

A photograph of a dirt road winding through a wooded area. On the left, there is a large, dark wooden structure, possibly a shed or a wall. The road is unpaved and curves to the right. The trees are mostly bare, suggesting a winter or late autumn setting. The sky is overcast and grey.

Scott McLemore

Remote Location
Extended Notes

www.scottmclemore.com

The Music


Yes, well I suppose I should explain these titles. As maybe you can hear, this is an emotionally laden collection of songs. Although there are no lyrics, there is a lot of meaning/memory/feeling behind the notes. The title track "Remote Location" is a nod to where I now live. Living in Iceland feels remote sometimes, but oddly normal after you've been here a while. Part of the melody is inspired by the soundtrack to Peter Pan. At times Iceland reminds me a bit of Neverland, without the pirates.

I've basically lived in three places: Virginia, New York and Iceland. Each of these places has felt like home at some point, but when I think about it they all kind of never stopped feeling like home. When we go back to New York and walk around Brooklyn it feels like we never left. When I'm visiting family in Virginia it feels like I'll always be there... until I'm not. There is a pull there that I contend with on a daily basis. Perhaps that will lessen with time, but it's both good and bad. If it weren't for all the people there who are dear to me, I wouldn't feel this way, so it's really an extension of affection, and part of what inspired this music.

The oldest tune here is "Secrets of Earth" which is dedicated to trumpeter John D'earth who lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. John is one of my earliest musical heroes whom I met at a critical juncture in my life. He and his wife vocalist Dawn Thompson were very kind to me, inviting me to play with them in Charlottesville and encouraging me to really be myself musically.

A couple of years ago I recorded an album of hymns with the pianist Ástvaldur Zenki Traustason, who is a Buddhist priest. It was an incredible experience recording that music with him. I wrote "Citizen Sitting Zen" on the way home from the studio that day and I dedicate it to him. It's written in two parts, but the bass-line from the first part is kind of like a mantra that becomes the melody in the second part. This is a trick I first heard Bill Frisell employ on his album "Where in the World?" I accidentally found the recording of the Tui birds on the internet while looking for recording advice for my little digital recorder. I fell in love with their song and immediately began searching for a way to use it on this album.

The brief duet between Sunna and I called "Una Danza en la Cocina" is inspired by all the cooking we do together where we're dancing around, trying to stay out of each other's way. There is actually another melody to this tune. We recorded a version with the full band which didn't make it on the album. Maybe one day I'll release it as a single from the vault.

A photograph of a restaurant entrance. On the right, a chalkboard menu is visible with some text, including "Restaurant" and "Le Café". A bicycle is parked in the foreground on the right. The background shows a building with a textured wall and some foliage on the left.

“Dunegrass” is dedicated to my family in America. It is a reference to the grass that grows in the sand-dunes on the beach. We spend a lot of time on the beach when we’re there and the dunes are the backdrop for many of my childhood memories. This is another example of me playing with that trick I got from Frisell. The melody that Óskar and Robbi play at the beginning comes back in the last section of the tune in a different time signature.

I wrote “Woods at Night” while thinking back to the house I lived in as a teenager. The back yard was a wooded lot and there were raccoons that would peek in at me when I was up late at night writing music.

Speaking of being up late at night, “Waking” is about just that. I typically stay up too late, which was fine before I had kids. Now I need to remind myself of what it’s like giving piggy-back rides after 4 hours of sleep. Still, my most creative work happens in the wee hours, so it’s a struggle.

My dear friend from Virginia Beach, bassist Jimmy Masters used to loan me albums he thought I needed to hear. He has a penchant for Nordic jazz and one of the bands he turned me on to was “Masquelero” from Norway. It happened that the pianist Jon Balke played on one of their albums, and I consequently checked out a lot of his music as well. This tune is me tipping my hat to those musicians.

At the last rehearsal for this recording I walked in with a chart to a brand new tune, “Don’t Miss the Signs.” I was prepared to be yelled at, or for someone to throw down their instrument and walk out. In fact, no one batted an eye. For a long time I wasn’t sure if it belonged on the album at all. It is, after all, the only swinger. But after listening to it for a while I realized it was exactly what was needed: contrast without losing the atmosphere of the album. The title is a reminder to myself not to miss the signs the universe is showing me.

The last tune on the album, “Movement for Motian” is a dedication to the late Paul Motian. His approach to music both as a drummer and composer has inspired me from my earliest aspirations in jazz. It’s my way of saying goodbye to him.

The Musicians

Each of the musicians on this recording are special to me. Obviously, Sunna and I have a longstanding relationship and it felt very comforting to have her sound there, and also her presence during the recording. I made the decision not to get stressed about anything, and although we didn’t discuss it at all, she was always looking out for me if issues arose. I resigned myself to being “just the drummer” that day. (Well, and the

barista. I brought my espresso machine to the concert house and set a personal record for cappuccinos made in one day.]

Generally speaking I tried to say as little as possible and trust that the musicians would find a way to make it work. I was not disappointed. Everyone made suggestions about the arrangements, which is exactly what I wanted. That way it really felt like a band despite the fact that the group hadn't played very much together. To me, it felt like everyone was involved in this project more than just as a sideman.

After Sunna, the person I've known the longest in the band is Róbert. He and Sunna are old friends and he actually played at our wedding. I didn't really know him well then, but he was one of the first people we called when we moved to Iceland. The three of us have a band that is dedicated to playing the music of Bill Frisell, and it's through that project that we really got to know each other's playing. I love the minimalism he employs on these tunes. Each note he plays seems as important as the last.

Andrés was the first person to book me on a gig in Iceland after the move. It was to play music he wrote that ended up being his album "Nýr Dagur." We instantly clicked and have since been involved in several projects together including Bonsom, ASA Trio, Thin Jim and his new quartet. I originally thought that I wanted Andrés to play lap steel and dobro on some of these tunes, but as the band was rehearsing, I liked his sound so much on guitar that I forgot all about the other instruments. Of all the musicians on this album he probably had the least written material. He even had to learn some music by ear in an overdub session on acoustic guitar.

Óskar is known in Iceland first and foremost as the saxophonist in Mezzo-forte and ADHD. However, outside of Iceland he also has a cult-following among musicians for his duo work with bassist Skúli Sverrisson. His sound, like that of the other musicians, was in my head as I wrote these tunes. Listen to the magical way he interprets "Secrets of Earth." It sounds as if he might have been improvising the melody.

The Engineer

When I first met Kjartan it was on the recommendation of pianist Árni Heiðar Karlsson. Sunna had just recorded "The Dream" in New York and was looking to mix it in Iceland. He and I worked closely on that project and subsequently a few others. He truly went above and beyond during every step of this recording. For instance, he showed up to the concert hall with his own baffles and basically built his own studio from scratch.

We had recorded there before with Sunna's trio for "Long Pair Bond" and I love the sound of that album, so I was hoping to get close to that sound

with the addition of sax and guitar. I wasn't sure how it would work, but Kjartan was confident that it would be fine. He was right and I'm so happy I trusted him with this.

Working with him on this and other projects I got the feeling that he felt as invested in it as I was. When we were mixing it really felt like a collaborative effort, just as it did with the musicians.

The Photographer

I met the British photographer Jake Messenger through Twitter. He was one of my first followers. We found each other through our similar tastes in music, but I quickly realized that I absolutely loved his photography. He collects antique Polaroid cameras and shoots on medium and large format film. The photographs I selected are Polaroids he took on a trip to the south of France. You may recognize Pont Julien, a stone bridge built by the Romans in 3 BC. Jake and I met face to face when I played at the London Jazz Festival and I knew that I had to involve him in this project.

In Closing

I feel very fortunate to have been able to make this recording. For years after my debut album I felt pressure from myself to make another album, or rather a sinking feeling of underachievement. And yet as I look back I wouldn't have had it any other way. All the music felt ready and this is coming out at just the right time for me. I had all the right people around me and with their help these vague ideas of mine became a tangible reality.

- Scott