, I wanted to make sure the songs had enough space, so they would not seem restless and busy. By giving the songs this space and ability to breathe, I was lead into investigating dynamics and phrasing. These five elements (melody, harmony, space, dynamics, phrasing) were all a strong motivation for me to compose my own material, since I often feel they are ignored in a lot of today’s music.

The idea of a piece for solo piano comes from having a great affection for classical music. I have always admired the idea of a written musical piece that is refined to the composers uttermost ability, for then to be interpreted and shaped as beautifully as possible by the musicians and/or conductor. To me, this process stays more true to the actual musical result than jazz does, given that the process of performing jazz is a core value - not always the outcome. The textures and tonal language in a solo piano piece also differ a lot from the ones in Felix Fraternity, which I also wanted to emphasize and show appreciation for.
As I learned that we were to have an exam project, I figured having a deadline would be a good opportunity to start composing on a regular basis. Never having been the only bandleader and musical director, I felt it was about time that I challenged myself in this field.

I started out reviewing some of my earlier composition sketches and spent quite some time dwelling on which ones would work in a group format, and which were best suited as solo piano pieces. During my first two years of studying jazz in Bergen (2011 - 2013), I had written a couple of ballads on the piano that I liked because of their melancholic yet harmonically fresh mood. At the time, they unveiled both pianistic and compositional abilities that I did not know I possessed, so the feeling of personal achievement emphasized their importance to me. Unfortunately, I realized that both songs had a restless melody that would seem too busy in a quintet, so I set out to compose alternative ballads. As I started composing extensively in the fall of 2013 and early 2014, I had finally written pieces like "Portrait of a Memory", "Light Blue" and "Melancholia" that I felt had a better harmonic and melodic balance.

The first song I started writing for my exam concert set list was "Suspension". I seem to remember that I was quite influenced by modern American jazz, namely guitarist Kurt Rosenwinkel’s song "The Next Step". I wanted to utilize non-conventional chord progressions and create an edgy colorful palette for the melody to rest over. From searching freely on the piano, I ended up with quite a few altered and slash chords. The melody is derived from the chords and features a clear intervallic play in fifths and sixths in the A part which gives a somewhat rigid and simple melody that contrasts the ambiguous chord progression.

Here you can see the clear vertical melody structure and the suspended chords.

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It was not until I moved to Stockholm eight months after I composed part A, that I concluded the piece with parts B and C. I found it to be very challenging to depart from part A, as I had already pushed my abilities and felt lucky I had even arrived at such an advanced yet coherent eight bars. Finally coming up with part B, it took the piece from a light eight note based feel into an Afro section with the sensation of 4/4 divided into eight note triplets. This gives the B section more push, enforced though a busier melody line. The swinging vamp in section C gives a sense of arrival over a consonant Fmaj/G, before departing back to the intense solo changes in A and B.

Suspension is probably the most altered and Phrygian sounding piece we play in Felix Fraternity, yielding quite the harmonic challenge for soloists. Guitarist Emmanuel still refuses to play over it live, a year after we played it first time.

Whenever people come up to me after a concert, they always seem to point out how they liked "Le Cristal Vert", so I thought I might elaborate a bit on the composition, as I am also quite happy with it. Actually, I ended up with the intro for this tune by randomly falling into an F pedal tone at the end of my solo piano piece "Solitude". I start out cycling four chords in four over five, prolonging the last chord to fit it into a four bar period. The quarter note pulse is held stubbornly in the F octave, which clarifies the polyrhythmic layers and makes it comprehensible for the average listener. After four repetitions of A, it moves to B from minor to major, flipping the mood in a way that may come across as relieving and epic. The four over five rhythm layer remains as a constant for the harmonic exposition to relate to.

B opens with a Spanish sounding phrase, ending in 4/4 swing in C.
When we arrive at the melody in C, the foundation in B remains, only changing the polyrhythm into three over four instead of four over five, to have it match the rhythmic subdivision of the melody. At this point the melody bears a character of hope and curiousness, which I have seldom come across in my music. It was especially in this section that I saw shades of green and sensed a certain sharpness to the melody and the chords, which resulted in the name "Le Cristal Vert" - "The Green Crystal".

From C into D we use the three over four polyrhythm and modulate into the pulse of three, giving a new and slower pulse. At this point we have abandoned our repetitious F in the piano and move into a melancholic and crying melody line, supported by a chromatically descending bass line. The bass line moves so predictably that it catches the listener’s ear and makes the harmonic movement easy to grasp. The theme ends after D, and a saxophone and drum duet commence over the F quarter notes in the piano.

After a constructive fall semester in 2013, I had finalized seven new compositions, varying from sentimental ballads to more energetic medium/up tempo songs. Having a clearer idea of the esthetics of my works, I could now start to consider which musicians I would want to color my sketches.

Choosing band members

Since early on, I had envisioned having guitar, piano, bass and drums in my group. I knew I also wanted a linear lead instrument, either tenor saxophone, alto saxophone or trumpet. It was not until having made sufficient observations of fellow students that I chose to ask Björn Arkö to play tenor sax in my group. Since I was new in Stockholm and did not know anyone, I had the freedom of choosing musicians based solely on their musical abilities. Naturally, this felt like the most musical approach, but I knew there were various social groups in school and that not everybody was used to working across these segregations. I soon realized that the musicians I wanted in my band were quite a mix of characters and that only two out of five were playing together on a regular basis. Despite this, I figured I did not want to compromise my musical visions because of potential social differences and went on to form Felix Fraternity with Björn Arkö on saxophone, Emmanuel Hailemariam on guitar, Johannes Jaretég on piano and my Norwegian friend Åsmund Evja Eikill on bass. Originally Tom Eddy Nordén played bass, but as Åsmund came to KMH through an exchange program, it felt natural to ask him to join as we had played a lot together in Norway and get along musically very well.

I wanted Björn because he is a strong instrumentalist and can handle the pressure of standing in front of the band, performing melodies and soloing over demanding changes with conviction. As he is very facilitated on his instrument, he can also take the music to high energetic levels, like in for instance "Le Cristal Vert". I had my doubts though, since I feel he often plays technically and conceptually motivated things rather than playing what the music suggests in the moment. I find
his tone to be pretty hard and his phrasing very direct and sometimes not so sensitive, which does not resonate fully with the esthetic I had in mind for most of my compositions.

Considering myself somewhat of a fauvist composer, guitarist Emmanuel Haillemariam was a relatively easy choice. He plays very melodic with a rich tone and a fine sense for bringing out the colors I envision in my harmonies. Unlike most guitarists in school, he is not very much into the traditional jazz repertoire, but gravitates more towards gospel, r’n’b and pop. I personally enjoy the hybrid he has developed between the aforementioned and jazz, and it happens to work quite well in my band, I believe.

Pianist Johannes is brought up with a strong gospel fundament, but plays both classical and jazz as well. He has an amazing ear and in my opinion the richest tone among jazz pianists in school. He has a very rhythmic playing style which often makes it easy to interact with him, giving me a sort of ball playing or playground sensation. Like Björn he is a solid craftsman, having the capacity to overcome technical challenges withholding nerve and musicality.

Ásmund is among my closest friends and it felt like an obvious choice adding him to the group as we have a good lock between bass and drums from our time playing together in Norway. We have a similar mind set regarding improvisation, beat placement and group dynamics. As we are very close, I also appreciate that I can confide in him and get an honest opinion when I have doubts regarding my compositions, arrangements or role as a band leader. He may not be the most technically dominant bassist, but he is solid, has good forward motion and approaches his lines with care.

Rehearsing

As we had played through almost all compositions in May 2014, we mostly had to refresh the repertoire for my exam concert April 4th 2015. I set up four rehearsal dates spread over six weeks, considering Ásmund being new in the group and learning my new composition "Aurora Borealis". Although it all went smoothly during rehearsals, I wanted the group to play together as much as possible so we could free our selves from the charts and hopefully focus more on interaction and group sound. Unfortunately it was not easy to set up rehearsals since some band members were relatively busy and slow in responding to which dates would work. I found the process of scheduling rehearsals to be most demotivating as I began to question the quality of my compositions, playing and persona when I had to wait weeks for the band to reply on Doodle. After having sent out several reminders, I could finally set the dates. At this point, I hated having to put the group together for something I felt nobody else but me burned for and just looked forward to it all being over after my exam.

7 Doodle. Internet software for scheduling
Our first rehearsal was mediocre both musically and socially. It turned out Emmanuel had double booked himself, which to me just emphasized my discomfort as bandleader. During the rehearsal, I had difficulties hearing the piano and tried to move it closer to the drums without much success. The drums were so dominating from where I was sitting, even at lower dynamics, and I felt I had to compromise the spirit of the songs in order to hear any piano at all. Socially, Björn was in a good mood and had a good impact on both Åsmund’s and my presence. I believe we played through all eight tunes and it went quite well, given this being our first rehearsal. Second time we were finally a full group, with Emmanuel also showing up. We rehearsed in one of my favorite rooms, A451. A451 has a Steinway C grand piano in pristine order, the Yamaha drums are also good, although the heads should be changed more often. The general acoustics in the room strike me as more comfortable than the room we rehearsed in first time, A360, where the drums sound hard and the piano weak, also due to a weaker instrument. Although being in A451 made the rehearsal easier, I still did not hear us adding anything personal and interactive to the songs. As we met for the third time, also in A451, I felt that things fell more into place and that we had possibly established a ground for improvising together and not only reading the scores. During the final rehearsal, we had improved slightly, leaving me with some reassurance that we could hopefully bring out some nice improvisational and interacting moments during the concert.

By around the third rehearsal date, I started getting tired of the songs and started thinking “what kind of song is this really and how should I play it?”. Should I play offensively and bright or hold back and let the soloists control the energy level? Should I play wet using cymbals with sizzles and sustaining the hi hat or dampen the snare, avoiding cymbals and close the hi hat to create a dry sound? Brushes or sticks? Should solos build to a climax or rather have a flatter and less outgoing character? These were some of the quarrels that I still think about, without necessarily finding any answers.

**Poster layout and concert program**

As I do not own any professional artist photos over either the band or myself, I hoped to find something feasible among my private pictures. I ended up using a photograph shot by my sister in the French village of Lacoste. We visited with my family in the summer of 2011 and visited art designer Pierre Cardin’s chateau at the top of the mountain. Both inside the castle and on the grounds outside there was a modern art exhibition containing ceramics, metal sculptures and glass works. I discovered these colorful plastic threads hanging down from the ceiling of a quadrant box, and my sister coincidentally took a picture as I walked around it. The composition happened to look quite good, as I had just gotten a new haircut, a nice tan with the mysterious blue threads hanging next to me. I searched for a font that would be elegant and clear, yet unusual. As the headline would be on the blue background, I needed a strong color for contrast. When I tried different colors, I immediately dug how the blue threads complemented the pink font. I though to myself "man this is so bad ass! Can I even do this? Noo…". After having scrolled through the remaining colors, all I could think about was how I loved the eccentric
pink font. The composition turned out so nice and flamboyant, somehow symbolizing my fascination for color in music also.

After having reviewed the band’s repertoire, I realized we might have too much music for one concert. I contacted my mentor Sven Berggren and asked what would be a suitable length and if I should play two shorter sets or one longer. He replied that it was all up to me, and I finally decided to go with two shorter sets. I tried to find a balance between ballads and more energetic tunes, ending up with the following set list:

**First set**
- Nikon
- Light Blue
- Le Cristal Vert
- Portrait of a Memory

**Second set**
- Suspension
- Melancholia
- Theodora & I
- Aurora Borealis

I wanted to open strong with the catchy melody of Nikon, leading into the driving and hip chord progression in the solos. Light Blue is somewhat calmer, striking me as a medium waltz camouflaged like a ballad. It obviously differs in timbre from Nikon, yet maintaining a certain drive during solos. Le Cristal Vert has an adventurous character and would probably work in most places for a set list. Ending the first set I chose Portrait of a Memory, as it would be the one place I found it to be appropriate to either open or end with a ballad. I figured leaving the audience in a deep melancholic state in the first set could have them feel the sorrow
of the song even during the break, first to be relieved by the opening of the second set with Suspension. Second set also opens energetically, but with a more modern and harmonically complex sound. Suspension was the only tune that contained swing feel in 4/4, which some jazz purists may argue is too little for a jazz exam concert. Melancholia brings down the energy once before the two ending songs Theodora & I and Aurora Borealis build gradually to a flamboyant ending.

Being unaware at the time, Light Blue can be played in many different ways regarding rhythmic feel, dynamics and instrumentation. Both times we have played it live, it has yielded great interplay early on in the concert, giving the band a sense of confidence and relaxation that sets the pace for the rest of the show. I personally feel that Nikon usually seems somewhat restless and insecure when we play it as an opener, but by the second tune we get into it and settle in much more as a group.

I have the impression that many students want to play longer than the audience appreciate - a somewhat egoistic approach. When arranging Aurora Borealis, we had two different vamps of four chords, were each soloist would cue from one into the other. Björn usually takes his time in building up a nice energy in the first part before moving on to the second, where we often reach a climactic feeling in the middle of the last vamp. Guitarist Emmanuel then comes in and takes over on the same chord progressions. All in all it just might work, although the solos need clear variation, interaction and strong melodic lines to maintain the audience’s attention. At this point the song has a duration of 8-9 minutes, which is pretty long - especially for being the last song in the second set. I felt it would be natural to end in either B or after four repetitions of C, but the soloists strongly suggested they trade solos and gradually intervene over the melody in D before ending.

Part C, where Björn and Emmanuell trade solos and eventually end up playing the melody to close the concert.

We ended up with the latter, containing three climaxes, all with the same character, mostly with saxophone and guitar shredding. This is an example of where I feel certain instrumentalist’s need to impress others overshadows an objective approach to making a set list or arrangement. The bandstand suddenly becomes an arena for exhibiting technical facilities prior to making music.
Outcome

After having processed the exam concert for a few weeks, I feel somewhat torn between the experience of performing and the positive and negative feedback that I received. Playing the concert felt pretty effortless and we were all in control, which gave feeling of confidence and liberation. I recall some nice interacting moments, but suspect that they were usually not on a deeper level. This is were I feel the esthetic in Felix Fraternity is not unifiable with total improvisational freedom. We usually play the pieces maintaining a pulse and fixed harmonic progression, which makes it easier to comprehend for the average listener. If we were to let improvisational spontaneity rule in its full extent, we could end up abandoning the song structure and go into an ever changing sound palette, reminiscent of what many call free jazz or free improvisation. I personally love playing the latter, but as the Fraternity seeks a broader appeal, I figured the music needs to maintain certain basic parameters like constant pulse, sufficient consonance and clear forms. As a group, we have not discussed this matter collectively; it has mostly been something I have dwelled on myself.

Given my impression that the esthetic sets certain boundaries for improvisations, I would like to point out that during a concert at jazz club Fasching, one month after the exam concert, we had moments were solos would start and everyone payed close attention to the melodic and harmonic timbre and mood of the soloist, leading us into textures we had never explored as thoroughly before. I was surprised that this was even possible in my group, and it has opened up my vision for what might be possible within "the box". Thinking back, some of the musical landscapes we created were reminiscent of Wayne Shorter’s current quartet with Danilo Perez, John Patitucci and Brian Blade; there was open space, colored by sparse harmony, encouraging me to go into a quasi Brian Blade-alter ego, dropping bombs in the bass drum and crash cymbal. I had a continuous feeling of "So were can we take this solo - let us elaborate on it together and see what might happen”. I have never felt so free in Felix Fraternity. Although some band members felt unhappy about their playing that night, I still believe it was the best performance we have done as a whole group.

Returning to the exam concert in Lilla Salen, we opened with Nikon; a positive and bright composition in 3/4 that I believed would be a fresh opening for the concert. Following up was Light Blue, a mellow and somber waltz, based upon Wayne Shorter’s "Iris". It was originally intended as an exercise, were teacher Joakim Mildt told us to reharmonize the tune and then change the melody afterwards. I ended up liking my version of it, and used it at the concert. When playing it, I felt the solos took some interesting directions and the band was able to walk together as a unit, as opposed to sticking to individual, preconceived ideas of how the song should be played. Light Blue was probably the song that made me feel the best about my band’s playing, which gave me a sense of trust in our performance early

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8 Iris, E.S.P., Columbia, PC 9150 (1965)
on in the show. If I recall correctly, the feeling I was left with after the solos had me relax much more during the rest of the concert.

Closing our first out of two sets was Portrait of a Memory. This is one of the ballads were I in retrospect felt I comped restlessly and did not allow my playing to settle. Although, I felt I played passionately, which censor Jari Perkionmäki also pointed out after the concert. I believe I should have waited and supported soloists Björn and Ásmund more, by not throwing too many ideas their way. This was the only bass solo during the concert, and I was happy to hear how Ásmund also conveyed emotion through his playing. By the end of the song, we had played a few waves, simulating emotional outbursts, and I felt I could have started crying as the piano had played the outro. It was a very intimate moment for me, realizing I had put some of my most profound feelings and memories into both performing and composing this piece.

The last song we played, Aurora Borealis, was the one tune I had never played live nor in studio before, and I was pretty excited about how that would work. It is my most recent composition, and I feel it has a clearer structure and gets closer to the esthetic I seek for in Felix Fraternity than most of my other compositions. When the melody sets in after the opening piano vamp, we chose to play it in unison, which I believe worked well at the concert. I envisioned having a singer doubling the melody if we were to record it in the studio, and I had originally written it in sixths, with voice and guitar on top and saxophone below. This approach made the melodic lines seem too parallel in motion and the interval of a sixth was probably somewhat wide for a good blend. Ending up with doubling guitar and sax in the melody made it more direct and clear to the audience. When we came to the solos, it all started with only piano comping sparsely and saxophone playing soft lines on top. I guess we built it up quite well dynamically, but the interplay did not take me somewhere magical though. By the middle of the solos it was already pretty climactic, which I had expected to become a problem since there would be an outro vamp where both guitar and saxophone would solo intensively. I had suggested that we would not play the last part too long as it could become tiresome for an audience with a ten minute piece at the end of the concert, but both guitar and sax kept going for quite some time, which I feared was not serving the dramaturgical context of the show.

Here are the piano voicings for the intro of Aurora Borealis. It was through this piece that I discovered the possibilities and flavors in closed voicings, plus the freedom in chord progressions when maintaining the same top note. The Eb over a Bb triad is quite dissonant to some listeners, but I think it works in this context, since the Eb is strongly established.
Unfortunately, quite a few friends in the audience told me that the sound was pretty bad. The bass was way too loud and piano was hard to hear, were a couple of things I heard. The sound engineer was blamed by most people I talked to, as the levels on stage were very different than the ones in the audience.

**Solo pieces for piano**

I intended to write out two of my piano pieces that serve as introductions for Le Cristal Vert and Aurora Borealis, but never got around to notate it in Sibelius\(^9\). As I am not very skilled in notation software, let alone notating a piano score, I decided to record the pieces myself as I knew them by heart. The first piece I wrote, entitled Solitude, was recorded in the school’s studio on a Steinway grand piano, whilst my most recent piece I recorded at my home in Bergen on my parents’ Bechstein grand piano, although only with my phone. I considered playing both of the works live myself, but I realized I had not played piano in front of an audience since the age of twelve and feared I would screw up and overshadow the musical virtue with my limited piano abilities. Unfortunately, neither Solitude nor the introduction for Aurora Borealis were performed at my exam concert. It was not until the band’s concert at Fasching that pianist Johannes suggested I sent him the recording of Solitude so that he could learn it for the show. I was very impressed to know that he received the recording the day before the concert, and managed to transcribe melody and voicings in one afternoon, for then to perform it live next evening.

For a brief moment, I would like to discuss the compositional details of my piano works and shed some light on how and why they differ from each other. Solitude came about as a result from being influenced by pianist Robert Glasper’s solo version of Y’Outta Praise Him\(^10\). I have always gravitated towards the gospel piano sound with its colorful voicings and profound message. As I have not studied gospel piano at a deeper level, I barely had any theoretical understanding of the esthetic norms. I used my ears and tried to maneuver along spontaneously, without following a fixed predetermined song structure. I soon learned that stepwise motion with thirds in the bass sounded pretty good, and staying within one key would create a sense of calmness, which I desired for Solitude. I discovered the effect of using techniques such as parallelism and modal interchange for harmonic juxtaposition, creating tension and variety from static diatonism. The opening of Solitude contains pretty sparse four note voicings, including the melody note, which my earlier piano teacher Arne Tengstrand opposed to. He preferred a thicker orchestration, but I did not share his point of view. I like the simplicity of triads as it leaves space, confirming that one does not have to utilize broad and polyphonic orchestration techniques on the piano just because the instrument allows it. Lastly, I came across voicing major seventh chords with the seventh as both top and bottom note, creating a rich voicing within the span of an octave. Moving this

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\(^9\) Sibelius. Music notation software

\(^10\) Y’Outta Praise Him, In My Element, Blue Note Records, 0946 3 78111 2 2 (2007)
chordal structure in almost any random interval sounded pretty cool to me, as heard midway through the piece. All in all, Solitude has a clear gospel reference with dense and warm chords, moving around tonal centers in a subtle way. In contrast with my later solo composition, it strives after another esthetic that borrows more from the classical tradition.

Solitude

A simplified score of Solitude, written by Johannes Jareteg.

When I returned to Norway for summer holidays in June 2014, I spent some time studying classical piano pieces, namely Chopin’s nocturnes. At the time I found
myself being tired of the slick consonant character in many of my compositions, and wanted to incorporate more complex and dissonant harmony. I experienced a reviving interest in classical music, with a new emphasis on modernistic composers such as Arnold Schoenberg, Olivier Messiaen and Fartein Valen. I had never heard the beauty so clearly in dissonance, especially in works such as Valen’s string quartets. It goes with the story that my father had recently recorded Fartein Valen String Quartets\textsuperscript{11}, including three poems by Goethe that Valen had set to music. Obviously, this close connection made the music more accessible to me.

From searching randomly on the piano, only with a specific timbre in mind, I found a simple melodic motive of three descending quarter notes that were voiced with chords borrowed from diminished- and melodic minor harmony. After I had established a new palette, referring to modernistic classical repertoire, I left the current rubato feel and moved into a waltz. This part was heavily inspired by Chopin’s second nocturne\textsuperscript{12}, which I practiced at the time. I loved how the left hand played the bass note on beat one, floating elegantly up the keys to reveal the chord tones on beats two and three. I recall my fascination for how rich and beautiful the accompaniment of the left hand was - even without the melody!

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\textit{The first two bars of Frédéric Chopin’s second nocturne, illustrating the left hand accompaniment that I borrowed from.}

I could not resist the temptation of incorporating the same concept for my piece. At this point I was in deep waters, never having constructed a left hand accompaniment like this before, in addition to dealing with the coordinative challenges of having to search for a melody in my right hand simultaneously. I ended up with a hybrid between a composed and improvised melody, leaving some freedom to the performer. During a vamp between Bb minor and F# minor, the performer gets to improvise over the left hand ostinato in 3/4, leading into a finalization of the piece, ending in a counterpoint movement with ascending octaves in the right hand and descending octaves in the left, landing on the tritone of Db and G. I am pretty happy that I was able to create a context that prepared for

\textsuperscript{11} Fartein Valen String Quartets, Hansakvartetten featuring Hilde Haraldsen Sveen, 2L, 2L089SABD (2013)

\textsuperscript{12} Nocturne No. 2 (1830 – 1832), Frédéric Chopin
this dissonant interval to feel like a natural arrival point, leading into the opening of Aurora Borealis.

**Reflection**

Looking back, I am mostly satisfied with having composed ten pieces of music all by myself - pieces that I all believe in and feel are relevant for the period of my life where they came into being. My more somber compositions convey a cry that I needed to get out after dealing with a break up, and I found the process of writing them to be very therapeutical and helpful. I still recall how Portrait of a Memory came to me so naturally and effortlessly at the piano. There was no doubt in which chord or melody note that would come next - it was as if the tones just unveiled themselves before me and said "choose me!". The feeling of having created something beautiful from sorrow and pain was, and still is, very strong to me. Speaking of this "cry" in music and my passion for emotional movements in music, I want to share the last four bars of Portrait of a Memory here with you:

![chord diagram]

It is a very sparse and simple melody line, but the carefully ascending movement gives it a strong direction. The chords’ function is primarily to bring out the fragility and crying of the melody with melancholic textures.

In advance of my project, I was informed that I had a certain amount of hours I could spend with a teacher for guidance. This could be in terms of composing, arranging or to help out with the social aspects of being leader in a band. When this opportunity was given to me the first year I was in Stockholm, I acquired Joakim Milder as a mentor for my project, although we ended up never meeting. This year, for my final exam, I talked to saxophonist Fredrik Ljungkvist and asked if he could assist Felix Fraternity in potential guiding - I was happy to know that he said yes. At the time I had not set any specific schedule for rehearsal dates with the group, nor did I have any immediate questions on how to treat our repertoire. I loosely planned that Fredrik might attend some of my band’s rehearsals running up to the exam and maybe listened to some of our earlier recordings to see what he had to say about it. As time went by and the band had finally set a schedule, it was all so tight and I would have had to ask Fredrik to join for weekend sessions at only a few days’ notice. Musically, there were things I wanted the band to improve on, but it was primarily stuff that I felt we could deal with ourselves, without Fredrik there. Once again did not take the opportunity of using a mentor, which I in retrospect regret. I always wondered what professional musicians thought of my music and the way it is played, as I had never gotten any constructive feedback until sensor Jari Perkiomäki and supervisor Sven Berggren shared their opinions on my exam concert. Had I been in continuos dialogue with Fredrik, I suspect that he
could have brought out qualities in the band’s playing, both collectively and individually, plus having come up with interesting suggestions on how to rearrange certain parts for stronger effect. In addition, it would have been refreshing for the band to have an authority and just a new face in the room, to have us bring out our best and hopefully feel challenged. Fredrik has a very positive aura and as far as I have experienced, always makes musicians around him feel good yet creating an urge for them to perform their best.

Although I feel the esthetic sets certain borderlines, I still believe there are better ways for us to present melodies and accompany soloists. These are subjects I felt could have been better in the concert. Too often I found myself questioning the purpose and effect of the background we provided behind soloists. I feel we fall into a limited mind set of how to comp and usually end up doing one of two things we know might work. In which case, we do not let the music lead us but stick to our preconceived ideas. After recently having attended the Betty Carter Jazz Ahead program for two weeks in Washington D.C. with a faculty consisting of Jason Moran, Eric Harland, Carmen Lundy, J.D. Allen, Cyrus Chestnut, Eric Revis and André Hayward, I understood the gravity of interacting with a soloist and how this can make the music progress unforced.

Jari Perkiomäki’s feedback after the exam was important for me. It was pretty much the first time a professional gave an honest opinion on my music and the way they were performed. He was very thorough and clear in his opinion, which made it easy to comprehend. For the most part, I agreed with his criticism, especially when he pointed out a restless feeling in my comping by moving on to new ideas too fast and not letting things settle. This was something I had suspected, but I had not been sure of. I know that I felt extra pressure and a need to control things since it was my band, my music and my exam, although a need to dictate and over-control in jazz rarely works well. Another thing he pointed out was that none of my melodies were up-tempo, which is true. Although, I got the impression he made that point solely on summing up all songs and realizing no melodies were fast, not because there was a need for it in the concert. I see the value of having fast melodies, but I do not necessarily feel it is needed in all concert programs, especially when trying to create a mellow mood.

It took me many years before I finally started my own project, and having done that now really opened my eyes for the artistic freedom one gets as leader and the invaluable experience in having to organize rehearsals, concerts and musical arrangements. I am also very happy to have recorded eight of my tunes in the studio with pretty good takes, given it was all recorded in five hours. The feeling of having it audibly documented is gratifying. I gained important experience from being musical director in the studio with a deadline to withhold, making sure everybody was comfortable while still being efficient.