

Torben Ulrich & Søren Kjærgaard

Suddenly, Sound: 21 songlines for piano, drainpipe, etc.

Expanding Fields, Extending Rules: Still Going for the Core

Is there something in the Danish waters of Limfjorden, a particularly swinging something, that both nurtures and resonates with the music of pianist Søren Kjærgaard (b. 1978)? Because it's in this northwestern part of Jutland, close to the North Sea, that Kjærgaard began playing the music we call jazz – often jamming with his cousin, the dynamic drummer Kresten Osgood, also a local. That particular environment, regional and geographical, might explain why pause and silence have always been embodied in Kjærgaard's playing and sound. Or maybe here I'm out on a limb.

It's a fact, however, that Kjærgaard's musical inclinations led him to study at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory in Copenhagen in 1997, from where he graduated in 2002. Active on the jazz scene during his time at RMC, Kjærgaard received several prizes for young musicians – both as a pianist and with the trio Fuchsia, which won the Nordic Young Jazz Competition in 2000.

A grant sent him off to studies and playing in New York (2001-2002). Here he connected with several important players on the Downtown Scene, leading to gigs and sessions with, amongst others, Tim Berne, Jim Black, Andrew d'Angelo, Derek Bailey, Herb Robertson and Michael Blake. A trio with Kjærgaard, Osgood and bassist Jonas Westergaard became the nucleus of the Danish band Blake Tartare, with saxophonist Michael Blake, and ongoing cooperation with several international tours and album projects: *Blake Tartare* (2003), *More Like Us* (2007) and *The World Awakes – A Tribute To Eli "Lucky" Thompson* (2007).

Kjærgaard's touch on the piano already long ago revealed a musician with a particular sensibility, with regard to both harmonic and rhythmic parameters. But he's also a bit of a wizard on other keyboards and instruments. Likewise, both composing and arranging for bands of varying sizes and instrumentation are part of his artistic palette. In addition to the trio that goes into *Blake Tartare*, Kjærgaard has worked with another trio, with Frands Riffbjerg on drums, on the albums *Amfebia* (2005) and *Akustika* (2005). The choice of drummer for this trio grew out of Kjærgaard's wish to create another trio sound, and is a telling sign of his ability and desire to explore the music in new situations: to change the rules and seek out new territories.

These multiple talents and activities have Kjærgaard still further involved in playing and performing with a host of other groups and genres – electronica, modern rock-pop, etc., but mostly he has explored and worked extensively within improvisational settings. In this sense, Kjærgaard's playing sometimes could be called genre defying – yet is always trying to reach and touch the core of the music. Mixing this with Kjærgaard's knowledge of the jazz tradition in most of its various expressional modes and periods, you have a young musician gifted with an extraordinary talent and a sincere and pure artistic devotion. In 2005 these qualities led to Kjærgaard being awarded the annual Jazz Award for younger talents by the national Danish Broadcasting Corporation, resulting in an experimental solo album for various keyboards, *Keys* (2006).

As part of a wave of younger Danish players with international experience, Kjærgaard was also active in establishing the independent label ILK, operated and controlled by the associated musicians who release their own music and productions under the ILK umbrella. As a seeker of sounds, Kjærgaard masters many keys, and his work with guitarist Jakob Bro in the group Bandapart is another example of his interest in moods and soundtracks for the mind, as documented on the albums *Bandapart* (2004) and *Vision du Lamarck* (2007).

Kjærgaard's interests and visions encompass the music of Duke Ellington as well as Morton Feldman, but Cecil Taylor, Paul Bley, Lennie Tristano and many, many others have also been filtered through his fingers onto the keyboards. And still in my mind is a memorable festival concert (2003) with updated interpretations and arrangements of the music of Danish pianist and bandleader Leo Mathisen, a beloved figure from the golden Danish swing era.

A special chapter is Kjærgaard's work as a rapper with a self-invented language made up with Osgood in the group Ikscheltaschel. This crazy and sometimes hilarious outfit has made their improvised version of slam-rap poetry a unique genre in itself, which probably would have been the envy of the Marx Brothers.

With all this and more as part of Kjærgaard's body and soul as I knew it, I felt it only natural – or at least my intuition told me so – to suggest to Torben Ulrich that he drop by the Seattle club The Tractor in 2006 when Kjærgaard was visiting with the Danish group Emil de Waal+. Just to listen and say hello to the guys. And thus the lines of Søren Kjærgaard and Torben Ulrich crossed and intertwined. A common ground resonating.

It didn't take long for Kjærgaard to foster the idea of making music and poetry together with Ulrich. When Kjærgaard had lined up a recording session in New York with bassist Ben Street and drummer Andrew Cyrille, he went to Seattle after rehearsals with the trio and recorded with Ulrich. Their work with sound, silence and space seems related to the music Kjærgaard recorded with this trio on the album *Optics* (2008). But the process was different: At the session in Seattle, all of the music was improvised, not just on the grand piano, but also on other instruments available in the studio, including the rarely heard Mellotron. For Ulrich it also represents a sonic atmosphere that differs from his work on the albums with Clinch and Instead Of.

Suddenly, a rendezvous in Seattle turned into a new collection of sounds and songlines. To quote Wayne Shorter: "Wherever you are, there you are."

Ib Skovgaard, January 2009
Translation: Molly Martin

A Poetic Schooling: Learning and Unlearning

For half a century or more, Torben Ulrich (b. 1928) has been interested in the relation between being and action. Setting off from diverse forms of ballplay – not the least tennis (at times on top level internationally) – he has, in his characteristically experimenting and fabulating way, looked into the body as a means of *erkendelse*: of insight, understanding, an experienced knowing. Likewise, at other times – or parallel with the athletic activities – he has immersed himself in the ways of jazz music, poetry, art, philosophy, and much more. As a rule, he would be both receiver and practitioner. And always with the idea to bring together the corporal and the spiritual, praxis and reflection.

Thus Ulrich's approach has continuously been an attempt to bridge apparent oppositions, partly through physically concrete experiences or learning processes, partly through analysis and intellectual work. He has related to athletics and music as sources of fundamental insight. And never lacking in concentration attempted to learn – while simultaneously trying to unlearn, to let learning go (formulated in what you might call *en afmestrings poetik*, a poetics of un-mastering, or off-mastering). He has worked on bringing into language the experiences of the senses, while at the same time having a feel for the sensory qualities of language itself. And first and foremost he has, through his own example, tried to articulate the meaning of being present, here. Being-in-this-place, here-ness. Learned and unlearned in a pulsating dialogue.

In Ulrich's open and manifold universe, the different disciplines have typically been either directly linked or mutually related, where they have nourished and illuminated each other. From around the 1980s, however, to an increasing degree they have begun to coalesce, fuse: Thus, from having been a multidisciplinary practitioner, Ulrich has become a ballplaying painter, a listening writer, a philosophical performer.

And still more recently, the experiences and insights of a long life have also begun to find expression in a new type of writing: short, concentrated texts, lean vertical lines, songs, songlines. Again worked out in an approach both open and playful, where the contingent and unpredictable is given space within the framework of a set of rules, clearly defined, a stringent (and softly parodic) methodology.

Thematically, these lean vertical lines are closely linked with Ulrich's many spheres of interest: athletics, music, poetry, philosophy, Western and Eastern systems of thought. And also more concretely, the texts are woven into these diverse activities. They have appeared in Ulrich's paintings, they play an essential role in *Before The Wall: Body & Being* (2002), a film he has made together with Rick New and Molly Martin. They form the ground for several musical collaboration projects, in particular with the Danish free-jazz trio Clinch and the Seattle group Instead Of (together with whom Ulrich has so far published two CDs, respectively *Dice*, *Done* in 2006 and *Live on Sonarchy* in 2007). And finally the Danish publisher Bebop has released two collections of these texts, *Terninger, tonefald* (2005) and *Stilhedens cymbaler* (2007).

The texts heard on *Suddenly, Sound: 21 songlines for piano, drainpipe, etc.* – a collaboration with Danish pianist Søren Kjærgaard – follow in direct continuation of Ulrich's earlier writings, not the least as expressed in *Terninger, tonefald* and *Stilhedens cymbaler*. In those two books, the method is presented as part of the work: Some delimited groupings of root-lines serve, via samplings and permutations, as an impetus for, in principle, an infinite number of off-lines – where the off-lines are, so to speak, improvisatory variations over the root-lines. Almost as in jazz music (or other musical genres), where a musician may improvise over a given theme. Thus the off-lines are not end products but rather “examples”, still in motion, stages on the way, “frozen images of language” in an ongoing process. In practical terms, this means that Ulrich can relate quite freely to the off-lines, improvise over their linguistic material – again like a musician can make variations on a given set of notes.

Structurally, in these different contexts Ulrich has let his textlines be subsumed under varying patterns of numbers – prominently a five-foldedness: mirroring the launching ground of the texts in an attempt to understand the workings of the world via five elements. It may be the “classical”: earth, water, fire, air and space. However it can also be – like in the film *Before The Wall* – a set of athletic elements: strength, flexibility, speed, endurance and coordination. Or – like in *Stilhedens cymbaler* – musical/sonic elements: sound, line, pulse, silence and space.

Suddenly, Sound takes off from the five classical elements, but now in a thematic context, where they wrestle with the five sonic elements: sound, line, etc. Not as two alternative or parallel sets of elements, but as two dimensions that will meet in a Now, where the texts, having been just static words on a piece of paper, become living and performative, in interplay with the music.

Differently than before, this time the ten root-lines can be read sequentially, as a continuing narrative – divided into two sections, recollections of a couple of imaginary Gurdjieff courses (or discourses) – and in the 21 off-lines, words and sequences are transformed from these tongue-in-cheek mini-narratives into new variations on the themes in circulation. In the process, the weight is shifted from the classical physical elements to the sonic – showing, in fact, how contemplation of the body's/human being's situatedness in the world necessarily will bring a change of mode when set into speech, set into tone, performed. And at the same time the words comment, so to speak, upon their own musical sonicality, as the written lines eventually become spoken/sung lines. Songlines.

Which set things into motion. The present album – with Kjærgaard and Ulrich in attentive interplay – is one manifestation. Coming live events will be others. And the whole thing will continue to move. Between being and action, playfully.

Lars Movin, January 2009

Translation: Molly Martin

The basic narrative 10 root-lines »

10 root-lines »

10 root-lines »

10 root-lines »

10 root-lines »

10 root-lines »

10 root-lines »

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10 root-lines »

where, once upon	of working on not waiting	how this distillation of stilling and still moving	but then, instead of staying,	if they would even land, and distilling	then, on another occasion,	all slowing down, paying close attention to the deepening of breath and	events or say, a certain continuity leveling off, giving into a space	and again, in listening closer, to find elements of the elements: pulses of the sound of fire, a melody	of awareness, still without dualising, they would begin moving, slowly increasing the tempo, some
a time they had this place	for the stop, and then it would come	would be inter- woven, and brought	they would break with form and burst	yet again this cry, its sound, its	the friends and students had come together again	further sensing the senses, being alert to subtle differences	of very quiet, a resonating expanse, where, after a while,	line in the flows of water, that way, and	staying inside a whirl, others leaping about, never
called the sudden school of staying where you are	and they would stop, according	into the fabric of the five elements, of earth, of water,	into the largest leap they could manage, everyone at their own proper moment, crying	pulse and so on into the whole	to share anew a play of learning and unlearning, where	in motion and motility,	they would begin to hear, perhaps	as they were staying	leaving a larger sense of silence, but
where, in com- memoration of mr. gurdjieff and	to the tradition and see what was still	of fire, air and of space	out as they flew, not knowing	play of movement and non- movement, heart	this time they would start from stillness, or approaching it, settling into	maybe through a breaking, maybe through a shifting	of their own: the voices of the elements,	within this, if we may call it, ensemble	if they would falter, that would be fine too
his friends, they had this exercise	moving, and they would look into			and utter openness: unlearned	an over-	by degree: a minuscule leap within	of winds, of earth,		



Suddenly, Sound

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where
learning
and
unlearning
would
come
together

in
the voices
of
fire,
of earth,
where
a deepening

of
breath
would
be
breaking
into
another

fabric,
further
slowing
the melody
line,
when

all
of
a sudden

and
paying
close
attention

to
a slow
leveling
off,
staying
inside

the
cry
without
dualising
heart
and
resonating
space,
without

shifting
a knowing
openness
into
the subtle
tempo
of
tradition,

learning
the whole

and
again,
approaching
as
students,
moving

within
the expanse
of
the elements,
silence,
space
and

so
on,
settling
into,
say,
sound
of

fire,
staying
through
it,
sound,
its
fine
motility,
burst

of
being,

minuscule

and
never
leaving
the tempo,
staying

within
the continuity
of
voices,
the movement
of
play

flows
into
a larger
pulse,
the cry
of

silence
breaking
all
form,
breaking
the fabric
of
knowing,
distilling

the senses
into
this
where,
where

and
anew,
in
com-
memoration
of

the
elements,
the tradition
of
earth,
of
water,
the openness

of
their
movement
within
space,
the learning

of
this
school
of
knowing,
its
way,
its

working,
and
then:
to break,
unlearning

slowly, distilling a pulse	then: everybody and their friends flew	or to start from stillness, leveling	and to stop waiting	again, moving slowly, not knowing	then, after a while, the voices would begin	not without awareness	a resonating space,	as if, within their own voices,	to share anew the subtle
from silence, moving into a tempo not	into a land called expanse of stillness, where	off, leaving way for minuscule voices still moving through, a quiet	for certain events to play out, for	what would come, still to share the leaping	to come together, settling into a larger sound, where	of this continuity of dualising, breaking	where events would falter, if they would falter,	all voices would begin to come through, deepening	flows within the pulse of play, the whole
brought about by continuity, by a certain form, an even	they were called upon to make the largest sound they could manage, and	of melody come to a close,	this sound to be slowing down, for this line	of play, together	line and pulse would form a sudden leap	elements into further elements. slowing down	and pulses would pulse according to a line of their own, leaving	by degree, resonating within all the senses, the five	of sound distilling its ensemble of voices, to share
line, but by listening: for space, on	to make the largest sound they could manage, and	but brought to a larger silence: sound	to be still, for the breath deepening, perhaps	where	the melody would land, the pulses	into what may be called a whole: openness	this line of time, increasing this, still	the proper to the proper, staying	anew, through closer listening, through
its own, giving way	after a while, all slowing down, they would begin	of awareness	for time to stop or maybe be quiet	begin breaking into fire	unlearned	to be: inside the play of the inter- woven	the proper to the proper, staying	elements inter- woven, stillness on fire, flows	a certain melody of attention, called
	to hear						within the how of how	of silence, listening	perhaps: openness

or maybe staying	then, again, to look into the sound	without leaving or stop listening	and not waiting	then a sudden leaping, whirl	staying, then, with this sound,
a moment within the pulses, giving close attention	of breath, alert to the flows, the continuity	to the voices of the elements, of sound, of	for a certain sound, a certain sense of form, the proper,	of winds, a fire breaking through, pulse increasing, giving	not moving away, listening, closer
to their way of breaking, their way of giving	of its pulse, slowing down, perhaps	line, of pulses, and so on, to be giving	according to this tradition or another, working instead	way to another sense of play: a melody flew, tempo	and closer, to its pulses, the voices within
breath: to the flows of sense, the larger line,	within its shifting, alert	perhaps the larger attention to the sense of whole, say, continuity	within a larger whirl: winds, fire,	shifting, the whole place come together: friends,	its pulses, the winds within its breath, the silence
heart melody of space	to the subtle melody of winds, of air, deepening	of whole, say, continuity	earth, the elements crying out	friends, how are you	within its silence, deepening
	space of being				

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Co-produced by Torben Ulrich and Molly Martin

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Other releases by Søren Kjærgaard on ILK

Kjærgaard/Street/Cyrille – *Optics* ILK140CD – 2008
Søren Kjærgaard Solo – *Keys* ILK116CD – 2006
Bandapart – *Bandapart* ILK103CD – 2005
Søren Kjærgaard Trio – *Akustika* ILK102CD – 2005
Søren Kjærgaard Trio – *Amfebia* ILK101CD – 2005
Ikscheltaschel – *Ikscheltaschel* IKS002 – 2004
All titles available on iTunes or on www.ilkmusic.com

Other releases by Torben Ulrich

Arnvid Meyer's Orchestra – *Right Out of Kansas City*
STUCD 08102 – 2008 (includes three numbers by
Torben Ulrich's Blue Note Jazz Band and Torben
Ulrich's Quartet)
Instead Of – *Live on Sonarchy* (independent) – 2007
Torben Ulrich in Clinch – *Dice Done* DOCD5610 – 2006

Other texts by Torben Ulrich

Stilhedens cymbaler – Bebop 2007
Terninger, tonefald – Bebop 2005



