

Hankikanto – Falling into the Anti/Natal Abyss #2

On playing god with genetics

Theme music:

I see it now, it all comes back to me
I had to leave them to this gloom
Lest they fall for the procreative dream
That nearly caught me in my bloom
But I am back, and I will end their pain
I am back, and I will set them free again
What have we done to deserve this burden?

My name is Matti Häyry, I am an Antinatalist philosopher.

And my name is Amanda Sukenick, I am an Antinatalist activist.
Welcome to the second episode of Hankikanto: Falling into the
Anti/Natal Abyss!

So Matti in addition to being a very, very busy philosopher, bioethicist, author and professor, you are also a very talented musician and song writer, who has written not one but two rock operas! In #65 of The Exploring Antinatalism Podcast, we of course played 4 of your songs - yet another reason for anyone who has not yet heard that recording, to run there right now and check it out - and you speak about these projects there in some detail. However, at the time of putting together that first episode, there was still much I had not yet heard & observed for myself, and there was still a great deal that at the time I didn't understand about these projects. What an absolute delight it's been to fully deep dive so much further into these projects for the preparation of this episode of Hankikanto!

But before we start speaking about the operas properly, I would really like to hear about how music began for you, how long have you been singing and writing songs and what instruments do you play?

My father played guitar in a folk music group, there was a lot of singing in the house, and I was forced to take piano lessons and music theory classes since I was seven. There was no escaping really. But let me specify.

Father's folk music group was not what you'd think – advanced, socially conscious country music. It was old Finnish stuff from the folk players of the nineteenth century – waltz, quadrille, polka, that kind of thing. They played it well, but it never grew on me.

The singing in the house was mostly done by drunken, patriotic businessmen and town dignitaries in what seemed like endless late-night parties when I was trying to get some sleep. Lots of songs about going back to war and defeating the Soviet Union.

The piano lessons I feared so much that when I had to go to our regular meetings with the teacher, I tried to ring the doorbell so softly that he wouldn't hear. That would give me a reason to go home and say that he wasn't there. Never worked.

The music theory was elementary, learning the notes and scales and tempos and annotations. That was boring as anything but in the end it was useful. Combined with my piano practice that gave me an ability to see music as well as to hear it.

The family moved when I was nine and for three years I had a really good piano teacher. I learned all the classics so that now when I always have a classic radio channel on, I know half the pieces because I've played them. Mozart, Beethoven, you name it.

The family moved again and at my new school I began my public performances. I played, at the Christmas festivities, Silent Night, Holy Night, badly, as I recall. From then on, I played almost everything badly and tried to wriggle out of the piano lessons.

I succeeded when I was about fifteen and inherited father's old guitar. For a long time, the only chords I knew were E minor and D major. With those, I could play a popular Finnish waltz and Black Sabbath's Solitude from their album Master of Reality.

As teenage years went by, I bought my first electric guitar – a Fender Telecaster – with money I earned working in a sausage

factory during my summer holidays. I added bad singing to my repertoire and wrote my first songs. One ended up in my first solo rock opera, Orkid, forty-four years later. Long fuses.

I know that you are a big fan of rock & roll, punk & metal, but how did Rock Opera specifically become your chosen musical genre?

This is probably a question of definition, but I've never liked rock'n'roll that much. I learned my Johnny B. Goodes and Roll Over Beethovens in due time but that was older generation music. Finnish tangos were my favorite. They were contemporary.

There were echoes from the Big World Outside, of course, but they were mostly limited to British pop. The Beatles (good tunes), The Rolling Stones (never saw the charm really), occasionally something from the US, but Americana somehow didn't touch me.

The turning point was when one Christmas my parents bought me Led Zeppelin I. That was it from the word go. "In the days of my youth I was told what it means to be a man". Not that we thought much about gender distinctions in those androgynous times.

And, by the way, I wasn't kidding about the Finnish tangos. The Christmas before, my present had been Rakkaustarinoita – Love Stories – by a very popular schlager singer Eino Grön.

Talking about long fuses, it took me thirty-seven years before I saw Led Zeppelin in action in their one-off reunion gig in London. And the words that I mentioned were the first words that Robert Plant sang – the song is called Good Times Bad Times. Quite memorable. But I stray.

Back in the day, that settled it and my musical taste in the wider world of rock was formed in the early 1970s. Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Uriah Heep, and Emerson, Lake & Palmer. There was one American band, but we'll come to that later.

During my military days after school I turned against the system, like you do, and started listening to politically loaded punk, much of

it from Finland with a Finnish message. I also had an American favorite at that time, Dead Kennedys. Brilliant, I thought.

But protometal and prog remained on the agenda while I was also learning to appreciate opera. From the later metal genre, I only picked what I could understand – melodic with some magic and mystery. On the non-metal side, Queen became a big influence.

Rock opera, then. Wikipedia at some point defined it as “A concept album which may or may not be performed on stage.” And a concept album means that you have a point. We’ll see in a minute how the point came about. Music already pointed to that direction.

In preparation for this episode of Hankikanto, you sent me a beautiful song in Finnish called Peili - Your Eyes in the Mirror that you had originally written In 1997, and later recorded in 2009. This song from what I understand, along with a 2010 book project, which we will speak a bit about next, went on to form the basis for the massive musical projects to come. What can you tell me about Peili, and the role that it played in the development of your future Rock Operas?

Thanks for the compliment! Should we listen to it first and then I can explain? It is, as you say, in Finnish but music is universal. Even with my bad vocals and the demo quality, there is something in it. At least it became the stem song of all my rock operas so far.

As a word of explanation to our non-Finnish audience, it tells the story of two people in love who see each other’s eyes when they look in the mirror, each other’s form in their sleepy lonely beds, and dream about being together. Should we play it?

Yes, let’s! Here it comes.

[Peili]

So, the birth of the song and its influence on the rock operas. Long story short, this is how it all began.

In 2009, Tuija – my then-partner who has figured in our podcasts before as Partner 2 – and I realized that we have written loads of songs but recorded none. Among those was Peili, lyrics by Tuija and music by me, originally written in 1997, as you said.

Some friends had a studio nearby and we asked for help. One of them – Mika – promised to do some recording, we carried our gear to the studio, and taped Peili, as you just heard it. Mika played the bass parts, Tuija and I alternated in the guitars, I did the vocals.

The song was now recorded but how do we get to the rock operas from here? I see it in your notes that we should really deal with the next item before we continue this saga. It makes more sense when the other cornerstone of the first opera project is in place.

Rationality and the Genetic Challenge: Making People Better? (2010)

Yes I agree! Before we go on to discuss the first of the big rock opera projects, we must first make a quick detour to your 2010 book, *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge: Making People Better?* Surprisingly, we spoke very little about *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge* on Exploring Antinatalism, but it's a really important book, not only in the role it would play in future projects like Playing God, but also in the context of your own Antinatalism.

The Anti-natal world, is sometimes quite stuck in near dinosauric concepts of creating children in the traditional way, and seems to sometimes forget that the procreative landscape, and the boundaries science is allowing procreators to push is ever changing, allowing the Genetic Challenge to jump higher and higher hurdles of natalist madness...

To quote an early part of the book:

“The genetic challenge, as I understand the notion in this book, is a set of questions raised by the engineering, political and medical solutions to the original threats posed . By ‘engineering’ solutions I mean our responses to natural obstacles; and by ‘political’ and ‘medical’ I refer to

our attempts to control our own psychological, social, and physical shortcomings. The genetic challenge, like many other tests to humanity, arise when we cannot readily agree on what our reactions should be and on what grounds.”

How did *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge* come to be?

My long-term plan since the turn of the millennium has been to write a book called *Breeders’ Morality: Its Nature, Implications, and Alternatives*. It’s a story of voluntary reproducers ruling the world. But to focus my thoughts, I’ve had to walk several side avenues.

One of these, for twenty years, has been that I try to understand what words like “dignity”, “solidarity”, “precaution”, and “vulnerability” mean to different people. They form the conceptual background of whatever else I’m doing.

The other, from my work in the ethics of genetics, is the idea of making people happier by scientific advances. If biomedicine could remove suffering from human lives, the antinatal case, at least the philanthropic version, would lose some of its credibility.

In *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge*, I study, in tedious scientific detail, seven possibilities of making human lives better: genetically perfect babies, other designer babies, savior siblings, cloning, stem cell research, gene therapies, and life extension.

This was all based on my bioethics teaching at the University of Manchester in England, and I tried to be as neutral as possible. I don’t say what’s right or wrong, I merely catalogue the differences in people’s views. I called this the **polite bystander** method.

Once again, my Manchester colleagues happened to be in good terms with a publisher and persuaded Cambridge University Press to publish it. My only international book in which I got to choose the cover. It’s my favorite gargoyle on top of Notre Dame in Paris.

While Antinatalism is certainly not the subject of *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge*, it does sort of come up as a subject from time to time, though I don’t believe you knew the word yet back in 2010. I would just like to quickly point these instances out, (And please also let me know if I missed any!)

On page 42, while discussing an argument made by Habermas, you say

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“I do not understand how Habermas can dodge the fact that by deciding not to enhance their offspring parents already make a choice for which consent would be needed. The only way to respect future generations would seem to be not to produce them at all (a respectable solution, I believe, but probably not one that he is after.)”

And on Page 67, you do actually make a reference to David Benatar’s Better Never to Have Been in the footnotes!

The comment on Habermas is quite antinatal, isn’t it? Not to have children would be a respectable solution. Good for me. And there I was saying that I didn’t make any normative conclusions. And yes, David Benatar’s book appeared at the time of my writing mine.

A concept found within this book, which you just spoke briefly about above, is the idea of the polite bystander’s point of view - would you mind further defining what this idea is, and give a bit of detail as to the importance that it has?

Neutrality – apart from snide remarks like the one on Habermas, apparently – was the aim. I had earlier promoted something called the reflective equilibrium model, in which we go back and forth between theory and intuitions and then achieve a normative result.

The polite bystander does all this going back and forth and comes to conclusions but then always specifies whose conclusion it is. If you think like this, you should, to be consistent, do that. With antinatalism recently, I have returned to my blatant normativity.

Several key concepts, discussed at length within Rationality and the Genetic Challenge, would, in a feat of extraordinary creativity, be transformed into the basis for characters within the narratives of the rock operas! These core concepts were - Savior siblings, Life extensions & immortality, Cloning, designing perfect human beings, Gene therapies, amongst others.

When you were writing the book, were you already starting to think about it as inspiration for music? Or did that come later?

Now this is the time to continue the Peili song answer that I started earlier. The idea of music was brewing while I wrote the book but nothing definite, certainly not a rock opera. Except maybe that I had this idea of a popular book featuring cloning.

When Dolly the sheep was cloned in 1997, The Vatican issued an early statement. They said that since only God can give human beings a soul, human clones would be born without one. They retracted quite soon but I thought about it from time to time.

So when there was a call for popular books that would be written by a scientist and a philosopher, I proposed this. Gods realize in their annual inventory that there is a discrepancy. The number of people on Earth exceeds the number of souls issued from the divine repository by one. Someone has been cloned.

Gods send Luci down on Earth to investigate. Luci has a device – think of Robocop’s vision helmet – that will detect whether a person has a soul or not. Luci is sent to the most probable location and investigations start. And finally end because they all have souls. Luci turns the machine around and the soulless one is Luci.

The book proposal was turned down and the idea as such didn’t survive in Test, Playing God, or Orkid but traces of it remain in the character of Luke in the first two. And the idea will return in the final part of the Orkid trilogy. But now I’m way ahead of myself.

In early 2010, Tuija and I visited Tuija’s cousin Krista in Lupsingen, Switzerland, and gave Krista a copy of Rationality and the Genetic Challenge and a home-burned CD of Peili. To my utter surprise, she read the book during our stay and the stage was set.

On the second or third evening we were going through Krista’s soon-to-be ex-husbands wine cellar. Price list in hand, only the most expensive ones made the cut. Revenge drinking. Quite a lot of revenge drinking, to be more precise.

After the umpteenth bottle, we listened to Peili once more and the Idea came to us, like a lightning bolt. Rationality and the Genetic Challenge will be turned into a rock opera, and Peili will be its musical starting point. The chapters will become characters.

There would be Tony, the perfect boy, Sophie, a designer-deaf girl, Tina, a savior sibling, Tim, the brother Tina was supposed to save, three bubble boys rescued by gene therapy, their parents, and an evil scientist. Luci would appear as Luke, an immortal drifter.

Or at least records show that this was the count when we reunited in Finland a couple of months later. And this is the amazing bit. How many drunken master strokes like this make it to the next day, let alone further meetings and, eventually, production?

We established a nano-company and called it Polite Bystander Productions, Krista's idea, referencing my method in *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge*. Unfortunately, that contract, signed by our heart blood, later fell through the floor boards. Life happens.

Matti, we recently learned that *Rationality and the Genetic Challenge* has been translated into Japanese, congratulations! Has the book ever been translated into any other languages as well?

Thanks. Only into Finnish that I know of, and I did it myself. It's surprisingly difficult to do that, by the way. You'd think that the subject matter is already there and you just type it up in your native language, but that's not how it goes at all. Different languages have different background philosophies and that makes it hard going. My congratulations go to the brave one who has translated my ideas into Japanese. That must have been quite a chore.

Test (2010): <https://happyville-musical.show/portfolio/test-rock-opera-trailer-2-1/>

Of your rock opera projects, Test is the one that I sadly still know the least about, and I'm looking forward to hearing you speak more about it! What is Test, how did this project begin, and what happened that eventually caused you to leave the project?

Test was the original name of the project. Krista is, among other things, a theater director and she was in the process of directing the musical *Rent* when we developed Test. Four letters and a solid double meaning. Test genetically, test humanity's resilience.

Two years into the project, a den of snakes had found its way to our little paradise. Tuija and I continued working on the music and Krista was in charge of the plot and the cast. Slowly but surely, we began to drift apart on both counts.

Krista had found musician twin brothers who could do what you do in musicals – sing a high C and make a split at the same time. The deaf girl was beginning to make incomprehensible noises. The boys with an autoimmune disease were becoming the comic relief.

The noises and the humor of being ill did not bode well with our ethical sensitivities – we saw them as offensive. We may have been wrong, trying to insert ethics into art, but that's how it was. And the music was going to directions that we didn't like, as well.

Tuija's solution was to introduce an outside veteran of rock music, Corky Laing. He was the drummer of the American hard rock band Mountain and has two gold records from Woodstock. If you know one Mountain song, it will probably be Mississippi Queen.

We had met Corky in Manchester 2006 after a Mountain gig. I wanted to see the band that had been my only American favorite when I was growing up. Tuija and Corky had kept in touch by email and she thought that collaboration, if possible, could save Test.

And so it came to be that Corky was invited to spend some time in Tuija's family country house to make music and plan what to do with the rock opera. This was then repeated many times and we were getting results that we fed back to the Swiss team.

It was all going well for a while. The Swiss were impressed by the presence of a Rock Star and we had rehearsal retreats at the Country House and in Krista's huge summer house in Lapland. We even recorded some of the stuff with the musical twins.

It soon became apparent, however, that the formula didn't work. The plot was still not to our liking and the music suggestions by the Swiss were turning the rock opera into a musical. With all due respect, musical was **not** our genre of choice.

Two years after the memorable meeting in Lupsingen, the project divided into two. Krista started a new production company,

Happyville Productions, for completing Test and our Polite Bystander Productions took charge of Playing God, our version.

Krista went on to produce Test and it was performed in Basel. We were not in close contact at the time, so I don't know all the details. Some of their songs and scenes can be found on the Test – The Rock Opera website, but apparently no recording was made.

We continued with our project independently but things were so far gone that most of the characters in the two are the same. Even the name of our eventual recording is Playing God – Corky Laing and the Perfct Child perform original music from Test: The Rock Opera.

As sad as it is that the project encountered the problems that it did, and that it didn't end up the way you had wished, what I've heard of at least some of the resulting musical, is fantastic, with Marc Storace, the famed lead singer of Krokus playing Luke.

No reason to be sad at all. That night in Lupsingen thirteen years ago has produced two rock operas and, indirectly, my Orkid and many albums by Tuija and Corky, not to mention Corky's priceless memoirs Letters to Sarah that they went on to write together.

And yes, the Krokus connection. During one of our visits to Lupsingen, we travelled to Germany to catch a gig by Ken Hensley, a legendary songwriter and musician of the British prog rock band Uriah Heep. Uriah Heep will also figure later in Hankikanto.

Anyway, we knew Ken and had an invitation backstage, Tuija, Krista, a couple of her Swiss team, and I. While Tuija and I chatted with Ken, trying to get him involved, Krista turned her attention to Mark Storace who shared the dressing room with Ken.

Nothing came of our talks with Ken (R.I.P.) but Krista and Mark apparently struck a common chord, as Mark then became involved in Test. Some really great singing by him in their endeavor. And yes, he became Luke, my original Luci, in a very different disguise.

There was, and is, an incredible amount of ridiculous talent floating about in that scene. The last-millennium artists who spent their

fortunes in the High Life back when are still around and looking for lucrative opportunities. Our gain, not necessarily anyone's loss.

Did any of your music remain in the resulting show, even after you left?

In short, no. But let me tell you about one song. It illustrates the difficulties that we had, and I continued to have with Playing God. The song was originally called When the Apple Blossoms Bloom in the Windmills of Your Mind, I'll Be Your Valentine. Snappy.

I wrote it in fall 1980, as I recall. It was a dark and stormy night, and I was the officer on duty in the garrison where I was first stationed after Military Academy. I had my guitar with me and the song was born in one sitting.

It is best described as a suicide-pact song. In it, I promised my partner that if she goes first, I will follow immediately. I can still remember the sentiment perfectly. The one thing I don't get is that one line says, "down above". I sometimes surprise myself like that.

Anyway, I offered it to Test and the Swiss team said we could use it, with different music and different lyrics. That's what they said. "We can use it, with different music and different lyrics. I still don't know what that even means.

I then offered the song to Playing God and almost the same thing happened. Tuija wrote new lyrics, retaining none of the original, and Corky sang it with a melody line that I didn't recognize. I let it be but vowed to release my vision at some point, too.

And this I did in Orkid under the title The Mirror Is Broken. Otherwise, the words and the music are exactly as in my original. Sang by the very talented Bonnie Parker from Long Island, New York. Shall we play it for the audience?

Yes, please!

[The Mirror Is Broken]

Such a beautiful & sad song, one of my favorites from Orkid, and I'm very happy to now know more about its back story! Wonderful that it finally got to exist with the music & lyrics it was originally meant to, and especially that it's a part of your Orkid - sometimes it seems, things

come together in the best possible ways. I look forward to discussing this song more, once it gets its place within the Orkid story line.

Yes, and that concludes my story of that particular song for now. I'm still trying to figure out what the "down above" means. It's sometimes like that with ideas. The one that you don't get may be the key. Perhaps I will Know Everything when I finally understand those words.

Playing God - The Rock Opera (2013):

Well, Matti, I do believe we have now come to the conclusion of our look at Test, so now on to the next chapter of your Rock Opera journey -

So In 2011, you & Takala broke off from Test, along with "Corky" Laing, and the project became a new rock opera called, Playing God - no relation to your 2001 book of roughly the same title, except in theme. Together, the three of you would develop 25 songs, which would eventually be released as an album in 2013, called, Playing God: Corky Laing and the Perfct Child Perform Original Music from Test: The Rock Opera, produced by Polite Bystander Productions.

Yes, and since we are criticizing the idea of genetic perfection, "perfect" is misspelt, without the second "e" and I pronounce it "perfucked child".

Now, you spoke extensively about Playing God in our first interview, and in preparation for that episode, I had indeed heard a little of this, and seen a little of that, but I didn't really understand much about it at all at the time... In addition to this, you speak somewhat disparagingly about Playing God-on Exploring Antinatalism, and so considering that, I'm sort of shocked just how much I've fallen in love with this show, now that I've done the proper full deep dive into the project - Playing God is an excellent Rock Opera, a brilliant concept, and an even more incredible album!

Thank you. I'll promise not to be disparaging this time. I'll just lap up all the praise and collect all the credit.

Let me first off by say that, people listening should absolutely pick up a copy of the album, you can get it on Amazon and there will be a link to it, but also, on the Polite Bystander Productions YT channel, you can see a 19 minute video version of one of the stage productions! Not to be missed!

Yes, the whole thing would be out in the open, like Orkid, if I had my way. But the other two owners still think that it could be commercially exploited, so we cannot even play the recorded songs here, more's the shame. I'll give you something, though.

It would be criminal of me not to point out the incredible amount of talent that went into the cast of Playing God - I had never heard of "Corky" Laing before this, but he's phenomenal on the album and my god what a drummer! Can you tell us a little more about him, as well as the character that he plays in both the show and album, Luke?

Originally from Montreal, he became the drummer of Mountain, quite a famous hard-rock band in the US in the 60s and the 70s, soon after Woodstock. And since I mentioned those old things, let me complete that by dropping all the relevant names from the era.

Corky played in Mountain with Leslie West on guitar and Felix Pappalardi, who had produced the Cream album Disraeli Gears just before. Pappalardi had health problems and Corky and Leslie West ganged up with the former Cream bassist Jack Bruce.

They were known as West, Bruce and Laing and made a record or two but High Life was more important and the band folded pretty soon. Corky went on to play with Mickey Ronson (David Bowie's guitarist), Ian Hunter (of Mott the Hoople), Noel Reading (of Jimi Hendrix Experience), and Eric Schenkman (of the Spin Doctors). And then us. Like you do.

His character in Playing God is, in the versions that you have seen, Luke, a distant descendant of my original Luci. But on the album he sings all the male parts and in our first performances he was still both Luke and one of the Perfect Boys. Very confusing,

Luke is a 110-year old bluesman who about sixty years ago had some experimental longevity treatment. He's not ageing at all but

he's bored of life and tries to kill himself with pills and liquor. He gets as far as the gate of the Terrace of the Gods, but the Gods don't let him in.

Gods live on prayers and people have stopped praying for the health of their future children. The Gods want to know why and send Luke back to Happyville, the place he came from and the location of the lowest prayer rate on Earth.

What can you tell me about some of the other cast members, and musicians who make up the players of Playing God?

On the album, the main forces were Corky, Bonnie Parker and Denny Colt from Long Island (you already heard Bonnie on vocals and bass), and our studio master Lacce. Over twenty musicians have been involved in the studio and on stage but this is the core. Eric Schenkman, the Spin Doctor, did some guitar on the album.

I don't think I've ever seen an instance in a musical, or anything of the kind, where the main character, in this case Luke, spends most of the show behind a drum set! Was that a difficult juggling act to have to contend with having such a pivotal character, who needs to drive so much of the narrative, obscured behind a drum set for so much of the show?

It was, and is for the people who know Mountain, a Corky show, and they don't seem to mind. For the continuity of the plot, it was a nightmare, but I think it evolved quite nicely when we performed it on stage. In the end, almost everyone was trying to steal the show. When I was on stage, I thought that my own character Mr. C, or Mr. Cunningham, was the key figure.

Like Mr. Cunningham, Luke is the one other character I feel we get barely enough time with during the show, so many questions about who he is, so much left about him that could be further explored!

We can do some exploring.

And we should – You sent me a wonderful back story for Luke at some point, before he met Cunningham, about his life as a brilliant guitarist, traveling to Chicago, playing in clubs – is there anything you would like to say for now about this proposed backstory you had written about him?

That can wait until we get to a good point in the opera's story. I'll just say now that there might be more to him than meets the eye.

Let's talk a little bit about the story of *Playing God*, and let's do so by going through the album itself.

From the liner notes of the album:

"The good people of Happyville, set back in a 1970s version of tomorrow, have enjoyed the advantages of genetic engineering for decades without any thought, but the day of judgment is near. When Luke comes to town, and gods develop an interest in Mr. C's science peddling, the secrets of the townspeople are about to be revealed, and their lives may never be the same again."

That's what it is. Before we plunge into the songs, just talking, would it be an idea to give a short teaser of what the show is about? I happen to have a couple of minutes' trailer for one of our shows. Care to see it?

Sure! Play it, Sam!

[The Gloria Trailer.]

That is a good summary of the musical extravaganza. Thank you! And now the songs, one by one.

1. Gods March:

Opening instrumental track of the show.

2. Luke's Blues:

Here we are introduced to Luke, played and sung by Corky Laing. Luke is a haggard blues guitarist, who was the victim of Mr. Cunningham's life extension treatments - Luke is now 110 years old when we first see him, suicidal, and promptly ends his life after nailing the contract he had once signed to Cunningham's door.

Quick question on Luke's deal with Cunningham - Cunningham didn't necessarily swindle Luke in this deal, did he? He may have overcharged him, that we don't find out, but he did give Luke what he had wanted at the time, no?

The audience cannot know. There is bad blood between them, that's for sure. The most probable story is that Mr. C kinda lured Luke into the life extension experiment by promising to pay his gambling debts – which he presumably did. Luke's beef, judging by Luke's Blues, is that he is tired of life and blames Mr. C or at least the deal they made all those years ago,

3. Terrace of the Gods:

Now dead, Luke travels to the terrace of the Gods, where he finds several gods, lamenting that no one is praying to them, and the loss of 'dignity' "Whatever happened, to those calls of despair, They were praying for their unborn babies, To be healthy and without a care.' Much to Luke's bewilderment & horror, he is sent back down to earth so that the gods can use him to find out what's going on.

Yes, well done, that much is clear.

4. Perfect Boy:

Back down on earth, Luke first finds himself 20 years in the past, and witnesses Mr. Cunningham making a deal with Mr. & Mrs. Pigafetti, who want two perfect twin boys. Mr. Cunningham gladly obliges them, charging them nearly 100k for his service, but does he provide what is being asked for? The resulting twins are Tony & Alex - genetically 'Perfect' boys.

One of the later Revelations tells us that Mr. C simply ordered two clones of the handsome actor whose photo he showed the couple. He is Mr. C, not Dr. C, as in the Test musical version. He is a businessman and maximizes his profits.

It's sort of creepy here how Mrs. Pigafetti essentially orders two sons who she describes as being sexually attractive to her!

Yes, Bonnie does a very good job of being in love with the idea of these beautiful boys. Reproducers, breeders, can be like that, I guess. Creepy indeed.

5. Tony's Return & 6. College Girls:

We now jump 20 years into the future, to the opera's normal time, with the return of Tony back to Happyville from college. Tony is extremely

popular, and everyone is delighted to see him again. Once there, he regains everyone with his stories of his sexual conquests in the song College Girls.

As an aside, during the album's production, I was so fed up with Tony and his brother Alex, originally Krista's Swiss twins, that I tried to sabotage them in any way I could. I even prepared a trailer in the tune of the movie Crying Game.

Tony dances with the most beautiful girl in the college at a party, College Girls is playing, they drift into the dormitory, start removing their clothing, and Tony finds something he didn't expect. He takes a closer look, and the beautiful girl is his twin brother Alex. He wakes up back home in Happyville, sweating and panting.

The trailer didn't make it to the official marketing plan.

7. Silent Dream: (Is this also 4. The mirror is broken from Orkid)

In the next song, Silent Dream, (One of my favorites from the album.) Tony expresses his love for Sofie, a young girl whose father sells vegetables in town, and who is also an assistant to Mr. Cunningham.

We heard the Orkid version. The Playing God one is, I believe, semi-secret courting between my two collaborators. I only realized this much later. But the song is resilient and they didn't destroy it.

8. My Brother's Gonna Die:

But now, the story turns quite serious, as Tina, who is a savior sibling, created to save her dying brother. Tim begs the people of Happyville for help. This pair of characters are I think two of the most moving of the whole show. Tim's eventual death, and the devastation it leaves poor Tina are profoundly tragic elements to the story.

If you're brought into this life with poor consideration

There's no hope that you will see much emancipation

A new one will be made by test tube fertilization

And she'll be made to pay their debt by supererogation

Brilliant!

Thanks. That's my earlier song Passification – we heard it in episode #65 of the Exploring Antinatalism Podcast – in double speed and truncated. The performers, especially Maya Paakkari, and our director, Kate Mueth, have really made the most of it.

From what I understand, Tim is terminally ill with a disease called X-SCID, the bubble boy syndrome, that when treated with gene therapy turns into leukemia...

Actually no. The Bubble Boys were dropped from Playing God and they only appear in the Swiss team's Test: The Rock Opera.

Tim's disease is, following my Rationality and the Genetic Challenge, either Fanconi's anemia, thalassemia, or Diamond-Blackfan anemia. These are all fatal diseases which may be cured by producing a healthy, genetically matching savior sibling. Stem cells collected from the umbilical cord or later from blood or bone marrow are implanted to the ailing child who may be cured.

Mr. C's business crime, and one of the reasons for his eventual downfall, was that he ordered a cheap genetic test in the production of Tina, the supposed savior sibling, and this led to Tina's being the "wrong kind", not the savior that she – well, someone else really – could have been.

9. Open Up Your Imagination:

In this song 'perfect' brothers, Tony & Alex sing about their brotherhood. One thing that I wasn't particularly sure about regarding both of these characters - do they know that they are supposed to be perfect? And does Tony believe that he is, while Alex seems to know that he is not?

Most of the perfect-boy twists and turns are a little enigmatic to me – hangovers from the earlier Test days of the production. But we needed them to have different mentalities, Tony's world-conquering extrovert and Alex's poetic introvert.

The matter of whether the boys know about their perfection was much debated by the Test production team when we were still all in it together. I seem to recall arguing that Mr. and Mrs. Pigafetti, their parents, didn't want the townspeople to know, in which case the boys wouldn't have known, either.

10. Here is Our Blood:

Another favorite of mine from the show - Tina gathers all the people of Happyville to have their blood tested, so that they may find a match to use Tim. Everyone signs Cunningham's contract clearing him of any responsibility.

This is the first we see of Mr. C's business. The standard contract indeed states that he is not to blame for any damage caused to his clients. The clients, the townspeople, seem to be so used to this that they gather meekly to offer their blood at Tina's summoning.

The testing itself is a futile exercise, as there is very little chance of finding a genetic match from a random collection of people. It came to be a part of the story due to the name Test, but it stayed in *Playing God* to herald the townspeople's uprising later.

11. Jupiter:

Another really beautiful song, I'll simply copy what's written about it in the liner notes of the album here:

Love comes in many shapes and forms. There's love at first sight between Tony and Sophie, and sibling love between Tina and Tim that transgresses the boundaries of death. Life is peculiar - as Luke observes.

That's a Corky classic, lyrical content intact from his previous projects. Bonnie and Denny turned it into more metal and Eric Schenkman added the quivering guitar here and there.

I've seen some video footage of your shows, and there's one detail that intrigues me. Halfway through the song, there's a little moment where one of the gods stands on the terrace, and Mr. C stands on his box, and they sing these lines at each other - "In this world We gotta have Someone we can count on, You know you can, Always depend on me" And then you both walk off - what is the significance of that moment? Do Mr. C and that particular God know each other? What is this 'dependency' on each other that they seem to be communicating? Isn't Mr. C taking something away from the gods, not offering some kind of symbiotic relationship?

Playing God was originally performed in two acts and the intermission was there-about-ish. When we moved on to one go, the songs in that area were mixed and everything was rethought. This is possibly a moment during which the Gods see for the first time through the mist that covers Happyville – and see Mr. Cunningham.

But that's not necessarily so. See, they are both singing to the Townspeople – that when the Townspeople look for someone to rely on, they should turn to us (say the Gods) or to me (says Mr. C). The reason why Mikaela Mansikkala, the God on the Terrace, and I look at each other is to make sure that we are singing in sync. And the reason why Mikaela is alone up there is that all the other Gods are busily playing their designated instruments downstairs.

But sorry, that's just the boring logistics. The meaning is that we both, the Gods and Mr. C, want to retain our monopoly in the prayer business.

12. Tim's Requiem:

Instrumental track. Tim dies.

Denny's masterpiece. In Kate Mueth's direction on stage, it developed into a touching acceptance of death as a part of life.

13. Not Good Enough:

Sophie & Tony are now in love and want to run away together, much to the chagrin on the Pigafetti's, as well as Sophies 'father'.

A necessary comic relief after the sad moment, the Pigafettis being more worried about their vegetable supply than the happiness of the young ones. Also, a bridge to Sophie's liberation.

14. Father's Lament:

Sophie's father is devastated by the prospect of losing his only daughter, but Sophie insists that she needs to be free to make her own decisions.

And here it comes, the liberation.

This scene was really powerful in the production video - does this vegetable seller father have any idea that he's not actually her father?

Good actor-musicians make good stuff, I agree. No, no one knows anything before the Revelations. You have probably seen Joe Venti as Mr. Veggie and Johanna Ahola-Launonen as Sophie.

Joe is one of Corky's long-time collaborators and performed after Playing God in one of his Mountain comeback bands.

Johanna is a philosopher in my team at Aalto University School of Business. I recruit only people who can sing, play, and dance, to save in the production costs of my musical endeavors. Or can I say that out loud? Probably not, so forget. (Black glasses, beam, erase the memory.)

15. Crying Shame:

Tony & Alex realize they are both in love with Sophie, and the two quarrel over this revelation.

While Tony was in college, Alex stayed in Happyville and developed a crush on Sophie. On his return, Tony sweeps Sophie off her feet. And yes, during the song, Alex realizes this and the boys have a verbal fight.

16. Journey:

An absolutely beautiful song, Tina tries to figure out how to live after the loss of her beloved brother Tim, who she was born to save.

Time for another name drop. The song was written by Malcolm Bruce, Jack Bruce's son, for another one of Corky's endless collaborative projects. Originally a story of dealing with the World Trade Center events. Music bends to fit new purposes.

17. Sisterhood:

Instrumental track in which Tina is comforted by some of the townspeople of Happyville.

Again, works on stage because of Kate Mueth's solid directing.

This was originally supposed to be a sisterhood of police officers – I might say something about that later.

18. Vital Stream:

Tina finally realizes that she is more than the genetic curse that created both her and Tim, and she is finally free of her past's hold on her future.

The way you are telling the story makes it really visible that one of the main side stories in the show is Tina's predicament as a failed savior sibling, Tim's death, and Tina's slow process of recovery. Finally, an antinatal theme! The parents are the culprits!

I know we cannot use the Playing God tracks, but we have now gone without music for quite some time and the story is about to have a turn. I just happen to have an early demo recording of this song that is my intellectual and artistic property. Should we?

Absolutely!

[Life in the Shadow]

A real treat getting to hear that! I was kind of hoping you had some early demo versions of some of these songs squirreled away for such an occasion, thank you for the rare peak into this early iteration of the song! And I sympathize with the lyrics quite a lot.

Thank you for listening to that all-Matti version of the song. The point made in it is another almost antinatal moment in the story. If I'm here, if you've made me to be here, then at least let me be me, my vital stream. There. I've had my rant, and we can go on.

19. Revelations I:

Sofie, who has become disenchanted with both Tony & Alex, explores Mr. Cunningham's secret files, & through her explorations, some of Mr. Cunningham's nefarious deeds, begin to become known. In this first revelation, Mr. Cunningham tells us all about his having created both Tony & Alex, for a sum of 50k for each boy, however, it is also revealed that the boys, aren't actually perfect at all, and are simply clones of an actor whose picture he had shown to the Pigs.

Yes, and it's all downhill from here.

20. Meltdown:

Tony laments the imperfection of his supposedly perfect life, and the pressure of what he's supposed to genetically be crushes him.

This could be read as evidence that Tony knows about Mr. and Mrs. Pigafetti's intentions. Not necessarily, though. Some parents tell their children that they are perfect and keep repeating the message so that the children come to believe so themselves. Maybe this is what happened to Tony and he went a little cuckoo. At least I tried to question parenthood, all parenthood, all along.

21. Revelations II:

Mr. Cunningham's second revelation from his secret files, Sophie finds out that Mr. C ordered ineffective, lower cost tests for the full cost, probably causing the death of Tim where he might otherwise have been able to help him.

This is the physically worst thing that Mr. C has done. Tina was selected because of this test, was **not** a match, and could **not** be the savior she later on would have liked to be. If Mr. C had ordered the more expensive test, Tina would **not** have been selected and someone else would have come to existence and saved Tim.

So there's no winning for Tina as a devoted, life-loving savior sister in this scenario. Either she exists and Tim dies **or** Tim would have lived and she would **not** have existed. I'm pretty sure that the audience missed that completely. The logic of these beginning-of-life choices is a little opaque, shall we say.

22. Eyes in the Mirror:

Another favorite song of mine from the album, such a sad song, this time sung by Alex as he longs for the love of Sophie.

Thank you. A rare specimen of mine that made it to the album almost intact.

23. Revelations III:

And now comes Mr. Cunningham's most shocking revelation - he is in fact Sophie's father!

This indeed is the revelation that shocks people the most, and I find it interesting. Mr. C has just handed Tim a death sentence and

we are more concerned about paternity issues. I mean, we all have a biological father, and ten percent of urban populations identify the wrong bloke.

This short spoken passage used to be my litmus test for how drunk the audience was during the live shows. My line goes, "I used my own sperm at no cost." With a stone sober audience, the "sperm" drew a couple of nervous giggles. A properly fortified audience had a more relaxed quick laugh.

24. Mr. C's Demise:

Upon hearing this shocking revelation, Sophie decides to expose Mr. Cunningham's deeds by printing copies of all of his secret files and making them public to the many victims of Happyville.

Outraged, the people of Happyville form a mob to take their revenge against Mr. C, who tells them they are hypocrites - which I would understand more if he was speaking to the Pigafetti's perhaps, but among those there, really no one has used his services, except for Tina, who I have a difficult time blaming for much of anything in this situation... Do you think Mr. C is at all correct for leveling this accusation against the people of Happyville?

It's assumed that the whole town has happily used his services, probably even knowing that he's a bit of a crook, just believing that they themselves have had the straight deal.

But it's not a question of justification. Of course, he's in the wrong, just pompously trying to defend himself in what he sees as an alarming but manageable situation.

Cunningham is murdered after Luke informs the gods of Mr. C's crimes. He is killed by the people of Happyville for stealing their hopes and money, and slaughtered by the gods for stealing their prayers.

My, my, is that what happens? It's open to the viewer's interpretation, of course, but since Gods don't really exist, the townspeople are strong candidates. As you mentioned already, at some point I entertained the idea of turning Playing God into a detective TV series. Didn't catch fire, I'm afraid. But I opened the script by a newsclip about the event. It says:

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MAN DIES IN MYSTERIOUS EXPLOSION – LOCAL PEOPLE CLAIM ACT OF GOD

A man died in an explosion early yesterday morning in Happyville, Mississippi. A forceful blast took place in the middle of a heavily crowded market square, but the lethal impact was inexplicably limited to just one person. Information about the incident is scarce, and eye witnesses are reluctant to talk to the media. The town, historically inhabited by Scandinavian settlers, has a strong tradition of Norse religious mythology. Some townspeople contacted by the press allege that the death occurred as a divine punishment. The victim's name has not been disclosed.

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Then an entire TV series would have been launched to investigate the case.

Yes! During our correspondence, you've shared quite a bit with me in regard to this possible TV series sequel iteration to *Playing God* – for whatever it might be worth, I do hope this idea sees the light of day at some point, I think there is so much more story left to tell in regard to Cunningham's backstory, as well as many of the other characters!

You've mentioned that you had at some point developed an entire 24 episodes of this possible future series?

Yes, it would have examined character by character who actually killed Mr. C and revealed many more possible secrets and possible worlds. There are obvious additional questions to be answered. Where are Tina and Tim's parents? Where is Sophie's mother?

To give you a taste of how my delirious mind works, one of the storylines I concocted was that Sophie's mother now lives in the neighbouring town and is having a clandestine affair with Mrs. Pigafetti. Sophie's mother left Mr. Veggie because he is a stupefyingly boring man and she couldn't bear his hippie-vegetarian lifestyle. After the events of the opera, they move to Washington. D.C. and Mrs. Pigafetti ends up being the President

of the United States. The usual stuff for TV series like this.

And then there is, of course, the obvious question. Who and what are Luke and Mr. C and why is their relationship what it is?

Your response to my original questions regarding Mr. Cunningham's death reminded me, I had forgotten - there were a number of different possibilities you had proposed as being alternative causes of death aside from the obvious possibilities of the Gods & the townspeople including that, Cunningham had been offed by the government, and also that he was possibly assassinated by international terrorists! Anything at all you might like to say about these two alternative explanations?

Well, they are good candidates assuming that the experiments Luke and Mr. C were involved in were in fact a part of a military-industrial-complex plan of some kind. When Sophie starts releasing Mr. C's secret files, the government faces a clear and imminent threat. And Luke may have been converted to some terrorist ideology during his bluesman days in Chicago and is now activated by his foreign masters to get rid of Mr. C.

But the story told on stage is firm and tells us that Mr. C is brought down by a lightning bolt thrown from the Terrace of the Gods. We had some pretty impressive light effects and thunder for that in the more mature performances.

Just before the lightning strikes, the gods sing:

Dignity, sanctity, where's the humility,

we have to force them to see what is right

ART, DNA, IVF, PGD

That's not the way to respect our right

I would be interested in hearing you speak more about the meaning you intend here behind, Dignity, sanctity, & humility.

Our stage Gods had a time of their lives rehearsing that one: five people have to go in unison with "Dignity, sanctity, where's the humility, we have to force them to see what is right" – I won't even try the abbreviations.

But the meaning. It's the Gods' turn to be pompous. Perhaps they have to justify to themselves that they are taking Mr. C out, so they resort to reciting their old divinity-based privileges. People should've treated them with respect, recognizing their superior dignity and sanctity and being humble and servile. Instead, Mr. C has turned them into science consumers who don't need Gods to protect their offspring.

This, by the way, in our official version is the first time that the Gods hear about all those biomedical innovations – in vitro fertilization, pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, and the like. Could be differently. I'll say something about that in a jiffy.

25. In This World:

“The evil man is no more. It was not their fault, nothing is their fault.”

Is this saying that without science and the ability to manipulate life, they are innocent because without it they will pray, and without it they will once again be the possession of the gods?

It could be saying that. Or they could just be horrified by their own mob justice and try to sweep the incident under the carpet. They are decent, simple folks, after all, and if they took a life in a frenzy, they could feel bad about it and try to forget it as soon as possible.

And then Sophie & Tina appear to become lovers, and the story ends.

Yes, my final attempt to break the heteronormativity of the story.

Ah, I didn't realize this was something you had made a conscious attempt to do with the story! Though in your proposed TV sequel, you do mention that one possible connection between Luke & Mr. Cunningham could have been that they were ex-lovers, which I think makes perfect sense – I always thought Luke's line at the very start of the show - 'They laid me down, They split my genes' might have a little bit of a double meaning.

That little gem – the double meaning of “dʒi:nz” – didn't escape our attention at the production stage. But Luke's Blues is very much a one-take studio solo effort by Corky, with some ad-libbing with the lyrics, so we kept it for its solid, raw, live quality. Also, the guitar is

fashionably out of tune. We thought that that was perfect for the occasion.

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I would be really interested to know any details you might be willing to share about what went into the writing on *Playing God*? How long did it take to write the music & the story, and what kind of story lines were perhaps tried, but did not make the cut?

First, the writing and the general shape of the thing.

As you know by now, there were quite a few songs that had been written by Corky and me and many others much earlier, some of them dating back over thirty years. So when we put it all together in 2011–2012, we had a job keeping some kind of continuity.

Music is, of course, durable and can be recycled. Maybe I should give you an example. As late as June 2012 I had a song called *Let's Lynch the Conman* that was headed for the *Playing God* album. To my surprise and dismay, it was cut out of the completed product and only parts of it survived in *Mr. C's Demise*. I made it up to the song by including my more original version in *Orkid*, my next rock opera, a few years later.

Anyway, durability. With different original lyrics. this is the first song I ever wrote. The year was 1974 so it had to wait for 38 years to be released but released it was. I just found an all-me-and-the-studio-master version of it when I was excavating my files. Would you like to hear it?

Sure, let's do it!

[*Let's Lynch the Conman*]

Wow! I hope you know how much I enjoy getting to hear these rare versions of the songs, this one especially offers a fascinating window into where the development of both *Playing God* & *Orkid* were at this particular time, a halfway point almost, of sorts. Great details offered by the lyrics regarding Alex's character, by the way, he stands out here as being a voice of reason along with *The Constable* in the mad murderous frenzy of the mob against *Mr. C* - this is an element of his character I think perhaps got a bit lost over time, but really helps here in

distinguishing him from his brother, Tony. A real treat also hearing you do all the different voices - I personally wouldn't mind an entirely all Matti version of any of these albums at some point!

Thank you. Yes, I liked the Alex character more than the Tony character, and Alex is presented here my way. Shy, romantic, withdrawing, but sensible and firm when the going gets rough. Unlike Tony, who is mainly just full of himself.

Their parents' reactions in this one, by the way, answer one of your earlier questions, at least in my interpretation. Mrs. Pigafetti says, "And now they all know / It wasn't my grace" – which clearly indicates that they had not revealed their perfect-boy plan to others. Reproducing naturally would have been more respectable, it is suggested. That is also reflected in the Townspeople's line "Stop all this or full exposure / Shames us like we never knew".

Going back to your question about the making of *Playing God* in its many disguises, the album and the performances tell slightly different stories.

Our long backlog of songs meant that the album ended up being more of a jukebox musical than a concept album. The stage performances gradually made it the work of art that you have seen and will, I hope, be released by my collaborators sometime soon.

To put this in another way, the album doesn't have a proper libretto. This means that Kate Mueth, as the director, had to develop her own, and we all tried to help. To good effect, I hope.

Then the storyline material that didn't make the cut. I am reminded of two notable cases.

First, the Constable who features in my *Let's Lynch the Conman* with Alex as a voice of reason. Since the early days of *Test* with the Swiss team, there was supposed to be a female police officer in Happyville, patrolling the streets and seeing everything, protecting people. With Luke and Mr. C, I guess that there are two father figures in the story, and she would have been the mother figure. Mrs. Pigafetti is not exactly a role model.

In the instrumental dance number *Sisterhood* – I promised to return to this – Tina has joined the police force and the sisterhood

of constables helps her over the loss of Tim. In the early stage performances, this was still visible in police headgear, but the director took that out for the final shows as an unnecessary distraction. You saw the police women briefly in the trailer video.

Another major gap is that the theme of Luke and the Gods is seriously underdeveloped. Originally, they were supposed to communicate at regular intervals, Luke reporting back to the Gods what he had found out. The anger of the Gods in the end wouldn't have come out of nothing, like it seems to do on the album. Again, this was partly rectified in the stage performances.

Another idea was that the Gods would be having a party on their Terrace of the Gods and the party would unfold with the events down on Earth, their time being different from ours. In the beginning, when they send Luke back, they would be sober but they would then become tipsier and tipsier until in the end they are in a devil-may-care state of consciousness. Hence the lightning bolt that kills Mr. C. In my Let's Lynch the Conman this would have been more visible, as you heard, but after the song was scrapped, the rest of the idea kinda evaporated.

Performances of Playing God ran from 2013-2016, beginning in Manchester, then Paris, Basel, New Haven, New York & Helsinki - which is really quite an impressive lineup of locations! How many performances of the show total do you believe occurred over this span of time? Where did the show see the most success?

All in all, about a dozen different performances during three mini-tours. Maybe the most notable success was at the Kaye Playhouse, an Off-Off-Broadway theater on the 68th Street between Park and Lexington Avenues, Manhattan, New York. We gave a solid performance to an audience of 600 and they seemed to like it.

In that show, I had the best Ozzy Osbourne make-up of all the gigs. A true professional who did that with just a few slashes of black. Simple is beautiful.

After the show, we had a big-time afterparty somewhere in the Meatpacking District and celebrated our success. All guests

received a gift box that contained, as a highlight, custom-made Playing God condoms. Every little bit helps in the antinatal battle.

After the afterparty, I was purchasing some late-night or early-morning snacks in a deli on Houston Street and had some odd looks. That's how good the makeup artist was. Odd looks on Houston Street, New York – can you imagine?

In the band's name, Playing God: Corky Laing and the Perfct Child Perform Original Music from Test: The Rock Opera, there exists an intentional misspelling of the word Perfect as Perfct, which is a very interesting choice. Can you explain why this decision was made?

As I said in passing before, the official explanation is that genetics can only produce perfucked, not perfect, children. Other reasons include originality, the worn-out nature of the expression "perfect child", and perhaps my general tiredness with the whole theme by the point the album was completed.

From what I understand, at least some stage productions of Playing God had an extra narrator character who does not feature at all on the album, the character of Death - why was this character added into the stage production?

Yes, this is an addition that we made for the final performances in Helsinki, hopefully to be released at some point.

You are a film professional, so you know the reason. When executives look at the final product – as in a movie – and cannot make head or tail of what's going on, they add a narrator. It's a cheap gimmick and shows that you haven't done a proper job in the making of the artwork, but it worked like a charm.

For those out there listening who have maybe not heard our first episode, you explain there that part of the vision behind the Playing God project was, as a Bioethics Educational Tool, complete with after-show discussions on Biomedical issues which are key parts of the story - a truly admirable addition to the concept, and one I can't imagine doesn't still have great potential. What were some of the things that people would typically ask about after the show?

We had after-show panel discussions in New Haven, organized by Yale University, and in New York, organized by Hunter College of Columbia University. The audiences didn't ask anything but they were clearly interested in some of the topics that our academic guests introduced. Do we really think that genetics is such a monster? Whose responsibility is it that it's used for iffy as well as for clearly benign purposes? Why is the chief villain of the piece Mr. Cunningham as opposed to Dr. Cunningham?

I was always on an after-performance high so I have no recollection of what I responded – if anything. I just tried to be clever and lovable, I guess. The audiences were there to be entertained, not lectured at, after all.

We actually had better discussions when we just told about the show and then let people, academic and non-academic, talk about the ideas that popped into their minds. We had such events organized at the universities of Manchester in England, Harvard and Denver in the U.S., and Sorbonne in France.

So now let's spend some time speaking about the villain of *Playing God*, the malevolent Mr. Cunningham, played by none other than, Matti Häyry!

At one point in the development of *Playing God*, was it decided that you would be playing the role of Cunningham?

We had our work cut with this character. We were in loose talks about the role with Marco Hietala, then of Nightwish, and Michael Monroe, the front man of Hanoi Rocks, but nothing came out of those. Also, it was becoming evident that we were not writing a proper lead singing role for the character.

I tried to rack my brain to avoid the role to the last. One of my suggestions was to use Denny Colt or another of our female cast so that I could get some gender blindness to the show. In the end, as I was the one writing all his lines, I was forced to become Mr. C.

Had you ever done any acting on stage before playing Mr. Cunningham?

I was the candle holder in the Military Academy's Star Singers Christmas performance in 1976 but after that things had been quieter in my acting career. In other words, no, not as such. But

I'm a university lecturer and feel comfortable before audiences, so no one saw that as a major problem. And the role is not that difficult. Sit and stand, deliver a few lines, and get slain.

Kate never actually directed me. I guess I was the hopeless case who wouldn't take direction, anyway, so why bother?

You also feature quite prominently on the album for *Playing God*, but singing & voice acting in the role - your voice acting is fantastic on the album!

Thank you. The studio master did wonders.

You are of course, wonderful as the incredibly evil Mr. Cunningham, a fascinating character both within the show, and in how he stands in juxtaposition to who you are as a human being - You, the Antinatalist ethicist, someone who cannot see how it could be his duty to act in ways which do not produce the maximum of net good - and Cunningham, the Natalist villain, who uses anyone and everyone to satisfy his own selfish and corrupt ends.

From what I understand, Mr. Cunningham was originally Dr. Cunningham, a geneticist, from *TEST*. Cunningham in *TEST*, was a medic, and actually the hero of the story. Can you tell me more about how the two versions of this character differ?

In *Test*, the idea was to vilify science, and that's why Cunningham was a medical man. If he in the Swiss production ended up saving people, that must be down to Krista's pronatal vision. She wanted to start the show like Woody Allen's *Everything That You Always Wanted to Know About Sex*, with the unborn queuing and struggling to become existent. From what I have seen on their website, she seems to have held that idea.

In the concluding part of my own rock-opera trilogy, starting with *Orkid*, I may, just may, return to that theme with my newly acquired awareness of antinatalism. What if they draw lots and the loser is sent down on Earth – like Luke in *Playing God*? Possibilities.

Who is Mr. Cunningham? What went into the development of his character? We get to know so little about him during the course of the show - where did he come from, and why is he so unfeeling and

malevolent? And is there something in particular he's trying to buy with all of that stolen money?

On the album and in the stage performances, we just don't know. Having developed this further in my idea of the TV series, however, my speculations are:

He must be old, as old or older than Luke – 110 – because otherwise he wouldn't have been around to lure Luke to the immortality experiment. My guess is that he took part in that himself. He's been around for generations of Happyvilleans and is likely to have a hand in all their lives.

I play the part and I've had to create some sympathy towards the character, and I don't think that he's evil or even, at heart, uncaring.

Like in classical Greek tragedy, he once was a noble man but then succumbed to hubris – a false belief that he is above human and divine powers. The Revelations show how he descends from ripping money off the self-righteous Pigafettis (not that objectionable) to carelessness in the savior sibling case (criminal) all the way through to – maybe – a sense of power in using his own sperm to produce Sophie (what they seem to have done, the worst of the male reproductive doctors, in real life).

And like in classical Greek tragedy, he meets his nemesis – the wrath of the Gods. And like in classical Greek tragedy, the audience experiences a catharsis – the satisfaction of the resolution of the case and the restoring of the moral order that he dented. Or something. What do I know? The audience competition is open. What could motivate a person like the one we have been describing here?

I'm probably way off, but I'll share my thoughts anyway - having now fully studied *Playing God* and in thinking a lot about what the character of Mr. Cunningham means, it struck me that what he reminds me of most is one of my all-time favorite stories - Faust. There is no bet between God & Satan this time regarding to corruptibility of humanity - the corruptibility of humanity, at least from the perspective of the Gods here, only seems to be measured in a loss of divine ego gratification. And so,

they enslave a man, Luke, to investigate an evil they apparently are incapable of seeing, and that evil is apparently a crooked arbiter of The Genetic Challenge - Cunningham. If Playing God is a Faust analogy, then Cunningham is some type of Satan, complete with his contracts, but instead of collecting souls in exchange for his nefarious services, he is some kind of natalist super villain instead, who steals cash for only half provided, biological promises... Have I read far too much into this, or was there indeed any conscious connection to the story of Faust? Are flirtations with The Genetic Challenge, like making deals with the 'devil'?

The Townspeople are Faust. They have made a deal with Mr. C, the Devil, and, in a way, they pay for it by denting their humanity in slaying him. Would that be an answer? Mr. C speaking here.

Yes, I suppose that's what I was attempting to say – instead of one Faust, as imagined by Gounod or Goethe or others, it's an entire town of Faustus – and if the Faust connection was conscious, this makes Playing God an extremely unique version of the story for that reason. As for if having killed Mr. C dented the humanity of the town folk, of course, they should not have harmed him, what good came of killing him? It brings to mind the parents of Elm Street, who collectively murdered Freddy Kruger, only to then have Freddy destroy the lives of their children in their dreams... there is nothing solved in murdering the devil, not in a world where new devils and their victims continue to be born every day. Retribution is always waste. The only possible peace is turning the tap off completely, for good.

A very good analysis of the case. Congratulations!

When we produced our first episode together, you spoke about some of the work you had done in your past at the University of Manchester's Centre for Social Ethics and Policy, and how the work you had done there involved procreative beneficence, freedom of choice and savior siblings, and how you now not only saw how that work had at the time made you a type of 'Eugenic Pronatalist', but also that you had only begun to realize what you called the 'error' of some of your ways then, during the process of creating episode #65... So considering that, do you think you cast yourself as this natalist villain, as this 'science peddler', as a way of showing yourself some of your own ethical conflict? Out of some kind of unconscious, misplaced guilt?

Absolutely! And then perhaps not. My superego – trying to do the right things as the idea of antinatalism was emerging – should have done that. Make amends, try to heal, show what’s wrong in the bigger picture.

Unfortunately, my mind doesn’t seem to work like that. I am id-driven – I feel that children should not be had – and ego-controlled – “the rational thing to do here is to keep my job **and** kick its ass, if I can, with the artistic ideas”. Anyway, antinatalism had not come to focus for me then, partly because there were personal things riding in this production.

Or was it simply a bit of fun for you to play someone so unlike yourself? A little bit of both perhaps?

I’m not sure that Mr. C is so different from me. If he had seen an antinatal surge coming, he would have focused his services into that area. He’s a businessman and a narcissist, trying to make a living and yearning for recognition. That’s me, I think.

Is performing *Playing God* something you would ever like to do again someday? Or have you closed the door forever on this project?

In art and philosophy, there are no closed doors. Look at me, returning like a dog to its vomit, on both counts.

Haha, and I’m happy that you do. Now, it’s time to close this episode, and we can do that in your words from an academic article you wrote about the project as a bioethics education tool. They echo what you said just now about coming back and going on.

“*Playing God* is primarily about survival, especially through reproduction. Reflecting the ongoing nature of these human enterprises, the last words that our audiences hear, with the fading notes of the last song, are as follows”

“It is not over

It is never over

The road to Happyville goes ever on”

And with those depressing words, I am Matti Häyry

and I am Amanda Sukenick and you have been listening to

Hankikanto:

Falling into the Anti/Natal Abyss. Stay tuned to this channel!