

LOVE CHILD AND ROOTS

Creating two albums with original compositions and arrangements for trio and quartet

By Torben Bjørnskov, assoc. professor, RAMA

Why compose?

In my musical career I mainly worked as a sideman playing in other musicians' groups playing other musicians' compositions.

When you are asked to play in different constellations there might be a wide range of reasons why you are asked.

I want to focus on two that I find important for this article.

1. Your specific style of playing and personal sound.
2. Your ability to play a certain genre and contribute to the overall band sound.

So my main issues here are how to develop a personal style and find the most fruitful way to express music, having developed all-round musical skills. In pursuit of that goal, I believe composing is a very important and great tool for exploring your musicality

and a main reason for me to compose, other than the fact that I love doing it.

In a way you can say that a personal sound is a gift, great musical skills are a gift too, but something you can work on in a very concrete and professional way. Developing a personal style for some is something that comes natural, for others something that develops and changes over time.

When I compose, I seek to compose music that I feel comfortable playing but also music that I can relate to on as many levels as possible: harmonically, groove-wise, emotionally, style-wise etc. Especially, I try to develop music that helps me define a more personal sound and style of playing, finding a great vehicle for telling stories through music.



Torben Bjørnskov

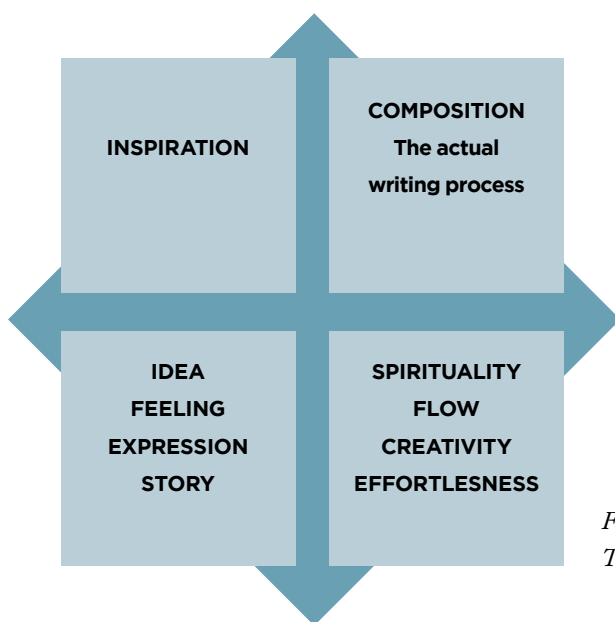


Figure 1.

The four stages in the composing process

As a musician I find that developing as a musician and finding new ways of expression through composing have kept me in music for almost three decades, It's been a blessing, and also a neverending process, because I always am aware that I can spend more time composing and developing the music.

Compositional process

What really is interesting when it comes to composing is the process. It is the understanding of how your creativity and imagination works.

To me composing can be a mystery. Even though it is an art form or even a craft that can be studied as well as any other art form, it is not really possible to define completely, how a great composition comes to life.

You need to acquire certain technical tools

to be able to define, write down, arrange and work with a composition, but there is still something indefinable that completes a great composition.

Figure 1 shows four stages of the process, illustrating not a specific order but how these four elements influence each other and may interact during the process from idea to final composition.

Where does the music come from?

I have read quite a few articles and biographies by various composers, and it is interesting to study the different approaches and thoughts about composition which they express.

An essential question is: where does the music come from?

- Does the music already exist and does the composer just receive it?
- Is it a spiritual or intuitive experience?
- Is it a craft of formal structures that you develop and refine until you become a great composer?
- Is it the composer's imagination, emotional expression or urge to tell a story through music?

These are some of many approaches that I noticed reading about the composing process and talking with composers I have met or worked with. I like to think that all the listed points are possible, and you have to find your own source of creativity and not least find your own methods of going in and out of the composing process.

To me composing is like a well or a source. If I do not use it, the well dries out; it needs care and consistent work. Since I do not compose on a regular basis but only in periods of time it takes a little while before it becomes joyful and more at ease. To begin with it is mostly a bit of a struggle. I start out with small ideas and develop them. I might compose a tune and rewrite it over and over, until finally, after some days or even weeks, the process begins to have a certain flow. A whole tune can then be written in just a few minutes without any major corrections.

I mainly compose instrumental music for small ensembles in a genre which may be defined as jazz. An important aspect of jazz composition is, and has traditionally been, to write music which work as a vehicle for improvisation. In that perspective a jazz tune often consists of a melody and a set

of chord changes, and it is implied that the musicians in the rhythm section invent the rest. This means that the composing of full arrangements and orchestrations is not fully taking place. The arrangements are often written as main ideas or smaller arrangements, as harmony parts or specific lines for certain passages etc.

Of course many great jazz-composers have written full scores for large ensembles and in that way created fully arranged compositions. Composition of songs and melodies is often the cornerstone for larger compositions and arrangements which are often built on variations of the melodies, motives and main themes.

When I wrote the music for *Love Child* and *Roots* I had different ways of approaching the compositional process and tried to develop methods to get into the process. These are some of the overall concepts to work from.

1. Write strong melodies (melodies which might have a story to tell on their own)
2. Write songs to improvise on (or more specific: fit different ways of approaching improvisation)
3. Have the musicians in mind (try to write music that would fit the specific musicians' approach and sound, rather than try and make the musicians play a certain way to fit the arrangements)
4. Work with both simple forms and more complex structures
5. Write complete arrangements to a few of the compositions
6. Use metrics (odd measures and meters)
7. Express certain stories or emotions

8. Use electronics to expand the overall sound
9. Compose with an open mind and be willing to accept or discard any idea or any song.
10. Explore the creative process: finding sources for inspiration and work-flow, take a walk, do manual work, have a coffee at a great place, meet with friends, take a small part of a solo and make a composition out of it, do daily improvisations etc.

In the following you can read about my to latest albums Love Child and Roots.

Love Child

Love Child is a trio + 1 album containing ten original compositions and arrangements. My main purpose with the album was to express my passion for the trio format and the possibilities of musical freedom, a small ensemble can provide. I also set a goal to continue the writing process until the music felt honest and easy to communicate. I am fascinated by and wanted to explore our Danish music heritage and how what we call jazz has developed in the Scandinavian part of the world. At the same time my main musical impact has been American Jazz, Blues and Soul music since I started playing. An on-going process is to bring these musical influences together.

I wanted to experiment with bringing electronic music into an acoustic trio tradition and examine the possibility of adding new expressions and colours.

I wrote the music particularly with these musicians in mind: Peter Rosendal, piano and Karsten Bagge, drums plus Lars Vissing

on trumpet and electronics. These are musicians who are very dear to me, and people I have worked with before. Although I have described my purpose with the album as an expression of my own needs and thoughts, as arranger and writer of the songs, I must say that when it comes to performance, I always find that the musicians must have the freedom to give their own interpretation of the music. The natural impulse from the musicians is always a gift to the music. And nothing beats the feeling of a band becoming a homogeneous entity.

Why the title Love Child?

Well, I try to put several meanings to the expression Love Child. To make a long story short, the actual meaning of the expression Love Child is: a child born out of wedlock. (My personal reference is my dad who never knew the identity of his father). But I also refer to the love of a new-born child (my youngest daughter was born just before the making of the CD.) The CD is also meant as a dedication to people like Gandhi and Dalai Lama for their courage and the enormous sacrifices they have made to make the world believe in non-violence and love.

Compositional thoughts and soundscapes.

The album is recorded as a trio and traditionally you would add horns or strings to orchestrate. However, with modern technology you have the possibility of creating a completely different sound or orchestration. On some of the album's tracks, Lars Vissing played the trumpet through various effects such as old vintage synths, echo-machines, noise-filters and other effects, thereby creating various soundscapes.



I asked him to improvise on top of the music and for each song he laid down several tracks. Afterwards I listened through the whole thing and started editing the tracks. I decided which tracks to use and often I split up phrases, moved phrases or even reused phrases as new counter melodies. For the soundscape parts I mainly mixed the levels and opened or closed the effects. On the songs "The Magic Of Seven" and "Mercy" you most clearly hear the results. (Follow links listed after the article to hear some of the effects and then listen to the songs to experience how it blends with the trio.)

Using odd meters in 4/4 time.

The title song Love Child is in 4/4 time. It is built on a melody, which is very melodic and could have been played more as a mellow quiet song. After writing the melody, I tried different harmonies and finally decided on a set that I liked. To make some tension I wrote a bass line in odd meters as a counterpoint. Look at the music and the odd meters and listen to the bass line via the link on the next page. Then take a listen to the whole song.



The CD cover of Love Child

Roots

Roots is a result of my wish to bring together musicians that I have played with over the years and with whom I bond and communicate particularly well: Pojken Flensburg, piano, Espen Laub, drums and Stan Sulzmann, saxophone. The constellation is marked by an almost telepathic communication even though the material is new, untested and sometimes unpredictable.

The title of the album "Roots" refers to the music's roots and origins – where does the music come from and why are we creating the sounds and expressions we do?

In a globalized world, we are influenced by cultures from around the world and are not necessarily rooted in one place. Yet there is something in the culture in which we grew up that creates a special resonance and reverberation in us. The starting point has not been thinking in terms of genres – but rather a deliberate search for and perception of common musical roots – from a strong desire for simplicity, strong melodies and hopefully an inspiring platform for improvisation.

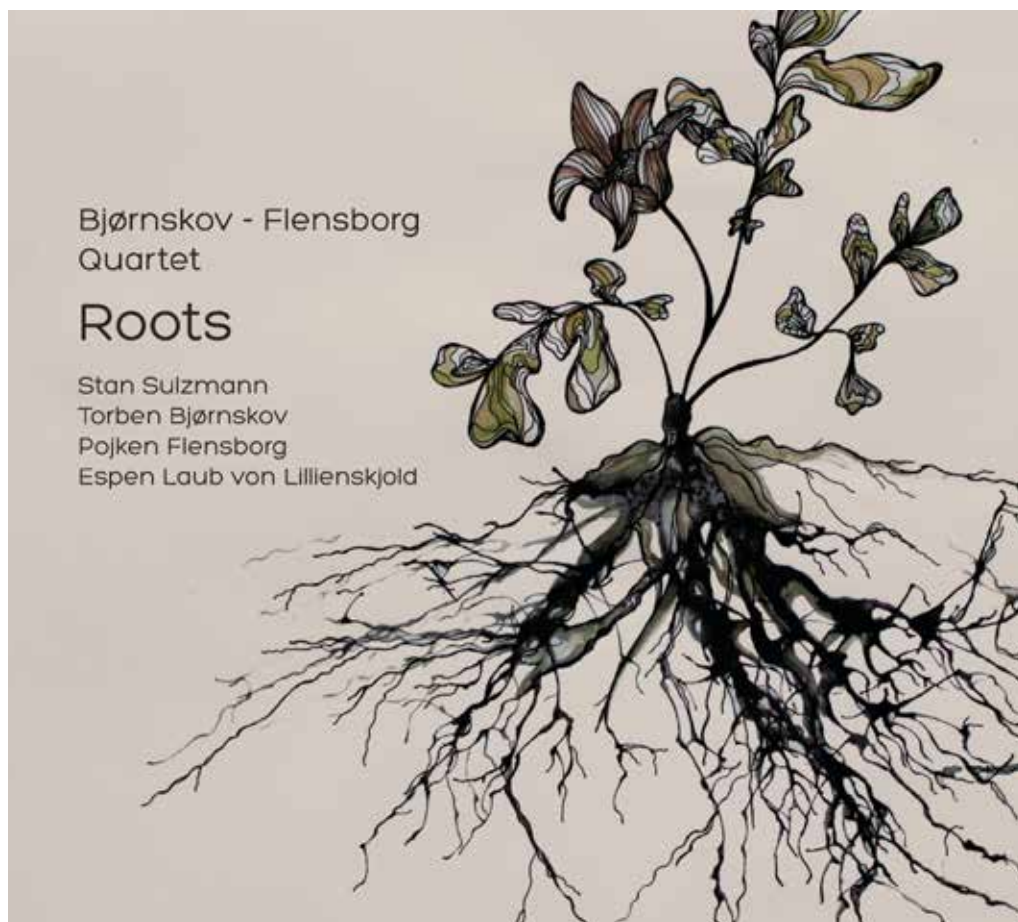
In my preparation for the album I made three choices:

1. To write any song that came to my mind without judging
2. To have the musicians in mind when I composed.
3. The overall theme was to make a connection between a European and Nordic sound, not rejecting the influence of American jazz.

The challenge is to make these choices possible without trying to construct something rather than having something honest to say.

After a while I felt like I wanted to share this process with Pojken. So I asked him if he wanted to meet and play through a lot of our songs. So we came up with more compositions, than we needed for the album. We played through them and talked about their stories, the sound and also how strong we felt the compositions were. Actually we did not want to judge in terms of good or bad, we just went for the ones we had most fun playing and the ones that we thought would fit the concept and the musicians.

When we finally went to the studio we just played the songs without too much talk or explanation. Our goal was to see what everybody heard and felt and go for that. Some of the tunes obviously came out quite different from what I expected, but that to me was exactly what I had hoped for.



De to omtalte albums er yderligere dokumenteret på Torben Bjørnskovs hjemmeside. Her er det også muligt at høre uddrag af sangene og eksempler på musikalske detaljer beskrevet i artiklen.



Love Child: <http://www.torbenbjoernskov.dk/torbenbjoernskov.dk/LoveChild.html>



Roots: <http://www.torbenbjoernskov.dk/torbenbjoernskov.dk/Roots.html>

Composition/CD

Roots

Sulzmann
Flensborg
Bjørnskov
Laub

The Music on this album is written with no particular style in mind. It is more a search for the sound of our "native language" and musical roots: Four musicians from nearly four generations meeting and together expressing their love for improvisation, melody, simplicity and beauty.

Cd-release August 2013

Thanks to The Royal Academy of Music for supporting the creation of this project.



The Royal Academy
of Music
Aarhus / Aalborg

Torben Bjørnskov Associate Professor
tobj@musikkons.dk
www.torbenbjoernskov.dk

Skovgaardsgade 2C
DK-8000 Aarhus C
DENMARK
www.musikkons.dk

BIO

Torben Bjørnskov (1966) er musiker og komponist og har optrådt/turneret i det meste af verden og arbejdet sammen med musikere fra en lang række lande, særligt USA og de skandinaviske lande. Derudover medvirker han på en lang række studie- og live-indspilninger, herunder en række albumudgivelser i eget navn.

Torben Bjørnskov er uddannet på Rytmisk Musikkonservatorium i København med bl.a. NHØP som hovedfagslærer og er i dag ansat som lektor ved Det Jyske Musikkonservatorium i Aarhus/Aalborg med fagene Kontrabas/El-bas, hovedfags-pædagogik og sammenspil.

Udvalgte musikalske sammenhænge:

Torben Bjørnskov Lovechild Quartet, The Matthew Herbert Big Band, Nordens Tone, Lillian Boutté Musicfriends, Burich-l'etienne N.O. ensemble, Pojken Flensborg Trio, The Rascal Swing Band.

Udvalgt diskografi:

Torben Bjørnskov "Love Child", The Matthew Herbert Bigband: "There Is Me There Is You", Phil Parnell: 3 "Blue", Nordens Tone, Michael Bladt: "Kirkland", Kwella Quartet: "Closer", Billy Cobham: "Hope Street", Marc Bernstein: "Dear Tom Harrel", Lillian Boutté: "He Touched Me", Benjamin Koppel Quartet.

Credits udlandet:

Bill Cobham, Billy Hart, Tom Harrel, Robben Ford, Marie Bergman, Leroy Jones, Lillian Boutté, James Moody, Ed Neumeister, Mac Gallaban, Johnny Vidacovits, Ed Frank, Thomas l'etienne, Shannon Powell, Denni Ilett, Phil Parnell, Mark Bernstein, Stan Sulzman, Geir Lysne, Matthew Herbert, Jiggs Whigham, Alex Iles, Vincent Nilsson, Gregory Boyd, Michael Davis, Mark Nightingale og Bill Reichenbach, Gerald French, Dylan Howe, Pee Wee Ellis etc.

Credits Danmark:

Benjamin Koppel, The Orchestra, Ensemble NEW, Kasper Villaume, Thomas Clausen, Teitur Lassen, Erling Kroner, Pernille Bewort, Jesper Riis, Jens Winther, Thomas Frank, Jesper Thilo, Bent Jædig, Christina von Bülow, Ben Besiakov, Thomas Fryland, Erik Ørum, Thomas Larsen Projekt, Ann Farholt, Holger Laumann, Fuzzy, Henrik Bolberg, Jørgen Svarre, Jacob Fischer, Kristian Jørgensen, Bob Rockwell, Anders Koppel, Jacob Andersen, Emil de Waal, Nils Ratzer, Claus Mentzer, Henrik Sveidahl, Master Fatman m. Nanna Lüders, Kenn Lending, Finn Burich, Filts kvartet, Peter Reim, Steen Raabauge, Steen Hansen, Allan Botschinsky,

Hans Ulrik, Morten Grøn-vad, Pojken Flensborg, Jacob Buchannan, Christian Vuust, Espen Laub von Lilienskjold, Hans Esbjerg, Kwella, Jesper Løvdal, Benni Chawes, Malene Mortensen, Magnus Hjort, Ole Fessor Lindgren o.m.a.