



10 months in Göteborg

About four months it was, in between getting the phone call from Göteborg that my Erasmus application was accepted and the day I arrived alone in Sweden's second biggest city. Four months of excitingly waiting, dreaming. I was going to study with the great Anders Jormin, up in northern Europe from where the sounds of the musical scene already triggered my imagination for a long time. But as a double bass player I also had to think straight and practical. To get my instrument to Göteborg safely and in one piece, driving a car would be almost the only option. Because my brother was going to study the Nordic Jazz Master (*) starting in Aarhus (Denmark), he, me, my mother and sister packed the car with camping material, luggage for two persons for a whole year, a baritone saxophone and a double bass, and drove north. Aarhus is a welcoming and cozy city, with a very modern and provided school for high musical education, where the teaching and overall artistic level is above average. After the first semester my brother told me that the jazz scene itself may not be so extensive but he learned very useful and broadening things, and said the level and creative mindset is very motivating and inspiring in Aarhus. Worth checking out, I'd say!

Camped for a few days and having said goodbye to my brother, my mother and sister drove me to Frederikshavn, a city almost 200 kilometers further north where one can take a ferry directly to Göteborg. After we'd parted, my mother and sister would drive back to Aarhus, stay a night or two to say goodbye to my brother and then drive back home. From that point the adventure turned into a solo thing. Me, packed like a hinny with my provision for a



year and a double bass on top of that, on a boat to the West-shore of Sweden.

A good tip is to check on "pick-up" dates from your city's or university's housing service. Due to that and the fact we planned our trip in such way that I could arrive on one of those pick-up" dates, I got a student waiting for me with a van at the Stena Line terminal to bring me to the university's Service Center. Here I could immediately get my key and so have direct access to my apartment. Later in the semester when I realized how far and difficult the route is from

the terminal to my place, especially concerning my heavy luggage, having no clue about public transport and the mountain-ish structure of Göteborg, I am really thankful for this "pick-up" arrangement.

And it is not the only time I got "served" in Sweden. The average Swede is incredibly helpful and kind. With meeting or introducing yourself to someone, it seldom feels they are not instantly involved with you and willing to help you on the spot. Watch out with sarcasm though. Wait for it until you believe the person can take it, instead of ending up in awkward silences too often.

Now, Hogskolan för Scen och Musik (HSM). Or 'Artisten' (den Artiëst zouden wij zeggen), as this department for performing arts of the Göteborgs Universitet is often called. As I read in my subscription documents, I would be doing my exchange year in the Second Bachelor of the Improvisation department (IMP2). It may sound odd because in Belgium I would be a first Master, but chronologically it is the same: my classmates were as well starting their third or fourth year of intensively studying music, because almost everybody goes to a Folkhogskola for about two years between graduating high school and starting the Bachelor at a university. In these schools, a student gets the opportunity to discover his motivation to whether or not choose for a higher education in arts. In the jazz/improvisation department it means studying the tradition in a disciplined school-system way with many collective lessons and side courses, combined with getting to taste from different aspects the artistic world has to offer besides a traditional approach. One could compare this to the Jazz Bachelor in LUCA campus Lemmens.

Because of that Folkhogskola-system, the musicians that get admitted at HSM are supposed to have a certain level which includes self-consciousness, technical skills, field experience and an idea of their artistic direction. Translated in the education at HSM, it means very few lessons and assignments, an open and diverse completion of the courses, projects and masterclasses, almost no exams and a very wide pool of artists of all kind of interests and goals. A lot of artistic freedom but on the flipside it means many own responsibilities, a grown up approach which is comparable with a Master education



in Belgium. Very few Swedes add a Master after their Bachelor. It would in most cases mean a 6th and 7th year of studying.

So, the first weeks I jammed some Realbook material as well as free improvised music.

No "jazz department", but "Improvisation". The name is not stolen, nor is the team of teachers and department-leaders. There is a professional musician for any kind of issue, almost anytime you want. You only have to count your amount of hours you have left

and book one or more with the teacher of your choice. No inspiration for composing at the moment but maybe later? Or need a deadline to put yourself to work? Just book an hour with top-class composer and pianist Peter Burman in a few weeks.

I am not only speaking to bass players when I advertise shortly for Anders Jormin. Questions of any kind can be asked to this amazing musician with countless experience and crazy technique. Even life-issues are not less in value to discuss.

What I would be practicing was quite quickly determined: in the first lesson Anders suggested a left-hand-technique on the bass which I was so eager to master I ended up with two overburdened arms and a break from playing bass for a month. I never practiced, practiced together and jammed as much as in the first semester in Göteborg. Also watching and participating in concerts has reached a temporary record. Because wow! My Facebook almost exploded from event invitations (concerts, jams, ...) and from having to notify me everyday with "you have – at least – three events coming up today". While my Facebook exploded quantitatively, I did qualitatively. Just like the education, Göteborg has a very wide scene. Free improvised music at Brötzn today but not having the mental space and energy for it? Let's go to Smedjan for that acoustic woodwind quartet and the solo singer, or maybe Oceanen for some live traditional African music. HSM has a World Music department with many great musicians of all different cultural styles, which is an eye-opener and an amazing opportunity to be at the source if you want to work with elements from other parts of the world.

Although the jazz scene in bigger clubs (that are mostly more focused on traditional jazz) is quite dominated by a rather fixed group, there are many opportunities for young musicians. I realized that cities like Gent have a similar thing to offer, but in my opinion the difference lies in the easiness of the accessibility to for example extreme free improvisation. Is it my former (lack of) experience or is it facts? I don't know, but I am sure my stay in Sweden convinced and motivated me to do my own thing.

A major reason I chose for Sweden was the need for input, stuff that would on the spot and through trail-and-error make me see, hear and feel radically different than earlier and bring me closer to use both the old and the new/unknown as a path to my own artistic voice. I thought I would find that up there, in the north. Or at least partly. And I did.

My Erasmus to Göteborg includes many milestones in my life. Beside the ones I've spoken of, I also discovered myself as a composer, arranger and bandleader. I recorded my own music and organized a concert tour in Belgium. Being away opened my eyes for the beauty of my home country, what it has to offer. And above all, it is not just a glossed fairytale that studying abroad means a lot on the path of self-creation. Discovering and reflecting on aspects of my personal and social self, has proven themselves as being pillars for my artistic development. Therefore I would recommend every artist to live life and study or travel abroad. Meet people. Use art to communicate beyond borders of any kind and use that to reach into the world.



(*) The Nordic Master in Jazz is a two-year long Master education where the students who get admitted (2 per school = 6 per academic year = 12 in whole Scandinavia because there are two different Nordic Masters) change school every semester, until you graduate in your last semester in the same school you started. The schools are Aarhus-Stockholm-Helsinki (performance) and Copenhagen-Göteborg-Oslo (composing). Definitely worth checking out !