

The Album

- Beginning

In the beginning, the process was just about documenting various sonic textures and inspirations. As a creative step at the Svaram sound studio, I would invite artists for a recording session, and we would explore until we hit a moment of musical flow and would then go a little further catching a song line or an inspiring melody. About 2 years ago, I would not have been able to see the unfolding golden thread that was magically weaving it all.

- Process

Each of the songs has a unique seed and this further inspires a momentum of its own until we were satisfied with it.

- Inspiration / Expression

It took as little as a sound sample lasting a few seconds to then inform and let the rest of the song unfold around it.

- Collaborators / Artists Involved

None of the artists were curated for a specific song. It is the momentary connection and sheer will of all of us to create something special which invited us to offer to the unknown space that was unfolding ahead of us.

- What did the collaboration contribute to the music?

A unique idea, a fresh perspective, a grounding element for each of the songs, diversity.

- Time-line

This project has been in the process since January 2019. In November 2019, I collaborated with a producer and artist from Sikkim, who helped me weave it together. We then had the good fortune of listening to the album with a top producer from Woodstock, Julie Last, who has worked with Joni Mitchell, Michael Jackson and John Lennon to name a few. Her discerning ears took us a step further in fine tuning this musical puzzle. It was finally completed in December 2020.

- Journey

Making this album has been an adventure so far. The collaborative nature of it, is what brings in the mysterious element to it, as one can never predict where it is headed. The ever unfolding puzzle is constantly planting seeds and ideas, waiting to unfold and bear fruits.

- USP

Each song has the potential and inspiration to unfold in a new and unique way. Essential building blocks of produced music have been covered and further exploration can open bridges to music education, music for wellness, alternate music production perspectives, live performances, art installations, dance, collaborations, voice classes, online training sessions and so on.

- Niche

The organic nature of the found sound and the minimal yet supportive nature of the synthesized sounds, create a space for the listener to travel with the music and go on an inner journey full of colours and visuals, if one chooses to listen with closed eyes.

- Overview

Working on this project is always enriching and exciting as it holds a key to a new approach to my field of work. It helps me think out of the box in terms of how one can harvest and make the best out of a commodity such as music which can so easily drown out in the band-width of up and coming music. It is an exploration of how one can sustain through the release of new music.

Songs : Origin Story, Process, Instruments, Artist Collaboration, Other ...

01) Stotra

Story Line :

An offering to listen within, to listen to the stillness and peace that is ...

Origin / Process :

Picture a noisy showroom at Svaram. In the midst of it all, Mahesh Vinayakram, son of legendary Ghatam player and Grammy award winner, Vikku Vinayakram, walks into the showroom. We bump into each other and he shares his urge to sing. It so happened to be an auspicious day, Maha Shivaratri 2019. Heading to his request and racing against time to catch the song line in his heart, I rushed to set-up a microphone while paying close attention to the sounds in the show-room. We needed a drone to sing over, and I chose the beautiful Svaram sound-bed which I had recorded at an earlier moment that year. He came in, sat down and took a few moments to tune-in... after which he sang, an auspicious and beautiful offering. It was clear that one of the pieces he improvised on would then go on to be the opening of the album. "Isai Ketakavarangal", in essence it means, come listen to the music.

Name :

The name Stotra in Sanskrit means an Ode, a Hymn of praise. An apt title for the opening inviting people into this offering of sound, an ode to music.

Instruments :

- In the song one can hear a beautiful male Carnatic voice, dancing over a rich bed of sounds produced by the string bed, crafted at Svaram.
- The voice offers warmth and has a very soothing nature
- The string bed offers the grounding and opens the ears to a rich pallet of frequencies

Credits :

Mahesh Vinayakram : Vocals

Varun Rao : Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer

Karan Moktan : Music Production

Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments

Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer

02) Enchanted

Story Line :

A few sonic explorers walked out into nature gathering allies and sounds that reflect and represent their inner qualities. With the intent of weaving these sounds together, tuning into our individual inner landscape by the sea at the Quiet healing centre.

With one foot on the earth and another in a realm of enchantment we found ourselves dancing into a new dawn, transforming shadows following and from the ever present inner peace, awakening in enchantment.

Origin :

The elements of this song were recorded in an interesting music-improvisation session back in 2018. During my Sound Healing Training with Svaram, in one of the sessions, we were split into three groups. We then took a walk through the landscape of the Quiet healing Centre in Auroville gathering natural sources of sound like leaves, feathers, dried seed pods and anything else that we were drawn to. We were then invited to share and discuss a theme that was present for us at the time. We then played our found instruments along with some supporting instruments, to express our theme in sound. The emerging sound-scape was rich and diverse, packed with strong intent and energy. The story which emerged from the 3 groups was one of, Dawn, Enchantment and Transformation ...

At a later point in time, a similar process took place when we walked into the Auroville canyons and played music nestled in a canyon.

The flute in this song comes from a very special place. I inspired one of the participants, Isha who was new to flute playing, to express anything musical that was flowing through for her through a Native American flute. We spent about an hour in the Kala kendra, an acoustic dome at Bharat Nivas in Auroville. What came through in this session was a pure and magical sound.

The percussive element emerged from a different recording session with a professional drummer and artist Adi Schemberg from Austria.

Process :

I recorded these themes on a simple Zoom H1 mic (Basic pocket audio recorder). My process of weaving the song together from these seemingly independent recordings involved listening to the recorded audio, and piecing together a musical theme, drawing musical connections between the sounds and establishing a communication within the song and from there building a framework of organic sounds that offered the foundation for more musical elements to come together.

In November 2019, the invited artist in residence Karan Moktan, who helped me fine tune the then rough song by adding wonderful guitar lines.

The song was finally completed in February 2020 , when Anushka Gunpath, a professional singer from London offered her voice which then weaved it all together. The questions we asked ourselves ... What does it mean to feel enchanted, what elements of the voice express this. We were then exploring guided imagery and music as a study for another project that involved wellness and music. Bringing this into our work for this song, we held the image of strolling as if one was an angel, through a beautiful and enchanted land.

Name :

The entire process of this song has been one of enchantment, through the original experience through to the recording, editing and mixing. It is the energy that has been captured through the different stages and is reflected in the mood of the song. What does it mean to be truly enchanted is something that I ask myself.

Instruments :

Svaram : Svaraveena, Ocean Drum, Native American Flute, Shell Rattles, Plate Bells, Clap Sticks, Salangai
Other : Bird feather Pan Flute, Djembe
Elementals : Breath sounds, Bird sounds, Water Sounds, Enchanted Voice

Credits :

Isha Anand : Flute
Adi Schonberg : Djembe
Anushka Gunpath : Vocals
Varun Rao : Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer
Karan Moktan : Music Production
Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments
Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer

World Fusion, Sonic Art, Meditative, Inspirational, Indie, Experimental Electronic, Soundscape, Storytelling,

03) Bamboo Groove

Story Line :

In the garden of sound, walking through a bamboo forest, the overwhelming enchantment turns grey and dark clouds emerge... A confusion sinks in and the tremors within dissolve the Peace as the enchantment makes way for waves of the unknown. The stones in the ocean seem to know a little secret of what lies ahead.

Origin :

I stumbled upon the source inspiration for this song during one of my recording explorations at the Svaram sound garden in 2019. There were a few new sound installations and amongst them was the Bamboo Forest. A net of hanging bamboo that one walks through delighting in the sound of the clashing bamboo. On listening back to one of those recordings, I noticed that a small passage of the recording gave me the impression of a bass guitar playing interesting grooves. Thus began the exploration ...

Process :

It was fun working with Nature's Organic bass player. The bamboo tones offered the foundation for the rest of the song to unfold. This song invited a few more digital elements that fit perfectly with the unfolding theme. The overall treatment of the song was in a darker mood, reflecting a dense and shadow filled world, with echoes of children singing.

I was urged to share the work in progress on Aug 15th of 2019, Sri Aurobindo's Birthday, and I stayed up through the night trying to work in different elements. I felt drawn to play a Xalimo (Pungi), I managed to lay down the solo lines early that morning just before the sharing. The song lines were beaming with auspicious energy.

In november 2019, Karan helped me weave it all together with some polyrhythmic guitar melodic lines and tasteful arrangement.

Name :

Bamboo Groove, a name that emerged as a result of the seed inspiration of the song.

Instruments :

Svaram : Plate Bells, Kalimba, Bamboo Forest, Shakers, Xalimo, Pulse Tube, Sound Stone

Earth Moments : Children Sounds

Other : Guitar, Shakers, Tambourine

Digital : Synth, pads (Logic Alchemy)

Credits :

Varun Rao : Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer

Karan Moktan : Music Production

Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments

Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer

04) Oh Manna

Story Line :

Trying to catch a breath in the ocean of your thoughts, stranded on an island with strange sounds. Feeling your heartbeat... anger arises from what has become. A journey then to transform this anger. I call the forest... my tribe, to face this world within.

Origin :

If one has been to Auroville, then one would have experienced or at the least heard of the incredible sound journeys offered by Svaram at the Unity Pavilion. I had the privilege of playing and capturing some of those incredible experiences with a Zoom H5 handy recorder. One of musical segments in the sound journey has always fascinated me, using an Indonesian traditional instrument Angklung, we move in a playful circle communicating a momentary story and sharing smiles as we play. I went through a few of these samples and finally found a few that were consistent and gave me the inspiration to work around.

Process :

Working on this song was a powerful experience. In its production, I found myself exploring the powerful grooves and music of a primal nature. The pulse of the song was recorded using a set of traditional water drums, which are traditionally only played by the powerful women in tribes.

Anushka and I found ourselves in the studio one evening, wondering what we could work on. She was immediately inspired to work on this one when we listened to the foundation. What you hear on the track, is a made up yet powerful language, which we later realised, has a connection to the Mauri culture in New Zealand. To reach this point, we placed ourselves in the midst of a dense forest and sang the forest to life, with the tribe gathering around her passionate voice. Powerful dreams followed us into the night.

Karan, being a professional drummer was able to further enhance the rhythmic space of the song.

Instruments :

Svaram : Frame Drum, Nose Flute

Other : Water Drums, Angklung, Shaker

Elemental : Voice

Credits :

Anushka Gunpath : Vocals

Varun Rao : Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer

Karan Moktan : Music Production

Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments

Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer

05) Native Breath

Story Line :

Listening to the bells of freedom, riding on the waves of our ancient breath, surrendering to the forces of our nature, tears pour out to empty the being, making way for newness. Intimate and vulnerable, feeling the pulse of life... a prayer rises and one can hear a hopeful whisper.

Origin :

This song finds its roots emerging from the beautiful atmospheric and elemental textures of the sound journey offered by Svaram.

Using a simple frame drum the elemental nature sounds pulsate and flow, towards a soundscape of pure harmonics.

Process :

In 2019, I met a master flute maker Hans Houkas, who brought with him a very special 3 chamber flute called the Innate Flute. I played the weaving melody using one of these special healing flutes. (Story of the flute)

With Karan, we were able to wrap up the song by creating melodic shifts using some string and synth pads.

Instruments :

Svaram : Native Flute, Overtone Flute, Frame Drum, Bull Roarer, Sonorium Sounds, Nose Whistle, Pulse Tube

Other : Innate Flute, Korean Gongs, Electric Guitar, Jaw Harp, Ektara, Salangai

Samples : Earth Moments, Yidaki samples

Credits :

Varun Rao : Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer

Karan Moktan : Music Production

Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments

Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer

06) Revolt

Story line :

Inner energies rising. Reaching the last of your chains and walls, finding the strength in your feet and hands, knock on the gates of your inner garden of bliss.

Origin :

On the recommendation of a fantastic baul singer and artist Sukanya, I invited Devarshi Kar, a drummer and percussionist into the studio for an exploration together. Unsure where we were headed, we took a walk through the show-room in Svaram and I asked him to gather whatever he felt like playing with. A few interesting percussive sounds were in our space to play with.

Process :

We had an hour to work together but no clear direction. We decided on a tempo and created a loop of one minute, over which he expressed himself musically through each of the selected music instruments. One of the quickest and most dynamic recording processes in this album.

It then came down to hours of editing to piece this musical puzzle together. With a little sample layering using the Earth Moments sample pack, the track reached a solid and defined space.

Instruments :

Svaram : Attabouq, Tongue Drum, Duff, Frame Drum, Rattles, Tribal Drums, Clap-sticks

Samples : Earth Moments world instruments sample pack

Credits :

Devarshi Kar : Percussion

Varun Rao : Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer

Karan Moktan : Music Production

Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments

Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer

07) Hamsa

Story line :

Deep inside the being, a cave, within it a wounded swan... hurting, hiding. The heart strings begin to vibrate, a hum turns into a song, calling out to the inner light, to come forth and shine bright.

To let go of fear, to gather courage and peace and cross the murky river towards a brighter shore.

Origin :

It was a very vulnerable moment in a sound healing session with a dear old friend Rosemary, when I happened to see the image of a swan mid treatment. This was quite a powerful image for me as it inspired me to then sing this song in Kannada. With the depth of this instrument this song emerged in the moment, precious and personal. At the end of the treatment, during our sharing she reflected that she has in her past, dreamt of a wounded swan that hides in a cave. In essence the words of the song are in hope of calling out this inner swan across the river.

Process :

The evening after the treatment in the Svaram Sonorium, I plugged in a microphone and recorded 2 basic pluck patterns on the Nguni. One with a bass line and another layer on top. I then wrote down the lyrics and practiced it a few times. I left it at this stage for quite a while.

When Karan heard the track, he was instantly hooked to it and helped in arranging it further by adding a spectacular guitar line and layered atmospheric pads to support the fragile melody.

During one particular sound journey at Unity pavilion, we caught yet another song line. It was with Anushka's voice that we finally recorded and integrated the two segments of the song.

Name :

A symbolic Raga - Hamsadhwani, which means the song of the Swan, the swan is a symbol here for the soul.

Instruments :

Svaram : Plate Bells, Wind Harp Percussion

Other : Acoustic Guitar, Shaker, Nguni

Synth : Pads (Alchemy)

Elemental : Vocals

Credits :

Anushka Gunpath : Vocals

Varun Rao : Vocals, Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer

Karan Moktan : Backing Vocals, Music Production

Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments

Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer

08) Catch

Story Line :

Be playful, she said ...

Origin :

One must have chai... It was during one of the chai breaks at Svaram, that we had all gathered at the tea table near the sound garden. Sitting at the table, I heard a melody being played over and over, I instantly knew that there could be a possible song in the air. I quickly brought out the handy zoom recorder and walked up to the tap-tongue to find out who was playing it. Turned out to be 2 Jazz artists who were passing by and were delighting in this instrument. With their permission, I recorded a snippet of the melody. This sound sample was not usable, however I had the seed for a song.

Process :

In the studio catching another creative momentum, I recreated the melody line, followed by a few more layers of the same instrument, until I had a nice deep Tap-Tongue based musical framework. I ended up using a variation of the song in its skeletal form to create the sound-track for the video of the sound garden.

The wood blocks were yet another interesting element to play with. Running them through some specific delay signals gave me an interesting rhythm pattern.

Inviting Anushka once more to sing and improvise over the track was a super decision as she gave the song it's uniqueness, through a playful yet confident improvisation that fit so seamlessly with the track.

Name :

To catch the wave of joy and laughter and let it spread through your entire being.

Instruments :

Svaram : Tap Tongue, Wood Blocks, Ocean Drum, Storm Drum, Spinner, Bamboo Forest

Digital : EP, Synth, Percussion

Elemental : Voice

Unique Feature : Scat Vocals in a made up language

Credits :

Anushka Gunpath : Vocals

Varun Rao : Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer

Karan Moktan : Music Production

Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments

Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer

09) Seven Moons

Story Line :

And then it rose in the heart... a song of love, like the moon shining soft and tender above the sleeping world. Recognising the heart of life once more ...

Origin :

Everything about this song feels mystical. I was walking in the Matri Mandir garden one evening with Aurelio, and he urged me to listen deeper to the water fountains and the tree leaves. Recognising instantly, the sound of nature's drone. As we passed a bodhi tree, we decided to greet each other on the other side with a melody line that we picked up as we walked under the tree. To my surprise, we happened to harmonise on a few notes. Delighted, we continued to the next garden. There were 7 miniature water fountains that were in differently sized basins. We picked a few each and decided to listen to the tone of the individual fountains. We met and shared our notes and here is where it got exciting for me. We ended up humming strange notes that fit together. Inspired by these notes, I made a mental memory of them and made my way to the studio later that night and played the notes on my electric guitar. Much to my surprise they were in the scale of C# and even more so, combinations of these notes created some beautiful chords. I recorded these chords and let it rest for quite a while.

Process :

Somewhere in October 2019, through a training in sound healing, I met a fantastic Turkish singer, Suzin Aklan. In an effort to collaborate and explore, I shared this track with her and it was an instant click. I shared the story of the full moon night under which the song emerged. Expressing her connection with the moon energy, we spent the evening exploring song lines and howls. It was a while before I managed to piece it together. Her voice carried a softness which gently whispers an unknown sound

The song took a deeper plunge another full moon night after a recording session with the amazingly talented and gifted singer Sukanya. In Addition to the elemental Raaga work that we were exploring, I asked her if she would lend her voice for this unfolding piece of music. We tried a few approaches but nothing felt right. Deciding to take a walk, we stepped out of the studio to catch a glimpse of the full moon. Much to our disappointment it was a cloudy night, with no moon in sight.

That is when the image of the song hit me. I asked her to sing the clouds away, riding on a chariot of sound towards the moon, parting the clouds to shine bright in her light. We went in to record and she left me spellbound by her expression and song. We stepped out and there she was shining bright on a clear starry night.

With Karan, we finally polished the different elements of the song.

Name :

Inspired by the 7 pools of water, I saw the full moon reflecting in all of them the night the song came through.

Instruments :

Other : Electric Guitar

Electronic ; Synth Pads (Logic Alchemy)

Elemental : Voice (Turkish and Hindustani Classical)

Credits :

Sukanya Chattopadhyay : Vocals

Suzin Aklan : Vocals

Varun Rao : Composition, Music Production, Mix Engineer

Karan Moktan : Music Production

Svaram : Recording Studio, Instruments

Roshan Joseph : Mastering Engineer