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The different shapes of my music

Three compositions, four arrangements, four ensembles

Aleksis Liukko

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Author: Aleksis Liukko

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Supervisors: Professor Per Anders Nilsson, Professor Anders Jormin

Examiner: Senior Lecturer Joel Eriksson

ABSTRACT

In this thesis I describe the process of composing three jazz compositions, arranging them to four different settings and performing them during my stay in Gothenburg. The four settings are traditional jazz piano trio (piano, upright bass, drums), strings quartet with piano, piano trio (piano, bass clarinet, tabla) and big band. The purpose was to gain experience with the aforementioned things and thus develop versatility as a composer and a musician.

Key words: jazz, composing, arranging, jazz piano trio, string quartet, tabla, bass clarinet, big band, piano

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Introduction

Versatility is an advantage. As a musician I feel like I want to be versatile in the fields of jazz and improvised music. This is my aim also as a band member, a composer, an arranger and a band leader. The versatility I'm after extends the borders of music genres, not limiting itself to only jazz. But not everything is possible or even reasonable. In this thesis I describe the process of challenging my abilities by composing three tunes, using, arranging and performing them in four different settings, that are not necessarily familiar to me. This took place during my master studies over my stay in Gothenburg from fall 2017 to spring 2019.

I chose to limit myself to compose only three tunes, realizing that two of the settings I arranged them to I have little to no previous experience of. As one would imagine, the process was also very time consuming. I am quite experienced when it comes to playing with, composing and arranging to traditional jazz piano trio (piano, upright bass and drums), but the trio setting with piano, bass clarinet and tabla was completely new to me. Before this project, I had made only one practice work for string quartet years back, but for a big band I have written numerous works mostly for the Finnish Sointi Jazz Orchestra and some works for composition competitions. The largest one is an hour-long entirety for vocalist and big band, which is written for the lyrics of the children's book *Der Struwwelpeter* by *Heinrich Hoffman*.¹ The aim for me is also to collect experiences and to expand my personal musical universe.

I grew up in an environment where classical music was strongly present. My parents were and still are professional musicians with strong classical background. My father is a violinist and my mother is a pianist and singer. Growing up, I was constantly surrounded by the music of such masters as Johann Sebastian Bach, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Jean Sibelius, just to name a few. When I started my piano lessons, they were also classical for over 10 years. Therefore, in addition to my own interests I heard a lot of classical music, so the sound of symphony orchestra, strings and other similar settings are familiar to me. Also, I listened to some jazz from my father's collection – he also used to play jazz

¹ Heinrich Hoffman (1809-1894) was a German psychiatrist, who also wrote some short works.

with the piano as a hobby - and in my teens, when I played a little alto saxophone and electric bass, I occasionally accompanied him.

As I recall my childhood and teens, I wasn't really the hard-working kind. I practiced a bit and went to the lessons of course, but my own real interest started to grow later. That being said, I started playing jazz and improvised music relatively late in my life. That included quite a lot of playing with piano trio. My first serious jazz compositions I made in the year 2008 if I remember correctly, and those included works for piano trio as well as quartet with saxophone. I am mostly self-taught when it comes to big band music and being a pianist, it was quite easy to start writing for sections. At some point I heard somebody say that if it sounds good with piano, it will probably sound good with sections as well and that I found out to be at least partially true.

Before I moved to Gothenburg I worked as a piano teacher and played in different bands of different genres. At this point of my career and studies it was very important for me to have this time to fully concentrate and focus on playing, composing and arranging without other distractions.

In general, I found it quite easy to get into territories one is not so familiar with. The main reason for that is the modern technology, people have access to endless web pages with instructions, libraries and of course the audio and video material. There are ways to learn for different learners, you can read, watch, listen and try out different things by yourself. These are the things I did with my work, in addition to the hours spent with my professors.

Fall 2017: composing for the piano trio

I composed three tunes which I aimed to make different from each other. The tunes were first performed at “The eternity of a moment” concert which is the semester concert for the master of improvisation students and it took place 4.12.2017 at Lindgrensalen, Artisten. In addition to myself on piano, this concert featured Albin Lindgård on bass and Adam Ross on drums, who were both studying at the Academy of Music and Drama at that time.

For me, there are several major influences when it comes to traditional jazz piano trio. When I first started to listen to jazz in the late 90s the two first jazz recordings were *Jazzlantis* by Trio Töykeät and *Nothing to hide* by Lenni-Kalle Taipale trio which are both Finnish jazz groups. After that my listening range widened a lot. While Trio Töykeät stayed on my playlist, I started to listen more and more music based on American jazz tradition, the earliest being Bill Evans’ trios, Oscar Peterson’s trios and little bit of Erroll Garner’s and Bud Powell’s trios. I was also taking influences from Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, McCoy Tyner, Ahmad Jamal, Keith Jarrett, Brad Mehldau, Kenny Kirkland and Gerald Clayton. Those amazing artists became my main sources of inspiration.

Since the piano trio is a relatively old setting in the world of jazz, it has been around for a long time. There has and will be a lot of different sounding trios so how it is possible to create something new? Maybe that is not the point here. I am trying to create new music for myself that is also challenging in different ways. For a jazz pianist such as myself I think it is wonderful to have the support, freedom and interplay when playing with a drummer and a bass player. As the British born pianist, composer and journalist Leonard Feather puts it:

The unaccompanied pianist has unlimited structural freedom, but at the cost of the kind of exchanges with a rhythm section that often stimulate inspired improvisation. The big band pianist can enjoy the thrill of playing with a powerful ensemble, but the tradeoff is that he or she is often tied to a clearly defined part within the written arrangement. In the trio format, however, the keyboardist can enjoy most of the advantages and suffer few of the restrictions of these two extremes by having the opportunity to

juggle the roles of soloist and accompanist, rhythm player and melodic improviser, even adding bass lines to these interchanging responsibilities from time to time.²

For me, the composing process for a jazz piano trio has usually been simple. Like a lead sheet,³ I just write the melody, harmony and rhythmic feel. This time I thought of arranging them a bit more using interludes, outros, interludes, basslines, rhythmic hits, modulations etc.

Blah Blues

‘Blah Blues’ is a 5/4 24-bar blues with the last eight bars being 4/4, polyrhythm of three wheeling under the melody. It is a beat tune and it is in Bb minor; the solo section transposes to Db minor. I wrote this tune during the early fall of 2017 so it is the first one of the three tunes. The tune begins with a bass riff that sounds little like a tango but in 5/4 and after that I composed the melody. I wanted the melody to have a harmonization but not necessarily in the ongoing tonality, so I made a second voice that sounded good to me. It also had to be playable with the right hand only since the piano doubled the bass riff as well. By experimenting the melody, I felt like it was rhythmically too obvious as the phrases started from the first beat of the bars. Displacement of the melody phrases was the key here and after a few tries it worked quite well as the ending of some of the phrases landed on the first beat of the bar. This problem was solved and I was happy with the result.

As mentioned before, bass played the riff during the head and continued in the solos, but the drummer could do anything that goes with “rude beat”. Drums started the tune by playing the groove alone until piano and bass joined in the melody. On the concert I felt like the intro was a bit too long, but as I listened to the recording of it, it didn’t feel like that. The entry of the two other instruments feels a bit sudden and unplanned. In general, the head sounds good despite one missing upbeat we agreed upon in the rehearsals. The second segment I found amusing as the drummer makes the polyrhythm sound like a new tempo. Since the solo section is in different key, it needed a transition so I added one extra 5/4 bar with a continuing idea, which landed smoothly to Db minor. At this time piano was the only

² Leonard Feather, “Leonard Feather’s Choices for the 10 Greatest Jazz Piano Trios,” *Keyboard*, February 1984, 34.

³ A lead sheet is a form of musical notation that specifies the essential elements of a popular song: the melody, lyrics and harmony.

one to play the solo in this tune and after soloing we made a similar transition back to Bb minor, played the head once more and ended the tune to last chord of the head that was B major seventh.

Humming

The first segment of 'Humming' is balladlike rubato and has a melody that I composed subconsciously by humming and made the chords at the same time. I had an idea of an ascending bass line with the melody, but the problem was how to create not too obvious harmony over that. I decided to use some not so common slash chords⁴ such as A/F (also known as Fmaj7#5) and use voice leading⁵ under the melody that sounded good to me. The piano plays the first segment alone twice, the second time improvising over the chords. Improvising over the chord structure wasn't as daunting task as I imagined in the beginning and the freedom with no accompanists and tempo rubato made it also cozy. In the concert the drummer decided to add some sounds under the second time, but it was completely fine, as it was very discreet.

The second segment is slow 16th note beat starting only with piano again with syncopating rhythm. This segment repeats plenty of times and is also used as a base for piano solo. The harmony here is simpler than the initial one, with a pedal point⁶ on top of the voicings. This created contrast to the little quirky melody from the first segment, along with contrasts between the steady tempo and rubato and between piano alone and complete trio. As the bass and the drums provided steady environment for the piano to improvise without much interplay, what is the way to go here? As can be heard from the recording, the somewhat natural choice was to continue the pedal point idea for a while, and not to play the chord changes too much since the form is heard multiple times. Also, the time could and was twisted by the piano player, since the steady groove was present all the time. The first segment comes once again after the piano solo, this time with both drums and bass accompanying rubato. In this tune there is no transition parts between the segments and I didn't add those later either.

⁴ Slash chord is a chord whose bass note or inversion is indicated by the addition of a slash and the letter of the bass note after the chord symbol

⁵ Voice leading is the linear progression of individual melodic lines and their interaction with one another to create harmonies

⁶ A pedal point is a sustained tone, typically, but not necessarily in the bass, during which at least one foreign, i. e., dissonant harmony is sounded in other parts

Sounds Oriental to Me

The third tune is called ‘Sounds oriental to me’ and it is a fast 6/8 tune. The somewhat complex melody is in the 5th mode of harmonic minor, that makes it sound like oriental, hence the name. This tune has also two segments, the first being the 12-bar main melody subdivided as A-A-B, the second one is even more technically challenging melody – I wanted to challenge myself – with harmony that uses four chords three times in a row changing the bottom notes in upward motion. When composing this it felt like the composition was dull, nothing really happening except the complexity. How to make it more interesting? The easy answer was to bring it down dynamically and that was exactly what I did in the last third of the first segment. Also, the second segment is brought down quickly after the fierce start in the second segment, just to have a crescendo after that.

Both segments come twice in the beginning, but only once in the end. During the rehearsals I decided to start an intro with piano only, bass and drums joining little by little. This was more interactive with the players in contrast to ‘Humming’. Also, I added bass solo segment before piano solo that was in the “oriental” mood. Drums were not the only accompanist here, I decided pretending a percussion instrument playing rhythmic motives with damped A-string. The problem with myself with the piano solo was how to keep the energy level high with such an energetic tune. When I found myself playing melody from Pyotr Tchaikovsky’s Chinese Dance from The Nutcracker in the solo, I felt very hectic and didn’t have the peace. That can be heard from the recording as well, but now that I have performed the song multiple times it has reached its way. After the piano solo, which was played over the harmony of both segments, there was a drum solo over the second segment accompanied by bass and piano. After the last head we stayed in the mood and faded out eventually.

Spring 2018: arranging for the string quartet

I arranged the three tunes for piano and string quartet (violin 1, violin 2, viola and cello). I had almost no experience of writing for such a group so at this period I tried to deepen my knowledge and get influences from some string quartet music from different composers and eras such as *Voces Intimae* by Jean Sibelius, *3 pieces for string quartet* by Igor Stravinsky, *String Quartet No. 8* by Dmitri Shostakovich and *String quartets Nos. 1 and 2* by Elliott Carter to mention some. Especially the energy of the second movement of the aforementioned Shostakovich quartet, not to mention the whole work, made an indelible impact on me. Additionally, I went through some jazz albums that had strings added to the arrangements such as *Imaginary Cities* by Chris Potter, *Wide Angles* by Michael Brecker, *The Mad Hatter* by Chick Corea and the list goes on. As mentioned, I mostly listened to the works with thought, not with the scores. The “Eternity of a moment” -concert was 19.4.2018 at lindgrensalen and the musicians with me were Lisa Meschi and Pauliina Nyman (violins), Manon Briau (viola) and Adrianna Arapinowicz (cello). The members of the quartet were studying at the Academy of Music and Drama at that time and I didn't know anything about the quartet's abilities when it comes to improvisation, it was practical, since the quartet had been already playing together.

Blah Blues

In 'Blah Blues' first segment the piano plays the bass riff with both hands as low and as high on the piano as possible, giving the room for the strings in the middle register. Strings play the melody and the second voice altering the phrases the first being with violin one and viola; the second with violin two and cello etc. The second segment of the melody and the bass polyrhythm is played by piano and strings accompany with a sparse polyrhythmic motive. After that piano has two choruses of solo while strings accompany. I was wondering what to write for musicians that are not involved with improvisation to make it sound kind of interactive? The answer found was to write infrequent rhythmic hits so I could “communicate” with them while playing. This point I felt that the strings were just backgrounds for myself and something had to happen, at least in the second half of the solo. We tried different things with the string quartet and eventually decided to have them play little bends with more frequently appearing material I wrote for the second half of the solo. Cello is mainly playing the bass riff here and for the ending of the solo section more wide lines are heard by the quartet. For some reason I decided not to have a key change with the solo section and as I listen to the recording now, it

would have been welcome addition. After the solo section we returned to play the main theme again and ended the tune to coda, which continued the main motive a bit.

Humming

The melodic and harmonic material in the first segment of ‘Humming’ is played only by the strings. They play the harmonized melody quite low, because when I listened some material, I found that sound very nice. Piano improvises two choruses over the chord structure, strings play long chords and again I had the problem of just writing backgrounds for myself. All over again we tried different thing at the rehearsals including pizzicato,⁷ sul ponticello,⁸ col legno⁹ and tremolo.¹⁰ As nice as some of those techniques sounded, eventually the string players tried humming the same note they were playing and that was what I wanted them to do in the end. In the second segment piano is again soloing over the part. Repetitive material is heard from the strings and they start it pizzicato one by one; first violin one, then violin two, viola and cello and when all have joined they change to arco and continue until the cue to sudden ending. After the solo the first segment is played by the strings once more to end the tune.

Sounds Oriental to Me

At this point I thought that it would be nice to have the string players improvise as well. What to write for musicians who had little to no experience of improvisation? I decided to write clear instructions and also, we did have plenty of rehearsals so they’d got more familiar with the idea. ‘Sound Oriental To Me’ starts with a phrase that everyone repeats in their own tempo without caring what others play, starting slow and accelerating until on cue to the main groove.

I wrote a complex 16th note-based groove and after the first rehearsal it became clear that it was too difficult. The problem seemed to be the very syncopated 1/16 notes and the question arose what to do with them, I had no choice but to make it simpler by removing some of the syncopations and make it

⁷ Pizzicato is a playing technique that involves plucking the strings of a string instrument with the fingers.

⁸ Playing on the bridge of a string instrument.

⁹ The strings are to be struck with the wood of the bow, making a percussive sound.

¹⁰ Playing a rapid, measured or unmeasured repetition of the same note.

more 1/8 note based. The easier version was also changed from 6/8 to 6/4 to ease up the reading even more. As in the first segment, the melody is played in the second segment by the piano as well. Cello and viola continue to play the rhythmic idea, this time violins provide polyrhythms of three and five.

The melody of 'Sounds Oriental to Me' is played twice and then the four-bar transition leads to the solo section, which is again a bit improvised by the strings as well. Strings play two note motive, which I wrote, in tempo and in a pace of will, so it creates a feeling of interplay and improvisation. Again, the time keeping without a percussion instrument was a bit difficult in such a fast tempo, so in the rehearsals we decided that the first violin plays the motive in the beginning of every bar so we had a clearer sense of tempo. As can be heard from the recording, the strings also communicated with dynamics when they heard my playing being so sparse in the beginning of the solo. Piano improvised on top of the weave that was created by the strings. After solos came the head once again and the coda was similar to the transition, the last note being short.

As I think about the playing with string quartet, I feel like it took much more effort and concentration from myself mostly because of the different time feeling. I suppose it would have been like this with any quartet with classically trained players, not only this. Also, the lack of experience, when it comes to playing with and writing for string quartet made the situation uncertain.

Fall 2018: re-composing

Before, the ideas I wanted to do with the tunes and arrangements were quite clear, but in the beginning of fall semester 2018 I hadn't still made up my mind what to do. I thought about arranging the tunes to more fusion setting with two or even three guitars and drums, while I would play the synthesizers and provide also the bass when necessary. A classical wind quintet or something with a choir were also possibilities. I also decided to re-compose the tunes and make them into one bigger entirety. As the time slipped from my hands, the arrangement was done for Indian tabla¹¹ player Prabhat Das and Finnish bass clarinet player Ville Lähteenmäki, who were both studying at the Academy of Music and Drama at that time. I had little to none experience with tabla music so I investigated it and listened some, mainly Indian tabla players from the internet. Tim Garland's Lighthouse Trio had some influence to this setting as it has piano, bass clarinet and percussion instruments. The concert took place at Lindgrensalen the 5th of December 2018.

The unofficial name of this re-composed tune is 'Gothenburg Trilogy'. As an intro piano plays the melody from the second segment of 'Blah Blues' and it used the harmony that is usually there as well. When I played it, I felt like I've heard that too many times before. Of course, one hearing the tune first time wouldn't necessarily care, but I did, and decided to experiment with always the same voicing down from the melody note. The voicing in question is the one heard in Kenny Kirkland's¹² soloing; Faddb6/C the note C on top. Just a little time before the concert I decided to try pedal technique, where the sustain pedal is pressed down immediately after the chord, so the dampers barely return back to the strings. I found this to be quite amusing sound while practicing it and playing it in the concert, but when I listened the recording, it didn't come across as well as one would hope.

I met the tabla player before we rehearsed with the whole trio and it turned out that he was unable to read western notation. As I was aware that this could be the case here as well, the material didn't suffer huge losses. So how to proceed from here? When we discussed the matter, recording the rehearsals and memorizing the material was the way to go here, maybe some extra rehearsal dates were also needed. I wrote somewhat complex things when it comes to time signature for piano and

¹¹ Indian percussion instrument

¹² American pianist/keyboardist (1955–1998)

bass clarinet with a unison bass line that hints the bass line and melody of the first segment of 'Blah Blues'. While now it was perhaps unthinkable to teach the complexity of the part for the tabla player, I decided to have him play steady groove in $\frac{3}{4}$, which went on despite the alternating time signatures, and eventually landed safely to the first beat of the repeat and the next segment. In the repeat piano added parts of the melody from the first segment as well and the second segment of 'Sounds Oriental to Me'. This included some tricky polyrhythmic ideas for the piano and even though the time spent practicing, some of the ideas were not executed.

After that comes the piano solo section, which continues with the same tabla groove, bass clarinet accompanying with some fills. In the rehearsals we agreed that when cued, the tabla would fade out since the transition for the next part is only for piano. However, a misunderstanding happened in the concert and the tabla faded out way too early just to come back a bit later. In the end, when listening to the recording, I kind of liked this mishap! The solo is mostly played in the main mode and some lines outside is also heard. It was also easy for me to take the time in the beginning of the solo since the steady groove was going on.

As mentioned before, after the solo piano plays a transition to a new part that uses the second segment of 'Sounds Oriental to Me' and accelerates to a new groove in $\frac{6}{8}$ to prepare for the first segment melody. 'Sounds Oriental to Me' melody is played thoroughly, this time with Kanjira.¹³ Now, when the tune had already been played and experienced couple of times, it felt like it needed something new again. The idea born here was to play the melody with left hand and a diatonic inversion with right hand. The second segment piano plays the melody with right hand and counter melody with left hand, seems like the pianist's nerves couldn't handle the situation... Bass clarinet solo section follows in the main mode and a cadenza from the second segment of 'Blah Blues' in the end of the loop. Early on I decided to play the main mode with very busy rhythmical improvised and variating pattern with only A notes to give the soloist more harmonic freedom.

After this tabla has a solo spot with no accompanying and on cue piano starts playing the first segment motive of 'Sounds Oriental to Me'. As this goes on in rubato, bass clarinet joins and plays the first

¹³ South Indian frame drum

segment melody of 'Humming'. After that piano accompanies the same melody with the correct harmony and improvising over it. The second segment of 'Humming' starts with polyrhythmic motive in 5/8 over 4/4 played by piano and bass clarinet joining in in a while with motive in 6/8. Lastly tabla joins with a busy groove and after a while the tune ends.

Spring 2019: the big band

My experience as big band composer and arranger was the biggest of these settings excluding the piano trio. During the period in Gothenburg my listening repertoire included mostly big band music and albums from United States such as Maria Schneider Orchestra, Vanguard Jazz Orchestra and some earlier big bands with compositions and arrangements by Neal Hefti, Gil Evans, Bob Brookmeyer to name a few. The album *Up from the Skies* by Vanguard Jazz Orchestra had already been in my playlist for years, but I get back to it regularly, since I find the compositions and arrangements of Jim McNeely¹⁴ very pleasant. During the spring, in addition to these three arrangements I did also two more big band compositions and a composition/arrangement for Gothenburg Wind Orchestra.

The three situations with the three big band settings were all different. In addition to being the composer, in the first band, Sointi Jazz Orchestra, I was the pianist with a conductor; in the second band, Bohuslän Big Band, I was the conductor of the band; in the third band, West Coast Big Band, I was the pianist and the practitioner of the band. As mentioned before, I am mostly self-taught when it comes to big band arranging, but I have browsed some books. In his book *The Professional Arranger Composer*, Russell Garcia underlines that “Do not believe anything you read in this book until you have weighed it over in your mind and tested it in actual practice.”¹⁵ I think it is a good sentence and I have obeyed it, in other situations as well.

Blah Blues

In fact, I arranged ‘Blah Blues’ already in the fall of 2018 for a Finnish band Sointi Jazz Orchestra led by Finnish composer Rasmus Soini and when writing this, it has already been performed several times. The band differs from traditional big band setting not only with the trombone section which has three trombones, tuba and French horn, but also with a wide selection of side instruments, including clarinets flutes and an oboe. Nevertheless, I chose not to use the side instruments since I wanted the tune to be playable also by other big bands.

¹⁴ Jim McNeely (born 1949) is an American jazz pianist, composer and arranger.

¹⁵ Russell Garcia, *The Professional Arranger Composer* (Criterion Music Corporation, 1954).

The tune starts with drums playing the groove with percussion elements on top of the drums. Bass and baritone saxophone plays the main bass riff with variations including triplets and quadruplets, the melody is ready to begin. The idea of rhythmic variation came already when composing of the tune, but it was clear that it would be used later on, not in the original composition. It is funny to realize that quite many of the ideas presented here were already invented before, like the way the melody is played by soprano saxophone with tenor saxophone playing the second voice. As the rhythm section was already accompanying the melody, the second segment is joined by the low brass section with polyrhythmic motive. The repeat of the complete form features trumpets playing the harmonized melody, low brass section and rhythm section is accompanying and saxophone section provides answers to the melody phrases.

The second segment melody is played by brass in pyramids and rest of the band accompanies with the polyrhythmic motive. First solo section features trombone starting with only drums. Later, the rhythm sections join and plays the whole form twice, backgrounds join the second time. After the first solo comes the drums solo first accompanied by piano, bass and baritone saxophone playing parts of the bass riff, the rest of the band joins playing parts of the melody until drum solo ends halfway through the first segment. 'Blah Blues' ends to a full ensemble long note after the rest of the form is played as in the beginning.

'Blah Blues' for big band was first performed the 3rd of November 2018 in Sointi Jazz Orchestra's 5th anniversary concert in Helsinki, Finland. Everything went quite smoothly, except for little bit of complaining by the saxophone section because of the fast passages in the second head, but I knew who I was writing to so they were able to execute the place. In the rehearsals I decided to have the trombone solo start only with drums and after a cue, the original solo section began. I didn't really interact with the band since there was a conductor who took care of the duties, as we did also earlier with my compositions or arrangements.

Sounds Oriental to Me

I had the honor to have my arrangement of ‘Sounds Oriental to Me’ played by the great Bohuslän Big Band¹⁶ as a part of a course that is held at HSM every spring. The main concern for me was the conducting, since the band doesn’t have a conductor of its own and every one of the course members should do it as a part of the course. At first I was worried because the lack of experience when it comes to leading a band of such size. The concern with the conducting appeared to be pointless for the self-evident reason that the band has so much experience of playing without conducting, they use members of the sections for that if necessary. That being said it was easy for me to try the conducting and I did practice it a bit – the pattern of 2 over the time signature of 6/8 – and also having to rehearse the band was an experience not to underrate at all. The feedback session, where some of the members of the band were present, took place right after the concert day. The feedback was mostly good; I appeared to be confident while leading the band even though I didn’t really feel like it. As I thought of it later, I feel like the tension caused by the lack of experience with conducting affected my attitude towards everything at that situation, but seemingly it didn’t show so much. Also, some voicings with the trombone section were to fix, because of the too small intervals and some of the places, where the mutes were to insert, were too short.

With this concert, which took place 25th of April 2019 in Lindgrensalen, extra stress was caused because the lead trumpet player of the band suddenly got ill right before the concert and was replaced by the third trumpet player (who also played the lead trumpet in West Coast Big Band¹⁷ at that time). A member of the aforementioned course then replaced the third trumpet. (He was the only trumpet player in the improvisation department at that time.) Even though the tune was well handled in the rehearsals, the saxophone section didn’t execute the riff in the very beginning, but they succeeded in a while. It seemed to be rhythmically difficult place for experienced big band musicians not to mention the string players students. Another exceptional situation occurred during the trumpet solo. The soloist was present in the feedback session and explained how he tried to keep the feeling in the primary mode even during the tail of the first segment and that way fooled the rhythm section to continue in that mode. It made me doubt myself during the performance as well, but I kept my head and showed

¹⁶ The Bohuslän Big Band is a modern jazz ensemble from Sweden, which started as a military orchestra in the 19th century.

¹⁷ West Coast Big Band is a Big band from Gothenburg, Sweden, which plays the music of active Scandinavian composers including the band members.

the entries for the backgrounds where I thought they should be. Also, some of the 1st and 3rd trumpet places are missing because of the sudden illness.

‘Sounds Oriental to Me’ starts with just the saxophone section slap tonguing¹⁸ ad lib until rhythm section joins on cue with a steady riff. It turned out that one of the members of the section wasn’t able to execute that extended technique, the solution was to just imitate the sound of it. After the drums and the bass joined with a steady groove and a pair of brass phrases, saxophone section started a riff that also continues under the first section melody. This riff was actually the original material written for the string quartet in the spring of 2018 and with such experienced band it was executed – at least in the rehearsals. The slap tonguing suited well here since the riff is also short notes similar to them.

The first section of the melody is alternating and later played in unison between trumpets 1-2 while trombones 1-2 and flugelhorns replace the accompanying reeds with simple melody. The second section continues the alternating melody now with alto saxophones doubling and trombone section playing long notes. After the first melody, the transition introduces a new section which consists of two flugelhorns, two tenor saxophones and baritone saxophone, which is used later on in the tune.

Second time, the melody is fully crowded with alto saxophones, tenor saxophone, trumpets 1-2 and flugelhorn playing the melody (also piano, if the player so decides) harmonized while the rest of the band accompanies. The first solo section is for piano. It is accompanied only by third trombone and bass trombone playing fifths in different root notes in the main mode. After a while rest of the trombones and 2 flugelhorns join and leads the tune to second solo, which is for trumpet 2 in the complete chord structure. As the bass and drums accompanies all the time, the brass provides some backgrounds and saxophones join in the second solo chorus. After the trumpet solo comes shout chorus¹⁹ where the earlier mentioned section is featured with rhythmic motive by rhythm section, baritone saxophone and bass trombone. Rest of the band joins little by little also using material from

¹⁸ The sound is created as a result of the release of the suction in the mouth and the popping sound that the reed produces which amplifies as it travels through the horn.

¹⁹ Shout chorus is usually the last chorus of big band arrangement and is characterized by being the most energetic, lively, and exciting by containing the musical climax of the piece.

earlier parts of the tune. This section eventually leads to second section of the melody which leads to the saxophone section riff introduced in the beginning and disbands to slap tonguing again.

Humming

As might have been noticed, during the period in Gothenburg I became mildly obsessed with polyrhythms on top of each other and the soundscape they make. In a somewhat similar way as in the arrangements for piano and strings, and piano, bass clarinet and tabla, 'Humming' for big band also starts with this method. It begins with alto saxophones taking turns playing polyrhythm of three over 4/4 and it is joined after eight bars by trumpets 1-2 taking turns playing four eighth notes each (not really a polyrhythm, but as important ingredient). Another eight bars and muted trumpets 3-4 join taking turns playing polyrhythms of five; after eight more bars enter the tenor saxophones taking turns playing polyrhythms of six. Lastly, rhythm section, trombone section and baritone saxophone start playing the basic second segment groove of 'humming'.

Needless to say, the order of the two segments in this tune is reverse. The ballad segment which used to be first is played four times, first introducing the chord structure only by the rhythm section with light piano soloing. Second time the melody is provided by flugelhorn in different key with saxophone section accompanying lightly in unison. Third time after modulating again, trombone joins flugelhorn in the melody and saxophone section continues now with more harmony. One more modulation and the saxophone section plays the melody harmonized while the brass section accompanies.

Back to the initial section; a sudden change of the mood, guitar solo, and the material introduced in the beginning comes after a while this time in different key. The question here was what to write for guitar when it comes to selection of sound effects? As I rarely write for settings that include guitar, it only now occurred to me that some guideline texts for the guitar part should be added since the modern guitarists possibly have a wide selection of sound effects. The tune ends with unison melody with guitar and piano fortissimo while rest of the band accompanies with the same riff.

West Coast Big Band played the arrangement of 'Humming' at one rehearsal, but it turned out that on that very date the drummer, one trumpet and one saxophone were missing so it didn't sound like it should be recorded. But I did an audio version of the arrangement with Sibelius software and Note Performer since they were available in the school computers. This means the drum-, piano- and bass parts were written out instead of leaving only the slash-notes, as it is the way to go normally.

Conclusion

The compositions and composing

Naturally, the compositions I made, were not the only ones I worked with during the period. As I discussed about composing with my peers and professors, and gathered information about the subject from different sources, listened, played and analyzed music considering my topic, I became more aware of possibilities and ways of composing. As we know, there are multiple motifs and sub motifs when it comes to melody, harmony and rhythm or lack of them. At one point I collected a list of things aforementioned and started to use it as a helping hand when composing. That turned out to be worth continuing also because the fact that limiting yourself can open new possibilities.

In the beginning I was quite happy with the compositions, but as I worked with them a lot, I got tired of them, maybe that's how human brain works. Now that I look back to them, they are quite simple form-wise, actually all of them have only two not very lengthy segments with repeating elements. What I am missing here is perhaps a tune with longer form with not so repetitive chord structure and less riff like feel. I am happy that I composed tunes that are challenging for me. That made me practice the tunes more than usual, so the outcome would hopefully be fluent. For example, in 'Blah Blues' I played bass riff with left hand and 2-part melody in right hand in the time signature of 5/4 followed by polyrhythm of 3 over 4 with left hand and arpeggio melody with right hand.

Usually, the most recognizable element of a piece of music is the melody. As I think of the essentials of the three compositions, I pretty much used the melodies of the three songs as is, apart from minor rhythmic or melodic things especially in 'Sounds Oriental to Me'. In fact, all the basic elements were more or less heard in all the arrangements. In 'Blah Blues' the melody, harmony and bass riff were used four times, sometimes varied, in 'Sounds Oriental to Me' the melody and the harmony were used four times. In 'Humming' the melody, harmony and rhythmic feel of both segments were all used four times.

The arrangements and arranging

As mentioned earlier, the melodies, harmonies and rhythmic feels of the compositions were used all the time. The arranging had more to do with the form, instrumentation, modulations, intros, interludes, outros, the movements inside harmony and so on. Arranging for the piano trio was quite straightforward. Intros and interludes, solo sections and modulations, and as discussed earlier, the interplay between the small band consisting talented musicians is kind of arranging in itself.

The most intense learning happened during the rehearsals and playing with the string quartet. What was surprising to me was that the string quartet also rehearsed without me. The things that I maybe should have paid more attention were the way of playing the difficult rhythms and the timing. As I think of the classical way of playing, it includes somewhat more physical movement while playing and the rhythmic approach is not as accurate as I would've hoped. In the rehearsal it could've been more helpful to encourage the players to focus more to play the exact rhythms in exact time without the extra movement. And since it is possible in the modern times, I could've sent the audio files from the Sibelius software for them to listen. Now that I think of it, they in fact requested it, but at that time the current Sibelius software version somehow didn't manage to do it even though I tried. Generally speaking, it was clear to me that the rehearsals with the string quartet were learning process to me and I'm happy that we tried different things including some extended techniques, singing while playing and improvisation. This was my first time arranging for a string quartet so the result was surprisingly nice to begin with. I liked the sound of the string quartet in my arrangements to some extent, but I think I should have more courage to compose not so safe things, if I may say so.

As it occurred, I combined and re-composed the three tunes to a one bigger entirety. What I tried to do was to take one element, for example melody or harmony, sprinkle and mix them to different places of the entirety. I managed to do something with the idea, but now I feel like it should've been much more, I should've taken more risks, even if the arrangements wouldn't sound so good in the beginning. Now that I think of it, I feel like the self-criticism in my composing and arranging is lesser than it is in my playing, at least for now. That being said, I should've been able to try some wild things. In his book *Effortless Mastery*, Kenny Werner talks about fear-based composing. He says: "Try writing three

bad pieces a day. I bet you can't do it. Your talent will sabotage you and cause some great music to come out!"²⁰ I agree with him, at least in the case that the aim is to expose the work.

The biggest and the most time-consuming arrangements were naturally the ones for the big band. I did the arrangements mostly with the Sibelius software, excluding some ideas I worked with piano and added to the arrangement later on. In the beginning of the period, I planned to do one of the arrangements in an old-fashioned way, using just pencil and paper, but then more tasks occurred and I didn't have the time to do it. This made me think that how easy it is to compose and arrange nowadays, because you can hear the material immediately after you write it down with a software of your choice. In the future I will definitely try to do a big band arrangement without the help of a computer, I think it is possible that it will make the arrangement process even more focused and perhaps important for oneself. In the end of the spring of 2019 I also started to do a big band transcription and it turned out to be very challenging yet educative, but the arrangements in question didn't "benefit" from that.

I've heard somebody say that when writing for a bigger ensemble such as big band, it would be good the scores to have too much information rather than too little when it comes to dynamics and such. I agree with this. When I first started to write for big band years back I somehow kind of overrated the musicians' ability to know what the composer wants and that the music itself will tell. Obviously that was not the way to go and now I think I've gotten better at that. Also, what I think now is, that the same rule should be used when writing for smaller ensembles. Of course the bandleader is usually present in the possible rehearsals to tell the details, but what if the case isn't that? It is reasonable to give sheet music that is fully informative than the one that lacks the info for the sight-reader who is substituting the original player, with a very short notice. Of course, a good musician can make the music sound good, but not necessarily in a way the composer wants.

Versatility

According to the Oxford dictionary, versatility is "ability to adapt or be adapted to many different functions or activities." As mentioned before, that is my goal to some extent. Practicing my skills as a

²⁰ Kenny Werner, *Effortless Mastery* (Jamey Aebersold Jazz, 1996), 75.

player, as a composer, as an arranger, as a bandleader, it is obvious that during this period I became more versatile musician. For me it means the ability to work in different environments convincingly and to be able to collect the missing knowledge or skills as fast as the situation demands. As a player this can mean among other things knowledge of styles and the ability to focus on things that are not so clear for the player. As a composer or arranger this can mean the knowledge of instruments you're writing to. In general, it is problem solving.

As a working musician, it is impossible not to meet people from different cultures and backgrounds etc. Before, I had worked with mostly northern European people since that has been the place to be for my whole life (excluding some trips of course). We have long history with music in Europe and the manners and habits have become a norm, so we basically know how to behave. It was easy to work with the classical string players since their work ethics are very good and as mentioned before they rehearsed my material together without me asking for it! Not necessarily the case with big band sections. For me the working with the Indian tabla player was new experience and obviously it must have been very much an invigorating experience for him to come to northern Europe. When asked about the subject via Facebook messenger, he says:

My experience so far has been very fruitful and amazing. I have played with a lot of musicians from different genres and it was so inspiring and a great learning process for me. I have started to look at my playing and approaching music from a different perspective now. I feel more freedom and safe space to create new things and challenge myself in the school environment. Playing with you and Ville was one of first steps towards challenging myself and trying to cross border with my music. While playing with you I never felt that not able to read sheet music was any disadvantage for me. I was most of the time trying to feel the groove and not focus on time signature. It was more like playing with flow. Also, a great thing for me was you allowed me a lot of freedom to play what I feel like but at the same time you guided with nice inputs. The piece we played had a lot of space, which allowed me to blend in perfectly.²¹

Now that the studying in learning institutions in my life is most likely done, if I am willing to learn, I must be my own teacher. I feel like I need to do it especially with the big band scores. Don Sebesky states: “- you can examine your score by comparing it with the recorded performance, evaluating its effectiveness for yourself. I do this after every record session. I analyze every page, making notations

²¹ Prabhat Das, Facebook messenger message to author, May 5, 2019

in red pencil under those sections which didn't work as well as I had hoped until I uncover the reason for any weakness in voicing, form, continuity, or texture."²² I have touched this only lightly, but I am planning to put more effort to it.

As I am writing this, I have gathered plethora of new information for myself and gained plenty of experience when it comes to composing, arranging, performing, practicing, communicating, playing and phenomena related to those, not only in jazz idiom. I have learned to not rely on certain genre all the time and write more what I hear. The thing I thought later on a lot was the fact that I knew who I wrote to. It is a great benefit if one knows that, as you can customize the material you are writing, while writing it. I feel like I didn't put enough thought on that, even though I knew the players or ensembles beforehand and this is one of the things I should pay more attention in the future. On the other hand does it need to be done? Does the music become even better when thought is put to the ensemble or the player in addition to the artistic knowledge and level of the composer? Go figure.

I have considered myself more of an instrumentalist than a composer, but the experiences so far have directed me more and more towards composing and arranging. As I will continue my career as a pianist I will definitely not leave the composing behind. Quite the contrary, it is interesting to me and I sympathize with the quite common idea that composing is long term improvising.

²² Don Sebesky, *The Contemporary Arranger* (Alfred Publishing Co., Inc., 1974, 1979), 236.

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Appendix

Scores

Score 1: Blah Blues (piano trio)

Score 2: Humming (piano trio)

Score 3: Sounds Oriental to Me (piano trio)

Score 4: Blah Blues (strings, piano)

Score 5: Humming (strings, piano)

Score 6: Sounds Oriental to Me (Strings, piano)

Score 7: Gothenburg trilogy (piano bs. cl., tabla)

Score 8: Blah Blues (big band)

Score 9: Sounds Oriental to Me (big band)

Score 10: Humming (big band)

Audio files

Audio 1: Blah Blues (piano trio)

Audio 2: Humming (piano trio)

Audio 3: Sounds Oriental to Me (piano trio)

Audio 4: Blah Blues (strings, piano)

Audio 5: Humming (strings, piano)

Audio 6: Sounds Oriental to Me (strings, piano)

Audio 7: Gothenburg trilogy (piano, bs. cl., tabla)

Audio 8: Blah Blues (big band)

Audio 9: Sounds Oriental to Me (big band)

Audio 10: Humming (big band), note: exported audio from Sibelius software