

Provenance - The Album

There is a distinguished tradition of solo bass albums on ECM, but Provenance is the first to be devoted to the electric bass guitar. Björn Meyer, Swedish-born and Swiss-based, has shaped a unique voice for his instrument inside the most diverse contexts, working alongside Persian harpist and singer Asita Hamidi, Swedish nyckelharpa player Johan Hedin, and Tunisian oud master Anouar Brahem. For a decade he was a member of Nik Bärtsch's Ronin, in which his bass guitar was frequently the lead instrument.

His solo work is concerned with the experience of sound in acoustic spaces: "Even though the instrument is technically non-acoustic, the music is deeply influenced by the properties of the space where it is played. The many different ways in which acoustics affect my compositions and improvisations have always been sources of surprise and inspiration. There is definitely a second member in this solo project – the room!" The participating room on Provenance is the highly responsive Auditorio Stello Molo RSI in Lugano, its rich acoustics helping to bring out all the fine detail in Meyer's subtle playing.

Provenance Liner notes:

The electric bass in acoustic space

.. Sound

I have been fascinated by acoustics for a long time now, how they affect the creative process and our experience of sound. Already very early in my relationship with the electric bass I came across what many see as a paradox. Even though the instrument is technically non-acoustic, the music, as well as its impact on a listener, is deeply influenced by the properties of the space where it is played. The many different ways in which acoustics affect my compositions, improvisations and ultimately each performance, have always been sources of surprise and inspiration. There is definitely a second member in this solo project - the room!

.. Collaborations

Throughout my musical life, I have been able to collaborate with fantastic singers and players of acoustic instruments. Many times I have found myself in settings where an electric bass has not seemed the most obvious partner. The harp and voice of Asita Hamidi, the Nyckelharpa of Johan Hedin and the Oud of Anouar Brahem have - all in their own way - forced me to redefine the way I play. They have given me many reasons to rethink the function of my instrument but also to invent new ways of adding sounds and extending its tonal range. Musically, as well as technically, there are often a lot of challenges in playing the only electrical instrument in an otherwise fully acoustic setting. At the same time, this allows - actually even coerces - me to make use of the freedom to explore outside of more common approaches to electric bass. Some years ago however, I found no other alternative than to go acoustic as well. There was some music lying around that called for what turned out to become a new instrument. Three years of design discussions and the building efforts of luthier Richard Rolf made it possible and opened up yet another sonic environment.

Very often, especially when recording electric bass guitar, the fragile sounds of the actual instrument, the touching of strings - physical noises if you will - tends to get forgotten or deliberately left out. Yet they inspire me in the search for new sonorities and playing techniques. With this recording I wanted to share an alternative experience of the instrument, the way I hear it. I am very grateful that Manfred supported this approach and that Stefano managed to capture the dream behind the idea in the most beautiful way.

.. Music

Since 2013 I have followed a ritual as part of the preparations for my solo performances. 27 days before each concert I started recording whatever I was working on. Improvisations, experiments, practices, actual compositions or any combination of all. At some point during each day I would cut out exactly 60 seconds of music and release it on the internet as a kind of countdown or diary of ideas.

When I started preparing for this CD there were already more than 150 such fragments lying around. Some of them had grown beyond recognition, some were still in their original 60 second shape and some were really not suitable for posterity. I made it a mission to revisit most of the fragments and see what kind of program they would evoke. Arriving in the studio I had a very clear picture of what material I wanted to use, but I hadn't really anticipated how strongly the room would affect the music. Lugano Radio Studio is a fantastic sounding room and it opened up for a few improvisations and a fully new piece written in the night between the recording days, in spite of the Blues Festival echoing the streets of Lugano ..

"Provenance" is my way of saying welcome to my world, I hope you will find your own space inside it!

All music performed live.

In memory of Asita Hamidi