

TEIS SEMEY

**WHERE
THE FENCE
IS THE
HIGHEST**

JAPAN SUITE

OVERTURE

SUMMER

FALL [DEAR NOVEMBER]

WINTER

SPRING

PERSONNEL

TEIS SEMEY [GUITAR]

FUENSANTA MÉNDEZ [VOCALS]

XAVI TORRES [PIANO]

NICOLÒ RICCI [TENOR SAXOPHONE]

JORT TERWIJN [DOUBLE BASS]

GUY SALAMON [DRUMS]

ARMED TO THE TEETH

PROLOGUE [ON THE THREE METAMORPHOSES]

PALM

KNUCKLES

FINGERTIPS

EPILOGUE [BLOOD IS COMPULSORY]

PERSONNEL

TEIS SEMEY [GUITAR]

MO VAN DER DOES [ALTO SAXOPHONE]

ALISTAIR PAYNE [TRUMPET]

JORT TERWIJN [DOUBLE BASS]

SUN-MI HONG [DRUMS]

I have a tendency against calling this music classical. It awakens some deep cringe within me when I see descriptions such as *jazz meets classical*. Therefore I don't completely love calling these two collections of pieces suites. However, I simply cannot think of anything more fitting, since they are 4-piece-long collections of songs written in the same time period, using the same material and with a common goal. Sometimes creation has a deadline, and to cancel the music because you can't think of what to call it would be stupid. But what is it really? The word "suite" comes with *classical* associations, while the music is also heavily focused towards improvisations and interplay. In fact, those are the most dynamic moments of the performance - we never know where it goes, and that holds true while recording too. The format lies: the recorded format gives you the impression that everything was pre-meditated. Of course it wasn't - but that doesn't make it less intentional.

We hold improvisation and interplay as a philosophical nucleus in the music. But what shall I call it? I have asked myself that question countless times.

A genre is rarely defined by the musicians themselves, and the fact of the label suggests that the time of the music *was* rather than *is*. Classical music is thus 18th-century music, and jazz is 20th-century American music. But what do we call "now music"?

But of course, genres are bigger than that - we recycle labels and let them grow with our culture. An expanding umbrella. The danger to music, I think, is the recording of it. We alienate what it is that happens when it is played,

and we make it seem that music is only organized sound. But isn't it more? It comes from a human - it is organized *by* someone. It is not the *what* but the *why*. Music as art needs a fundamental human experience at its core to qualify. By recording, we trap it as a genie in a bottle, and pretend that it is thereby finished. But it is created anew every single time it is heard and experienced. Just like reading a book, you allow the musicians, the music, and myself to come into existence as you listen. Can we surpass the human element in the creation process? Not if we want to stay human.

Armed to the Teeth is a three-part experience that later received a foreword and an epilogue. It has several layers of meaning that I try to convey: all three main parts are named after parts of the hand because of the extreme level of expression that organ of ours seems to have. **Palm** is the welcoming, the warmth, and the intimate. It is friendship and what we carry with - things and symbolically each other and our knowledge.

Knuckles are on the opposite side of the hand and symbolize war - destruction and fighting. **Fingertips** symbolize sensitivity; a beginning and an end at the same time. If we eat with our eyes, maybe we also see with our hands. To touch is to get to know and to open up.

While Palm, Knuckles and Fingertips have separate dedications, the suite is collectively dedicated to Nietzsche and the part of his book "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" titled "The Three Metamorphoses". It describes how the spirit can undergo three consecutive transformations if we let it. First, we become a camel: we carry the full load

of knowledge without questioning what or why. We take on without questioning and burden ourselves.

“What is heavy? Thus asks the weight-bearing spirit; thus it kneels down like the camel and wants to be well laden.”; “What is heaviest ... that I may take it upon me and rejoice in my strength”

But in the loneliest of deserts, the second metamorphosis occurs. The camel becomes a lion. It sheds the weight – we rebel against our old masters – we question and rip ourselves free.

What does it mean to be a lion? The metaphor speaks for itself. The lion is the king of the beasts. The lion spirit says “I will” – and that is the whole of the law. The camel becomes a lion when the subject of spiritual transformation, having ventured into the desert of human expectation, discovers that “God is dead”, and surmises that everything is permitted. In this moment, the individual realizes that there is nothing to forbid them from creating their own values, imposing their own will upon the world. But, in the desert of the real, the lion encounters a dragon, and “Thou Shalt” glistens on its scales. The dragon is Nietzsche’s image of societal norms. In the lion-stage, the subject of spiritual transformation must engage the dragon in mortal combat. One needs to be a lion in spirit, to defeat the law of “Thou Shalt”, and affirm the conditions of one’s flourishing.

There is no happiness in fighting dragons all one’s life, however. To complete the three metamorphoses, the lion must become a child. Maturity,

for Nietzsche, means rediscovering the seriousness one had as a child at play. The child is affirmative, open, and respects its history as well as its future. The child is a sacred “yes”, it “wills its own will”.

These pieces are odes to the modern era. Everything is interconnected, not only by technology but also by sharing the impending doom of pretty much everything. As with the pending climate change disaster, the increasing global gap between rich and poor, and a growing sense of losing grasp on what is factual, it feels kind of doomy to live these days, and maybe that is a reminder to stay true and authentic in the art we make. There is maybe a responsibility by artists to not only stay true and authentic to our past and herald the greats that came before us, while also stay facing forward and owing up to the future. Only by taking the past, making it a real and respected part of ourselves and manifesting it in our future can we move forward and beyond petty destructivity.

Japan Suite was written and composed for the Entrée Horizons event at the Royal Concertgebouw Amsterdam. I was simply asked to compose 30–45 minutes of music on “Japanese impressions”; basically it was on Japonism in European art during the 1800s. Think of Van Gogh and his beautiful Japan-inspired paintings. What I find very beautiful about it, is that Van Gogh never went to Japan. He acquired dozens of woodblock paintings that had gotten popular in Japan, and studied them endlessly. He let himself get completely carried away with those paintings, and built his fantasies about what Japan was like.

That, to me, signals one of the most beautiful things about art; upon engaging with it, we create a world around it, that in turn becomes almost equally as the real world when it manifests itself into art.

I perpetuate that by trying to get inspired by Japanese art and Van Gogh's art the same way as he was inspired; by seeing and fully experiencing, borrowing attributes and letting them bury themselves deep into the core of his compositions. I found that lots of parameters of composition are shared between composing in painting and music-making: perspectives, motives, colors, seriality and such, all can be easily translated into music.

I was heavily inspired by Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji. It is a series of landscape prints by the Japanese ukiyo-e artist Hokusai (1760-1849). The series depicts Mount Fuji from different locations and in various seasons and weather conditions. It is to me a very pure and beautiful idea to recreate an object that many times, by experiencing it from different places. Japan Suite represents my views of the ocean, and every piece holds a different location.

Summer ocean (Denmark's west coast), **Fall** ocean (the Baltic sea in Estonia), **Winter** ocean (experienced in northern Iceland), and **Spring** ocean (The Hague in the Netherlands). The ocean as an object holds an extra symbolic value to me, as it is always the same water everywhere in the world, yet never the same.

To create is intrinsically important in order to insist on our humanity.

Creating is an act of exercising a sense of freedom. It is the creation of something that matters, more than the static of being it and therefore as a musician I create. We must busy ourselves with the process of creation as the process of living, rather than being content with having created - having been born. I am proud and thankful that I got to give birth to this music alongside my musicians. Thanks to my musicians, TRPTK, and Brendon Heinst, the music can now be created by you. I wish you the best of musical experiences with it!

- Teis Semey

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CREDITS

Recording & mastering	Brendon Heinst
Assistant engineer	Luuk Meijssen
Cover art	Heleen Berkhof
Layout	Brendon Heinst
Liner notes	Teis Semey

EQUIPMENT

Microphones	Sonodore RCM-402 Neumann KM-104 Rens Heijnis modified Schoeps MK2H Rens Heijnis modified Neumann M149 JZ Vintage 67
AD/DA Conversion	Merging Technologies HAPI
Monitoring	KEF Blade Two loudspeakers Hegel H30 amplifiers Sennheiser HD800s headphones
Cabling	Furutech custom microphone cables Furutech LineFlux XLR interlinks Furutech NanoFlux NCF power cables Furutech FS-a36 loudspeaker cables
Misc.	JCAT M12 Switch Gold JCAT NET Card FEMTO Furutech NCF Boosters

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All recordings are done in DXD (352.8 kHz 32 bits) in immersive 5.1-channel surround sound, and all masters are generated from the original DXD Studio Master, without dynamic compression or limiting of the signal. In both stereo and surround sound, our aim is to truly recreate the original venue and atmosphere.



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