





sing a song with us. They came on stage to do a little improvisation, which later became the last track on the record. The whole ending to *Hold mine hænder* was Casper and the choir singing together. Pieter Theun, who founded the B.O.X ensemble, also made this lovely arrangement for the ending of *Under broen der ligger du*, so we recorded that and created our own samples that we could chop up and place where we needed them.”

Sample libraries are already creating incredibly sophisticated sounds based on choral samples. Does using that as source material interest you?

“Hmmm, yes and no. I think it’s very difficult to make really good music using other people’s samples, but this topic requires a really long discussion because there’s so much more to it than just the sound. Basically, I find it really difficult to be inspired by even a piano sample. Yes, it sounds really good, but there’s always a latency problem and then there’s the difference between the smell of a plastic keyboard versus the smell of an old piano. If you fully understand the mechanics of a piano, you can put your finger on just one string and make an overtone – and that’s just one instrument.”

Can these limitations in the software realm ever be overcome?

“The way Native Instruments is going with its African sample library loops, for example, is good for some people but I don’t think it’s quite for me. Sometimes you use samples to fulfil your ideas because orchestras are human but what you actually want is something that sounds superhuman. The player has to breathe but sometimes you just want a note to sustain. In that sense, samples can be very helpful to blend in and accomplish an idea.”

The album mix is seamless. No instrument stands out, and we wondered if that was deliberate to some extent?

“I think you’re right, but it’s not something I have thought about. For me, I hear it very differently because I know it, whereas you have to absorb and decipher the sounds. I’m just reminded of the *Piramida* album, which was mixed by Francesco Donadello. When the first mixes came, I was disappointed that the trumpet was not louder because I deliberately wanted to pinpoint certain instruments. Francesco said, ‘but then we’d have to put everything at the same volume?’, so now I have a tendency to create a mix where everybody can see the whole picture.”

In order to see the whole picture, you don’t want sounds distracting the listener?

“Yes, but then you really appreciate when ‘distracting’ sounds are put in there. I think there are drums on almost half of the album, so it’s not as if they’re not there, and I don’t know how many times you have listened to it but there’s some mileage in the fact that over time you will find more things to discover. I like that about albums. We mentioned Talk Talk earlier – you can listen to their albums a hundred times and always discover something new.”



“A mastering session isn’t a place for a composer to be... it’s too nerdy”

Is the seamless integration of instruments worked on at the mixing stage or are you very careful with your placement of sounds from the earliest stages of production?

“For this album, we started with a very nice recording at Jet Studios in Brussels. We had the B.O.X ensemble with their instruments while Rasmus, Casper and I were playing along doing old-school basic tracking. It’s a legendary old studio, so the room is absolutely fantastic. We tried to record and capture everything so there was enough separation between the instruments and worked with a very nice engineer called Pierre Dozin. It’s rare that I need an engineer to get our ideas across,

but he was on it and gave us a few different options with the room mics. Basically, when you have a good room, good mics and a nice desk, it becomes fun and very easy to make something sound good.”

The better the recording the less need for post-production?

“Yes, I kept the tracks untouched all the way up to the mixing stage because there was so little processing going on. We actually recorded the music at several studios and mixed the album in France. We’d go to studios with stems that I’d spent a fair amount of time making, which meant I could go into any DAW with about eight stems and didn’t



have to load up sessions. Then I came home to Copenhagen, added the new tracks into my master session and built everything up in a structured way.”

Did you need a mix engineer for this project?

“When we finally went to mix the album, we sent the session with the plugins to Paris where the mix engineer took over. I’d deliberately tried to not make the music sound too good because I know from experience that if you try to create a final mix while still recording you end up fighting yourself. I find it’s better to keep everything as raw as possible so there’s a lot of room for the mix engineer to make final adjustments, but the music is still the way that we want it to be.”

We understand that you prefer to mix digitally, as a rule...

“We like the benefits you can get from working digitally as opposed to the stress of mixing in analogue where you have to be 100% sure that everything is right because you cannot change it afterwards. I find that makes a project easy to mix because you can work for two hours on a song and change a sound without having the same amount of pressure when you come back to it.”

Do you adopt the same attitude to mastering (as in, the final mix is deliberately left open to be improved upon)?

“When it came to mixing, there was quite a lot of heavy processing added so there was definitely some colouration, compression, EQ and limiting going on. Then we handed everything over to Francesco Donadello in Berlin to do the master and he did an

amazing job. It was one of the few times that an album of ours came back and we thought, whoa, it sounds different but so much better. It’s that classic thing where he opened everything up, almost as if there was a veil over it that needed to be lifted. The end result was clearer, wider and deeper.”

Some artists like to sit in on a mastering session, others are not so keen. What stance do you adopt?

“We’ve worked with Francesco many times before, so we trust him. I have attended mastering sessions before, but it’s really boring to be honest [laughs]. It’s not a place for a composer to be because it’s too technical and nerdy. I can’t relate to watching someone make tiny adjustments that I can barely hear even if it makes a big difference. I love mixing, but with mastering I find it better to hand it over and let them do their best.”

Does the band have a central location for recording sessions?

“After *Piramida*, I moved back to Copenhagen and Casper moved to Lisbon. He has a writing room that’s next to the river which has a little interface, a MIDI keyboard and a few instruments. In Copenhagen, I have a small production studio but all the main equipment is there, from hardware synths to a few preamps and speakers. I try to control myself and make do rather than have too many options. I have a little bit of Eurorack modular too. I have one module that’s really good for running external sounds through for filtering, effects and other sample-based stuff and another synth for making arpeggios.”

What hardware synths did you use while making the album?

“For the cornetti and other baroque instruments we used Native Instruments’ Kontakt to create the sampled-based synth sounds. We also used a fair amount of Hammond organ. The first song on the album was so hard to get right. At first we used a mellow pad sound that I’d tried on many different synths, such as the Korg M1 and the Yamaha SY22. I prefer to use hardware synths to software libraries because you just need to open the filter a little bit to wobble the pitch and it makes a big difference to the sound from synth to synth.”

On the granular side, we understand you’re quite keen on using Max/MSP software?

“I believe it’s just called Max now and I control it with my iPad so it’s really hands on. I’ve set it up so that I can move any instrument I want into the buffer to give me full control over it. Then I press a button to fill and granulate the buffer so I can process live without any feedback risk and control the size of the buffer, the grains, randomisation and pitch on the fly.”

Is Max as complicated as some people suggest?

“It’s not super-difficult, but it can get rather complicated. There’s a learning curve, and I took a few months out to do that. If you’re into sampling, DAWs and computers it’s a different way of thinking, but if you put in the time a big world can open up for you. The main benefit to Max is that you can totally adapt it to your needs. The whole Liima set was based on a Max patch that I’d made from scratch and it was the only thing I was running from my laptop on stage. The idea came from me wanting to make a clock that wasn’t fully metric so that each clock position was slightly different. That created a pulse that was techno metric – not random, but dancing around a scale. Max is so good for that because you otherwise would have to make a MIDI map or groove template, which usually becomes constraining.”

Finally, will you tour the album with B.O.X?

“We’re doing some shows with the ensemble but we also want to set out a new direction from here. That means we’re building a band without the ensemble so we can play more stuff from the back catalogue. We also find that reinterpreting the sounds is more fun that creating them, which allows us to look at everything in a new way and create something fresh. We have the summer off, but we’ll get going again with some shows in the fall and then start touring during the winter time.” **FM**

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The new Efterklang album *Altid Sammen* is released 20 September on 4AD. For more information, visit: [facebook.com/efterklang](https://www.facebook.com/efterklang)