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»Min gravide krop ændrede ved tingene – at komponere med processen«

Sounding Women's Work | I en situation, hvor kønsbalancen er skæv til fordel for mænd, kræver det handling at ændre balancen sådan, at ingen har en særlig fordel, mener komponist, saxofonist og forfatter Laura Toxværd.

Min gravide krop ændrede ved tingene. Kvalmen, som bedst lod sig dæmpe ved, at jeg spiste hele tiden, og mavemusklerne, der flyttede på sig, og det at være stakåndet. Jeg var i gang med at indspille mit debutalbum for min altsaxofon og forberede min afgangskoncert på musikkonservatoriet, og jeg havde travlt med at øve og spille koncerter med forskellige bands.

Først var det kun min allerkæreste, der vidste, at jeg var gravid. Lidt senere fik mine nærmeste det at høre. Men jeg ville ikke fortælle det til min omverden, før jeg var et godt stykke henne i graviditeten. Da min mor fødte min lillebror, var det efter hendes femte graviditet, hvoraf to ikke var lykkedes. Fire dage senere var det 1. maj, og vi var til morgenmad kl. 6 i vælgerforeningen med lillebror i barnevogn. Jeg var en pige på 6 år og erfarede, at arbejderkvinder ikke lod sig mærke af graviditet og fødsel.

Det barn jeg selv ventede, ønskede jeg mig uendelig højt, og hvis jeg ufrivilligt aborterede, troede jeg, at det ville være lettere at komme sig over det, når graviditeten ikke havde været kendt af andre. Jeg følte, at det ville være uoverskueligt at måtte fortælle folk, at min graviditet var blevet afbrudt. Tanken om at skulle møde omverdenens trøst og omsorg i den situation gjorde mig ubehagelig til mode. Men det betød samtidig, at jeg ikke kunne forklare folk, hvorfor jeg ikke syntes, at jeg kunne leve op til mit sædvanlige niveau på saxofonen, fordi det var blevet så fysisk hårdt at spille.

Alligevel blev jeg ved, for mit indtryk var, at min slægts arbejderkvinder havde håndteret deres graviditeter og fødsler uden at beklage sig

Jeg spiller på min saxofon på en måde, der involverer intense, kraftfulde lyde, og det

var vanskeligt for mig at gøre, når jeg var stakåndet, manglede mine mavemusklers styrke og havde kvalme. Alligevel blev jeg ved, for mit indtryk var, at min slægts arbejderkvinder havde håndteret deres graviditeter og fødsler uden at beklage sig. Mit arbejde var at være saxofonist, som jeg stort set altid havde været, og jeg havde brug for at tjene penge.

»Nå, så du er sangerinden«

Saxofonen fungerer som en slags teknologi i min kompositionsvirksomhed. Når jeg ser saxofonen som en form for teknologisk komponent i min kompositionsproces, er det fordi, jeg ikke anvender saxofonen til at komponere musik, som en refleksion af idéer jeg udtænker. Snarere vil jeg forklare det sådan, at mit arbejde med at komponere er i færd med at blive til sammen med saxofonen i en gøre; som diffraktion i kontrast til refleksionens statiske forhold mellem idé og musik, og i uadskillelige intra-aktioner forstået i modsætning til interaktioner, hvor adskilte enheder eksisterer forud for interaktionen.

Et eksempel kunne være, at jeg over en længere tidsperiode, måske et år, nedtegner grafiske notationer, som jeg spiller på min saxofon til koncerter sammen med andre musikere. Løbende ændrer jeg de grafiske notationer ud fra koncerternes musik. Sådan arbejdede jeg for nogle år siden på Rytmask Musikkonservatorium med artistic research-projektet *Composition of graphic and sonic works through the improvisers' co-creation*, der findes som peer reviewed exposition på konservatoriets portal på researchcatalogue.net.

Et andet eksempel kunne være, at jeg befinder mig i et bestemt rum sammen med nogle mennesker og siger mine tanker højt og afprøver ting på min saxofon, vedrørende et stykke musik jeg finder på, mens jeg bevæger mig rundt blandt menneskene i rummet. Afslutningsvis spiller jeg musikstykket. Denne arbejdsmåde har jeg anvendt i det ph.d.-projekt, som jeg er i gang med på Universitetet i Agder i Norge.

Da jeg ventede det næste barn, besluttede jeg at lade være med at spille. Faktisk var jeg på vej til at holde helt op med at spille, fordi jeg oplevede, at det ikke kun var svært at have en gravid og efterfølgende ammende krop; musikverdenens ustabile arbejdsmarked uden nogen sikring ved ulykke og sygdom, gjorde mig bekymret for børnenes tryghed. For at holde udgifterne nede da børnene var små, havde jeg ikke mit eget øvelokale eller arbejdsværelse.

Jeg har øvet på min saxofon og komponeret i forbindelse med, at jeg underviste på konservatorier, og hvis jeg ikke gjorde det, så arbejdede jeg i stuen eller soveværelset eller tog ud til mine forældres hus i Herlev. I dag 18 år senere er jeg taknemmelig over, at det alligevel er lykkedes at blive ved med at spille og arbejde med musik, men at tingene ændredes af min dengang gravide krop har stadig effekter, der rækker både fremad og bagud i tiden.

Som helt ung, da jeg begyndte at bevæge mig ind i det professionelle rytmiske musikmiljø i 1990'erne, kan jeg huske, at jeg ofte oplevede at folk spurgte »er du sangerinde?«. Og når jeg ankom til et spillested, hvor jeg skulle optræde, og jeg inden koncerten talte med ansatte eller publikum, sagde de »nå, så du er sangerinden«. Jeg tror, de spurgte, fordi jeg er kvinde. På det tidspunkt var det typisk for den rytmiske musikscene, at kvinder sang, og at mænd spillede instrumenter.

Fra begyndelsen har jeg altså oplevet, at det, jeg gjorde, var overraskende for mine omgivelser. Jeg blev klar over, at det ville være sådan, at når jeg gik i gang med at spille på min saxofon, så ville folk ikke kun se og høre én, der spillede saxofon; de ville uundgåeligt se og høre en kvinde, der spillede saxofon – en kvinde, som de i første omgang havde troet var sangerinde. Det har været en irritation for mig, at jeg ikke selv har kunnet gøre mig fri af at se mig selv på den måde.

Imidlertid har det at arbejde med at komponere, hjulpet mig til at se anderledes på mig selv. I udgangspunktet har jeg ikke følt mig særlig godt tilpas med at forsøge at træde ind i en tradition af komponister, som jeg opfattede historisk set var defineret af mænd. Men hen ad vejen har jeg fundet måder at komponere musik på, der

flytter mit fokus fra, at jeg er det centrale individ, der komponerer. I stedet er jeg optaget af, hvordan musikken og dens komposition sker, og hvad det gør ved os og verden. Jeg prøver at flytte mig lidt væk fra mig selv og se på, hvad tingene gør, og hvilke effekter det har.

Man kan vel egentlig godt sige, at jeg derved så alligevel har fået mit eget (arbejds)værelse

Der indgår to musikalbums i mit igangværende ph.d.-projekt. På det ene album, *Calling*, improviserer jeg sammen med Maria Faust på altsaxofon og Jacob Anderskov på præpareret klaver ud fra en grafisk notation, som jeg har nedtegnet på forhånd. Det andet album, *The Winds*, er en indspilning af mine improvisationer sammen med Julie Kjær på altsaxofon, Peter Friis Nielsen på el-bas og Marilyn Mazur på trommer og perkussion. På den led er saxofonen afgørende i mit kompositionsarbejde og i mine improvisationsmøder med forskellige musikere, herunder to forskellige saxofonister, der er kvinder som mig selv.

Kategorier som magtgreb

I takt med at jeg udvikler mit arbejde med at komponere, er jeg blevet bedre til at se mit arbejde i sammenhæng med andres virke, og jeg forstår, hvordan jeg arbejder på baggrund af forskellige traditioner, der ikke blot er defineret af mænd, men som har mangfoldige udspring. Samtidig føler jeg mig efterhånden godt tilpas i dette imaginære kompositionsrum, som jeg arbejder i, og man kan vel egentlig godt sige, at jeg derved så alligevel har fået mit eget (arbejds)værelse.

Før jeg blev gravid brød jeg mig ikke om kategorier, som jeg skulle passe ind i. Kategorier opfattede jeg som magtgreb til at normalisere os og gøre os ens. Jeg brød mig heller ikke om at blive kategoriseret som kvinde. Sidenhen har jeg lært om kvinden som det andet køn, og jeg har overvejet, om der knytter sig misogyni til, at jeg ikke har spillet særligt meget sammen med kvinder. Igennem min karriere har kvinder været underrepræsenterede indenfor mit felt, så det kan være en årsag

til, at når jeg har mødt folk, som jeg haft lyst til at spille med, så har det oftest været mænd.

Jeg trådte ind på musikscenen på et tidspunkt, hvor det magtmisbrug og den sexismen, som vi i dag gør op med, var udbredt. Selv syntes jeg dengang også, at det var galt, men jeg ville gerne frem i verden, og min egen løsning blev at navigere udenom de mest betændte steder. Med en arbejderklassebaggrund, hvor jeg havde oplevet, at mine forældre og bedsteforældre havde drømt om uddannelse og kunstnerisk virke men ikke havde kunne realisere det grundet økonomiske begrænsninger, var jeg som tidligere nævnt taknemmelig for, at jeg blev givet mulighed for at skabe en tilværelse først som musiker og senere også som komponist.

I en situation, hvor kønsbalancen er skæv til fordel for mænd, kræver det handling at ændre balancen sådan, at ingen har en særlig fordel. Jeg vil gerne gøre mit til at skabe bedre balance. Inden jeg blev gravid, ville jeg ikke kendes ved kvinden som kategori, og det fik den effekt, at jeg ikke forholdt mig til problematikken om underrepræsentation, men da min gravide krop ændrede ved tingene, blev kvinden helt nærværende for mig. I dag er effekten af mine graviditeters nærværende krop, at jeg som sagt gerne vil gøre noget. Jeg prøver at undersøge problematikken, når jeg spiller musik, og når jeg forsker, samtidig med at jeg forsøger at undgå at forholde mig til kvinden som en begrænsende kategori.

Laura Toxværd, april 2022



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ESSAY

»My pregnant body changed things – composing with the process«

Sounding Women's Work | In a situation where the gender balance is skewed in favor of men, it takes action to change the balance so no one has a special advantage, says composer, saxophonist and author Laura Toxværd.

AF LAURA TOXVÆRD 25. MAJ 2022 | FOKUS: SOUNDING WOMEN'S WORK (ENGLISH)
LÆS PÅ DANSK: »MIN GRAVIDE KROP ÆNDREDE VED TINGENE – AT KOMPONERE MED PROCESSEN«

My pregnant body changed things. The nausea that was best alleviated by the fact that I ate all the time, and the abdominal muscles that moved on, and being short of breath. I was in the process of recording my debut album for my alto saxophone and preparing for my graduation concert at the Conservatory of Music, and I was busy rehearsing and playing concerts with various bands.

At first, only my boyfriend knew I was pregnant. A little later, my loved ones heard about it. But I would not tell it to my surroundings until I was well into my pregnancy. When my mother gave birth to my little brother, it was after her fifth pregnancy, two of whom had not succeeded. Four days later it was May 1st and we were having breakfast at 6 in the voters' association's premises with my little brother in a pram. I was a 6 year old girl and learned that working class women did not let themselves be defined and hindered by pregnancy and childbirth.

The baby I was expecting myself, I deeply wanted, and if I had an involuntary abortion, I thought it would be easier to get over it if the pregnancy had not been known by others. I felt that it would be unmanageable to have to tell people that my pregnancy had been interrupted. The thought of having to face the comfort and care of the outside world in that situation made me very uncomfortable. But at the same time, it meant I could not explain to people why I did not think I could live up to my usual level on the saxophone because it had become so physically hard to play.

I kept going, for my impression was that the working women of my family had handled their pregnancies and births without complaining

I play my saxophone in a way that involves intense, powerful sounds, and it was difficult for me to do when I was short of breath, lacked the strength of my abdominal muscles, and had nausea. Still, I kept going, for my impression was that the working women of my family had handled their pregnancies and births without complaining. My job was to be a saxophonist, which I pretty much always had been, and I needed to make money.

»Well, so you're the singer«

The saxophone works as a kind of technology in my composition business. When I see the saxophone as a kind of technological component in my composition process, it's because I do not use the saxophone to compose music, as a result of ideas I produce. Rather, I will explain it in such a way that my work of composing is in the process of becoming in entanglements with the saxophone; as a diffraction in contrast to the static relationship between ideas and music, and in inseparable intra-actions understood as opposed to interactions where separate entities exist prior to the interaction.

An example could be that over a long period of time, maybe a year, I design graphic notations that I play on my saxophone for concerts with other musicians. I constantly change the graphic notations based on the music of the concerts. This is how I worked a few years ago at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory with the artistic research project 'Composition of graphic and sonic works through the improvisers' co-creation", which is available as a peer reviewed exhibition on the conservatory's portal at researchcatalogue.net.

Another example could be that I am in a certain room with some people and say my thoughts out loud and try things out on my saxophone, regarding a piece of music I come up with, while I move around among the people in space. Finally, I play the piece of music. I have used this way of working in the PhD project that I am working on at the University of Agder in Norway.

When I was expecting the next child, I decided not to play. In fact, I was about to stop playing altogether because I found that it was not only difficult to have a pregnant and subsequent breastfeeding body; the music world's unstable labor market without any insurance in case of accident and illness, made me worried about the safety of children. To keep expenses down when the kids were little, I did not have my own rehearsal room or study.

I have practiced on my saxophone and composed in connection with teaching at conservatories, and when I did not, I worked in the living room or bedroom or

went out to my parents' house in Herlev. Today, 18 years later, I am grateful that I have still managed to keep playing and working with music, but that things changed by my then pregnant body still have effects that reach both forward and backward in time.

As a very young person, when I started moving into the professional rhythmic music scene in the 1990s, I remember people often asking, »Are you a singer?«. And when I arrived at a venue where I was going to perform and I was talking to the crew or to the audience before the concert, they said »well, so you're the singer«. I think they asked because I'm a woman. At the time, it was typical of the rhythmic music scene that women sang and that men played instruments.

From the beginning, I experienced that what I did was surprising to my surroundings. I became aware that when I started playing my saxophone, people would not only see and hear someone playing the saxophone; they would inevitably see and hear a woman playing the saxophone – a woman they had initially thought was a singer. It still annoys me that I have not been able to free myself from seeing myself that way.

However, working on composing has helped me look at myself differently. Basically, I have not felt very comfortable trying to step into a tradition of composers that I perceived was historically defined by men. But along the way, I have found ways to compose music that shift my focus from being the central individual composing. Instead, I am preoccupied with how music and its composition happen and what it does to us and the world. I try to move a little away from myself and look at what things do and what effects it has.

You could probably say that I now have a room of my own

Two music albums are included in my current PhD.-project. On one album, *Calling*, I improvise with Maria Faust on alto saxophone and Jacob Anderskov on prepared piano based on a graphic notation that I have written down in advance. The second album, *The Winds*, is a recording of my improvisations with

Julie Kjær on alto saxophone, Peter Friis Nielsen on electric bass and Marilyn Mazur on drums and percussion. On these music albums, the saxophone has been crucial in my composition work and in my improvisation encounters with different musicians, including two different saxophonists who are women like myself.

Categories as power grabs

As I develop my work of composing, I have become better at seeing my work in the context of the work of others, and I understand how I work on the basis of different traditions that are not only defined by men, but by a diversity of origins. At the same time, I gradually feel comfortable in this imaginary composition space that I work in, and you could probably say that I now have a room of my own.

Before I got pregnant, I did not like categories that I had to fit into. Categories I perceived as power grabs to normalize us and make us alike. I also did not like being categorized as a woman. Since then, I have learned about women as the second sex, and I have considered whether there is a misogyny associated with the fact that I have not played very much with women. Throughout my career, women have been underrepresented in my field, so that may be one reason why when I have met people that I wanted to play with, it has most often been men.

I entered the music scene at a time when the abuse of power and the sexism that we are dealing with today were widespread. I thought it was wrong then, but I wanted to advance in the world, and my own solution was to avoid the most hazardous places. With a working class background where I had experienced that my parents and grandparents had dreamed of education and artistic work but had not been able to realize it due to financial constraints, I was, as previously mentioned, grateful that I was given the opportunity to create a life first as a musician and later also as a composer.

In a situation where the gender balance is skewed in favor of men, you must act to change the balance such that no one has a particular advantage. I want to do my

part to create a better balance. Before I got pregnant, I did not want to be categorized as a woman, and it had the effect that I did not relate to the issue of under-representation, but when my pregnant body changed things, the woman became completely present to me. Today, the effect of the present body of my pregnancies is that, as I said, I want to do something. I try to investigate the issue when I play music and when I do research, while trying to avoid relating to womanhood as a limiting category.

Laura Toxværd, April 2022

OMTALT I ARTIKLEN

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