



Stop Driving! (the Gospel of Mister Jensen)

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About the song Stop Driving! (the Gospel of Mister Jensen)

We have turned the somewhat shy and timid emigrant Albert Carlson, the main character in Vilhelm Moberg's novel *A time on earth*, into a singing storyteller. We give voice to Carlsons existential reflections of his everyday life, his lived experiences and the people he meets, and turned these reflections into melodies. The lyrics depart from the fact that that Carlson meets with Jensen in different situations throughout the novel: from serene encounters of conversating by the sea, from seeing Jensen from afar when he is immersed in preaching at the crossroad of San Pedro Boulevard and Cleo Street. In other words: Jensen is portrayed through the gaze of Carlson both from a direct interaction and from gazing from afar.

We found it profoundly important to capture the gestalt of Jesus-Jensen, noting that Moberg wrote of Albert Carlson as having a respectful, reasonable relationship with Jensen and showing him a care that countered the locals' conception of Jensen as a madman. This tone of care and respect led us to see Jensen through Moberg's eyes rather than as a mere lunatic, village idiot, or city-sidewalk original. To emphasize this perception, we dignified Jensen with the title "Mister". We anchor our view of what it means to be a human being in an existentialist philosophical tradition. We, as humans, are depths rather than dichotomies. We are never solely mad, nor solely reasonable. Thus, we have the capacity of being both mad and reasonable. Sometimes at the same time as well. That said, there is perhaps a Jensen in all of us? Jensen wants to stop people from driving because he wants to save them from losing their lives in traffic accidents. He has even named his nemesis the Death Machine. To make people understand the magnitude of deaths, he talks about piling human bodies in the shape of a pyramid for others to see. That surely sounds like a vulgar way of illustrating the number of lives lost during a year, since the pyramid would be built of 40.000 human bodies, given the statistics given in the novel. Mad right? Yet, who are we to say that his mission to illustrate the annual human casualties of heavy traffic as a pyramid of dead bodies as a sign of madness? It sure does sound mad, but defined as an art installation: would it be viewed as mad, absurd or simply avant garde?

Our understanding of Jensen's life, the sounds of traffic, and the constant beat of the city's pulse inspired the musical composition. The tempo is slow without becoming sluggish, as a reflection of what we interpret as the traffic situation could have been in Laguna Beach in the 1960's. A guitar-based riff introduces the song, pointing the musical direction towards a meeting between classic soul and modern blues. This blend is intended to immerse the listener in how we believe that Jensen as a person sounds. The organ and Rhodes piano add sonic ornaments that resemble the noise of traffic and a city in motion. The sudden outburst of the organ emphasizes

particular words and phrasings. This is an artistic decision intended to capture the sense of sudden traffic noises, that often come without warning. Underscoring the sense of motion, the drumbeat carries the song forward, while the bass melody adds a groovy ambience/flavor to the song. As such, the instruments are a means to an end, helping to construct Jensen as a sonic composition with a soundscape intended to tell the musical story of a broken man's life in a modern city. Broken might not be a completely correct choice of words, because he is after all still alive and on a meaningful mission. He powers through the everyday life with a particular kind of resilience found in those who make a living out of staying alive, which is something that we argue is illustrative of what it means to be an existential entrepreneur.

Lastly, we have composed the song intentionally as something that is graspable for a wide variety of listeners, underscoring the musical value of melodies and hooks. This is both an artistic decision, to compose music that we, ourselves, would like to listen to. This is a core tenet in our creative process, which leans heavily on the producer Rick Rubin's words, and we paraphrase: the artist creates for him- or herself first, not for the audience. The audience comes later. We hope that our melodies pave musical pathways to Moberg's novel and his authorship. For that matter, we are working from a stance where the composition of memorable melodies is suitable for turning listeners of our music into readers of Moberg's works.

About the authors

Pär Strandberg is a PhD in business administration, currently working on research projects that are focused on entrepreneurship, existentialism and music. He earned his PhD with his dissertation *Moving Beyond Stewards versus Agents*, where he explored the possibility to transcend theoretical ideals by utilizing the fundamental assumptions underpinning existential philosophy. His dissertation was composed with a resemblance to song crafting, using elements such as bridge, refrain, and coda to structure the line of argumentation. In his latest project, he attempts to transcend the role of the researcher in the process of the becoming of a lyricist and singer. The song *Stop Driving (the Gospel of Mister Jensen)* is a concrete example of that transcendence.

Ola af Trampe is an experienced musician, producer, and song writer. His career ranges over three decades in a variety of genres and capacities: from recording albums and touring in Japan, USA and Scandinavia to working as a studio musician. He currently shares his time between teaching, producing and song crafting. His overarching aim is, and has always been, to serve the song and write melodies that stays in hearts and minds of the listener. This aim has been of utmost importance in the creative process of composing for the upcoming album *A time on earth*.