

KETIL BJØRNSTAD LARS SAABYE CHRISTENSEN ANNELI DRECKER



BETWEEN HOTELS AND TIME

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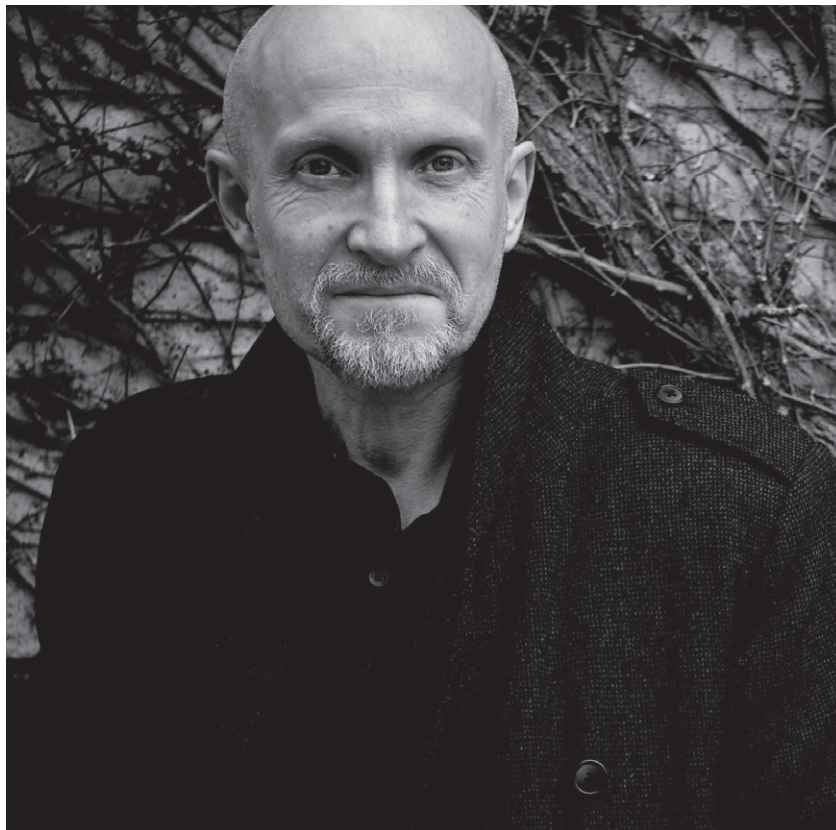
Music and piano: KETIL BJORNSTAD
Poems by LARS SAABYE CHRISTENSEN
Vocals: ANNELI DRECKER



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THE SPIRIT OF A FRIENDSHIP

It is not always the case, especially when it comes to art, but sometimes one can sense the meaning of a friendship – everything one doesn't need to say, but that has been there, unsaid, for years. It is 44 years since I met Lars Saabye Christensen for the first time. We were confirmed together at Frogner Church in Oslo. Maybe Lars has a completely different version of the circumstances, but for me there was a feeling that we had sparked a friendship, although we had barely said a word to each other. We both lived in the Frogner district of Oslo. We were both interested in literature and music. It was as though we didn't need to say any more to each other. It actually took many years before we began to talk



together. In the meantime he had been an important voice in the bold, young counterculture community of Norway. Street poems, readings, festivals. Our meeting places were festivals, concerts at the old Munch Museum, literature events. I had already made my debut as a poet in 1972, and one of the young writers in Lars's circle, youthfully tough and intrepid, included me in the literary magazine *Dikt og datt*. All the same, Lars, who was not a published writer yet, agreed to eat dinner with me at my regular haunt, Jaquet's Bagatelle. This had been the most French-influenced restaurant in Oslo since the 1930s, frequented by both successful and failed artists of all ages, and was the predecessor of the famous Michelin-starred Bagatelle, now also a victim of the ravages of time.

I remember the evening clearly. It was the day before Christmas Eve, 1975. I had already had four books published and had released four records. Lars would have his first poetry collection published the following year, which would win the Tarjei Vesaas First Book Award and pave the way for one of the most significant and highly praised careers in European literature. I myself was busy with concerts, records and new book projects. I was never goal-oriented in the same way I felt that Lars might have been,

and still is. But we stayed in contact, and saw each other at festivals or at the outdoor restaurant Herregårdskroa in Frogner Park. We read each other's books and listened to each other's music. He was already working closely with some of Norway's leading jazz and blues musicians. And in 1997 I set two of his poems to music, which were included on the album *Reisetid* (Grappa).

We both lived far from Oslo for many years, Lars in Sortland, Vesterålen, and I in Vestre Sandøya on an island outside of Tvedestrand in southern Norway. Maybe the experience of living in parts of Norway that were far from the centre of power enabled us to share ideas and viewpoints about cultural and political life. Although we lived in very different parts of the country, we had some of the same points of reference.

His literary work has meant a great deal to me throughout the years. When I set *A Suite Of Poems* (ECM, 2018) to music, I felt a nearly paralysing reverence for the intensity of his poetry. But at the same time, there was an intensity in our friendship, where everything that was left unsaid was transformed into a strength. When at last I sat down to compose, I did it quickly and confidently.



The same thing happened with *Between Hotels And Time*. I was uncertain whether I had the energy to infuse these powerful poems with so much light and shadow, because I had just completed a major cycle of novels in six volumes, *The World I Used to Know*, and was exhausted and drained by all the impressions I had absorbed. But the poems grabbed hold of me, as Lars's poems always do, and although the tears flowed a number of times while I was composing, I also felt a strange sense of strength. All art arises from experience, from dreams, from a lived life, grief, loss and fear. And nevertheless we find our way back to art, again and again, to gain new comfort and new insight.

Lars and I barely exchange a word while I was setting these poems to music, which was both disquieting and consoling. This is the way it has always been between us. A few brief sentences. Mutual agreement. Always trust. Never upsetting discussions. When I was finished with the songs, they were accepted by Lars. That was the way it had to be.

There was never any doubt that we wanted this song cycle to be sung by Anneli Drecker, with whom we had created *A Suite Of Poems*. But it couldn't be taken for granted that she would be able to join us. She was

involved in her own projects, both her own band and a reunion with *Bel Canto*, for which fans all over the world had been waiting for many years. She was also a highly regarded professor at two Norwegian universities at a great distance from one another, one in the north and one in the south.

When I called her she was, as always, enthusiastic. I had known her since the turn of the millennium, when we collaborated on *Grace* (Emarcy/Universal), which expanded my own musical horizon and had a massive influence on my later work, both musical and literary. We had become friends, too, but like Lars and I we didn't call each other at all hours of the day. We got together for concerts all over Europe, and in Canada, too. We presented a duo concert in St Petersburg, surrounded by soldiers carrying machine guns after the massacre at the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow in 2002. The previous year we had performed the same music in a church at the Montreal International Jazz Festival and at a church in Hamburg. Months, even years, could go by between our encounters with each other. But it was always as though we were continuing the conversation from our last meeting. We didn't need to ask about all the details and events that had occurred since we last saw each other.

"I would really love to do this," she said. "But there is so much light here in the far North right now. I'm sleeping so poorly."

"Just do what you feel you have the strength to do," I said.

This is what the spirit of a friendship is.

And we brought this spirit with us into Propeller Studio during a few short days in November, 2021. Anneli had recorded her most recent album in the same studio, and I would be returning to my beloved C. Bechstein grand piano, which I had played on *Vinding's Music* (ECM), *Shimmering* (Grappa) and *Images* (Grappa).

But this time something unusual happened. Maybe it had to do with Mike Hartung, a technician we both trust implicitly. In the course of only a few seconds he had set up the sound for us. And Anneli already knew the songs through and through. I had recorded a demo for her at Rainbow Studio that spring. She knew the direction I was planning for the music. At the same time, she had rehearsed the songs in the keys that suited her best, with the thoroughness that I had always admired in her. So we both said to Mike, "Even though this is actually the first time we're singing this through together, could you please record it right from the start?"

Because it was true – we had not rehearsed. Not together, at least. Each of us had rehearsed on our own. But then and there we realised that we had already arrived at the same way of expressing ourselves, with the additional gift of improvisation to draw from. We started at the beginning and sang the first song right through. We didn't need to record another take. And this was how it continued. Song after song. We recorded the album live, without a rehearsal, without any other practising than what we had done on our own, each in a different part of the country, and with the enthusiasm that arose from hearing these songs emerge in the space between us. We recognised how well we knew each other. I knew exactly how she was going to phrase a melodic line seconds before she did it. It was perhaps the most remarkable studio experience I have had in my life.

And Lars was at home, in quarantine with Covid, and had complete faith in both of us.

This is how the spirit of our friendship is.

KETIL BJØRNSTAD

29 March 2022



01 On Tour (take away dreams)

Cheap hotels
Bad reviews
Broken mirrors
Blues on the news

Someone is knocking at the door
My take away dreams
Don't work no more

I used to live in luxury
Now they have to look for me

Between the sleep
And the wakeup call
I thought that I
had seen it all

But nothing's like it was before
My take away dreams
Don't work no more

Please, will someone
Make my room
My lover will come
Half past noon

And I hope that he will stay
And take my take-away dreams away

Between the sleep
And the wakeup call
I thought that I
had seen it all

Cheap hotels
Bad reviews
Broken hearts
Blues on the new

Someone is knocking at the door
My take-away dreams don't work no
more

02 The Finder

Let me be your finder
But first you have to lose
If you still have it
Then I am out of use

But as soon as you have lost it
I am on the track
I promise you will love
the things that I bring back

Cards and keys
And handkerchiefs
Gloves and rings
And broken wings

Let me be your finder
I will ease your mind
You will be surprised
Of all the things I find

Months and years
A lot of tears
Knives and spoons
And afternoons

Hair and nails
And fairytales
Clocks and time
Are what I find

So let me be your finder
I find what you have lost
I even will bring back to you
The lines that you have crossed

03 **My Suitcase and Me**

Oh suitcase my friend, have patience with me
There are so many places I can't wait to see
There are so many people I still like to know
Oh suitcase my friend, I am not ready to go

Oh suitcase my friend, don't leave me alone
In this lonely hotel on the wrong side of town
If this is the end, I will rather forget
Oh suitcase my friend, I'm not ready yet

Oh suitcase, stand still
Till I've paid my bill

Oh suitcase my friend, I am counting on you
There are so many things I still want to do
So please do not leave, do not leave me behind
You know I got the money, but you got, yes you got the time

Oh suitcase, stand still
Till I've paid my bill

Oh suitcase my friend, I'm confused and afraid
Time is running out, and the bill is not paid
I hope for the best, this is where I will be
Then we go to rest, then we go to rest my suitcase and me

04 **The Pawn Shop Band**

I'm the singer in a pawn shop band
My voice is vintage, my clothes are second hand
But after all I'm second to none
It's me they call when all the rest have gone

And maybe I sing *Strangers in the Night*
If you tell me what happens after the light

My songs are old but my memory is good
I know all the words in *Don't let me be misunderstood*
'cause I'm the singer in a pawn shop band
They give us the finger, then they give us a hand

And maybe I sing *We'll meet again*
If you tell me what happens after the rain
They send us from town to town in a cage

And open it up when we find another stage
The drum is a top hat, the base is a broom
I'm always out of style but I'm never out of tune

And maybe I sing *Georgia on my Mind*
If you tell me what happens after all the time

I'm the singer in a pawn shop band
My voice is old, and I'm second hand
But if you still don't know who we are
Just read the signatures in our scars

And maybe I sing *I love you because*
If you tell me what happens after the applause

05 **Boredom is a Town**

Boredom is a town where no one wants to be
Nothing to do there, nothing to see
The ground is too high, the wall is too deep
Even the actors in the theatre fall asleep

You can always close your eyes and count to ten

And then you can do it once again
But it's too late to run, too late to hide
The hotel has been closed since the last bellhop died

The lobby is filled with suitcases and names
Everyone is guilty, but no one is to blame

Boredom is a town where no one wants to be
Nothing to do there, nothing to see
As soon as you arrive you just want to go away
But some have no choice, some of us must stay

The clocks are broken here and time stands still
You can't spend your money, 'cause you can't find a bill
The barber is out of work, the hair won't grow
You cannot leave us, there is no place to go

Boredom is a town where no one wants to be
Nothing to there, nothing to see
It's not so far away, it's always close
In the end this boring town is inside your house

You wish it was more than this lonely afternoon
But a sign on the door says: I'm coming soon

06 **Green Room Blues**

Time is not yours
Time is not mine
Time belongs to no one
We're always out of time

Time is its own
Time does not wait
It left us behind
We are always too late

But there's comfort in the forest
Go tell my old band:
The leaves are falling
But the trees still stand

07 **The Left Overs**

I'm the flower left over from the bouquet of love
As soon as you picked me, it was impossible to grow

I withered instead and turned into sand
Dry and dead in a nowhere land

Once I did smell like the sweetest perfume
My colours were perfect, but I lost them too soon

I can't fall any lower, I got nowhere to go
I'm the flower left over from the bouquet of love

The beauty of decay does not last very long
It turns into prayers like the echo of a song

My gardener was not fair, he reminds me of a slaughter
He forgot to take care and did not give me any water

But please don't leave me here on the floor
I just can't live with what's left of me no more

Will you put me in a vase outside in the rain
Then I will face all my sorrow and pain

I'm the flower left over from the bouquet of love
I'm the old, forgotten lover you still are dreaming of

08 **Age**

I count the numbers
I count the ways
Too many hours
But lack of days

I walk in circles
And feel the rage
I'll be the next
I've reached the age

I look around
I look beyond
Sometimes I wish
I was never born

I take a step
Then I don't move
Afraid to fall
Afraid to lose

I'm going to the pawnshop and leave my things there
Then other men can find themselves a nice suit to wear
And the men can choose between my poems and my books
I had it all inside because I had never good looks

I think it's time
I leave the stage
And stand in line
I've reached the age

09 **Name**

There's a name in the window
There's a name on the door
There's a name in the mirror
The name is no more

There's a name in the river
There's a name in the wind
There's a name in the forest
Where all names begin

There's a name in the water
There's a name in the street
There's a name in the shadows
Where all names shall meet

Sing it and shout it again and again
The name is in danger
The name is your name

There's a name in the marble
There's a name on the stone
There's a name in the past
Where all names belong

There's a name in the window
There's a name in the rain
There's a name you remember
The name is your name

10 **Winter Drama**

It's easy for you to say, she said
Her voice so dry and thin
He closed his eyes and knew at last
None of them could ever win
How do you know it's easy?
How do you know it's easy to say?

It's just the way you say it
Like a line in an old, forgotten play
The rumours of winter reached us too late
The avalanche whispered: I can't wait
She sat down upon the unmade bed
Say it once again, she said
And as the snow began to fall
He said: I love you after all

11 **Thief**

I'm a thief
I steal pencils
I steal pencils from every room
I'm a thief
I steal pencils
I will write you a novel soon

I'm a thief
I steal blankets
I steal blankets from every bed
I'm a thief
I steal blankets
Don't believe a word I said

I'm a thief
I steal spoons
I steal spoons from every meal
I'm a thief
I steal spoons
And soon I will make a deal

I'm a thief
I steal leaves
I steal leaves from every tree
I'm a thief
Have no grief
It's not serious, it's only me

12 **Manmade Light**

The day is done
I'm out of sight
I'm looking for some manmade light
City, sorrow, restless cars
Ghosts in raincoats, shadows, scars
Suitcase, widows, do not wait
Dreams are always sleeping late
Begging soldiers, no one to fight
My love, go gently on me tonight
The day is done
I'm out of sight
I'm looking for some manmade light

13 **Serbelloni Memoires**

There's a man in the sand
With a rake in his hand
Wiping our footsteps away
It's autumn, my dear
All have to leave
But something will always stay

Mornings of light
Evenings of blue
The window, the lake
And a portrait of you

Menus and pens
Postcards and spoons
Room service, grief
And a slow afternoon

And the man in the sand
With a rake in his hand
All that he needs
Is patience and greed

14 **Self Portrait, After All**

I'm the building – site in October
I'm the crane in the rain
I'm the tools in the mud
I'm the wheels in vain
I'm the keys in the gutter
I'm all the garbage mail
I'm the hammer that got drunk
And woke up as a nail
I'm the helmet on the shelf
I'm the boots in the locker
I'm the copper that got stolen
I'm the building – site in October
I'm the calendar
Every day is a fine
I'm the crane who lifts the rain
Soon the sun will shine

15 **Nightmare on the Setlist**

Welcome to a party at the bottom of the sea
Don't forget your medals, passports and keys
Champagne will be served at the deck of the wreck
We promise of course that no one gets wet
You can dance in the lifeboats from half past ten
Or just mingle among old ghosts, dealers and friends

Just follow me to the bottom of the sea
And I show you what has become of me

Beware of pirates, moonshine and sharks
The life jackets close as soon as it gets dark

16 **Mood in the Afternoon**

I'm down like the calendar in the waiting – room
I'm down like the umbrellas in the last bar
I'm down like the band in the wrong elevator
I'm down like the traitor in the country without borders
I'm down like the robber in the pharmacy
Eating his pills, shouting it wasn't me

I'm down like the spy with nothing to share
I'm down like the barber in the town with no hair
I'm down like the clown no one wants to be around
I'm down like the clown no one wants to be around
I'm down like the writer in the swimming pool
I'm down like the sunglasses in Sunday - school
I'm down like in down, please download me
And go to the mountain and set me free

17 **My Suitcase and Me (instrumental)**

18 **On Tour II (memory and music)**

The picture in the violin – case
makes you safe, makes you safe
The one you love and leave behind
Every time, every time
A smile, a look, a gentle face
The picture in the violin – case

You see it only in a glimpse
Before you walk onto the stage

And when you gently afterwards
Puts the violin back in place

In the meantime
You don't use it
In the meantime
Memory and music

You don't know where you slept last night
You are always travelling, travelling light
But the picture in the violin – case
Makes you safe, makes you safe

The picture of the one you love
The one you love and leave behind

In the meantime
You don't use it
In the meantime
Memory and music

You know it's meantime all the time



Recorded November 2021

Propeller Studio, Oslo, Norway

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Photos page 1, 4, 36 and inlay card:

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Liner Photos:

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Cover design:

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Special thanks to HELGE WESTBYE

