

## Fredrik Rasten

The Berlin based Norwegian guitarist, composer and improvisor credits his wide range of projects to the fluidity of the Oslo scene he grew up in

By Peter Margasak



"Do people see me as a focused musician, or do they wonder what I'm doing?" asks the Norwegian guitarist, composer and improvisor Fredrik Rasten. "There's many strong artists out there that do something very focused, and they're so identifiable."

It's easy to wonder what Rasten is doing, given the wildly disparate projects he's involved with. At any given moment you might find the Berlin based musician exploring just intonation with Harmonic Space Orchestra, creating highly rhythmic sustained tones for an imaginary film soundtrack alongside guitarist Oren Ambarchi, or providing subtle guitar and vocal harmonies with the Scottish folk musician Alasdair Roberts. In the last few months, Rasten has released three new albums that reveal different manifestations of his engagement with just intonation.

The solo recording *Murmuration And Stasis* focuses on psychoacoustic patterns produced by a variety of guitars triggered by E-bows; *Strands Of Lunar Light* is a series of movements for closely aligned guitars tuned in just intonation performed with Belgian musician Ruben Machtelinckx; and *Fuse*

*Modulations* is by Asterales, a new ensemble with keyboardist Léo Duplex, bassist Jon Heilbron and bass flautist Rebecca Lane. In all of them Rasten draws from the same specialised sound palette of kaleidoscopic harmony and rich textures, tailored to the needs of each project.

"It circles back to this human aspect," he explains. "All of these people I play with in the most important projects of mine are really good friends." It's an interesting perspective coming from an artist who has developed a rather specific soundworld that revolves around tuning, minimalist structures, sustained tones and harmonic exploration. As specialised as his sound is, Rasten stands apart for his ability to find ways to deploy it in so many contexts. His musical interests began, oddly enough, with the progressive rock albums he listened to with his father as a kid. But instead of soloistic virtuosity he was drawn to harmony. Through his studies he gravitated towards jazz and improvisation. Lacking the chops to get into the music programme at Trondheim Conservatory he instead earned a degree in philosophy at the school, which

afforded him plenty of opportunities to play with many of Norway's best young musicians.

By the time he moved to Berlin to study with composer Marc Sabat, his immersion in free improvisation had opened up his deep interest in just intonation and sustained sound. Before his actual move, he had spent some time with Berlin composer Catherine Lamb, and once he moved to the city he was moved by their openness. "One never knows, approaching new people," he says. "But they were so friendly and curious and happy to welcome new people into this kind of interest." He got involved in the formation of Harmonic Space Orchestra with Lamb and Sabat, but continued to maintain the musical relationships he had forged in Norway.

Since 2006 he has maintained Pip, a duo project with a high school classmate, trumpeter Torstein Lavik Larsen, with whom he shares an interest in sustained tones. In fact, early on they began experimenting with psychoacoustic phenomena like beating patterns on a purely instinctual level. Larsen and Rasten are also part of the improvising quartet Oker, with percussionist Jan-Martin Gismervik and bassist Adrian Fiskum Myhr. "The just intonation aspect fits into settings where all the players don't relate to it in completely the same way as me, because it's just a sound, the same way as Jan-Martin or Adrian have their own personal practices," says Rasten. "Jan-Martin works with something very rhythmically complex, which I don't understand, but it's still a sound, so it all just fits together."

These days, every guitar Rasten plays is tuned in just intonation, but he's not dogmatic about it. "In a way," he says, "I think just intonation is just a focus where you open up to the idea that pitch is totally flexible, and all pitch relations are interesting, because tones sounding together are interesting in themselves. The just intonation system is just a way of organising pitch, and a very beautiful sound when the pitches relate to each other in that way, because then it opens up."

His duo with Roberts emerged from *The Old Fabled River*, a 2021 album the singer made with the Norwegian group Völvur that Rasten also plays in. Over the last few years they've developed a repertoire of new and traditional songs, with Rasten's accompaniment adding a glowing resonance around Roberts's acoustic picking. Expect a recording from them next year, but this autumn Rasten will release an album with Oker, an Asterales set of Duplex's compositions, and the soundtrack he and Ambarchi made for *Dragon's Return*, a 1968 film made by Slovak director Eduard Grečner.

"I think one thing that I have brought with me from Oslo is doing many different things," remarks Rasten. "Musicians from the Norwegian scene often have different projects that do different things. I'm also just a product of that, where you are interested in different things that are still very defined, but there's many things you don't like. You're not like a session player that does all kinds of things, but you still have these separate but synergistic interests." ● *Fredrik Rasten's Murmuration And Stasis is released by Moving Furniture. Strands Of Lunar Light is released by Aspen Editions. Fredrik Rasten with Asterales' Fuse Modulations is released by Thanatosis*