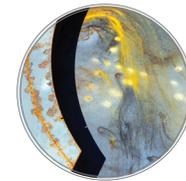


Part Two

VISION



4: LONDON



ARAM: I'm interested in the early guitar pieces you composed.

TOMMIE: The first was "Aforismer." Bo Strömberg suggested the title, and at that point, he suggested I study with Sune Smedeby.⁶ It was my first fumbling attempt at musical modernism, that piece. I had a record by Julian Bream with guitar music from the 1970s, and I was fascinated by his ability to transform this rather inaccessible music into something exciting. It encouraged me to go out of the tonal world and find a new language. "Aforismer" was a sort of theme and variation of a melody. Bo suggested I send it to the composer Per Lindgren in Stockholm—he was a former student of Bo's—and he replied briefly, encouraging me to go on and write more.

ARAM: What were your thoughts on what you wanted to do, musically, beyond the guitar?

⁶ Sune Smedeby (1934–1998) was a Swedish composer and author of books on music theory.

TOMMIE: I had an urge to read all I could find about Beethoven, Bach, and Dowland—scores, biographies, to learn as much as possible. Julian Bream inspired me a lot at this time. I'm mainly thinking of his way of playing Dowland—it's almost demonic. His importance for the guitar in the twentieth century was like Horowitz was for the piano, with an expressive virtuosity far beyond technique. Segovia doesn't even get close, in my opinion. There was something about Dowland's music that went straight to my heart. He expressed sadness, joy, and longing far beyond words. I tried to compose similarly but didn't yet have a language of my own. Then, I met John Mills, the English guitarist, who lived in London. Bream said about his sound that it was England's most beautiful tone. That meeting with John and his striving to achieve this beautiful sound changed my direction.

ARAM: You went to London to meet John?

TOMMIE: No, he came to visit Halmstad to teach a master class. He was invited by Apoyando and paid for by the ABF.⁷ All the guitarists in Halmstad participated, including several of Bo's students. I played Fernando Sor's "Variations on a Theme by Mozart." Lots of guitarists from Scandinavia were there listening. I was dead nervous and didn't consider myself to be very good. But Mills came up afterward and said, "I think you should come to one of my master classes at Burton Manor."

⁷ ABF (Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund) was a study association for adults and children strongly supported by the Swedish Social Democratic Party. Its goal was to make education available to union members, but anyone could sign up for the courses, which were mostly held in the evenings.

Photo: Tommie Haglund



John Mills, c. 1983

ARAM: Was it a shock that John Mills came up to you saying this?

TOMMIE: It really was. Someone playing in a manner I had never heard before. So much poetry and beauty, but also a bit wild and unrestrained.

ARAM: So, you went to Burton Manor in Cheshire prior to living in London? What was that like?

TOMMIE: Yes, I flew into Manchester. John turned up at the airport in a big blue Japanese car with four female guitar students in it. I sat with them in the back seat all the way to Burton Manor. I'd been to London before, but not to the rest of England. It's idyllic

and old-fashioned. I felt very at home there, particularly with the people. The master classes were very interesting and of the highest quality, but the evening concerts were more like variety shows, with professional and amateur participants on the stage at the same time. It was so liberating to be in a context where jokes and seriousness were mixed—so English. There was one very good American guitarist, Scott Saari, and a Dutch guitarist, Cobie Smit, who was later to become John's wife; there was a zookeeper named Frank and a computer engineer named Steven—they were amateur guitarists. The amateurs laughed at themselves. Frank read poems—typical English humor with great conviction that I loved. And there were three elderly ladies on the stage, trying to play through *Elizabethan Serenade* arranged for a guitar trio. They had to stop all the time, and the audience roared with laughter and almost fell off their chairs. I also took lessons in baroque interpretation with Evelyn Nallen, who is a renowned recorder player. John's humor was very much like Monty Python. I wanted to communicate music the same way he did, with great depth but also relaxed and free. I realized also what a perfectionist he could be in a way I'd never seen before. The next step for me, I realized, was to arrange to study with John in London.

ARAM: Did Helen go with you to London?

TOMMIE: No, she stayed here. She had a job with the university. We briefly thought of moving to England, but there was great unemployment in England during the Thatcher years. I went to the bank and took a loan for a sum that could keep me going a while. You could do that in those days. John said, "Well, you can be put up in something called the Cedars Guesthouse" in Kingston, close to Long Ditton, where he lived. It was owned by Lord William

Townsend—generally called Bill. He was a huge fellow, very kind, walking about in a worn-out sweater, living in a little room with a bed and a TV. But he owned a big mansion outside of town and a green Jaguar. He couldn't stand his wife, so he ran the guesthouse during the week. He roomed with a little, retired sea captain named Don Christie, who probably lived there for free. He was 70 or 75 and loved strong curries. They both loved classical guitar music.

ARAM: What did they think of you as a Swede?

TOMMIE: You know the English. They're obsessed with class, at least in a way that's alien to Swedes. So, after a few days of living there, Bill asked about my parents and their background. I told him, well, my father worked for NOHAB, the company that installed the Swedish press system for *The Daily Telegraph* and *Financial Times*. Dad went over there for a year or two to supervise in the late 1970s. "Where did he live?" they asked. "St. John's Wood," I said. "Ahh," he said, "that's a top-notch place." So, I was instantly one of his own. Stupid, but that's how they adopted me.

Most of the time, it was easy to get along with Bill and Don Christie, and I could see that they wanted to help me with practical matters. One Christmas, Helen and I ran the guesthouse while Bill and Don went abroad. But I couldn't stay there the whole time. It would be too expensive, and Bill didn't have any other estates in the city, but he knew people who did. "So," he said, "Why don't you get elected into the Conservative Club?"

"OK, how will that happen since I'm Swedish?"

"Well," he said, "you phone the Conservative Party in Sweden," which was the Moderata Samlingspartiet, "become a member of that, and they send the form over here." So, I phoned and joined

the Conservative Party! I had them send something to the Tories, and I became a member of the Conservative Club in Kingston. I went there; it was an aristocratic sort of place. I met the fellow who owned the houses. "I'll put you up," he said. "I've got a big room you can hire with a kitchen." I shared the toilet with a lot of people, and I had to put coins in a machine to get heating every day. England was so backward in those days! And in a way, it still is. You'd come home from the pub in the winter and just drop, and in the morning, oh no, you've forgotten to put the coins in, and it was freezing. You could see your breath. But there I lived and practiced. There was this old-fashioned dining table in the middle of the room, and at night, I had to take the cushions from the dining chairs and put them under the bed mattress; otherwise it would collapse, and I'd fall out. But none of this bothered me at all. It allowed me to do what I loved.

ARAM: So, by this time, you had started lessons with John.

TOMMIE: Yes, when I arrived in London to have the first lesson with John, we played together, and he said, "Come on, set yourself free, and don't be afraid of making mistakes." He was in his thirties then and was living at home with his parents because he was traveling so much. We became lifelong friends. I think the reason we connected on so many different levels was that we shared this romantic, old-fashioned attitude about music and an absurd sense of humor.

When he was touring around England, I traveled with him, and we played together. We went out with these eccentric characters, people you can only meet in England. I met one guy from New Zealand who hated the British system; his name was Fred McEwen.

This was the Thatcher era, as I mentioned. The Falklands had just ended. They had invented the Harrier jet in the sixties—you know, the plane that could take off and land vertically. Fred worked at the factory where they made them. I used to see him at the pub in the evenings. “You should see these planes,” he said. “You should see the interior. There is a big hangar where they have them cut in half so you can see through all the workings.” “I can’t get in there,” I said, “I’d be considered a spy.” “No, no,” he said, “I’ll get you in. You can borrow my brown coat and a cap, and then you buy a pork pie in plastic. You take the bus up to the factory and go to the entrance where the workers come in. You go there at 12 o’clock when they have their lunch. When they go out, you go in, and I’ll go with you.” I got in there, but it was dangerous; there were a lot of people. We went into this enormous hangar with glass walls, and behind the glass, there were people supervising or whatever, but they were eating. So, we got into the hangar and went up a ladder and could look at these planes. Fantastic construction, all these tubes. I didn’t understand anything. Had I been an engineer or spy, I could have photographed everything.

I met so many other strange characters in those days—people from the aristocracy, people who had been in the Second World War. The elderly gentleman who took my room when I was to go home had been in the war as a bomber pilot. He invited me back once he had moved in. He was the stereotype for the old British military, and now the only thing he did was paint. I expected to see something pastoral or some portraits, but instead, the walls were covered with paintings of bombing raids. I could only guess what went on in the old man’s head.



Photo: Tommie Haglund

Outdoor view of the residence at Cranes Park, Surbiton Hill, UK, c. 1983, one of multiple residences Tommie inhabited.

ARAM: All of this was while you were studying with John?

TOMMIE: Yes, I studied with John every week unless he was on tour abroad. And always at the end of the lesson, the door opened, and you’d see two hands with a tray, and on the tray, there was tea with apple pie and custard. That was John’s mum, and it signaled the end of the lesson, and then he’d put on these 78 rpm discs. He had an entire wall covered with them, most in mint condition. He’d play some, and I realized music was made in a very different way than the way we are making it now. When the 78 rpm discs were made, it was a single take. Rhythmically, they were so free and fiery. It was there that I first heard the music of Delius.

ARAM: At some point, did you decide you would compose seriously for more than just guitar?

TOMMIE: Oh yes. When I heard Delius' music, I realized I would not be a guitarist. Delius' sound world was an invitation to start composing again after being totally focused on playing the guitar. We had dinner in my flat for John and his then-to-be wife, Cobie Smit. And he brought a cassette with a recording of the 78 rpm disc, the Pougnet-Beecham recording. The batteries in my tape recorder were low, but John was so insistent that I hear Delius that we went to a petrol station to buy more batteries. I'd never heard music like that in my life, but John really wanted to introduce it to me. He knew this very personal musical language would appeal to me. He even gave me a cigar and a glass of port, and I heard Delius' Violin Concerto from 1916 with the surface noise, which added a layer of mystery to it. Delius was something completely new. When I came to John Mills, a whole new world opened, with romanticism and free feeling, tempo and agogics,⁸ and an overwhelming sense of harmony that would have an enormous impact.

ARAM: So, the first time you heard Delius was with John?

TOMMIE: No, actually, I had bought a record when I was eighteen, in Lund. It had Delius' miniatures, but that wasn't why I bought the record. It also had Vaughan Williams' *Lark Ascending* and William Walton's incidental music for a Shakespeare play. That's why I bought the record, but I did listen to Delius' miniatures. *Summer Night on the River* was also there. I found the harmonies a

⁸ Fluctuation of tempo within musical phrasing rather than by increasing dynamic stress.

bit restless, especially compared to Vaughan Williams and Walton, which are like easy listening. The Delius wasn't easy listening. But they were small works, and they didn't tempt me to go further. I didn't know at the time he had written larger-scale works.

ARAM: But the real beginning of your interest in him was actually with Mills.

TOMMIE: Yes, it really was when John Mills played the 78 rpm discs for me in London. I really began paying attention then. I did know who he was, but I didn't know anything about him.

ARAM: What of Delius did you hear with John?

TOMMIE: The Violin Concerto and the opening of the *Song of Summer*, which was taken by dictation to Eric Fenby. I'll never forget my first impression of the D major string chord when the cello and bass played the notes G#-A-D-C. I asked John to dub *North Country Sketches* onto tape and then all the other pieces he had. I wasn't at all disturbed by the surface noise. I think the radio noise from my hospital experience added to the otherworldly feeling.

5: ÅRHUS, DENMARK



ARAM: After you'd moved out of the flat and the bomber pilot had moved in, where did you go?

TOMMIE: I went back to Halmstad for a time and later returned to London for more lessons.

ARAM: What made you decide to go to the conservatory in Denmark?

TOMMIE: Leif Christensen, a professor from the Royal Academy in Århus, put on a concert in Halmstad arranged by Apoyando. He played some very curious and difficult pieces by Giulio Regondi, a nineteenth-century virtuoso—some newly discovered compositions. They didn't say anything much to me, but it's very virtuosic, and it meant a lot to Leif. But there was nothing in Leif's playing that captured the warmth and power that was so natural to John Mills or Julian Bream. Anyway, he stayed with us, and one night, he heard me practice, and he suggested I should come to Århus to study. I wasn't convinced. But then, when I returned from London, I thought, well, I probably won't be accepted, but I'll do this

audition and see what level I'm at. I took the ferry across to Århus and played for the jury. I wasn't nervous at all. I just really wanted to get as much sound as I could out of the guitar. It was difficult for foreigners to be admitted to the conservatory because there was a quota system, and you had to beat all the Danes. But I ended up with the highest score!

ARAM: What did you play?

TOMMIE: A very fine composition by John Mills—an homage to Delius, a rather complicated piece, then some Spanish music by Torroba and *Tombeau D'Monsieur Hartig* and *Fantasia* by the baroque composer Silvius Leopold Weiss. All very poetic music. The headmaster of the school came up to me and said in Danish, "Do you want to be a concert guitarist?" I said, "Well, maybe." But then I was a bit upset when I heard from a student that my playing needed to be tamed. It was too wild. But anyway, I just ended up in Århus, a place I never really wanted to be, and I found myself surrounded by guitarists who didn't know anything about symphonic music. They didn't know Mahler and didn't know Tchaikovsky. They knew them as names only.

ARAM: What did they know?

TOMMIE: Standard works for the guitar. Fernando Sor, Walton, Britten, Giuliani, but no music for other instruments. And, of course, a couple of Bach lute suites and the Spanish twentieth-century repertoire.

ARAM: And Rodrigo?

TOMMIE: Yes, Rodrigo. I moved down there, and I couldn't understand a word they were saying. I never understood Danish. I do now. I speak fluently now. So, I moved into a student corridor

built in the '70s—very modernistic, concrete walls and needle-felt carpet. There was a big common space with a public kitchen. It was a collectivist, half-socialist situation. There were fourteen of us, so every fourteenth day I bought all the food and cooked for everyone. You had to do that. I didn't want to at first, but this big Danish guy came in and said, "Now listen, you. We're doing it like this here." Those were the rules, so I did it.

ARAM: By this point, you knew you only wanted to compose.

TOMMIE: Yes, I gradually started to question why I was there. I wanted only to compose. So, then I had my first lesson with this Danish teacher, Erling Møldrup. He was a splendid guy—sadly, he died just last year [2016]. He played lots of Per Nørgård, which interested me a great deal, but it wasn't the music of my heart. Møldrup had a solid technique, but self-expression was maybe not his strength. He might as well have been a Swiss watchmaker for the way he performed—a lot of care for details but no sort of romantic elasticity like with John Mills. He loved guitar music more than anything else, you could tell. He could play the most difficult pieces. The first lesson I had with him, he came in and said, "Oh, it's the arch enemy," meaning the wars between Sweden and Denmark in the 1600s. Well, that's a welcome, I thought. But he took to me. I had my lessons at his home. Sometimes, when we were at the Academy, we had a lesson at 10 o'clock in the morning, and after that, we'd go down to the canteen, and he always ordered beef tartare.

ARAM: How were you perceived at the Academy?

TOMMIE: I was considered a very odd person at the Academy. I was interested in 78 rpm discs. I wanted to talk about Mahler,



Photo: Martin Buch

Tommie Haglund with his Volvo PV outside the conservatory's student dormitory, Århus, c. 1984

Delius, and big orchestral works. They had a fantastic library with all the records you can imagine, but I was the only guitarist in there listening to anything. I didn't fit in. They were all about their fingerings, and there I was, walking around with a cassette of the Delius violin concerto in my pocket. I thought they were very German in their approach—in a negative sense. Very academic, and you were not allowed to express sensuality, wildness, or uncontrolled feelings.

ARAM: Apollo without Dionysus.

TOMMIE: Yes, a castrated Apollo, at least to my taste. [Laughs]. It was horrible. Then, I met this cellist, John Ehde, who became a life-changing friend. It was for him that I eventually wrote the

cello concerto. He was sitting in this listening room with his followers—he was the star pupil; he was a real Romantic. He played cello and really gave it everything. Anyway, he used to sit in there with a bunch of admirers listening to old recordings with Stokowski. When the music stopped, I asked, “Have you heard Delius?” “Yes, I played his *Brigg Fair* once,” he said. “But have you heard this?” I asked and put in the cassette tape with the violin concerto. He sat there, hypnotized. It was the first time I experienced someone listening to music with his whole body. That shook me up—to be completely physically absorbed.

String instrumentalists and pianists, like at the conservatory, saw guitarists as second-rate musicians. But John and I were both Swedes, and we became very good friends. Night after night, we listened to Delius, and we discovered a lot of new works we didn’t know. We formed a strong bond, and as I began to grow more distant from the guitarists, I saw more of the violinists, singers, pianists, and cellists—talking with them about what I considered to be the real thing. I learned a lot from them. The guitar music from the 1800s to the early 1900s is mainly pedagogues written for amateur events or whatever—though there is some music by Sor I really love. I mean, at best, you had Julian Bream encouraging Benjamin Britten and Hans Werner Henze to write for the guitar, but apart from that, you haven’t got much for the guitar other than Bach transcriptions and Dowland.

ARAM: So why did you spend so much time playing guitar if it’s so limited?

TOMMIE: I loved the sound. It’s different from the piano and violin—with a guitar, you have direct contact with the strings. But

I think it was the sound that attracted me, particularly the way Mills played. Master guitar makers used to regularly phone John Mills to try out the sound of new instruments, and he would send me when he couldn’t go. Once, I overheard him say to a guitar maker in Norwich, “Tommie sounds just like me, so if you don’t mind, I’ll send him instead.” And I went.

ARAM: It sounds like your discovery of Delius was also the discovery of a new sensuality.

TOMMIE: Yes, so I discovered romantic music, and I attended the composition classes and was really disappointed. It was so academic, so . . . Boulez⁹—the more difficult it sounded, the better. The less you understood, the better. That was my perception of it then, anyway.

ARAM: “Who cares if you listen?”

TOMMIE: Exactly. I thought I saw through all that— not to put myself above it. But, I thought, I want to compose, and if music is purely academic, I don’t want to do it. Why am I here? Then, I had this vision and an animated argument with this religious student.

ARAM: Who was that?

TOMMIE: Anne-Christin Strömgren. She was a very gifted pianist. I remember that she played lots of Chopin and other similar music. She helped me a lot because I was quite handicapped with practical things, such as buying food or taking care of myself. If I became nervous or upset, she could calm me down. It was no love

9 Pierre Boulez (1925–2016) was a French composer and conductor and a dominant figure in post-war continental music, especially serialism and the avant-garde. Haglund’s comment refers to a tendency for his compositions to be dogmatically modernist.

affair, nothing like that, but one evening, she explained to me that she was religious, Christian.

ARAM: What denomination?

TOMMIE: Oh, Lutheran, Swedish Church, I think. It bothered me a bit, and one evening, I started to question her: “What’s the point? How can you believe such things just to escape reality . . . ?”

ARAM: What then followed?

TOMMIE: What followed was...well, I wouldn’t call it a quarrel, but I was very agitated, and then I left. We’d been at her apartment, and I got back late to my own room. I was by the window—there was this big glass wall—and it must have been about 2 o’clock in the morning. I was awake. I was standing up, staring through the window, and it was just black, but I had these things before my eyes. It was like looking up into the sky, and it was as if I were racing from the earth into the heavens, over the treetops. I saw the leaves. It was so vivid, and there was no sound. I remember a very clear blue sky and green leaves, and I was heading up to the sky. I felt that this was something spiritual. Someone or something had talked to me. That was my explanation. So, I just made the decision instantly that I was going to only compose. I’d never heard of hypnagogic states. I didn’t know what that was. I thought I was going mad or something. It lasted for about fifteen or twenty minutes. But I wasn’t afraid. I was just fascinated, and I wondered what was going on. I thought then, there is a God, and he was telling me not to go on as I was anymore and that there is another reality you have no idea about... or maybe you have, but you’re sort of dismissing it all the time. That’s how I interpreted it then. I wouldn’t describe it as an utterly religious experience, but I could have become a religious

fanatic as a result. I might have felt I’d been “saved” or started to talk about God everywhere I went, but I didn’t. I kept it to myself. It really shook me. It really shook me. I admitted to myself, OK, there most likely is a God, and there is certainly another reality. And that was what Anne-Christin had been trying to say to me all night while we argued. And it was that night I decided to go back to Sweden and do what I needed to do—to compose. I stopped being a guitarist. I packed my bags. Straight after the vision faded, I went to the closet and packed everything I owned. I took the train to Grenå in the morning, then the ferry over to Varberg, and then the train to Halmstad. It seems radical, but that’s how strong the vision was.

ARAM: During that experience, were you seeing deeper into yourself or deeper into the external world?

TOMMIE: Both. It was an interior journey, but it felt like I was traveling physically toward the sky. So, it was both interior and exterior. I was awake. My eyes were opened. I wasn’t going to sleep or anything.

ARAM: At the time, you were anti- or un-religious.

TOMMIE: Yes, at the time, I was very anti-religious, but I think that was just verbally. I was very Delian, very Nietzschean. We’re all vegetables.

ARAM: By this time, you’d made the connection between Delius and Nietzsche?

TOMMIE: Yes. That was Nietzsche speaking. It wasn’t really me. It was Nietzsche speaking.

ARAM: What year did you leave the conservatory?

TOMMIE: I think 1985.

ARAM: You'd already been writing music for about a decade by this time?

TOMMIE: Yes, I tried to compose, but it didn't come to much of anything. I didn't believe in myself. I didn't believe I had any ability to write with substance. I didn't believe anyone would care to look at it. I found it embarrassing. I didn't want to approach a real musician to look at my work. I felt I wasn't schooled enough to write it seriously.

ARAM: The irony of your fleeing the conservatory in order to dedicate your life to composing music won't be lost on anyone.

TOMMIE: [Laughs]. Anyway, I arrived home and woke Helen up. I came into the house in the morning—she didn't know I was coming. I really scared her. She wondered what had happened. I told her I just wanted to compose. I'd almost finished the studies, but I couldn't do it anymore.

ARAM: What was her reaction?

TOMMIE: She was supportive in a way. I said I'd go to the evening school and see if they would hire me to teach guitar.

ARAM: Where was this? Which institution?

TOMMIE: Here, in Halmstad. You see, here in Sweden, they have these evening classes. They're for everyone at the *Studieförbundet*.¹⁰ You could learn English, German, French, piano, guitar, hunting, anything. And I think if you could gather five people, you could get money from the state. All the big political parties had their own schools. There are different organizations running

them: political groups, religious groups, and so on, but they're all non-profit. So, I went to one of those schools, and I knew a woman named Gunilla Inger, so she hired me. I'd start teaching at half past four in the afternoon and work till 10, teaching mostly elderly ladies to play Tom Dooley, that sort of thing. Bo Strömberg and I had published a guitar teaching method with these sorts of tunes. We were starting a publishing company, he and I. We got it off the ground, but it faded out because it was impossible to earn a living selling guitar music.

¹⁰ Studieförbundet is a study association supported by, among many others, the Farmers Association and Nature Preservation Society. Its charter is politically and religiously neutral.