Dear friends,

It's 2008 already and life has been pretty hectic since I got back from finishing up the record in Sweden in October, hence the lateness of this report. Before I start, if this is your first time visiting my blog, I suggest you take a quick look at my previous studio report from May 2007 which will fill you in on the background of these sessions.

The week I spent at the studio in October was the most fantastic experience. I flew to London on the red-eye with just enough time to shower and change at my brother's flat and I was on my way to the airport again, picking up Robert Kirby on the way (who assured me that he had ALMOST finished writing all the string arrangements!). We flew to Copenhagen and picked up a rental car for the splendid drive across the icy Baltic Sea to Southern Sweden. We made a quick pit-stop in Malmö for provisions at my favourite destination, the delicatessen Mollans Ost in Mollevangen Square where, quite by chance, the staff were playing Nick Drake's "Five Leaves Left". Robert jokingly accused me of having set this up! Suffice to say we got a 20% discount and the guys at Mollans Ost got their CD signed.

We got to the studio in time for supper and Christoffer's wife Ylva had prepared one of her trademark feasts. We chatted for hours, listening to Robert's fascinating stories of yesteryear, like the one about the rock opera he was commissioned to write in the late 60's for which a little-known band called Genesis were hired to record the demo reel, but they didn't like the singer's voice so they had him just play flute and got a girl in to sing! The day ended with Robert and I sitting at the kitchen table in the little cottage where the studio's guests stay, Robert putting the finishing touches to his arrangements whilst I whipped up a big bowl of trifle as part of the smorgasbord I was planning for the visiting musicians the next day.

October 2nd 2007 is a day I will remember for the rest of my life. In many ways it represented the culmination of a lifetime spent playing and writing music, and it was certainly the crowning moment of the production of this album. We arrived at the studio early to find Christoffer setting up the live room with microphones, music stands, chairs and headphone outlets for all the players. Shortly thereafter a minibus arrived from Malmö with our double quartet...nine young

players from Malmö's Opera Orchestra: Charlotta, Daniel, Urban, Johanna, Tomas, Hanna, Martin, Emil and Andreas. Introductions out of the way and we were soon assembled in the live room, Robert introducing the players to 'This Life', the first song they were to play on.

Up until this point I had not heard a single note Robert had written for these songs, so it was a little overwhelming when he first raised his conducting baton in the air and the orchestra struck up all at once. Since it was a dry run-through without the backing track, I had trouble figuring out which parts of the song went with what Robert had written. Indeed, even when they were playing along to the backing track, every last headphone socket in the studio was being used up, so I was still unable to discern exactly what was going on...I recognized obvious phrases that matched some parts of the song, but then the string arrangement would take a turn and I'd be lost again! Why wasn't I in the mixing room with Christoffer, listening to the strings over the backing track? Because I was in live room filming the players, and this is how it sounded...

I'll start you off with just the strings on their own so you can experience it as I first did, then I'll fade in the finished mix half way through so you can hear what they're actually playing over:

For the more discerning viewers out there, you can download the far superior 43MB Mpeg-4 file for easy playpack on your quicktime player by clicking here .

Christoffer's careful planning made the technical aspects of the recording seem invisible, leaving Robert and the players free to concentrate on their performance. I felt like a bit of a hanger-on for much of the day, being the only person who wasn't actually playing or engineering anything...I had finished recording all my parts back in May. I just tried to keep out of everyone's way, and it was a good thing I had the camera to keep me busy, not to mention the lunch I was busy preparing for 12 people.

After lunch it was back into the studio to record one of the more fragile songs on the record, 'A

Little Voice'. This piece had been around for five or six years as a short instrumental. I didn't know if I would even put it on record, but after Robert agreed to write some string arrangements I felt that this little piece might become something special, so I fleshed it out and wrote some lyrics for it the week before the May sessions, and sure enough Robert wound up writing a truly magical orchestration for the song.

In this clip you'll hear the whole song, and part way through we'll leave the string session and I'll show you a clip of Christoffer trying out a dulcitone part the following day with a little help from the studio kitten. We actually wound up leaving the dulcitone part off the finished mix so this is the only place you'll ever hear it! Again, feel free to download the 7 MB Mpeg-4 file here .

I have footage of all the other songs we recorded strings for, but I think these two will give you enough of an idea of the process. I'll just include one last clip, this time from the mixing stage of the album. I'm a big fan of those 'Classic Album' TV shows you sometimes see on VH-1 where they'll look at the making of albums like Sgt. Pepper, A Night At The Opera or Dark Side Of The Moon. I especially like it when the artist or the album's engineer sits at the mixing desk and brings up the faders one at a time so you hear one of your favourite songs come together bit by bit. So this next clip is a rip-off of that! I caught Christoffer just as he had loaded up the tape to begin mixing the song 'Half A World Away' and asked him to talk me through the tracks a little...

You can download the 13MB Mpeg-4 file here if you wish.

I'm really glad I had the video camera with me on this trip so that I could keep a record of the process and share some of this experience with you. I wish I'd had the camera on my two previous trips to Sweden, but I spent most of those either singing or playing guitar, so as great as it would have been to show you the sessions with Magnus and Jens (on bass and drums), it just wouldn't have been practical.

Making this record has really been the high point of my life as a musician and I only hope I get the chance to do it all again in a couple of years. Stay tuned for my release plans and send me an email if you'd like to get on my mailing list.

Best wishes and a happy new year to everyone,

Luke