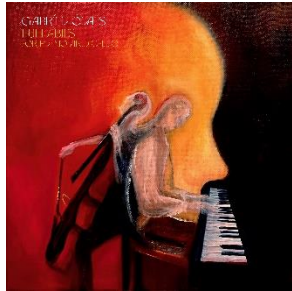


Gabriel Ólafsson

Lullabies for Piano and Cello

[gabrielolafsson.com](http://gabrielolafsson.com)



Piano and cello duos are quite popular, but I think that the collaboration between Icelandic composer/pianist **Gabriel Ólafsson** and cellist **Steiney Sigurðardóttir** is exceptional. Everything on the album **Lullabies for Piano and Cello** seems to work flawlessly. The concept of transmuting centuries old folktales and lullabies into contemporary post-classical music is very satisfying and rewarding for the listener. There is no age limit to enjoy these ten beautiful berceuse that have a sense of the cinematic created by thought provoking themes. Sigurðardóttir offers that the cello is the voice of her mother. And yes, there is a kind of matronly love in her every note. Ólafsson is the dreamer of the two, however, adding nimble fantasy elements and light whimsical touches throughout the collection.

The album opens with the tune **Fantasía**. It sounds like light hearted improvisation, a polyphonic meeting of two instruments for the first time. Each one drawing the other out. Finding the similarities and the differences. Finally, they merge on the same musical path and make spellbinding music.

**Sálmur** is indeed a hymn with a fine spun piano melody and with the violin whispering here and there as the music unfolds. The composition suggests the arrival of twilight as the sun falls below the horizon only to reveal a black, velvet sky gleaming with stars. This the music of a miracle and Gabriel treats the opportunity like a prayer of gratitude.

There is something decidedly nostalgic in the tune **Visa**. What do we remember? And why? The cello seems to haunt the main theme, but in an interesting way. Visa is giving us a direction, a way to go. Whether it is to the land of Nod or to our own fantasies, this quiet, lyrical tune will get us there. Ólafsson infuses some unobtrusive classical elements in this song that add to its complexities. Yes, overall the tune is very simple, but there are nuances to be heard.

In the melody **Mama**, Gabriel's piano is very delicate, almost fragile. Not really a lullaby, but a sweet, gentle song of respect maybe, to mothers everywhere who keep their children safe. Every note is a caress on a cheek, a pat on a tiny hand, or a kiss on a weary forehead. And every note is a like a prayer. You can almost imagine a soft voice humming the tender tune.

One of my favorites on the album is called **Frost**, probably because of its universal familiarity. It is based on 17<sup>th</sup> century English poet Ben Johnson's "*To Celia*", but clearly Ólafsson adopts this tune as his own. Even though our hearts sing the accustomed verses, the tune meanders far enough afield to give us new memories. Well done, sir.

You don't need to understand the Icelandic language to react to every sweet and subtle nuance of the tune **Bambaló**. This is a very old tune that, although covered by several modern bands, never

fails to invoke a great deal of emotion from any listener. There is a mellifluousness to the song that when performed, is like mother's soft, sweet prayer for her child to be at peace.

Another song that has a hint of classical roots is called **Draunheimar**. The closest Icelandic translation I can find is *Dream World* and it certainly is appropriate for not only the song, but the overall theme of the album. This solo piano reverie is quite delicate and ethereal. Its dreamy theme and waltz-like tempo seems to be a suitable finale as the babe closes its eyes and drifts off only to dream the dreams of the innocent.

If anyone can envision the Vikings as having soulful lullabies, then it is composer **Gabriel Ólafsson**. He has done a magnificent job of recreating old world themes and transforming them into modern day cradlesongs. But they are so much more. There is no doubt he is a story teller. Gabriel is a young man with a long way to go, and I would follow him to see what he does next. His imagination is his greatest gift. Highly listenable. - R J Lannan, [ArtisanMusicReviews.com](http://ArtisanMusicReviews.com)

