



Ingi Bjarni *Tenging*

It would be simple to concede that, despite societal and technological advances, our present-day awareness of primal engagement and harmony is becoming fragmented; most obviously by a reliance on digital-media interaction and the prominence of divisive political opinion. Yet, creatively and emotionally, the positive power of ‘connection’ remains a constant and perhaps increasingly important anchor in our lives – and that’s a key motivator, on different levels, for imaginative European pianist/composer **Ingi Bjarni Skúlason**.

Tenging (the translation of ‘connection’ in his Icelandic mother tongue) references Skúlason’s personal discovery of his inner musicality through the exploration of flow, freedom, confidence and, most pertinently, intuition. It brings together artists and friends from his longtime association with Scandinavia – Norwegian trumpeter Jakob Eri Myhre, Estonian guitarist **Merje Kägu**, Swedish double bassist **Daniel Andersson** and Norwegian drummer **Tore Ljøkelsøy** – in a fascinating encounter which expands the textural palette of his previous, well-received piano trio albums, *Skarkali* (2015) and *Fundur* (2018).

“I lived in Gothenburg, Copenhagen and Oslo while studying for my Masters degree in composition”, explains Ingi Bjarni, “and there, I met and performed with these amazing players. So the start of this project was chiefly about them as people and musicians, rather than a preconceived instrumentation, and I wrote all eight pieces on this album with their personalities and expertise in mind.” Skúlason’s choice of personnel is, indeed, inspired. Leading from the piano – equally as director, colorist and soloist – he observes the tonal synergy between Myhre’s trumpet lines and Kägu’s electric-guitar hues, enlivened by or ambiently bathed in the sensitive bass and percussion of Andersson and Ljøkelsøy. All the while, the spacial and improvised diversity of their output vividly reflects Skúlason’s desire to diminish boundaries of genre, though his work is particularly influenced by jazz tradition, Nordic folksong and electronica.

Listen to the smouldering jazz energy of *Ballad for my fearless friend*, for example, where memorable motifs are sustained by shimmering drum rhythms, or the elegance of the shared guitar and trumpet melodies in *Kannski blús* (Maybe a blues) prompting sparkly improvisations, and the breadth of this quintet becomes apparent. From its sinewy opening, the folksy waltz of *Já í dag* (Yes today) brims with brightly fluctuating ideas, while the players revel in the freedom of bustling, bass-resonant *Falin laglina* (Hidden melody) and cantabile *Angurvært* (Bittersweet melancholy). Ingi Bjarni’s pianistic solo delicacy is encountered in wistful, chromatic *Á sunnudegi* (On a Sunday) and a tender, Bill Evans-like miniature, *Ekki þjóðlag, ekki jazz* (Not a folk song, not jazz); and the title track’s varietal strands beautifully encapsulate the connective belief amongst this quintet.

“*Tenging*” is about continuing to find my artistic path”, says Skúlason, “and I feel it’s my best contribution yet”. Already knowing and respecting these players has meant that I can approach this project as composer and arranger while also enjoying greater flexibility in my own playing – a change from my trio environment, which is naturally conceived more around the piano.” Neatly summing up the importance of intuition and connection above intellectualism in his art, he considers: “I wonder if we truly know ourselves, and what we can be capable of in life and music. To me, ‘music’ is already here. It’s an ever-flowing waterfall – and our creativity depends on how much we lean ourselves into it.”

Ingi Bjarni Skúlason piano
Jacob Eri Myhre trumpet
Merje Kägu guitar
Daniel Andersson bass
Tore Ljøkelsøy drums

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