
SONO
LUMINUS
SL|Editions
LAYERS
TUI HIRV & PÁLL RAGNAR PÁLSSON

Layers The Album

For centuries, spiritual singing was an inseparable part of everyday life of mankind. It accompanied the course of day, course of life and course of year and acted as a kind of measure to keep in touch with the flow of time. There were songs to sleep and wake by, pray for God's mercy in all situations possible and maintain a harmonious and modest life. These songs travelled through Europe mostly with the help of protestant pastors and songbooks, but blended into local folk heritage in every parish. Different versions of well-known chorales create a unifying web across Western culture while maintaining a distinct, irreplicable voice of the isolated communities. These songs, either straight from songbooks or transcribed during field trips by scholars of early 20th century, are the core of this album.

Layers, so to speak, of spiritual singing reach seamlessly from Estonia, across the Swedish-speaking areas of Estonia to mainland Sweden and Norway, overseas to Iceland, making a stop at good old England where similar cultural processes took place a little earlier. Latin hymns translate into local languages, blend into folk tradition, get picked up again, make their way into art music directly or indirectly and become a source of inspiration once again. We encounter these songs in an environment where boundaries between social classes, styles of music, scenes and venues get blurred over and over, each time according to a whole different logic. We break a few canons, clichés and customs by approaching spiritual hymns with modern equipment, still making the vocals sound natural, timeless and unprocessed, vulnerable and enlightened. In our arrangements, we are aware of the tradition but treat the material with playfulness and a slight sense of irresponsibility. This is the layer we add to the heritage that has shaped our identities as individuals and nations, keeping the very core of human knowledge and spiritual existence alive and relevant.

Folk Hymns

Our arrangements are adding yet another layer to the hymn tradition. As melodic element we use notated transcriptions that educated musicians wrote down on their field trips to record the disappearing vocal heritage of Estonian villages. A big part of Estonian folklore is spiritual and has its roots in the Lutheran tradition. Going to church on Sundays and praising the Lord at home was a general practice. It was a natural part of existence equally in the ethnic Estonian and Swedish communities that lived side by side for many centuries. Estonian songbooks were compiled and translated into the peasants' mother tongue by German-speaking pastors while the Estonian Swedes sang from hymnals released in mainland Sweden. Nevertheless, the lutheran heritage was the same and the repertoire overlapped a lot. The smaller and more remote the settlement, the less likely it was to have an organ, a choir or notated music in the local church. Texts were written down in psalmbooks but the melodies were learned by ear and passed on within the family. Like this, every parish developed their own version of the original hymn, based on local ways of singing. Over time, the Lutheran church introduced professional cantors in most churches in order to unify the melodies and get the congregation to sing „properly", so the local versions gradually disappeared.

In late 19th and early 20th century, during the wave of national awakening, the Estonian student fraternity of Tartu University organized a wide-spread expedition of folk-song gathering all over Estonia that lasted for a number of summers. Secular songs were considered more original and valuable at the time than the ones developed from Lutheran hymns. For Estonian professional music life later on, the folk hymns have proved an invaluable source of inspiration and tokens of identity at difficult times. They underline Estonia's connection to Western culture while maintaining an irreplicable, unifying voice.

1. Nüüd hingvad inimesed	Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow	Folk hymn from Ridala parish, West Estonia
2. Bred dina vida vingar	hy Holy Wings O Savior	Swedish folk hymn from Skåne county, text Lina Sandell (1865)
3. Mitt hjerte alltid vanker	My Heart Will Always Wander	Norwegian Christmas carol sung to a Swedish folk tune. Text by bishop Adolph Brorson (1732)
4. Hátíð fer af höndum ein	Joyous Tides Do Now Begin	Medieval Latin hymn from Icelandic hymnal of 1575
5. There Is No Rose Of Such Virtue		15th-century anonymous English Christmas carol
6. Gjendines bådnlåt	Gjendine's Lullaby	Norwegian folk lullaby
7. In the Bleak Midwinter		Gustav Holst's 1906 setting to Christina Rossetti's poem
8. Nú kemur heimsins hjálparráð	Saviour of the Nations Come	Latin Advent hymn from Icelandic hymnal of 1589
9. Nüüd südant, inimene	Ye Sons of Men, Oh, Hearken	Estonian sacred folk hymn

10. Jeesus kõige ülem hää	Jesus Is the Best of All Good Things	Estonian folk hymn from Vormsi island
11. Kes Jumalat nii laseb teha	If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee	Estonian folk hymn from Käina parish, Hiiumaa island
12. Oh Jeesus, Sinu valu	O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded	Estonian folk hymn from the island of Vormsi
13. Ma vaatan üles mäele	I Gaze Up at the Hill	Estonian folk hymn from Saaremaa island
14. Kas sureb nii mu kõige armsam elu	Alas, Does My Most Beloved Life Thus Die?	Estonian folk hymn from Vormsi island
15. Su hooleks ennast annan ma	My all I to my God commend	Estonian folk hymn from Mustjala parish, Saaremaa island
16. Nú er á himni og jörð	Now in Heaven and on Earth	Icelandic religious hymn based on the 11th-century Latin hymn Festum nunc celebre. Printed in the hymnal of 1575
17. The Snow it Melts the Soonest		traditional English folk song from Northumbria

Vocals	Tui Hirv
Guitars and electronics	Páll Ragnar Pálsson
Electronics in track 8	Sander Saarmets
Bass in track 10	Skúli Sverrisson
Trumpet in track 12	Kaktus Einarsson
Piano in tracks 9 and 15	Tui Hirv
Accordion in track 17	Sóley Stefánsdóttir

Arrangements by Tui Hirv and Páll Ragnar Pálsson
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Mastered by Daniel Shores

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Liner Notes by Tui Hirv and Páll Ragnar Pálsson
Artwork on cover by Valgerður Briem (1914-2002)
Artist portrait by Brynjar Gunnarsson

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We would like to thank everyone who helped us during the making of the album, performers, friends and family. Estonian musicians and musicologists, without you we would never have known this heritage and for that we are eternally grateful.
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