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COMPOSING AND RECORDING *AUTUMN TALES*: THOUGHTS ON THE CREATIVE PROCESS OF FINDING A NEW TRIO SOUND



*Lord: it is time. The huge summer has gone by.
Now overlap the sundials with your shadows,
and on the meadows let the wind go free.*

*Command the fruits to swell on tree and vine;
grant them a few more warm transparent days.
urge them on to fulfilment then, and press
the final sweetness into the heavy wine.*

excerpt from the poem *Autumn Day* by Rainer Maria Rilke
(translated by Stephen Mitchell)¹

Seasons of the year have served as inspiration to countless works of art in many different areas and genres. In my case, the inspiration was certainly not one I had planned or even thought about in advance. But to explain how exactly my album *Autumn Tales* emerged and came to light,² I will need to explain the whole process of working on this music from the very first ideas that started it.

The trio setting comprised of guitar, acoustic bass and drums is one that has been dear to me ever since I was a teenager, listening to the legendary trio recordings of guitarists such as Pat Metheny, John Scofield, Jim Hall, Kenny Burrell and others. Even in my early years of involvement with jazz improvisation, I was strongly drawn to the harmonic aspect of the music. The guitar trio line-up, with the absence of the piano, allows for as much space to be filled up by the guitar harmonically as the performer

¹ R.M. Rilke, *Ahead of All Parting: The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, New York 1995.

² *Autumn Tales* CD cover is included in the Supplements Section.

wishes to and also leaves the music open, so one can move from harmonically rich textures resembling a piano trio to an approach where hardly any harmony is played, and the role of the guitar can also resemble that of a saxophone in a trio setting. This open end has always fascinated me, long before I even knew exactly why. And even though as a musician in my teenage years and early twenties I led bands which very often employed pianists or horn players, when I started thinking about recording my debut album, I realized quickly that the guitar-bass-drums format would be the most suitable one for bringing to life the sounds that I heard in my head.

I recorded my first CD entitled *Hidden Paths* in 2003 in New York City with Massimo Biolcati on bass and Kendrick Scott on drums. They were both fellow students from Berklee College of Music where I studied from 1999 to 2002 and we used to play together frequently in different combinations during our years in Boston, performing recitals at the school and gigs around town. But this trio was never a real working band, and we never had an occasion to tour together and develop the music over a longer period of time. Upon my moving back to Prague at the end of 2003, I established a trio with musicians from the Czech Republic and this was the first in a row of different trio line-ups that I have led for a number of years. The bassists I worked with were Jaromír Honzák and Tomáš Liška from the Czech Republic, Michal Baranski from Poland, and the Paris-based Israeli Yoni Zelnik. The drummers were the Czechs Jiří Slavíček, Tomáš Hobzek and Martin Novák, Lukasz Zyta from Poland, and Karl Jannuska from Canada, based in Paris. The trio became my main concert activity for many years, and it was a setting that I worked hard on developing but I felt that I needed to wait for some time before recording another guitar-bass-drums trio album and for that reason my CDs after *Hidden Paths* were recorded in different musical settings. And then around 2011 I felt the need to put the trio aside for some time and focus on other musical projects. I felt that at that point I had made use of all the possibilities that the trio line-up offered and that I needed to take a deep breath before going back to working in this setting.

Thoughts about re-establishing my trio started coming to me around 2014 or 2015 after I met bassist Jiří Slavík, a native of Havířov who spent years in Rome, London and Paris and resettled back to Prague around that time. Listening to Jiří I immediately heard that his skills, sound and approach were something that would push the trio in a new direction for which I had been searching for some time. So, my newly formed trio featured Jiří on bass and Martin Novák on drums, one of my favourite Czech drummers and a musician who I have worked with a lot in my previous trios too.

The music that we first started playing were my older compositions and new adaptations and arrangements of pieces from a number of different sources. One of my goals has always been to keep the band's repertoire varied and diverse and my choice of music clearly reflected this. We started playing arrangements of songs by 20th-century Czech

composer Bohuslav Martinů, but also arrangements of Jewish songs from the first half of the 20th century as well as modern adaptations of Czech swing tunes dating to the 1930s.

I was so delighted with the new trio sound that very soon I decided that this was the band that I wanted to record my new CD with. The recording date was set for October 2016, and I started working on writing new original music for the album. This was going to be my fourth album as a leader, and I knew that it would be different from my previous records in quite many ways.

First of all, it would be my first CD as a leader recorded with Czech fellow musicians in the Czech Republic (for different reasons all my previous CDs featured international line-ups). And I also knew that this CD was a sort of musical “homecoming” for me, turning to influences connected to my childhood, my family or my country and turning away slightly from influences that were apparent in my music during the past decade. Nonetheless, this transition was a very fluent one and the new original music that we ended up recording was also in many ways an extension and development of ideas from my previous records.

As I set to work to compose new music for this CD, the same questions rose in my mind as always when I start working on new material. How can one be inspired and creative? Where can we find the inspiration and the creative spark that ignites the magic in the music that we long to achieve, yet which always seems to appear only of its own accord, regardless of our will? Resigning very soon to find answers, I sat down at the piano and started going through ideas jotted down in my notebooks during the previous months. There was a lot of material to be addressed and developed, but as it is often in my case, going through older ideas is frequently just a way to get my own “composing mechanisms” started. Throughout my musical life, the compositional process has usually been a rather slow one for me, with only rare exceptions. By nature, I have always been very self-critical about my writing, and I tend to rewrite and rethink my pieces until reaching the point where I feel that I am as close to the perfect shape as possible. It happens very rarely to me that I come up with a finished tune quickly, within minutes or hours. I see myself more as a musical sculptor struggling with a piece of crude substance, gradually polishing and refining it. And so, during the first few days of attempting to write pieces for the new CD, I had come up with several sketches and drafts of songs, none of which was too satisfying. And as it usually is, in the moment that I was about to give up, something happened and a short melodic and harmonic idea with an underlying rock groove occurred to me, and this idea quickly turned into the opening track of the CD, *Glaciers Melting*.³ Initially I wrote this piece in 6/4 meter and it took me some time to find the correct spacing of the melody rhythmically. But

³ Sheet music to composition *Glaciers Melting* is included in the Supplements Section.

soon I found out that the 6/4 meter was too “even” for this music and that stretching each measure by one beat added just enough asymmetry to the theme. Later I added the transitional rubato section, feeling a need for a change of feel and texture that would be contrasting to the theme and to the guitar solo. The idea of adding more guitar parts on this piece only came to me in the studio but they added a great lot to the sound of this composition. And I thought of the title *Glaciers Melting* only when listening back to the finished recording. Somehow the mood of the music seemed apt for this title, especially the rubato passage containing sounds played on the guitar which are not so easily discernible.

The second piece that I wrote was *Homeland Elegy*.⁴ In the case of this composition, its title was the last one on the whole record that I made up – and the one that was the most difficult to find. The music itself was finished relatively quickly but the piece proved to be certainly one of the more difficult ones on this CD to perform.

The next two pieces that I wrote came about as a result of my experiments with Olivier Messiaen’s *Third mode of limited transposition*.⁵ The first of these pieces was *The Tale of the Autumn Sea*. The melody and harmony of this piece is derived solely from this mode (A-B-C-C#-D#-E-F-G-G#-A). Rhythmically I was experimenting with taking a simple 3+4 pattern in 7/8 and repeating it three times, thus obtaining a 21/8 pattern and then dividing this pattern into 10/8 and 11/8. The form is an extension of a classic AABA form, with the bridge employing a diminution of the original rhythmic pattern (the eighth note from the A section thus becomes an 8th note triplet in the B section). As for the instrumentation, the double bass has the melodic role in this piece and there is no improvisation involved in the composition whatsoever.

The other piece using Messiaen’s *Third mode of limited transposition* was *Song from the North*. This is mostly a rubato piece, again using a variation of the AABA form in the theme. The improvisation following the theme also uses Messiaen’s mode as a point of departure. In this piece I also tried to use the trio in a less conventional manner, with the bass having a melodic contrapuntal role and the drums creating a colouristic texture.

The piece that I wrote as the last one for this CD and that probably took the longest was *Shir HaMidbar (Song of the Desert in Hebrew)*. While all the other compositions were mostly written using the piano, I used the guitar to write most of this piece. It’s a composition in 10/8 meter with a 3-2-2-3 subdivision, with a strong rhythmic flow. The inspiration for this piece came very much from listening to Arabic and Israeli music, particularly the fantastic duo Toy Vivo. And the instrumentation also recalls this musical culture by the use of the darbuka (goblet drum) and the cajon. In some

⁴ Sheet music to composition *Homeland Elegy* is included in the Supplements Section.

⁵ O. Messiaen, *Technique de mon langage musical: Textes avec exemples musicaux*, Paris 2005.

ways this piece was a departure from my previous compositional style and perhaps also a presentiment of things to come in the future.

Besides my original compositions, bassist Jiří Slavík also contributed two of his pieces, the energetic and merrily sounding *Vláček motoráček* (*Little Train*) and the groovy *Uchem* (*By the Ear*).

As I have already noted earlier, in my case the titles of the songs are usually the last to arrive, very often only when the compositions are already finished and even recorded. And the same holds true for the titles of my albums. In all cases I came up with the titles of my CDs only when everything else was already finished. But in the case of my last CD, searching for the right title for the album was in many ways a very natural process, even though I wasn't aware of it from the start.

I spent writing the music for *Autumn Tales* during most of the summer of 2016 and as the autumn was approaching, we started rehearsing and performing this music for the very first time around clubs in Prague. We spent several days working on the music at a little cottage near the village of Slapy in September 2016 and a few weeks later, at the beginning of October we recorded the music in Sono Recording Studios in Nouzov near Prague. The atmosphere of autumn with everything that this season brings must have made a clear mark on how the music was documented on the CD. And in fact, I have rarely been so aware before of how strong an impact on the environment, the time of the year, the weather and all other surrounding factors have on the final shape of an album. However subjective this feeling is, for me the spirit of the autumn season was very present in the making of this album. And I believe that it is not a coincidence that the photos that photographer Dušan Tománek took in Slapy and other places and that we ended up using for the booklet of the CD, also reflect the spirit and magic of autumn with its unexplainable nostalgia and beauty.

So all in all, *Autumn Tales* is not just musing about the season of autumn, it's a look at what has passed never to come back, a reflection of and reconciliation with the past as well as with the present and a translation of these feelings and spirits into the language of music, where a single image can be expressed by a wide array of musical means and a multitude of sounds can personify a single idea. The music may be tangible and abstract at the same time, often depending on the perception and imagination of a particular listener. It is this transcendence that makes music and life beautiful for me.

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Supplements



Autumn Tales CD Cover

Glaciers Melting 1) - David Dorizka

[even 8ths]
[rock feel]

Chorus

Chorus Chords: C#-6,7 no5, G#-D#, E, E^b-7/G^b

Chorus Chords (2nd line): G#-, E^b-/B^b, G#-/B, E/B, C#-, F#4/C#

Chorus Chords (3rd line): B-(maj7), B-add2, D-F, C4/E

Chorus Chords (4th line): D4, mp B-add9, A-(9), G/B, B-

Chorus Chords (5th line): F#4/A#

Chorus Chords (6th line): pp stop

Verse

Verse Chords: C#-6,7 no5, G#-/D#, E, F#add4

Verse Chords (2nd line): G#-, A, F#4/A#, B, E/B, C#-6,7 no5, F#4

Verse Chords (3rd line): B-(maj7), B-add2, D-F, B^b-/F

Verse Chords (4th line): A-/E, B^badd2, E⁷sus, C#⁷sus, F#4

Verse Chords (5th line): Emaj7, C#4, Emaj7, C#4

Final

* This 2-bar repeat: On Guitar Solo - Open repeat until On Final theme - Repeat once Cue

Final Chords: E^b-

Final Chords (2nd line): rubato short bass & drums improvisation

Final Chords (3rd line): After guitar solo Fine

Final Chords (4th line): drum groove continues and fades out very soon into next section

Sheet music to composition *Glaciers Melting*

Glaciers Melting 2)

(rubato)
 1st time - guitar-melody pp; bass and drums conti-
 nue rubato improvisation
 2nd time - gradually go into tempo - bass and drums
 start gradually in tempo

guitar crescendo

Chords: E^b, B/D[#], E^b/D^b, B+(maj?), E^b/B^b, F[#]-A, E^b/A^b, B add 9 - F[#], E^b, D, E^b/D^b, B+(maj?), E^b/B^b, F[#]-A, E^b/A^b, B add 9 - F[#], B add #11 - D[#]

Drums start a heavy rock beat

Dynamic markings: pp, mf, ff

GUITAR SOLO D. 8

BOBO

[fast even 8ths] Homeland Elegy - David Dorizka

The musical score consists of ten staves. The first nine staves contain the main body of the piece, and the tenth staff is labeled 'Coda'. The music is in 8/8 time and features a variety of chords and melodic lines. Some parts of the score are crossed out with a large 'X'.

Chords and notes visible in the score include: E⁴, D/F#, C#-/G#, A-maj⁷, B-, D/A, F#⁺/A, D-/A, F/A, G⁴/B, C-maj⁷, A/c#, B^b/D, C/E, F, F-maj⁷, F-maj⁷, A^b/C, B^b/D, A^b/E^b, F, A/c#, B^b/D, C/E, D^b/F#, A, E⁺/B, A-maj⁷, F#, E⁴, D#, C-, A-maj⁷, B-, D-/A, A.

Coda

Chords and notes visible in the Coda include: ~~A~~, D, C#, A-c, B-, D/A, A.

Sheet music to composition *Homeland Elegy*

Solo form: Homeland Elegy (page 2)

Chords and notes visible in the score:

- Line 1: E⁺ D⁺ C#-
- Line 2: A-maj? B- D/A F# F#-A
- Line 3: D-/A F/A G⁺/B C-maj?
- Line 4: A⁺/C# B⁺/D C/E F-maj?
- Line 5: A⁺/C B⁺/D A⁺/E^b
- Line 6: A⁺/C# B⁺/D# C⁺/E D/F# A-
- Line 7: E⁺ A-maj? F#
- Line 8: E⁺ D⁺ C#-
- Line 9: A-maj? B- D-A A

BOBO

Sheet music to composition *Homeland Elegy*

Komponowanie i nagrywanie *Autumn Tales* – przemyslenia na temat procesu twórczego w poszukiwaniu nowego brzmienia dla tria

Streszczenie

Artykuł Davida Dorůžki opisuje wyzwania związane z komponowaniem na trio w składzie gitara, bas i perkusja w kontekście współczesnego jazzu. Autor opisuje swoje doświadczenia w obcowaniu z zespołem tego typu, jego historię i możliwości. Oferuje on także wgląd w proces kompozycyjny, który poprzedził nagranie w 2016 roku albumu *Autumn Tales* z Jiřím Slavíkiem i Martinem Novákiem. Analizuje również kilka utworów znajdujących się na płycie, omawia swoje muzyczne wpływy i pisze o różnych źródłach inspiracji, które doprowadziły do powstania tego albumu.

Słowa kluczowe: bas, gitara, improwizacja, inspiracja, jazz, kompozycja, jazz nowoczesny, jazz tradycyjny, trio