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Handledare: Klas Nevrin

Mai Agan

MaiGroup - You
From composing the music to album release tour

Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt, konstnärligt arbete

Det självständiga, konstnärliga arbetet finns dokumenterat på inspelning: CD
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Introduction

During my final term of my bachelor’s program at The Royal College of Music in Stockholm I found myself thinking whether or not I should continue my studies on an advanced level at the master’s program. I knew I was not ready to return to Estonia with the knowledge I had gained during those three years that I had spent absorbing as much information as I possibly could, practicing, composing and rehearsing every hour of the day. Besides, at last, the hard work had started to pay off - my name was spreading in the circle of musicians and I had work, more than ever; I had found friends, I had a life here! I could not leave this place. I needed more time. While contemplating the possibility of continuing my studies and at the same time writing my bachelor’s final thesis - I realized that the top of the mountain doesn’t get any thinner, only broader.

At the beginning of my studies at KMH I was struggling a lot with the feeling of being an outsider - I was not like any other jazz student I encountered, who seemed to be able to dedicate themselves wholeheartedly to one musical genre. My wide preferences in music made me feel that I didn’t belong anywhere, but at the end of my bachelor’s I realized - I belong everywhere! As soon as I acknowledged that, I knew I needed to continue this journey with a self-awareness which had been unknown to me before. I decided to apply to the master’s program.

Nevertheless, I needed a subject for my artistic research. I went to the school library and browsed through some master theses to gather inspiration. The demons of doubt started to approach - I wasn’t sure if I could write about music or my own musical journey in such an analytical and scientific way - so I decided not to. My songs are not science and in my opinion, the complexity of a composition doesn’t always make a good composition.

Writing this thesis will be an emotional rollercoaster. I will be going back in time to certain events and people that have shaped my life in a way that I cannot help myself getting overwhelmed with feelings while telling stories of what has inspired me to write music.

Purpose

The goal of my project was to connect my master studies with my musical career. It means that I wanted to record an album that I could use as my final project but I also wanted to release it for wider audiences to take a step further in my musical career. I wanted to use the knowledge I had gained at KMH in my professional freelance career even while being a student. I wanted to make the two sides of me, a student and a freelance musician, function together and benefit from each other. MaiGroup’s last album “Luv” was released in April 2013 and since then I had
been freelancing with other artists in different musical styles. After two years of playing other people’s music I wanted to write, record and perform new music with my own band MaiGroup.

I have been leading that band for many years now and finally, thanks to finding the right people by my side, it sounds the way I’ve always wanted (even though I’m sure that it never stops evolving into something new and exciting due to everyone’s personal development). The band consisting of saxophone, piano, guitar, bass and drums, is a pretty classical jazz band line up. One might think that the soundscape is therefore limited but I wanted to bring out the versatility of the band members, as well as different musical styles mixed in the music. The genre, jazz-fusion, is probably not for a very wide audience, but instead of reaching the masses I want my music to reach the audience that’s into improvisational music in general, perhaps jazz and fusion in particular.

My ambition with this thesis is to convey my aesthetic preferences, my struggles with the creative process and contemplation of my personal expression. Ultimately, I wanted to be able to graduate The Royal College of Music in Stockholm with a final work that I could use in my further musical career and create something that I could be proud of even years later. So, I decided to record my second studio album.

Creative process

How do we create art? Where does it come from and where does it go? Why does it happen? People have been asking those questions for centuries but the creative process continues to mystify us. People spend hours listening to music daily all around the world and it affects them in different ways from emotion regulation to cognitive development, along with providing a meaning for self-expression. In expressing ourselves, we make manifest aspects of our own attitudes: feelings, experiences, memories and points of view. To me, creativity is a very intuitive process of imaginative ideas turning into reality. It’s often impetuous and impulsive - acting on my current state of mind and personal emotions. In general, creating art is something very personal and I believe that every artist has unique abilities to produce art that is distinctive and special. Practical techniques and methods can be learned and adopted but ultimately every artist has to make their own decisions of what is needed to develop their own style of art.

I love the creative process. I also hate it. It is glorious but frustrating, absurdly difficult but an infinitely rewarding process of transforming a boring idea into an interesting one. Sometimes it even happens the other way around.

According to writer Flora Richards-Gustafsson, and scientists Jacques Hadamard and Henri Poincaré that her research is based on, the creative process has five main stages1:

1 Richards-Gustafsson, “5 steps in the Creative Process Model”, Hearst Newspapers, 2017
preparation stage which is all about immersing yourself completely into the subject and aspirations; incubation stage is when the subconscious is working through the information and you start synthesizing ideas using your imagination. As ideas start to mature, the individual has an illumination or insight stage - it’s when the “eureka!” moment attacks and you have an epiphany regarding how to piece the thoughts together in a manner that makes sense. This stage is considered the smallest part of the creative process, in terms of time.

Then comes the evaluation stage which is the most difficult part where you have to find the most viable option from the many ideas and sift through all of them. After the solution reveals itself in an epiphany, you evaluate whether the insight is worth the pursuit. The final stage is elaboration - the most important part when we take action to stay true to this one idea and start working on transforming a thought into a final product. Even though her theory is about creative marketing, I do believe that the same ideas can be applied on artistic creativity. I believe that artistic creativity is an endless process of examination and experimentation and perhaps not measured by the volume of achievements but rather the feeling of overcoming the obstacles during the process.

There were times when I got extremely frustrated with my own creativity. There are many ideas going through my head all the time but often that’s what they will always remain - voice memos on my phone. Sometimes there are ideas that won’t leave me alone and I get obsessed with finishing them, otherwise my heart won’t give me any peace. I could sit awake days and nights, in the search of a “perfect” chord or phrase. Sometimes I have struggles with not knowing where to start or how to end a song, or I get stuck in the middle of it, not knowing how to continue. Sometimes it helped me to put a song aside for a while, not think about it and come back to it a bit later. When I finally find what I am looking for, I play the musical idea many times and just feel it. If it feels right, it can’t be wrong. Then I write it down.

People have different ways of describing their personal creative process and I’ve had very disparate feelings about describing mine. At times, I’ve envied people who are able to use words to express their creativity in a way that it makes sense, but on the other hand I’ve also had a little punk deep inside me who is protesting against turning art into “rocket” science, my own (and other people’s) feeble attempts to analyze beauty in creativity that cannot be described or pursuits to find answers to questions that will always remain unanswered. I trust in the mystery of art and let the inspiration flow when it strikes. To me, music, and art in general, is a holy ground and I am infinitely grateful for the gift and will walk this journey wherever it takes me.
Philosophy of my art

To me, composing music is always an introspective look into myself and a reflection of what is currently happening in my life, or the life of the people by my side, or life in general - in the world. As discussed previously, I’ve always tried to remain free from analyzing my music too much. I do not sit down and plan writing a song in a particular key, mood, tempo or in a certain time signature. If I don’t feel inspired, I don’t write. However, during my years at KMH I took composition courses from Joakim Milder and Örjan Fahlström and I learned to write music by using certain tools for composing (mind mapping, limiting oneself with certain rhythmic patterns or notes, use-reuse technique etc) that can help me out when I feel uninspired. The “use-reuse” technique has been especially useful at times when I’ve felt stuck or empty after a creative period of time and it helps me to get back on track. The “use-reuse” technique means basically to grab an idea and start playing around with it, use different variations of it, use the same idea on a different chord progression and so on.

To me, beauty is very often something indefinable that forces me to find the essence within it. It applies to everything in life, including music, art and people. French writer and poet Antoine de St. Exupéry has said in one of my favorite books “The Little Prince:” “It is only with the heart one can see clearly. What is essential is invisible to the eye”.

I want people to forget about me in my music and feel their own feelings. I want to play music without trying to impress anyone because as much of a cliché it is, it’s true - when you try to impress, you fail to express. I appreciate musicians who can sing on their instruments and who have the patience to be beautiful and the courage to show their vulnerability in music. Listening to a song, I don’t want to listen to what meter or key it’s in, or analyze someone’s phrasing and its alterations. Of course, I’m not being ignorant - due to my musical training I hear all those things but I don’t want to focus on them. More important than knowing the time signature or the key, is if the song touches my heart, if I can relate to the story and recognize myself in the music. If it’s a song that I want to play and work on, of course, I have to transcribe it, write it down and analyse it, but when I put on a record for an emotional impact, I want to forget all the theory and just enjoy the music. That’s what I want to happen when people listen to my music - I want them to hear themselves, their stories, their sadness’s and joys. What I mean is that when I listen to for example Joni Mitchell, I hear her words but I never think about her, or her love affairs, her misfortunes or her great happiness - I think about my own. I recognize my own life in her lyrics and it touches me deeply. That’s what I want to happen when people listen to my music. That’s when I’ve truly succeeded.

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2 St. Exupéry, “The Little Prince”, Reynal & Hitchcock, 1943
Pianist Keith Jarrett: “Music always turns into music. As soon as I play a key, push a key down there’s no theory anymore. When I go and I hear a sound on the keyboard, all theories go out the window.” 3

One of my biggest influences, singer-songwriter Jackson Browne, has said: “I’d have to say my favorite thing is writing a song that really says how I feel, what I believe - and it even explains the world to myself better than I knew it.” 4

I believe that as artists, we have the mission to share the beauty and the pain of life with our listeners. So many people have the same struggles. I have stopped chasing after flawlessness and I’ve learned that scars make us beautiful and the imperfections make us perfect. That’s life and that’s the philosophy of my art.

**Inspiration**

Love is my biggest inspiration - the love I have for my partner in life, my family, my friends, my country, my home. Due to my lifestyle as a freelance musician I often have to be so far from everyone I love, so there is a lot of longing and release of pain in my music. Many songs have been written at times when my solitude has become loneliness.

It’s never love that hurts. In fact, love is the only thing that doesn’t hurt. It’s everything else around it. My dear friend Ginger once said the following wise words: “So much suffering comes from ignorance and simple misunderstandings but often the pain, after being endured and acknowledged can galvanize a strength in us that can bring wisdom and eventually, peace.” Willie Nelson, whose music has touched me a lot, has said: “As music expressed the pain, it eased the pain.” 5

My music is also inspired by listening to different musicians in versatile genres: from Elizabeth Cotten and Odetta to Allan Holdsworth and Jeff Beck, from Bach, Chopin and Stravinsky to Charles Ives and Arvo Pärt, from George Jones, The Byrds, The Flying Burrito Brothers and Willie Nelson to Amy Winehouse and Coldplay, from Joni Mitchell, Sandy Denny, Lucinda Williams and Bonnie Raitt to Charlie Parker, Miles Davis and John Coltrane and so many others.

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4 Carbone, “Jackson Browne: Even more true now”, Still Amazed, 2012
MaiGroup

Being a band leader is kind of like running a company. It takes years to find the right people; heart and courage to let people know when things are not working as they should or if they could go better with someone else’s contributions; patience and ability to stay calm in the most stressful situations; knowledge and experience to keep everything running like clockwork; and it also takes wisdom and gratitude to appreciate the people around you. It will be seven magical years in November 2017 since I started leading a band by the name of MaiGroup.

Gathering the band together

In August 2010 I started my studies in the jazz department at Skurups Folkhögskola - a school with a high reputation, many opportunities, valued teachers and an isolated location away from big cities all of which made the school a desirable place for many young aspiring musicians. My background as a musical chameleon did not support my struggles to become a jazz music puritan. The jazz curriculum at Skurups Folkhögskola was based on getting to play together with other students as much as possible, which meant that we had four to five different ensemble lessons per week plus music theory and ear training. I was thrown into cold water every day until I learned to swim. Playing all that jazz, songs that meant nothing to me and very often with people that I did not connect with - it started to eat me up inside. I started doubting myself more than ever. Who am I, why am I here, what is it that I want, why am I playing this music, where am I coming from and where am I going? I was lost.

One day I realized that in order to be able to play other people’s music I needed to play my own music too. I had some songs in the drawer and I figured it’s time for them to come to life with the help of the best musicians I could find around there. I invited people that I was connecting with on a deeper level than just jazz scales and playing technique. What I wanted was heart and soul, intelligence, sincerity and emotion. I wanted melodies, dynamics and ability to listen to each other. A beautiful melody to me is usually a simple phrase, very often uncomplicated and mostly consisting of a few notes. Seems like I prefer songs in minor, melancholic as I am by nature. Dynamics are important part of my music - it’s a tool to communicate the emotion of the song. Someone once said that a good musician is the one who knows when not to play - that also gives a chance for more dynamics.

My first choice of musicians were Alf Carlsson on guitar, Ludwig Lindell on piano, Daniel Nordén on saxophone and Henrik Holst Hansen on drums. We ended up recording some of my first songs, like “Hilton Dance” and “Alpha & Omega” and we also took part in a student jazz festival, “Tudengijazz” 2011 in Estonia.
In 2011, I got admitted to the bachelor program in the jazz department of The Royal College of Music in Stockholm. All MaiGroup’s members went separate ways so I had to find new people. I tried playing my compositions with several musicians along the way but it took time until I was sure what I was looking for in my band members.

First of all, I needed people who would play music for the same reasons as I do - because we love it and music is all our life. I needed people who I would connect with personally, who would interest me, feed my soul, excite my mind and who I would enjoy spending time with. I was looking for people who would have openness and appreciation for other music genres, like fusion, pop and rock, as my music is a mix of different musical styles. I needed people who have a strong voice of their own. Basically, I wanted to find musicians who would sweep me off my feet with their musicianship. Pretty high expectations, I know. After trying out different players, I finally found the people that I wanted to share my musical journey with.

**Björn Arkö - saxophone**

Björn and I started our studies at KMH at the same time in 2011, we graduated the same time and we also applied to the masters program together. We have been attending a lot of the same lessons together and Björn was always the brightest and most distinguished student in the room. Besides being a prodigious saxophone player, he always had the most knowledge in music theory and analysis. He would know answers to questions that nobody had even heard about. He was the nerdy kind of guy who would think about saxophone licks first thing in the morning and last thing in the evening and his eyes would light up as soon as anybody mentioned Michael Brecker. In my opinion, he is one of the most spectacular young musicians on the Swedish jazz scene - he is technically flawless, innately talented, unlimitedly creative, hardworking and dedicated to improving his skills. He is an excellent composer and very often his solos on my songs were like his composition on my composition. He is a Musician with all his being and the love he has for music is shining through every note he plays. I am truly honored to have Björn playing in my band.

**Simon Berggren – piano**

Simon Berggren is the newest member of MaiGroup. In the beginning of my studies at KMH I heard so much about him from different people but Simon was like a phantom - everyone was talking about his amazing piano playing but I never saw him, he was never around. In 2012, I asked him to sub for our piano player Rasmus Lindelöv at Muhu Future Music Festival “Juu jääb...” in Estonia. That was the first time we met and played together. I was intrigued by his charisma, his pristine energy and his quiet nature. Simon is an observer - he is very sensitive,
thoughtful and empathetic. His knowledge is so broad and conversations with him often leave me awed by the depth, sincerity and heartfulness of such a young man. He puts all that beauty and tenderness into his playing. When we play, he closes his eyes and gives every note a meaning. Simon has brought so much life into my music for which I will always be grateful.

**Jonathan Lundberg - drums**

Jonathan was the first person I invited into the band. He was brought into my life by my bass teacher Robert Sundin who introduced us. At first, Jonathan and I started jamming together and spent many long nights in the drum “dungeon” practicing just bass and drums and working on odd meters, keeping the time, staying in the “pocket” and exploring different perceptions of timing - bass note before, on, or after the bass drum. We learned to know each other’s playing and aesthetic preferences, so nowadays words are absolutely unnecessary. Jonathan knows what my music needs. Drummer Bengt Stark once said about the two of us together: “Rhythm section of the century”. Jonathan was exactly the player I was looking for - he is groovy, steady and interactive, his playing is tasteful, creative and he is always a reliable engine for the band. His playing technique is absolutely mindblowing and therefore he is able to play the most advanced things on his instrument. That said, he is one of the best drummers I’ve ever played with.

**Calle Stålenbring - guitar**

The hardest part of putting the new MaiGroup together was finding the right guitar player. Luckily Jonathan introduced me to Calle who I instantly connected with. He is very charming, warm, funny, polite and has many other good qualities as a person but when I heard him play his guitar, I was immediately amazed. Calle has the rare combination of being able to play the most simple and beautiful melodies which are essential in my music, while also possessing a heavier approach and being able to play the most complex and technically difficult musical passages absolutely faultlessly. There’s a lot of Allan Holdsworth (who we both love) influence in his playing but Calle has a recognizable voice of his own. Calle is one of my favorite guitar players in the world and it’s always such a heart fulfilling experience to play with him. He is enormously gifted, melodic and sensitive; he interacts and leaves space if needed, he’s technically proficient and very often takes the initiative and comes up with great ideas. We have this kind of musical telepathy - he has a clarity in which he sees most things, including me. I am really impressed by his ability to communicate emotion through his playing and I’m thankful for all the heart he has put into my music.

Through the years MaiGroup has grown from separate players into a band. Time has polished off some edges and we have all grown as people and developed as musicians. There is a deeper
understanding within the group and we play music for the same reasons. There has never been any major dramas or misunderstandings within the members in MaiGroup today but I do remember that while I was trying out different players in order to find the right ones, changing some of them was a pretty painful process. I could not handle musicians whose creativity was astonishing but who were unprofessional beyond words – not learning the songs prior to the rehearsals or sometimes not even one day before the tour began. It was always hard to tell someone that I think we should go separate ways. Luckily nobody took it personally. When I finally found Calle, Jonathan, Björn and Simon – I knew that everyone in the band is a keeper!

As my life and musical career has taken some crazy turns and I am settling in on a new continent - MaiGroup will carry on as much as possible. These boys are my people and we make good music together. I am already working on new songs and planning our third album.

Time will tell what will happen. But all I know is that I love this band. The world is small and music is an international language connecting people all over the planet.

You

There were ten songs that I composed for MaiGroup’s second album “You”. All the songs were written between 2013-2015 after the release of MaiGroup’s first album “Luv” (April, 6, 2013). I can see a huge development in my composing and my playing skills, as well as in my spiritual growth as a human being. The six years in KMH I spent working on my technical skills - shredding scales up and down, slow and fast, arpeggios, licks, bass etudes etc. I used to struggle with not being able to play anything that was very technically demanding on bass (I also know that I did set my ambition quite high and at times I was being too hard on myself). Sometimes while playing I heard perhaps a difficult and fast passage in my head but I couldn’t play it due to my weak bass technique. It was very important for me to develop a technical freedom on my instrument so that I would be able to play anything when the music needs me to. I don’t think I’m into playing fast all the time, but I want to be able to do it, if I need to. In order to develop my composition skills, I listened and transcribed a lot of music to find out what it is exactly that I like so much about a certain song. Thanks to jazz harmony lessons with Ola Bengtsson I learned to hear new things in music. I started to hear all these new harmonies and alterations that I didn’t hear before because I didn’t know they existed. So I learned to use the gained knowledge in my own composing. When I listen to my old songs and to what I write nowadays - I can hear the development. To me, my songs are more interesting to listen to - the harmonies are richer and the melodies are more mature, let alone I can express myself so much clearer on my instrument. I’ve really learned a lot.
“You” was an obvious choice for a title since each and every song on that album is inspired by someone in my life.

Before I start telling you about the songs, you all have to know, that I don’t sit down and plan to write songs. Music comes to me when it comes, I can’t force the muse to show up when it’s not there. My composing “technique” is very simple: I am alone, I miss my family and my friends because they are far away from me, I think about a certain memory or situation, I play my bass, I hear a melody, or a harmony, or a rhythm in my head and I try to find out on my bass, what it is. Then I develop it - I play it as long it starts to shape up, until I find a structure or form and I’m happy with what I hear. Then I record it and play it back on repeat. Then I start finding the rest of the missing puzzle pieces, depending on what comes first. For example, if I lay down a harmony, I start looking for a melody on it. Based on Richards-Gustafsson’s theory, I believe this is called the evaluation stage where I kind of play different versions of the same song, sift through the many options, looking for the “right” one. When I finally stay true to this one idea, then I’m at the elaboration stage with my creative process. That’s also when I finally write the song down in Sibelius program and start arranging it to the band. Usually it’s the sax and/or guitar playing the melody and I try to vary it with some bass melodies, piano and drum features - so that everyone would have the chance to shine.

In the rehearsals, I didn’t have to explain myself too much because the band already knew my aesthetic preferences, for example - never underestimate a good drum beat in my songs. I explain what kind of feeling I want to have in the song: a ballad, swing, even 8th notes etc. I leave a lot of room for the boys to come up with ideas and we work as a group, not only under my dictation. I believe that’s also one of the reasons that MaiGroup has kept on going - everyone feels that their opinion and ideas are appreciated and valued. I might be the band leader but I would be nothing without the people that bring my songs into life.

1. Painters of the night

“Painters of the night” is one of my personal favorites on the album because of what the song is about. It’s about two strangers spending a warm summer night talking until the early morning hours, until He had to catch a flight and She had to catch a train to the opposite sides of the world. They fell in love and life was never the same again. Everything that seemed to be impossible, was all of a sudden possible! The rest of the story is too personal to be written in a final thesis, so I draw the line here and let the music speak for itself.

“Painters of the night” is a ballad in 6/8 that I wrote on a bass but piano is the heart of the song. B and D section melody is inspired by a short melodic phrase in “Santo’s dream” written by
Greg Leisz in turn inspired by a song “Sleepwalk” (1959) by Santo & Johnny. “Santo’s dream” touched me deeply. The tonality, simple melody and especially that particular musical passage spoke to my heart and I wanted to use it in my own song. In my thesis I have been talking about wanting people to recognize themselves in my music - well, I heard myself in Greg’s song, as if it was something I wrote. I am using the variation of this instantly recognizable phrase throughout the theme, both on saxophone and guitar, as well as I later discovered, in my own bass solo. I guess that’s where Örjan Fahlström’s “use and reuse” technique came in handy.

Here is an excerpt from the main theme:

Here is the part which is inspired by “Santo’s Dream” and Sleepwalk”:

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The first three songs were already recorded when I wrote “Painters of the night” in July 2015. To me, this song romanticized an ending and a new beginning in my life; and therefore carried an enormous significance to me.

2. Forgiveness is for the strong

When I started studying at KMH I remember discovering Jonathan Kreisberg’s album “Shadowless” (2011) and being totally blown away. I listened to his music a lot back then, so now I can see the influence of his music in my compositions. It was “new” music to me. I have always been listening to music from the 60’s and jazz-fusion bands from the 70’s and 80’s but Jonathan sounded very innovative to me: his guitar tone, his phrasing, the arrangements and the drum grooves were very often kind of pop/rock-influenced which I really liked! It was all something I hadn’t heard before. I mix different musical genres in my music all the time, so I felt connected to Jonathan’s music.

I was especially fond of his song “Stir the Stars” which I can now relate to my song called “Forgiveness is for the strong”. “Stir the Stars” starts with a steady drum groove and then piano and bass join in with a unison line. I thought it was a cool idea so I used it in my own composition.

I believe that love is the greatest weapon in the world and not because I’m naive but because I’ve tried everything else. The world is hurting more than ever and people don’t seem to learn from history. I don’t think that a blind hatred, cruelty or execration is ever justified. Someone once said that holding onto anger is like drinking poison and hoping the other person will die. What I would really like to see in the world, is more truth, acceptance and forgiveness. I know it’s not easy to forgive someone who in seconds has destroyed a trust which took years to build, but I also know that there is so much freedom in forgiveness and letting go, especially in forgiving yourself for things you didn’t know you didn’t know, before you learned them. I also hope that people I’ve hurt, will one day forgive me too.

“Forgiveness is for the strong” is a quite fierce composition, starting off with a drum&bass influenced drum groove that I wanted Jonathan to play, until the piano comes in as an introduction to a busy bass and piano unison line which is strongly connected to the
composition. The B section is like silence before the storm - it gives room to the listener before it winds up into an intense solo section. There are two solo forms: the first one is on the same harmony as the B section, the second solo has a different harmonic structure to take up the energy even more, until the breakdown to the intro again.

3. Wellspring (to R.V.)

“Wellspring” is a song I wrote with a dedication to my first bass teacher Raul Vaigla. He is a man who has had a huge impact on me and my playing - he is such a melodic bass player who is equally amazing as a solo bass player as well as a sideman in other bands. In fact, he is the reason I wanted to start playing bass guitar in the first place, after I saw him play at Tõnis Mägi’s 55th jubilee concert back in 2002. The joy with which he was playing music was unknown to me before I first touched the electric bass at the age of 16. When Raul Vaigla became my teacher in 2007, he started feeding me Led Zeppelin, Weather Report, Uzeb & Alain Caron, Jeff Berlin, Tony Levin, Deep Purple, Tal Wilkenfeld, Bill Frisell, Jeff Beck and many others. We worked well together and he has remained by my side as a friend and mentor. Even during my studies at KMH, I asked Raul to be my teacher and luckily the school provided me with the opportunity. His continuous support and encouragement means a lot to me. Raul Vaigla himself, is still even after all these years, one of my favorite bass players. His fretless bass tone is so warm and beautiful and has been an inspiration to finding my own voice on fretless bass. Therefore, the only song on MaiGroup’s album which I played on fretless, was written to Raul. Those years under his guidance and supervision gave me a strong foundation for all my further discoveries in music. “Wellspring” means that we should never forget where we come from - it’s important to be grateful for our roots and as the music career starts to grow we should always remember who was there on the ground floor with us.

As Raul introduced me to Weather Report, the album “Heavy Weather” (1977) is still one of my favorite records. The song “A Remark You Made” is like an anthem to me which I haven’t even dared to play with any band. However, “Wellspring” contains a lot of influence from that song. It was recorded with Wille Alin on drums (read more about Wille under the “Guest artists” chapter, page 24).

When we started rehearsing the song, I played them “A Remark You Made” and said that this is the feeling I want in the song. “Wellspring” starts with an Eb pedal where Simon is playing Zawinul-like fills. Then there’s a bass theme until saxophone takes over and leads into bass and saxophone solos. Björn takes his solo into the bass-sax unison section. Then is the last theme and outro. The biggest challenge for me is always the intonation on my fretless but I believe that my violin studies when I was a kid really developed my hearing on a higher level so I hear
when I’m off the pitch and fix it right away. The more I play that instrument the more confident I feel on it.


On the 4th of October in 2013 I became an aunt to the most amazing little boy named Sebastian - the most precious gift my sister could ever give me. I used to be a person who wasn’t particularly fond of children, but my whole world changed when I saw something so fragile and intact, so closely. Sebastian has taught me the greatest lessons of unconditional love and he is an incredible source of joy and light. The moment I held him in my arms for the first time, I gave myself a promise to be the best auntie in the whole wide world. I started with writing him a song. The title is inspired by James Taylor’s song “Sweet Baby James” that he dedicated to his nephew James.

By that time, I had just taken Staffan Linder’s country music ensemble at KMH, I had met American country artist Doug Seegers and I had become an ardent admirer of country music (while it seems to me that most jazz musicians despise country music, if they only knew that Charlie Parker was a huge fan of Hank Williams and Miles Davis absolutely adored Willie Nelson…) like Alison Krauss & Union Station, Emmylou Harris, Willie Nelson, bluegrass wonderchildren from Nickel Creek, Punch Brothers etc. So, “Sweet Baby Sebastian”, a song written to a little cowboy, has a lot of influence from my discovery of country music. The song has a guest artist, Greg Leisz, about whom you can read further on in this thesis (page 25-27).

The song is based on this guitar riff below, there’s also a bass melody with saxophone joining in the B section.

\[
\begin{align*}
1 & : \text{Dmaj7} \\
2 & : \text{A/C#} \\
3 & : \text{Amaj7} \\
4 & : \text{Bm7} \\
5 & : \text{Amaj7} \\
6 & : \text{Dmaj} \\
7 & : \text{Amaj7}
\end{align*}
\]
5. Gregory

Not long after meeting Greg Leisz in the summer of 2015, I wrote a song for him. Bill Frisell was first to dedicate a song to Greg and call one of his compositions “Greg Leisz”, so I had to come up with something else. I called my song by Greg’s real name “Gregory”. I guess it’s one of my ways of saying “Thank you”. I am not going to talk about Greg’s impact on me here, since there will be a longer chapter about him later in this thesis.

The initiative to have a guitar intro came from MaiGroup’s guitarist Calle and I thought it was a brilliant idea to communicate the tenderness of the song using the dynamics and bringing in the whole band later. I also know that it’s Calle’s personal favorite MaiGroup song, so every time we play it, he makes magic with it. He has this ability to make the sad songs even sadder with his warm guitar tone and the choice of melodies he plays. At live gigs Calle plays a much longer, free improvised guitar intro that he leads to the main theme. Björn is free to solo until the end on cue. “Gregory” is a slow ballad in 4/4 and there’s saxophone solo on the outro.

6. Something magical feat. Håkan Broström

The idea of writing “Something magical” came when double bass player Tom-Eddy Nordén and I took the challenge to both write one duo song for electric bass and double bass per week. Every Wednesday morning we would get together in a studio and record those two songs. For one of those sessions I wrote this particular song and brought it to the studio. That composition was in 3/4 and electric bass was supposed to play dotted quarter note chords while double bass would play the melody. Good idea in theory, sounded great in Sibelius program with a metronome, but in real life - absolute failure… Without a rhythm instrument it sounded like I was playing long notes in 4/4 and the melody was totally off.

I rearranged the song for MaiGroup - piano plays dotted quarter notes while guitar plays every beat of the bar. I came up with a busier bass groove and wanted to have a cool drum beat which wouldn’t make the time signature too obvious - I just wanted to do something different from everything else I’ve done before. Jonathan read my mind and came up with this drum groove.
It all happened while I had just met Håkan Broström and found out that there’s something magical in his playing (read more about Håkan, page 24-25) and so I asked if he would agree to be a guest artist on the album. We were fortunate to get his quick reply: “Yes!”

7. 5th of May 1962

5th of May 1962 is the day my mother was born. I was born on the same day but 26 years later. Without her guidance I wouldn’t have found my way to music. She took me to my first music lessons at the age of 3 and I was six years old when I started playing the violin at Kuressaare Music school. Even though violin wasn’t my instrument, I graduated in 2003. Despite all the conflicts and domestic dramas, her intransigence won and I did not quit music school no matter how many times I tried. Perhaps she saw something in me that I did not see myself but that led me to singing and eventually finding the bass guitar, my true calling.

When I think about my mother, I see her unmeasurable strength and the undying love she had for us. When I was a kid, we lived in a tiny village Pärsama located in the northern part of the island, with around 250 inhabitants. I know now that we lived poorly, I found out many years later that we had barely enough money for food or to make both ends meet. Here’s the part I so deeply admire about my mom - she always made us kids feel that there’s enough, that WE are enough. We never lacked of anything. And what was most important - there was more than enough love in our family.

There’s a certain memory that made me want to write this song for her. It was 3 kilometers through the forest to the closest stop where I could take the 45-minute bus ride to Kuressaare for my music school lessons. She would take me to the bus stop, by bike or by foot 3-4 times
per week, and she would meet me at the bus stop again in the evening when I got off the bus. Taking that little 3 km walk was amazing - it was beautiful to witness the changes of the seasons, when everything in nature would die in the autumn and come back to life in the spring.

But now, I would like you, reader, to imagine one mother, in a huge snow storm walking bravely through a dark forest, dragging her crying daughter whose tears have frozen on her face, which she so desperately wants to kiss away. But she is holding so firmly her little hand and tells her to walk behind her and step in her footprints, so the winds and the snow would not get the little girl, but her. I know I did not know to appreciate this as a kid - seems like most of us take our parents for granted. But now, when I think about this one time, and all the times she took the heavy weight of life to carry by herself, and only by herself, I want to kneel down, put my head on her lap and cry. And so she is, to this day - the strongest human being I’ve ever known.

The song starts with a bass intro. I wrote the song on bass and at first the intro was the only thing I had until I arranged it to rest of the band. The intro is followed by a saxophone theme and guitar theme in the B section which are both based on the bass intro. The solo section is an interaction between piano and sax, leading back to the B part and the final theme.

8. Truth is One

“Truth is One” is the heaviest fusion song on the record, written for guitar, bass and drums. First I heard the bass riff in my head and I had no clue what it was, until I recorded it with Garageband and figured out that it was 4-tuple in 6/4 while I wanted the drums to play in 4/4. I wanted to have a guitar chord theme on it, so I was jamming around until the song started to take shape in terms of form and harmony. There is an intense build-up to bass and guitar solos where the time signature changes to 4/4. The solo section is a groove in G minor and after the cue starts chromatically ascending to E minor. “Truth is One” was the only song on the album that we recorded separately. I am not used to recording my music that way and in my opinion music loses a lot of “life” which means that since we are playing separately we don’t have the chance to react to what the others are doing, but Jonathan insisted on playing it with his own drum set which he had set up at his work. He had a solo there and so he wanted to make sure that he would be happy with it. After receiving his drum track I recorded my bass over his drums, after which Calle added his guitar track. I loved the way he began his solo and built up the tension. Even though the recording is lacking of interaction, Calle and Jonathan enjoyed working that way and surely it gave us all more time to work on our own parts.
The name for the title came after I read a beautiful poem “The Ending”6 (original title: “Lõpp”) by one of my favorite Estonian poets, Doris Kareva.

“Ma ootasin sind sellel kümal päeval.
Ma tean, et sa ei teadnud. Nüüd siis tea:
ma ootasin sind. Sellel kümal päeval.
Ei, vabandama tõesti sa ei pea.
Kõik otsustati väljaspool meid endid.
Ma ootasin, sest mina tahtsin nii.
Kõik otsustati. Väljaspool meid endid
ma teadsin, sa ei tule nagunii.
Ei, ära ütle et sa oleks tulnud,
kui oleksid vaid teadnud, võinud vaid.
Ei, ära ütle, et sa oleks tulnud.
Ma vihkan valesid. Ka ilusaid.”

Here is my translation:

“I was waiting for you on that cold day.
I know you didn’t know. Now you know:
I was waiting for you. On that cold day.
No, you really don’t need to apologize.

Everything was decided before us.
I waited, because I wanted to.
Everything was decided. Before us
I knew, you wouldn’t come anyway.

No, don’t tell me you would have come,
if you only knew, if you only could have.
No, don’t tell me you would have come.
I hate lies. The beautiful ones too.”

The whole poem touched me so deeply - I figured how it’s sometimes my own expectations bringing me pain. But more than that, I realized how much I have always hated lying and how I’ve always been so incapable of telling a lie myself. I believe that the truth is never as painful as discovering a lie.

6 Kareva, “Päevapildid”, Eesti Raamat, 1978
9. Seven years

“Seven years” is a ballad written for piano, bass and drums. That song was symbolizing a subconscious estrangement from someone I was together with for a long time - I guess there was an intuitive feeling of an approaching separation in the future. Change is an inevitable part of life, so I am not going to dwell on the past much longer.

I usually write my songs on my bass but this song was composed on the piano. I had the beginning phrase haunting me, so one late September evening in 2014 I sat in my bass room A362 and played my heart out on the piano until I had the A section finished. A few days later I performed it at Stockholm Jazz Festival 2014 with my trio with Alf Carlsson on guitar and Simon Andersson on drums. The song was really raw but I wanted to try it out. After playing it live, I had a feeling that something is missing. The form was short so I wanted to extend it and bring in some contrast and so I wrote the B section many weeks later. For MaiGroup’s album we recorded it with Wille Alin on drums - I love the way he is interacting with me, especially on the last theme, responding to my harmonics on his cymbals.

10. Vaara-Unva

Vaara-Unva is the name of my grandmother from my father’s side. She was born on the 30th of August in 1934 and I was so lucky to spend most of my childhood with her, her sisters and their husbands, my grandfather, my sister Maria and my four cousins. We had a perfectly beautiful childhood growing up in the heart of silence - in a farm, surrounded by nature, animals and fresh air. Growing up in a big house with a big garden also meant that we had to work hard - there were potatoes, carrots, beet roots, cabbages, peas, beans, onions, garlic bulbs, cucumbers, tomatoes, all sorts of berries, apple-, pear-, plum- and cherry trees and our favorites, strawberries, that we had to take care of. The garden was blooming with flowers that needed attention. There were animals: cows, horses, pigs, sheep, chickens, roosters, ducks, dogs and cats. I saw that animals, like people, respond to love. My grandparents gave me the greatest lessons that I follow today: “If you want to get something in your life, you have to work for it. Nobody’s going to bring you things on a golden plate.” My grandparents were people who survived World War II, their houses were burnt down (my grandmother’s house was burnt down twice), they were people who have known poverty and hunger, people who have had to fix things when they got broken and not throw them away, they were people who had to work hard for their dreams, people who knew what it felt like to live under Russian occupation, and they were people who had KGB spies as neighbors. My grandparents were people who despite
all the challenges and troubles in their own life, had hearts full of so much love. They taught me to never give up, because they never gave up. Now, many years later my grandmother, the source of so much wisdom and unconditional love, is still there, sitting in her yellow house, waiting for us to come by whenever we have the chance. At the age of 83, she is, of course, struggling with health problems. I look at her now and study every line on her face. I see what time has done to her - she has grown old. The color of her eyes has faded, she has grown so small and her hair has turned to gray. Now, she is the child I need to take care of, and give her the love that she once gave me. I wrote her a song to let her know how much I love her. I know she knows but I wanted my love for her to be in a song. I wanted to put her in music so she could live forever.

“Vaara-Unva” starts with a bass theme and has a very simple melody that leads to a unison line after which the whole band comes in. Dynamics is a tool that we use once again in order to communicate the emotion - we start gently and instruments join in one by one, building up the tension. When I think about my grandmother, I can’t write a super complicated song with several time signature changes and insanely difficult harmonic structure, just because I can. I can’t write a happy rock’n’roll song, or a heavy fusion composition with intense melody and groove, because that’s not who she is. She is in these simple melodies, just the way I’ve seen her my whole life.

**Guest artists**

While I was planning recording MaiGroup’s new album I had no plan of having guest artists. Unfortunately, the whole rehearsing and recording process started with some major errors. It was impossible to find a time when everyone would be available for the first sessions. Studio was booked but Jonathan got a tour offer in Germany. I was not able to change the studio time since our engineer couldn’t make it and the studio wasn’t available anymore, so after some pondering and with Jonathan’s kind permission I decided to ask another drummer to play on a few songs.

It was a stressful situation and I was kind of forced into finding someone else on the drums but it turned out to be a seed for a new idea that started rooting itself into my mind.

From there on, I wanted to do something different for MaiGroup’s second album and the Universe seemed to be on my side. I worked so hard on MaiGroup’s first album - I wanted it to be perfect - the sound, the playing, the album cover. Perhaps I felt like I needed to prove myself to other musicians. With “You” I decided to let all that stuff go. I wanted to have the *real* thing - not so much editing, cutting and fixing the tracks. I didn’t feel like I need to prove
myself to anyone. Not anymore. I felt that the music was different from the first album. It was more interesting, more mature. We were all different. Time had polished off some edges. I still had no plan to invite anyone else to play on the record but I met some amazing musicians along the way and in the moment, based on my intuition, I asked them if they would like to record for MaiGroup’s new album.

Wille Alin - drums

When I applied to The Royal College of Music in Stockholm in 2011, I had the utmost pleasure of having Wille Alin in the rhythm section for my bass test. I remember playing one of my own compositions “The Eye of Ra”, as well as Steve Swallow’s “Falling Grace” and Herbie Hancock’s “Dolphin Dance”. Wille was so present and played with his heart and ears open. The next time I had the chance to play with Wille was some years later in Linnea Henriksson’s band. We toured Sweden, Norway and Denmark together and I can say that he is one of the most musical drummers I’ve ever played with. I enjoy his energy, his sense of humor, his creativity and the way he reacts to people and music. Wille introduced me to a lot of music I’m listening too today, for example Graham Nash, Judec Sill, Neil Young.

Wille Alin was born on the 2nd of February in 1987. Nowadays he is a drum teacher and plays a lot with different artists like Filip Jers and Linnea Henriksson to name a few. I also had the pleasure to join Wille’s band Music Is The Weapon for their tour in Finland in March 2015.

Wille played three ballads on the album: “Wellspring (to R.V.), “Vaara-Unva” and “Seven years”. Wille’s sensitive touch was exactly what the music needed - he was playing the songs, not only the drums. He brought more of the jazz vibe on the album - that’s the genre he is most comfortable with. As always, he was fully present, interacting with everyone in the band. It was like having a dialogue with him in music - once he was talking to me, asking or answering, next time he concentrated on Calle’s guitar and reacted to everything that he was doing. I was so amazed by his ability to paint himself into my compositions.

Håkan Broström - soprano saxophone

The first time I ever heard Håkan Broström play was at Stockholm Kulturhuset in March 2014 when I went to listen to Joakim Milder’s Prefab Sprout project with Norrbotten Big Band. I was sitting very far back and didn’t really see anything but it gave me the chance to close my eyes and listen to the music. Every time Håkan played a solo, my heart rejoiced. I finally got to meet him many months later in Fasching jazz club after his concert with pianist Joey Calderazzo, bassist Daniel Franck and drummer Jeff “Tain” Watts. The beginning of our
friendship and future collaboration wasn’t very promising due to differences in our musical
taste and backgrounds. Luckily we kept in touch after the first meeting and got to know each
other’s music a bit better. I found out that Håkan had been playing a bit of jazz-fusion music
himself back in the days, so I invited him to be a guest artist with MaiGroup at Fasching in
March 2015. That was the beginning of our musical journey together. We got together a few
times after that to write music or just jam together. Sometimes he had musical ideas that he
gave me to finish, or I had a bass groove or harmony and I asked him to write melody on it. We
found musical kindred spirits in each other and decided to put together a band which we called
Agan/Broström Spirit. Our debut was at Stockholm Jazz Festival 2015.

Håkan Broström was born on the 12th of April in 1955 in Motala, Sweden. At the age of 15 he
got hold of a tenor saxophone in order to join a local blues band. Ever since, he has been playing
saxophones of all sizes, but early on, made the alto and the soprano his main instruments. He
also plays flute in big bands. Håkan is Swedish jazz music hardware and has played with some
of the biggest names on the scene. Via Norrbotten Big Band, Swedish Radio Jazz Orchestra
and the band Sixtus, he has played with such players as Herbie Hancock, McCoy Tyner, David
Liebman, Kenny Wheeler, Chris Potter, Toots Thielemans, Joe Lovano among many others. He
has toured and played as a band leader and sideman with Bobo Stenson, Palle Danielsson, Joey
Calderazzo, Esbjörn Svensson, Ulf Wakenius and Jeff “Tain” Watts.

For MaiGroup’s album I invited him to play soprano saxophone on the song “Something
magical”. We recorded him with Erik Metall at KMH studio 1. His soprano saxophone brought
in some new colours to the conception of MaiGroup’s record since we had never used that
instrument. It was a great honor for us all to have Håkan playing with us and I am so grateful
for his contribution, time and effort.

**Greg Leisz - pedal steel guitar**

I will never forget the day I met Greg Leisz, one of my favorite musicians walking this earth. I
knew his playing from Joni Mitchell’s albums, as well as with Brian Blade and Bill Frisell. On
the 14th of June in 2015 I was busking on the streets of Stockholm with my friend Doug Seegers
from Nashville, Tennessee. Doug and I usually played in the subways and if we were kicked
out by police, we moved on to the streets. That fourteenth morning in June, I told Doug that we
needed to go and play in the old town. Doug wasn’t too excited, but I insisted on going. We
took the subway and I took the wrong exit. I thought I knew the way, but for some reason I
turned to all the wrong streets. Now when I look back, I know that all the wrong moves were
the right moves. Finally we sat down on the stairs of a bridge and we got to play perhaps three
songs when it started raining. During those three songs, Greg Leisz walked by. I never saw him.
He was going to have lunch but on the way he met bass player Bob Glaub and told him about
Doug Seegers and the bass player. Doug and I were walking to T-Centralen through the rain when all of a sudden someone stopped me and asked if he could see my bass because his friend saw us play and said that I was playing a very rare Kay-bass. I found out that Bob Glaub was in town touring with Jackson Browne. I dropped my jaw. Long story short, Bob followed us to T-Centralen, played a song on my bass, took my contact and later by phone invited us to have dinner with the band and see the show the next day in Stockholm Waterfront. So as we went there the next day, to my big surprise, Jackson Browne wanted us to sit in. I walked by the stage and there he was, Greg Leisz. I knew his name but had never seen his face. He came to say hello and pressed his hand into mine. It was like an existential earthquake: suddenly I felt that an immensely important person has entered my life and he is going to change my life in a way I’m not yet aware of but I know the changes will be breathtaking in their magnitude. I felt an ineffable connection, an indescribable familiarity with him from the first moment. It was like a reunion of two souls that finally found their way back home. It was all very peculiar. That evening in Stockholm Waterfront we played Doug’s song “Going down to the river” with Jackson’s band. Greg and I exchanged only a few words after the show and that was it. After that brief meeting we kept in touch. Greg listened to MaiGroup’s first album “Luv” and was blown away. I gathered myself together and asked if he would like to play on my next record and he agreed. In return, I had to record something for him. That was the beginning of a lifetime friendship.

Gregory Brian Leisz was born in Buffalo, New York, USA on the 18th of September 1949. As a multi-instrumentalist Greg has performed on stage and recorded with the most influential musicians of our time, both in the popular and jazz genres: Joni Mitchell, Willie Nelson, Bonnie Raitt, Eric Clapton, Jackson Browne, Glenn Frey, John Mayer, Joe Cocker, Emmy lou Harris, k.d. lang, Brian Wilson, Tracy Chapman, Eagles, Randy Newman, Robert Plant, Bruce Springsteen, Rod Stewart, Lucinda Williams, Allen Toussaint to Daft Punk, Bon Iver, Lizz Wright, Bill Frisell, Charles Lloyd. He plays guitar, pedal and lap steel guitar, Dobro, mandolin, mandola, mandocello, banjo, bass and Weissenborn. He received a Grammy Award for his contributions to Ray LaMontagne’s 2010 release “God Willin’ & The Creek Don’t Rise.” In 2010 he received a lifetime achievement award from the Americana Music Association.7

For MaiGroup’s album Greg played on the song “Sweet Baby Sebastian”. He recorded his pedal steel track in Los Angeles at Lynne Earls’ studio on the 29th of September. After receiving the track from him, I was so moved, I got tears in my eyes. Pedal steel guitar on a jazz-fusion album? How could I ever have lived without it before!

7 Henry, “Go Tell it on the mountain”, Fretboard journal, no 33, Occasional publishing, 2014
It was such a great honor for me to work with a musician like Greg Leisz. Not only has he been working with the greatest musicians of our time, but he is one of them himself.

**Recording, mixing and mastering**

The first three songs of “You” we recorded on the 8th of May in 2015. Since Jonathan couldn’t make it, I asked Wille Alin to join us in the studio and he was happy to do it. We recorded “Vaara-Unva”, “Wellspring (to R.V.)” and “Seven years”. We recorded 4-5 takes of every song and during every take the song sounded a bit different - we tried brushes, sticks, with and without drum intro etc. When it comes to choosing a take, it’s obvious that everyone has to be happy with their own playing, but also hear the take as a whole. I don’t like to do too much cutting and editing. Of course, there where places where we had to punch in and fix one bass note, or someone’s tiny timing mistake but mostly everything you hear on the record, is as we played it.

The rest of the “You” was recorded during the second week of September in 2015 with the help of sound engineer Erik Metall. He provided us with some of his personal equipment, for example I could use his TC Electronic pre-amp in order to get the smooth but bright hi-mid low-treble bass sound I was looking for. The plan was to record 2-3 songs per day. We started with “Painters of the night” and recorded only two takes when we felt that the second one was the take - I loved the way the piano took over the bass solo and developed the intensity of the composition to a higher level until the saxophone came in again in the interlude and winded down to the last theme.

“Sweet Baby Sebastian” was the second composition we recorded. It was a little bit trickier since we had to leave space for Greg’s imaginative pedal steel. We recorded five takes and the main thing for us was to play less every time. From the playback we heard that the fills are not necessary because they might not work with what Greg wants to play on the track and so we all decided to mostly just keep the groove and leave room for the soloist. The last take was a keeper. I also liked my bass solo. My phrasing made sense to me - there were sentences with beginnings and endings. It wasn’t just shredding and showing my ability to play through a harmony. Greg recorded his pedal steel track weeks later in Los Angeles and I was so happy when he sent his track to me. His playing brought a whole new palette of colors into that song and to the whole album since I haven’t used that instrument in my music before.

We continued with recording “Forgiveness is for the strong”. Jonathan was worried that maybe that’s a song we should record separately to make sure that the timing wouldn’t be off. The
drum groove is really busy so I understood Jonathan’s concern but I refused to record it that way. We had played it live several times before the session, so I figured that if we’re able to play it live, we are also able to record it live without making any major mistakes that cannot be fixed in the mix. Björn wasn’t happy with any of his solos so it was hard to choose a take. I took all the rough mixes home with me to listen carefully which take has the best overall energy and flow. It was the last take out of four that caught attention more than others. It was the musical interaction that I enjoyed listening to. The next day Björn overdubbed his solo on that take and was happy with the result. He also tried doubling the bass/piano line on EWI (electric wind instrument that sounds like a synthesizer) but it was too much. Sometimes, less is more.

The next song we recorded was “Gregory”. This is Calle’s personal favorite song and it was important for him to be happy with his playing. Seemed like he was seeking for perfection. We recorded six takes and he still wasn’t happy with his playing. We listened to all the takes carefully and decided that the fourth take is the one to use. I fixed a few tiny timing mistakes in my bass solo and after that Calle overdubbed his solo for an hour. I cannot remember the exact number of the solos he played, but I guess it was around 20. Every take sounded perfect to me, but not to him. With every take he got more upset at himself so I was already losing hope but finally he played a solo he was pleased with.

We continued with “Something magical” which unlike “Gregory” came to us really easily. We recorded just two takes and we were happy with the track. We left the space for Håkan Broström to record his soprano sax track. Calle was not happy with his guitar solo again but with just a few takes he fixed it.

Next song to record was “5th of May 1962”. The song started with a bass intro. I messed it up every time - I wasn’t happy with a rhythm I played and sounded a bit clumsy. There were also some fret noises caused by me missing a note on the fretboard, so I decided not to waste any more time on it and overdubbed the whole intro later. The hardest part in that song is always the solo section. We wanted to do something different and decided that the piano and sax will take turns. It wasn’t the easiest path to choose because we were facing another obstacle: how to evolve these solos to the next section? Björn took that responsibility to lead his solo back to the B section. In the mix we had to do some editing and cutting between takes because there wasn’t a take that I was happy with from the beginning to an end. We cut the solo section until the end of B section from another take and came back to the original take from the A section again.

“Truth is One” was the only song we recorded separately since Jonathan wanted to use his own drum kit and make sure that he is happy with his drum solo. First I recorded my bass demo track in Tuhalaane studio in Estonia with the help of sound engineer Andre Maaker. I played
to a drum machine and fixed the structure of the song and the length of the solos. After that I sent my track to Jonathan who recorded his drums on it. When I got his track back, I booked Studio 2 at school and recorded my final bass track on his drums. It was a little bit more complicated process than I thought because we found out that the tempo was 89.96 bpm (beats per minute) and not 90 bpm. Jonathan figured that out because the click went off all the time. I also recorded quite a lot of takes of my bass solo but I got frustrated really soon because nothing sounded good to me. We started recording and whenever I messed up or wasn’t happy with what I played, I stopped. Then I listened back to what I played and punched in from where I stopped. I enjoyed working that way because I didn’t lose all of the solo, including the stuff that I liked about it but I managed to keep the part I liked and erase the part that I didn’t. I had never worked that way before so it was a whole new experience for me. After I was finished, I sent the bass and drum tracks to Calle who recorded his guitar on top of our tracks.

It was an interesting process because it was kind of like letting go of control and stepping aside from the role of a producer because I couldn’t be there in the studio with them and tell them what I would like to hear. I didn’t know what to expect when I got the tracks back. I would have maybe preferred a bit more intense drum solo but on the other hand it was really cool that Jonathan didn’t do the loud show-off and preferred to play with the meters instead and make the 6/4 quadruplets sound like a swing in 4/4.

I still prefer recording my songs all together, because it gives us the opportunity for interaction and reaction but recording songs separately gave me a new experience and surely more time to work on my own bass part. However, it sounds like three different parts, three different tracks, three different instruments playing a song. It doesn’t sound like one to me. It sounds like everyone is just minding their own business and not really listening to others, but well, that’s because we couldn’t do that. I also feel that I could have skipped some of the bass fills, or since my track was there before Calle’s track, maybe he should’ve left room for the fill and use it for his own solo development. These are the minuses. The good thing is that everyone was happy with their own playing. I am always looking forward to playing that song live because that’s when it actually starts living - everyone can really stretch out.

Erik Metall’s contribution to the album was immense. He spent a lot of hours from his spare time to make this album happen. He squeezed in hours for mixing when it seemed impossible to get the album mixed in time. Somehow he found those hours. He took the tracks home, worked on them after long days at KMH and sent me the mixes for feedback. We were so tight on time, so the mixing period was extremely stressful for both of us. Due to the lack of mixing hours and the fact that at the same time I needed to rehearse with my band Agan/Broström Spirit for the Stockholm Jazz Festival debut, I was not able to join in and mix with Erik and he was very much on his own. Unfortunately we have a bit different taste in music and therefore
different views on what sounds good. We communicated via e-mails and sent the files back and forth. That said, I was not really happy with the mixes. There were so many issues with the levels of the instruments - usually the drums were too loud and the bass sound was too boomy and it didn’t sound like me. I asked him not to add any weird extras for my bass tone and keep it the way I played it.

Even after he sent the songs for mastering and I received the masters, I had to ask Erik to remix “Gregory” because the drums were just too loud. So the song had to be remastered again as well. The album was mastered by Jonas Siöström whose patience and dedication really helped me during the stressful time period. I worked with Jonas while touring with Linnea Henriksson. He was our sound engineer and tour manager but it was great to work with him in a totally different situation.

Legendary drummer Jim Keltner once said that he always asks for the rough mixes from the engineer right after the session because these songs will never sound as good again. When it comes to “You”, I agree. I remember liking the rough mixes a lot and thinking to myself: “Oh, we don’t need much… just a bit of reverb here and there and we’re done!” I think that when the albums sell out, I will get them remixed and mastered and will release it again.

**Hooandja**

In September 2015 I started a “Hooandja” project “MaiGroup’s second studio album” with a goal to get together 3000€ to be able to finance the album art and printing. “Hooandja” is a crowdfunding platform, an Estonian version of Kickstarter, where great ideas find support with the help of people all around the world.

My project was successful and was funded on the 25th of October 2015. We had 72 backers and among them Toomas Hendrik Ilves, The President of The Republic of Estonia. My heart is filled with gratitude for all the kind people who backed up the release of “You” and made it even possible to release the album as a CD.

**Album cover**

The album cover art was the biggest fiasco of the whole process. It is very uncomfortable to write this part of my thesis, because unfortunately I was not pleased with the album artist Andreas Aru’s work, at all. My first idea, which I thought could come out really cool, was based on “The Vitruvian Man” by Leonardo Da Vinci. I wanted a cover where I would look like “The Vitruvian Bass player” (except I would wear clothes). We took photos already in July 2015. I wanted to give the artist a lot of time to make a cover that we could both be proud of.
My longtime friend, stylist Maarja Siim helped me out with my appearance. Unfortunately, from there on, nothing went as planned. The cover artist pushed my patience very far with his lack of communication - one week before the printing, I hadn’t even seen the photos, let alone chosen the ones I’d like to use for the cover. Finally, one day before the deadline I got an e-mail saying that his hard disc broke down and he lost all the photos. As the leader of the project, I had to remain calm and come up with Plan B. I had to change all my plans and get to Estonia as soon as possible to take new photos and make that album cover happen.

The next morning I still had no idea what to do. I just felt that if the Da Vinci vision didn’t work, it was probably not meant to be. When I got to Tallinn, we took some profile photos at the artist’s house and some photos of my bass guitar and then we put them together. Oddly, without any photoshopping - the bass guitar strings ran straight through my eyes, my nostrils and my lips. In a way, it was like a golden ratio that “The Vitruvian Man” is based on.

We had to finish the album art very fast so I didn’t have time to come up with a better idea. I had also asked all the band members and guest artists to send me a photo of themselves and then Andreas put them together. There were many errors after that too - for some reason the cover artist had wrong print sizes and then the print shop couldn’t get a hold of him for days to ask him to fix it. It was a huge chaos, but luckily on the morning of the release, I received boxes full of MaiGroup’s second studio album “You”.

**Release**

The official release of the album was on the 27th of October 2015. It was an amazing feeling to hold my new CD in my hands. My heart was full of so much gratitude towards all the people who were involved in making this album. I couldn’t believe I actually did it. We did it. The first thing I had to do, was to deliver the records to radio stations and reviewers so that the first reviews could be published the next day, as we already had started our Estonian release tour on the day of the release. Even though everything was pretty stressful, I felt that MaiGroup’s guys had my back. On our way to the first concert in Viljandi jazz club, I opened the first CD and we all listened to it. The feelings in the tour van were overwhelming.

**Concerts**

The “You” tour was divided into two different periods: autumn 2015 in co-operation with Estonian Jazz Union and spring 2016 organised by Jazzkaar festival and Estonian Concert. I was surprised by people’s great interest in our concerts - all venues were packed with people.
We decided to play all concerts in two sets, so we would have time to gather strength between the sets and after the show have a little time for our listeners. The songs in the setlist were changed between concerts. During the first gigs we experimented with the set list and tried to build it up so that the ballads and groovy songs would take turns. It just so happens that most of my songs are ballads and so we had to skip some of the slow songs and bring in some groovier songs from MaiGroup’s previous album “Luv”. If there were more than two ballads in a row, I could see people getting restless. In time we learned what songs light up the audience (“Sweet Baby Sebastian”, “Something magical”, “Gregory”, “Hilton Dance” from our first album), so I believe that eventually we got a perfect set list, providing the audience both with emotional impact as well as indulging their appetite to see the fingers run fast.

During the tours we all became more and more comfortable with being on stage and I could hear how the songs became more alive every time we played them. I guess it is pretty obvious that once you get to know the songs better, you can get more adventurous with them. As in everything in life - knowledge gives you power and freedom. So knowing the songs better and better every evening sure made us play with more confidence and playfulness, instead of being afraid of playing a wrong note or chord or forgetting the form.

MaiGroup has a beautiful understanding within the group where we don’t need to talk much about what we are going to do. Usually the greatest magic happens when you don’t expect the magic to happen. Of course, we have to discuss the set list and agree on who is going to solo, or if someone wants to play a longer intro and stretch out.

I am pretty consistent with how I want the songs to sound, in terms of energy and vibe. What I mean by it is that if I have written a ballad, I don’t want it to become a heavy rock song by the end of the tour, or when I’ve written a heavier song and I want to have a steady drum groove on it, I don’t like it when the groove disappears and the drummer starts playing too many fills (there is a good timing and place for everything and everyone). Fortunately, the guys in the band know my preferences as a bass player and band leader and they are not playing my music to feed their egos, but to serve the songs. They have all told me that they feel the freedom to do anything they want on stage with knowing that everyone is on the same wave length. That makes me really happy because that shows so clearly that the band is breathing as one.

**Autumn tour**

The very first concert at Viljandi jazz club on the 27th of October was very special to me because it was the first time my mother had the chance to come and hear MaiGroup play live. Viljandi is home for many music students - there is Tartu University of Viljandi Culture Academy in that town. It was quite unbelievable that there wasn’t enough room for all the people that wanted
to get in. I remember being quite nervous that night and not only because it was the première but also because of all the jazz students in the audience. After a few songs I started feeling their warm appreciation and it made it much easier for me to play. Since the club was small and people were sitting really close to us, we had to hold ourselves back a little bit, in terms of volume, which was perhaps most challenging for Jonathan. All in all, I believe it was a good gig and a great première to our tour.

On the 28th of October we played at a jazz club I had never played before - in Narva, the third largest city in Estonia, located at the eastern extreme point of Estonia, at the Russian border. The jazz club is held at Tartu University Narva College. The audience was extremely warm - their feedback and kind words moved me very deeply. It’s important to me that people would hear their own stories in my music and I could see that happening in Narva. I felt very connected to the audience - the melodies were just pouring out without any effort. It’s always a mystery to me why this synergy sometimes happens and some other times it doesn’t. Perhaps it’s the moon, the right constellation of stars or maybe your own mindset that night. Perhaps it’s your willingness to open yourself up to the audience and show your own vulnerability and fragility (or not) so that they could show theirs (or not). Whatever it is - the mysterious synergy was there and it made the band play in a way I hadn’t heard them before. That evening reassured me that I had really found my musical soulmates.

On the 29th of October we played in the jazz club in Tartu, the second largest city in Estonia. It is often considered the intellectual centre of Estonia especially since it is home to the nation’s oldest and most renowned university, the University of Tartu (founded by King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden, reopened by Alexander I in 1802). Again, the club was packed with people. For some reason I felt nervous again that night - I think I had my expectations too high after the concert in Narva. The concert went well - everyone played great, the sound was good and audience was carefully listening. After a while my nervousness disappeared and I let go of all expectations and just surrendered to the moment. After the show people came up to me and introduced themselves to me as Kickstarter backers - it was so nice to meet many of them in person! After the concert we had a long drive back to Tallinn to play on a television show early the next day.

On the morning of October, 30 we played “Sweet Baby Sebastian” and “Something magical” on the Estonian morning television program “Terevisioon”. The last concert of the tour was the same evening in No99 jazz club in Tallinn. We had a full house again and I was happy to see so many old friends and MaiGroup fans sitting in the audience. We also had a guest artist on stage with us. I invited a renowned bass clarinet player and my improvisation teacher at Georg Ots Tallinn Music School - Meelis Vind - to sit in with us and he played “Hilton Dance” from the first album “Luv”. The sound of bass clarinet, and Björn on
his electric wood instrument EWI brought some new colours into the music. The synergy was powerful and took over the whole club. I believe it had so much to do with my own mindset, my own attunement to the right frequency and most of all - my willingness to be present in the moment and be grateful for all the people who came to see us. Perhaps that’s the key to the interaction - when people in the audience feel that their presence is important to the artist and when they feel that they are appreciated - they open up to the music. I often find myself wondering if I will ever learn to create the same kind of magic and synergy every time I go on stage or is it something that could even be taught and learned, or is it just something that evolves with time and experience? What I’ve learned is that it’s important to let go of all expectations and just follow the flow, be present, let the music speak for itself and the magic and synergy will come to you. Perhaps some people are born with a natural talent of entertaining and some have to work harder for it. Most of the time, I am really comfortable with talking to people but I am sure my abilities to engage the audience can get better with more experience. I always like to take at least 10 minutes for myself before every gig in order to breathe calmly, meditate and attune myself to a peaceful vibe. Our concert in Tallinn was full of magical moments and it was a beautiful heartfelt finale to our tour.

**Spring tour**

In April 2016 we were invited back by festival Jazzkaar and Estonian largest concert organization - Estonian Concert. The first concert was on the 20th of April in my hometown Kuressaare. For me, it is always such an amazing experience to play for the people at home. Kuressaare, also known as Arensburg, is the capital of Saaremaa island and is the westernmost town in Estonia. It is situated on the coast of the Gulf of Riga and first appeared on maps around 1154. Our concert was held in Kuressaare Culture Centre. As an Islander myself the organizers were expecting more people than usual. They were right - the place was sold out and more. Even my grandmother was sitting in the first row. For some reason, I was extremely nervous that night. Perhaps it was the pressure of having so many familiar faces in the audience - from the mayor and highschool teachers to my family members and relatives. It was very hard for me to talk - I messed up, I stumbled and started over and my voice was quavering. Music was my safe place - I just stopped talking between songs and played music. Despite the fact that we didn’t have much time to rehearse the songs and the last time we played them was during the autumn minitour - it felt so good to play with MaiGroup again and communicate emotions through music. The warmth of the people in my hometown is something I will always treasure. I felt much better the next day while we played in a small village Karksi in the southern part of my country. The concert organization Estonian Concert has a mission to bring culture to smaller villages and towns as well, not only the big cities. We played at a beautiful culture centre and
compared to other venues we had the least people but the ones who were there, seemed to enjoy our concert. The sound was really good and sometimes it seems that when you have good sound on stage, that’s half the battle. I am amazed that Björn, Calle, Simon and Jonathan still blow my mind with their musicianship, creativity, solos and interaction, even after I’ve heard them play these songs numerous times. That’s what happened in Karksi. Playing music, in general, takes me to a good place, or a better place, depends, but that evening in Karksi took me to a really good place. The concert was so intimate - to me it was like deeper conversation with myself, my co-musicians and the audience. I always get very humble by the gift of music when these beautiful musical peaks happen. I think that these moments are what we, as musicians, all strive for. I didn’t expect much from that concert but in return I got one of the best shows we’ve ever played. Lesson learned, again - let go of expectations and be present, be real.

On the morning of the 22nd of April we had the honor to perform two songs on TV again, so we played “Forgiveness is for the strong” and “Gregory”. In the evening we had the utmost pleasure to open Jazzkaar Festival 2016 at Punane Maja (The Red House). In time, MaiGroup has really grown into a band, instead of separate players. We have found our sound. The house was packed with music lovers as well as familiar faces from previous MaiGroup concerts. The energy on stage was mindblowing and the communication between musicians and the audience was on a higher level. This time we played one long set which started with tender songs and ended with heavier fusion. I felt so relaxed that night. I had let go of all expectations. I could sense the good vibes from the audience and somehow I felt so close to my band and knew we’re going to have such an amazing time on stage. We really did.

**Life after “You”**

After the release of “You”, the album started living its own life in radio stations, magazines and newspapers. It was the album of the month of Radio Tallinn in November 2015 and to my biggest surprise, it was also published in the Europe Media Chart whose purpose is to spread the word about new jazz on the scene. “You” has opened many doors for me and is part of some life changing events. After my friend Greg Leisz gave “You” to one of my biggest musical heroes, David Crosby, the legendary singer-songwriter instantly wanted me to record for his new album “Sky Trails” which will be released in spring 2017. That, furthermore, led me to being part of David Crosby & Friends tour 2017.
Closing reflections

I look back to the time I started my master studies - where I was in my life, in my music, in my mind and in my heart. I was not living in happiness nor love, neither was I content with myself and others. I was constantly longing for something or someone, knowing there’s more to life but at the same time I didn’t search for that something or someone and lived like a hermit, escaping from the world and myself. I was craving for more knowledge, more music, more wise words and more simple truths of life, more heart, less pretense, more sympathy, less conflicts, more peace and more truth. I know the place where I am now. Happiness has become a state of mind, I live in the most unconditional version of love where honesty is the highest level of intimacy and where all the beauty becomes music.

I have to say - those three years have been quite a ride! I remember writing the first songs for the album, watching them develop as I played them, having doubts if anything I write or play is good enough until I figured - good enough for who? As long as my music is real and comes from my heart, it’s all that matters.

I overcame a lot of creative struggles by just letting go of my own expectations and accepting that this is where I am on my musical journey right now. I can’t be anywhere else than here! My teachers gave me the directions and shared their knowledge, my job was to learn how to use it. I believe that my composing skills developed to a higher level thanks to the lessons I had with Joakim Milder, Ola Bengtsson and Örjan Fahlström. Even though I’ve always had a strong sense of my musical aesthetic preferences, I believe that through the process of making that album I developed a sense of finding beauty in things I never thought I would - like letting go of control and letting the music take unexpected turns which also means finding beauty in making mistakes. I learned to have an open mind in everything that’s attached to nothing.

The primary idea to release the second album with MaiGroup ended up being much greater in its meaning than imagined. It was not just an album nor was it just another record. It was a soul-searching project with all its tides, ups and downs, stumbling, falling and standing up again. In the beginning, I had no plan to have guest artists on it, but we ended up having three absolutely amazing players on it. The plan was to have a release tour, but we ended up having two tours. I had no clue how people were going to take in the record, but the feedback was so much more than I ever expected.

I couldn’t have done it alone. I had so many wonderful people helping me along the way, from my teachers, friends and family to all the musicians who played on the album and people who worked with me for the same purpose to get the album released, all the backers at Hooandja, people smiling at me on the streets, saying encouraging words and spreading light and love. As
I read the introduction of this thesis, I hope that my purpose to communicate the emotion though my work, has been fulfilled.

At the brink of the beginning of a new chapter in my life - new career in a new world, on another country and continent, new people, new places, and new obstacles - I am deeply grateful for the years I’ve spent at KMH. I have grown from an insecure and shy dream-driven loner into a strongwilled and content musician, always seeing the light with my heart full of love and music. These have been the most productive years of my life so far and I am looking forward to the rest of my musical journey knowing that KMH has given me wings - now it’s time to spread them and fly.

Closing words

I would like to thank all my teachers throughout my years at The Royal College of Music in Stockholm: Ola Bengtsson, Robert Sundin, Jan Adefelt, Joakim Milder, Sven Berggren, Mikael Berglund, Håkan Goohde, Stefan Grahn, Gun-Britt Gustafsson, Bengt Stark, Klas Nevrin, Torbjörn Gulz, Örjan Fahlström, Pål Svenre, Andy Pfeiler, Raul Vaigla, Staffan Linder, Ann-Sofi Söderqvist, Arne Tengstrand.

Love to my family and friends who have inspired me to write all the music.

Music is all around. Music is bigger than us.

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New European Jazz Chart

A number of jazz magazines from across Europe have come together under the banner Europe Jazz Media to work on common objectives, in encouraging and strengthening interest in jazz and spreading awareness of the development and diversity of the music. One of the first initiatives is the Europe Jazz Media Chart: a non-sales related chart that reveals some of the hot new music surfacing across the continent right now.

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This chart has been compiled from a selection from the Europe Jazz Media members.
Concert review - MaiGroup: Something Magical

by Maria Patrakova

“One of the first concerts of Jazzkaar 2016 took place at Punane Maja. If there were people among the audience who got there by accident they could get an idea of what to expect from the band even before the show started. Three bass guitars set up on stage indicated a bass-dominated band. When the performers were announced, Mai “Estonian Fusion Lady” Agan with her Swedish MaiGroup came on stage and without further ado the drumstick countdown started.

The five musicians on stage were working as one. Each of them was perfectly aware of the others. You could see them balance between concentrating on themselves and on their instruments as well as respectfully listening to one another, playing with each other. They did not forget the audience either. The set list was precisely designed to firstly ease the public into the band’s elaborated music, and then make everyone hold their breath in admiration. They let the audience take a breath in the middle of the show with some gentle waltz beat songs. Finally, the group turned fusion full on, unveiling incredible skills and talent and making the audience clap in hope for not letting this experience end. The performance was kept dynamic at all times.

Sometimes the bass would start, sometimes the drums or guitar. Mai switched guitars every now and then. Björn Arkö replaced his saxophone with an electric wind instrument to play “Something magical” - a song from the band’s latest album. Each song was like a new story with multiple climaxes, and each musician was telling it a little differently, with their own perspective. They would pass the spotlight and solos between each other. Mai, the bass player and composer, talked to the audience in between the songs and introduced her colleagues with love and tenderness. The concert of MaiGroup felt like a very personal, even intimate experience between the audience, the band and the music.” (Maria Patrakova, Jazzkaar 2016)

MaiGroup’s surprising sentimentality

“MaiGroup’s second studio album “You” continues the musical journey without changing the course and mostly with the same members: Mai Agan - bass, Björn Arkö - sax, Calle Stålenbring - guitar, Jonathan Lundberg - drums, and with a new member - pianist Simon Berggren. MaiGroup - a strong woman from the island Saaremaa and four Swedish men, who all met during the studies at The Royal College of Music in Stockholm.

Mai Agan’s path to the master’s program has been consistent and tenacious - she started under the supervision of Tiit Paulus at Kuressaare Music School and later under the guidance of Raul Vaigla at Georg Ots Tallinn Music School, she firmly decided in favor of the bass lines. Now Mai Agan is well known young musician even on the Swedish music scene. Isolation from home creates an ideal ground for the development of a musician - very often young musicians start having too many “gigs” too soon, but since the foreign competition is tighter and talent alone is not enough, one must practice and work really hard. As we can hear - Mai has done that. All songs are composed, arranged and produced by bassist herself.

In addition to the perseverance and diligence there’s some homesickness that you can hear in her songs and - longing - in general. Most of the songs she has dedicated to someone. The fretless bass composition “Wellspring” is dedicated to her teacher Raul Vaigla, bright and uplifting “Sweet Baby Sebastian” is written to her nephew - every track has indeed a story within a story, and lessons learned in life have also become music (“Forgiveness is for the strong”). What is surprising is perhaps the fact that despite the youth, MaiGroup performs ballads very convincingly, of which quite a few are pretty sweet kind. They also play some fusion where the musicians get more off the ground but generally the music sounds sentimental and doesn’t follow the path of ultra-modern music. This mature choice is rather pleasant - as young jazz in the world is more and more pursuing to sophistication, structural complexity and going along with the speed of eclectic times - MaiGroup makes an obeisance to the good old. Therefore, on the album Agan shows her gratitude to the classics - Joni Mitchell, David Crosby, Jackson Browne, Robert Plant.

It is nice to hear that the band leader is not trying to impress the listener with something extraordinary or with virtuosity. The naturalness of the bass is definitely very welcomed - bass is the foundation of music and which function is to support, not take all the attention. In the solos freedom is obvious but Mai Agan still keeps everything in the borders of elegance. MaiGroup breathes together as one and making music together for many years is now in favor of mutual understanding. There are special guests playing on that album saxophonist Håkan Broström, legendary guitarist Greg Leisz, who has collaborated with several well-known names in the world, and Wille Alin on drums.

The first album “Luv”, and the new one “You” is obviously inspired by love and its heavenly statements. Love, as well as music, is learned through life, because it’s constantly evolving. Looking forward to see which shades these concepts will bear for Mai Agan in years and whether or not this sentimentality remains in her music.”(Hedvig Hanson, 9/10. ERR Kultuur)8

8 Hanson, “MaiGroup’s surprising sentimentality”, ERR Kultuur, 2015
IMC album of the day

“You” by MaiGroup (2015)

The first immediate image that comes to my mind when I listen to this album, is an artist standing in front of her easel, and she’s painting the most beautiful of pictures. This image follows me the album through and is enhanced by the fact the opening track of the album is entitled “Painters of the night”. “You” consists of 10 extremely strong original compositions all penned by band leader and bass player extraordinaire Mai Agan. Accompanied by her faithful and magnificent fellow musicians Simon Berggren, piano; Jonathan Lundberg, drums (tracks 1-2, 4-8); Calle Stålenbring, guitar; and Björn Arkö, saxophone. They have created one of the most beautiful and touching instrumental albums I’ve heard in a very, very long time. All of the above mentioned musicians deliver such an astounding musicianship on the highest level. As “special guests” contributes Håkan Broström, soprano saxophone (track 6); Greg Leisz, pedal steel guitar (track 4) and Wille Alin on drums (tracks 3, 9-10) with their enourmous talents to lift this album even more. All of the songs are perfectly executed for this musical journey and story MaiGroup wants to convey. This album captures so many emotions. It’s so heartfelt and based on a true love for the music.

Music is a matter of heart and soul, happiness and joy. It can guide you through sorrow and hard times. It can soothe your soul and help heal the wounds. It’s like a good friend who always will be there for you. Music is an international language that knows no boundaries. The music of MaiGroup touches all these elements on this new album. At times, it’s fragile, but there is an inherent beauty in these songs. There is something going on with these beautiful and melodious expressions which affect me and speak to me so strongly. It’s handsomely and dreamily and will allow you to just go with the flow while listening. As a songwriter, Mai Agan is like this painter I mentioned initially. She grabs her musical pallette and brush and blends all of the tonal colours available. She paints different pictures to tell the stories taken from her inner musical visions and she turns them into personal and honest songs. The outcome is a canvas of beautiful harmonies, chord progressions and languorous melodies. This journey of MaiGroup continues. With this new album they will reach many new listeners and fans. And believe me, they do deserve it.” (Mikael Engström, Inside MusiCast) ⁹

Recension: MaiGroup “You”


Kompositionerna är snyggt uppbyggda och det är intressant att lyssna på hur Mai Agans snygga och skickliga basgångar leker tillsammans med de andra instrumenten. Stilen påminner mig om ECM stallets jazz med bland andra Pat Metheny som en stilbildare.

Det är mycket smakfullt och rogvande album som innehåller fullt med instrumentala prestationer av Mai Agan och hennes medmusikanter. Lyssna till exempel på Greg Leisz vackra pedal steel tillsammans med Mai Agans puttrande basgångar i “Sweet Baby Sebastian”.

Eftersom Mai Agan har en stor bred i sin repertoar och dessutom endast är 28 år gammal så lär vi få höra mer av henne i framtiden. För en månad sedan uppträdde hon tillsammans med Doug Seegers på Parksnäckans scen i Uppsala.” (Pär Dahlerus, Uppsala Nyheter) 10

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Forgiveness is for the strong

Mai Agan

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Wellspring

to R.V.

Mai Agan

Solos

on que

Fade out
Sweet Baby Sebastian

Intro

Bm9

A/C#

A7

Dmaj7

A/C#

Bm9

A7

Dmaj7

A/C#

Dmaj7

A/C#

Bm9

A7

Dmaj7

A/C#

Bm9

A7

Dmaj7

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Dmaj7

A/C#

Bm9

A7

Dmaj7

A/C#
Something magical

Mai Agan

Intro

Piano

Gm7

Gm7

Add drum beat 3x, guitar plays \dot{\ \cdot \ \cdot \ \cdot}

5

Pno.

Gm7

Gm7

9

Pno.

Gm7

Gm7

13

B

Pno.

Dm9

Dm7

B

Dm9

Copyright © Mai Agan 2014
Seven years

Mai Agan

A

Bass

Pno.  

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Copyright © Mai Agan 2014
Vaara-Unva

Intro

Mai Agan

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