

Between composition and improvisation: Developing a post-human concept album in a Norwegian Jazz ensemble.

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Background and introduction

As a composer and guitarist, I've shifted between the positions of making absolute music, where the music doesn't mean anything beyond itself, and the idea of communicating ideas, emotions, and meaning beyond the musical architecture. The project *We left Eden*, found motivation in constructing a holistic musical piece that could do both. As a musician, an educator, and a father, living in the world and being faced with the immanent threats of climate change and the potential collapse of ecosystems, the idea of illustrating the relationship between man and nature was impossible to ignore.

Concept

The Israeli historian and writer Yuval Noah Harari's book *Sapiens* (Harari, 2014), describes the history of our species *Homo sapiens* and the development of modern society, from man being a creature within-nature, to developing a man-centered worldview, where nature is something else than us. Reading his book changed my approach to the entire project and nurtured the idea for the biblical inspired title: *We left Eden*.

When asking the Open AI, chat-robot ChatGPT to define the term, 'it' replied:

 **You**
define the term: We left eden

 **ChatGPT**
"We left Eden" is a symbolic phrase often used to convey the idea that humanity has moved away from a state of harmony, innocence, or perfection, similar to the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve being expelled from the Garden of Eden. It implies a recognition that human civilization has strayed from a more ideal or sustainable way of living, typically due to factors such as industrialization, urbanization, environmental degradation, social inequality, or moral decline. This concept is often invoked in discussions about the negative consequences of modernity and the need to return to a more balanced relationship with nature and each other.

   

(Screenshot, ChatGPT, OpenAI).

The initial title of the project had been a more dystopian one: *Chronophobia*. The fear of time, or the fear of the future. This originated from attending a seminar with professor of theology and philosophy, Paul Leer-Salvesen, 20.12.2018. He described the feeling of not being optimistic about the future. Salvesen described how young people in Greece during the nation's economic crisis, had lost their hope for the future. He described the anxiety for possible catastrophic consequences of climate change. "If we do not hope for the future, shouldn't we just close the schools and kindergartens? What's really the point?", he rhetorically asks the audience four days before Christmas. His argument was of course not to stay in this paralyzing state of chronophobia, but to find hope: "A person who takes hope away from a child is an outcast", he said. Such an act, of obliterating hope for a child, he stated would be close to the worst thing anyone could do.

This challenge of enhancing hope, but at the same time express this state of not being optimistic about the future, has been a key balance for my project. Chronophobia is preserved as the title of a song, but not as the overarching theme. Instead, it symbolizes the final non-optimistic, dystopian shakedown, before the progressive and inevitable end to the album: Forward we go, and finally Returning. Illustrating the process of realigning man within nature. A process our contemporary society have just begun.

We left Eden – Performed by Marius Igland Group

Prologue

I - A different Animal

II - Exploring

III - Ambience

IV - Water

V - Anthropocen

VI - Chronophobia

VII - Forward we go

VII - Returning

[View the live recording of the album here](#)

Musical imaginations

As a revitalizing project on my artistic career, I wanted to try something new. The initial idea was to use the entire spectrum of my arsenal of guitars, from the electric solid-bodies to the archtop jazz-guitars, and different acoustic guitars. Opposed to my other projects, i.e. Mirage Ensemble - Memory happens now (2014) and URO – OR (2017), where the sonic character of the ensembles had been clearly defined by limiting the 'ingredients': I had the idea of opening the options completely, by adjusting the instrumentation and musicians depending on the characteristics of each composition. I didn't want to be limited by having to write for a fixed line-up, and I wanted the art to be developed in the studio. In an early project document, I wrote: "The use of several guitars: a project where I'm completely myself". I also wanted to include the human voice, used as an instrument without lyrics.

As an academic, I've read a lot of perspectives on the arts, and the world in general, that I wanted to include in the musical work. I imagined having colleagues from

the theater-department recording fragments of insightful text, and to include these elements as a multidisciplinary expression, using literature, philosophy, acting, and music. Older recordings of speech by the British anthropologist Gregory Bateson, was also considered to be included as a fundament for musical improvisation. All these ideas were completely abandoned. (For now).

Process

The process could be divided into the following stages:

1. Idea development phase.
2. Ensemble development phase
3. 'Getting out of the rehearsal room' phase
4. Live-performance 12th of May 2024.
5. Post-production phase
6. Reflection