



Skúli Sverrisson & Bill Frisell - Strata

Musicians:

Skúli Sverrisson - Electric & Acoustic Bass Guitar

Bill Frisell - Electric & Acoustic Guitar

I've never been at a session like the one that we had in June of 2017 with Skúli Sverrisson and Bill Frisell. Sometimes you can really sense a connection between two musicians, some fitting together or a frisson of common experience and spontaneous invention. But this was of another order—a quiet and profound communion. With Skúli and Bill there's a shared internal language—a sense of inevitable logic—hypnotizing and surreal.

The studio is a charged environment—a kinetic energy of ideas about to be born, loaded with expectation and possibility. Emotions tend to come to the surface in both good and bad ways. Bill and Skúli hit a deep vein in the first hour and never needed to come up for air. They would track a song of Skúli's while seated across from each other, barely speaking. Then we would listen back in the control room. After the song was over, no one would say a word for a moment, as if a spell had been cast. Then Bill might look over at Skúli and say, "What do you think if I tried to overlay something on this one?" While Bill tracked a second guitar, Skúli would sit with his head cradled in his hands. When Bill would return to the control room, Skúli would lift his head, wearing a beatific smile.

This spell was only stirred once. On the second day of tracking, the film maker Jim Jarmusch came by for lunch. Jim is a longtime fan of Bill's music. His arrival was a brace of movement and charm. He'd tell a couple of stories, and then we'd sit in silence while Bill and Skúli tracked something. "Brothers from another mother, these two," I caught Jim muttering under his breath.

Skúli Sverrisson: "Bill's been a thread throughout my creative life. I wrote songs for this session, but Bill has been such an inspiration to me that, even on songs I wrote before I met him, he was already there."

Bill Frisell: "Skúli was one of those guys that I kept hearing about but hadn't heard his music. Before I heard what he did, I was already wondering, 'What's with this guy?' He had such a huge range, playing with some of my favorite musicians and in styles all over the map. The first time I heard him, the beauty of it touched me right away... I don't listen to much music. I mostly listen to someone like Duke Ellington—real classics. But I got two of his albums and I kept putting them on. I wouldn't have known that he was influenced

by me. He was tapped in to something I dream of. When we did the recording, it took it to 100%, it felt like something that was in my imagination, but even deeper and further.”

SS: “There seemed to be a clear path to the center of the music. The session with Bill was so easy—no complications anywhere. And then having Jim Jarmusch there! He was almost like a ‘ghost producer.’ He’s another one of my heroes, such a great and surreal experience. I was only in New York for three days to record the album, and the whole thing came together so easily and to have Jim there... I really came back home and thought, ‘Did that really happen—was that a dream?’”

BF: “This was really special for me, I’d wanted to play with Skúli for a long time and this was an ideal situation. Sometimes you play music with someone in another context, in someone’s band or at a session, and you think, ‘I’d like to do a project with that person’; but this was the first time we played together. It felt so immediate, like ‘This is it, right now.’”

SS: “I knew Marc Urselli from decades ago when he reviewed a rather obscure record of mine, “Seremonie.” Later we did many tours together with Laurie Anderson, when Marc was the front-of-the-house engineer. We became friends and I felt very connected to him.”

Marc Urselli (recording engineer): “Bill and Skúli are two of my favorite musicians of all time and having them together in the studio was most enjoyable. They are both so modest and so soft-spoken that (barely!) hearing their comments and compliments to each other, one incredible take after another, was both delightful and hard to believe. Being there when the two played almost felt imposing, in a way. It was like a sacred experience only a few lucky ones were allowed to be a part of.”

BF: “Playing alone is so difficult because you get nothing back. But as soon as just one other person plays, there’s a direct response, like an electrical current that returns. It starts to go. You play something and right away it comes back, like a two-stroke engine. Everything you need is there... There’s an elegance to it. I almost feel like I didn’t even play on this record. Compositionally, what Skúli brought is so amazing. There wasn’t anything for me to do, everything was there already. So natural for me to fall into, so effortless. What Skúli chose to play and what he wrote—he built this structure that didn’t have anything blocking me but it was holding me up the whole time. It feels like we’ve known each other longer than we have. And it feels like the start of something.”

- Elan Mehler