



Jimi Tenor Sähkömies

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CD / LP



With *Sähkömies*, Jimi Tenor released his legendary solo debut in 1994 on Puu, a spin-off of the Finnish label Sähkö Recordings founded by Tommi Grönlund and Mika Vainio in 1993. Recorded in Tenor's former home in New York, the album offers a previously unheard mixture of drum machine driven, electronic sounds and Sun Ra-inspired jazz. Written, recorded and produced entirely by Tenor in his apartment, the pieces have lost none of their spontaneous, roughcast charm to this day.

The record combines lo-fi electronics with Jimi Tenor's typical smoky saxophone playing, offering a fascinating listening experience that documents an artist who is full of curiosity and the joy of experimentation.

For the 30th anniversary of *Sähkömies*, Bureau B is thrilled to make this special album available again on LP and CD.

How did this idea of a solo album come about after you had previously played mainly with your band Jimi Tenor And His Shamans?

Jimi Tenor: I had no intention whatsoever to do a solo album. I was planning to become a photographer since I realized that trying to survive making music like Jimi Tenor And His Shamans would be hard. In Germany we could have played some gigs, but at that point my confidence in a career in music was super low. I had a job as a tourist photographer, so I was able to buy photo equipment and also some drum machines and synths. I bought an Oberheim DX and a Roland 606. My girlfriend Tiina Huczowski was doing dance performances in a club called El Sensorium. The club was run by a group of young people from Argentina and it was mostly like a pop up club. It would happen in various venues. A very arty club. I loved it. So I made music for those dance performances. I recorded them with my ghetoblaster on cassettes. Hearing my music in a club PA-system gave me confidence. It sounded really good!

At that time, Tommi Grönlund and Matti Knaapi were doing a project called Ambient Radio. It was a temporary FM radio that would play non stop ambient music. They needed a lot of original music for that project. Tommi had heard some of my music for Tiina's performances and asked me to send as much music as possible to be used in the ambient project. It was a very liberating task because I thought that almost any artsy music could be considered ambient. So I sent Tommi a lot of material. I had plenty, because I was doing recordings in my home studio almost every day. I had recently bought my first sequencer that could run a Korg MS20. It was fascinating. My own electronic music studio!

Some weeks after the ambient project Tommi called me and said he might want to release an album of some of my tapes. Of course I was excited. A great thing was that I was in the US and Tommi was in Finland. I had zero input in the track selection. I know I would have chosen the wrong tracks and that would have been it for my music career.

Was this sound between electronic music and jazz a conscious decision or did this instrumentation arise mainly from the circumstances of recording an album all by yourself?

Jimi Tenor: My setup was primitive. I could have only one sequence running in the Korg MS20 so I felt I needed to expand the sound of my recordings using acoustic sounds. I don't think I had a flute at that moment and also my sax didn't have a mouthpiece. Looking back it's hard for me to understand what I was thinking. Why didn't I have my flute or get a mouthpiece? I got lucky when I was looking for some props in Canal street for one of my photo shoots; I found a plastic tenor sax mouthpiece in a box that was full of screws and bolts. I think it cost me 50 cents or something. It didn't have a ligature so I used gaffer tape to attach the reed to the mouthpiece. I know it's ridiculous, but that's how it went. I started to play sax again and played it on *Sähkömies* on plenty of the tracks.

I guess what could explain my behaviour was that I really thought my career in music was over. Or at least if I would end up doing music it would be 100% electronic. So saxophone and flute didn't play any role in that scenario. I can't remember exactly, but I think I was doing a soundtrack for my friend's movie and I needed saxophone for one song. I had the mouthpiece now, so I figured I might as well play some sax on some of the new material I was doing for the ambient radio. I had a Sennheiser 421 and I used an old tape recorder as a mic pre-amp so I got a nice sound.

But yes, I thought my electronic music tracks needed something more. Something to separate me from others. Also I felt that the music we heard in the dance music record shops and night clubs was too cold for me. I wanted to make music that was more personal and even sensual.

How do you remember the recordings back then? What was your setup like?

Jimi Tenor: I had two separate setups. One was midi and the other one was sync. I ran the sync setup with a Roland 606 and I also had a Korg Super Percussion running as a slave. I triggered the Korg Polysix with the Super Percussion. Polysix has a nice sequencer for chords as well, so that allowed me to get some changes with the sync setup. If I was running midi, I would use a Yamaha QY10 as the main clock and I had the Oberheim DX running as a slave. I also had a Casio CZ101 hooked in midi. My mixer was a keyboard line mixer with one aux. So most of the times, I processed all sound before they would go into the mixer. I used the hell out of that small setup. I had some cool effect pedals like Rockman delay, Boss sampling delay, Electroharmonix chorus. So since I recorded everything on a cassette or hi-fi video tape, everything had to be live. I would make loads of takes to get all mixing and sax playing right. That was a good exercise.

In what period of time were the recordings made? Did you experiment for a long time or was the process very spontaneous?

Jimi Tenor: Everything was done 1993/94. I worked really fast. Like an action painter! I think I was in a flow state non stop for several years in a row. I am actually serious about that. I felt that life was amazing and the best thing about life was the studio setup. But I was also doing photography very intensively at that point. And going to night clubs. No rest! Zero.

How did the release on Sähkö respectively Puu come about?

Jimi Tenor: Tommi thought my music wasn't electronic enough to be strictly on the main Sähkö label. So he created a new sub-label for my album. Sähkö means „electricity“ in Finnish and Puu means „wood“. When I heard the finished album I couldn't believe that I had made all those tracks. For me it was the first time in my life that I was releasing music that actually sounded great! I had recorded everything so fast and a lot was happening anyway everyday, so I had already forgotten about a lot of the tracks I had made. The album sounded fresh to me. Like somebody else's work. It sounded like a strange organist was playing in the corner of a restaurant. In the end of the evening he starts to sing Take Me Baby!

How do you look back on this album today?

Jimi Tenor: This album literally changed my life. I dropped all ideas about becoming a photographer. It was going to be music. I never looked back. Sure, I have done Sähkö The Movie and some small videos and photo projects as a hobby, but I concentrated on music from that point on. I love the way my influences can be heard in very subtle ways here and there. But I managed to keep my own style. And of course this album has Take Me Baby, which is my most popular track.

— Daniel Jahn & Jimi Tenor, March 2024

Tracklisting

A1 Theme Sax
A2 Crazy Hammond
A3 Union Ave
A4 Take Me Baby

B1 Matti B
B2 Teräsmies
B3 Voimamies
B4 Travelin Dem Spaceways

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