



Isildurs Bane

Newsletter July 2004

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1) IB tour in Italy with Metamorfosi Trio

Mats, Jonas, Kjell and Thomas are back from a wonderful tour in Italy together with Metamorfosi Trio and special guest Teddy Bergström. After an uneventful trip from Sweden and a stop-over at Sauerlach, near Munich, where we all had some excellent food – they served three excellent vegetarian dishes – a good night's sleep was had by all. From our arrival at Asti to our leaving this beautiful region in northern Italy, we felt most welcome and we couldn't have felt more welcome than we did. A big thank you goes out to Franco Feruglio who organized our living at a great agriturismo called Tenuta del Barone in Penango. Pigi (the owner) and his staff made us feel completely at home and we enjoyed our stay there tremendously. We can whole-heartedly recommend the place! After a couple of days of intense rehearsals and wild improvisations at the agriturismo, it was time to perform the material live. The first concert was at Castagnole Monferrato, and it turned out to be a baptism of fire. Despite two highly untimely power breaks framing the show, the performance was good, if somewhat shaky. No wonder, since Mats had to reload his keyboards and his powerbook while playing without knowing if everything would function according to plan. Luckily, it did, but there were a lot of worries in the air. Nevertheless, it was a good concert, well attended by a good listening crowd.

Apart from one concert, at Cortanze, the weather gods were most benign. Sunny, bright and warm well into the evenings. The best concert was at Nizza Monferrato, where the whole square filled up with attentive listeners. An enchanted evening, and the music performed was pure magic. Among the highlights of the 75 minute performance was the beginning: a rearrangement of "Open" from MIND Vol. 4 featuring Christian Saggese on classical guitar and Luca Calabrese on flugelhorn with a little help from Mats towards the end. This composition was also reprised as the last piece, and worked wonders on the audience. Since hearing this constellation the last time, it was noticeable how our amazing Italian friends – who already are masters of their art and craft – have grown even more musically. Christian's

solo performance of excerpts from Ginastera's Sonata op. 47 was jaw-dropping, even better than on his record (you must buy Christian's CD!!!). Luca unfortunately had some lip problems, but even though he claimed to play less than 50 % of his abilities, many trumpet players would struggle to play like Luca at half his capabilities. Even though his upper range was limited, he did very inventive rhythmic things and worked with sounds to make up for it. At Nizza, he was back in action, having rested for a couple of days, and boy was he blowing! Franco must not be forgotten. Just like Christian and Luca, a world-class player, Franco has an enormous range of music within himself. During our visit he performed Beatles songs in his kitchen singing and playing guitar; in his music room he played me some Mauricio Kagel; and at the concerts, he moved gracefully between holding down the bottom end and improvising freely on his trusted double bass.

There were several differences between this tour and previous tours. Firstly, IB had prepared some composed music to be performed by this Italian-Swedish constellation ("Open" and "Celestial Vessel"); some material from MIND Vol. 3 was performed (for instance "The Sculptor" featuring Jonas on ringmodulated guitar and Christian at his most radical playing his chitarra bizzara, "The Coachman" and parts of "L'evento"); a joker was thrown into the deck (Teddy Bergström on marimba) to add something new to the project; there were solo performances by Christian and Teddy; and we recorded all the concerts plus some on location recordings at the chapel of the agriturismo. In addition to this, we shot five hours of film, some of it is likely to be used in future projects.

All in all, we had a wonderful time and met wonderful people, and this really calls for an extended thank you list, so here goes:

Antonio Lepore and Antonello Catalano at lo Spettatore for working with the organization, taking photos and being generally helpful. The organization has a website at www.provincia.asti.it/spettatore/

Giusy at Provincia Asti for helping us realize this project and for being supportive to us. We hope to see you again soon!

President Marmo of Asti for inviting us to lunch

The nice mayors we had the privilege to meet and eat with: Mr. Marengo of Castagnole Monferrato, Mr. Gallafrio of Cortanze, Mr. Padovani of Villafranca and Mr. Carcione of Nizza.

The staff at La Signora in rosso for their food, expertise and generosity in wine.

Sergio at Sette Colli, a fine wine cooperative, for being a good man with a big heart! Check out Sette Colli's website: www.vinisettecollimoncalvo.it

Our sound & lightning crew: Beppe & Teo of Db Sound not only for a job well done, but also for being genuinely nice guys. We hope to work with you again!

Pigi, Carla and Yuki at Tenuta del Barone for making us feel so welcome. We will see you again! www.tenutadelbarone.com

And last, but certainly no least – on the contrary: our dear friends Christian, Franco and Luca for taking us to Italy, playing so well and perhaps most of all for being great friends. Lots of love from all of us!

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2) New website

As I mentioned in last month's newsletter, IB have a new website. Joanna Bladh and Annika Nilsson have built a new website from scratch. Some features remain from the previous site, but the band has presented ideas along the way to incorporate things to improve the communication possibilities. We are very pleased with this, and hope that you are too. Let me know what you think by dropping me a line at thomas@isildursbane.se

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3) Profile of the month

I am proud to present the first international profile of the month: Luca Calabrese, trumpet and flugelhorn player extraordinaire of Metamorfofi Trio. You can hear Luca on several recordings, MIND Vol. 3 being the obvious for IB-fans, but he also makes a very brief appearance on MIND Vol. 4: Pass. Outside of IB, he has played with a number of big names: the late great Ray Charles and Tony Scott for instance. He has recorded with a large number of artists and groups, among them Cecil Taylor, The Nexus Orchestra and Beppe Caruso. For more information, see Luca's web site at <http://www.lc.too.it>

On a lighter note, he is also the reigning kubb champion of Italy. The story behind this is that we brought a kubb game for our summer tour of Italy. If you believe the stories, kubb is an ancient Swedish game, and the objective behind the game is to hit wood blocks with sticks of wood. Now over to Luca:



Name: Luca Calabrese

Currently living: In Milan, Italy

Please tell us something about your musical background.

- In my house we listened to a lot of music when I was a child: my father loved listening to opera and orchestral music, while my mother sometimes put an old record like Rhapsody in Blue or some jazz from the 50's on the turntable.

My first LP I bought was Something Old Something New by Dizzy Gillespie [an excellent album from 1963!], a record that I have literally worn out. A few years later a very interesting phase started that coincided with the discovery of the Big Bands. I learned the language of jazz, the magic swinging of Count Basie, the world of the standards and the mainstream. Being a trumpet player I have fell in love with the sound of Maynard Ferguson and the magic atmospheres of Chuck Mangione. Then I discovered Miles Davis, above all the Miles Davis of the sixties and seventies. The second important phase was the meeting with creative musicians: I discovered that there were other ways to express an idea and I that had something to tell.

– Please tell us about some other bands and projects have you been a part of outside of Metamorfosi Trio,

At the moment the most interesting things are the collaborations with the Italian Instabile Orchestra, the tuba player Beppe Caruso's Free Air Sextet (brass quintet + drums), Meridiana Multijazz Orchestra, a really big ensemble (The CD will be issued soon), the bass clarinet and saxophone player Carlo Actis Dato's band Actis Furioso and the double bass player Giovanni Maier's septet, the Mosaic Orchestra. In all the ensembles there are fantastic musicians to play with. All the musicians are most creative. Different bands, different musicians, different languages, but to me it seems like a big, big family.

– How did you get involved with Isildurs Bane?

By happy coincidence. Mats Johansson listened to some recordings of ours and called us to collaborate on the music for the show L'evento. We met him and the other guys 3 years ago, discovering the possibilities of making music together

– Would you like to develop your relationship with Isildurs Bane?

YES!

– You are also a composer. Could you describe your music?

Talking about music is not simple. The way I compose music is usually by writing down on a piece of paper what I have in mind. Writing down an improvisation instead of playing it. Lots of notes are dancing in front of you and you want to fix them. You can record them or write them down or forget them. When I write something, I like to have the musician I'm writing for in mind. Before the meeting with Isildurs Bane a few weeks ago, I knew we would meet a new friend, the marimba player Teddy Bergstrom, and I was thinking about something to play with him, and so I wrote "Bear Butte", just a simple theme to play together. We put it in the middle of "The Coachman" and it became a new song.

– What equipment do you use?

For composing: Piano, Paper and Pen

- What are you currently up to?

At the moment I'm writing something for brass quintet and I will compose something for two cellos.

– Could you recommend five musicians/artists/composers/groups who have influenced you?

OK, You can listen to Don Cherry, Bill Dixon, Lester Bowie, Enrico Rava and Tomazs Stanko. Strange, 5 trumpet players! But it's only because I have been listening to their music during the last weeks. I could have answered: Jaco Pastorius, Pat Metheny, Cecil

Taylor, Chicago, Blood Sweat and Tears or Kenny Wheeler, why not? I don't know who is influencing me at the moment. I listen to music and I let the music enter me. Something stays inside, perhaps.

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4) Your questions

And here they are:

Nicolas asks what the band thinks about Peter Jackson's adaptation of Lord of the Rings.

There is no easy answer to this question, simply because everybody has a different opinion of it. In fact, we discussed the film trilogy on our way back from Italy. Kjell has seen the whole trilogy, even making an event of it by watching the long versions of parts 1 and 2 on DVD and then going to the cinema to see the third part. Mats, on the other hand hasn't seen much of Jackson's epic Tolkien-suite, and considers it too gory for his tastes in film.

Susie from Canada is apparently very fond of MIND Vol. 4, prefers listening to the CD continuously and regards it as one piece of music, not individual songs. Her question is: "Have you performed MIND Vol. 4 in its entirety?"

Not yet. But on September 11th, IB will perform all of it (except for one or two pieces because of time restrictions) at an arts night in Halmstad. More on this in next month's newsletter!

Keep your questions coming! Send them to thomas@isildursbane.se

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5) Regarding music

Welcome to a new feature of this newsletter. When meeting people at IB's concerts, we frequently discover that a large part of our audience have strong – and often well-informed – opinions on music. Naturally, they ask about IB's thoughts on music and music related matters. In this series, Mats Johansson has kindly committed himself to write about a number of topics allied with music, and yours truly will comment on Mats' thoughts to widen the perspective. We invite you, dear readers, to interact with us by letting us know your thoughts on the subject. Send an e-mail to thomas@isildursbane.se to be a part of our discussions on everything Regarding Music!

Regarding music and media

By Mats Johansson

I started playing in a band in 1974 (I have been a member of IB since 1977), and during the 30 years that have passed, the development within music has been tremendous within composition, interpretation and the technical side of things. Needless to say, I am grateful for

having been able to experience these changes, but I nevertheless sometimes miss the spotlight on music itself that was prevalent during the 1970's. What I really enjoyed then was the discussions with members of the audience after the shows. People were open-minded and many asked about IB's way of thinking about music. You could find yourself going into deep and strange discussions. Such were the times, everything seemed possible. The situation is different today.

The music industry was rarely discussed in those days. Today, media – mostly the rags and commercially financed radio and TV – have become the right hand of the music industry (previously they had been the left hand), and the result is a sewer emission of music without substance. Let me stress that I am not a reactionary person, but the circumstances have led to a situation where too few composers and musicians within popular music control their own music the way they should. This in turn affects the listener who will have problems defending him- or herself against the strategies of the media industry to use their power to manipulate our freedom of choice. Unfortunately, most of the money generated from the music industry today goes to non-musicians, and regrettably I think this is only the beginning.

Something is terribly wrong when big music events need the media to support them by writing column after column of what are essentially advertisements for these events. The newspapers gain by selling copies, of course. The collaborations between media companies and the music business deepen and turn into an amorous relationship where the music journalist acts as coordinator for his superiors. When I have tried to present these arguments, the media representatives have labelled me a jealous, bitter and rabid plotter. I would describe myself in a different way: fit as a fiddle pointing my finger at a growing dependency problem within an area that journalists ought to prioritize from their integrity perspective which they are always harping on about. Divorces occur, but since very few companies control and fix the market, it is the same deck of cards that is being shuffled over and over again. Perhaps you should at least cut the deck occasionally?

The words “medially interesting” in connection with musical experiences are a qualified truth. It seems to me that reviews that deal with music are a thing of the past. Instead, you tend to find reflections on the artist's jacket, haircut, weight, looks, economy etc., frequently with irrelevant ponderings on the nostalgic adventures of the reviewer's younger days. The review is sometimes accompanied by a photo of the reviewer but not the artist, a paradox considering what the review is supposed to be dealing with.

IB have not suffered much of this kind of so-called journalism. This is probably because we have never moved in the musical circles where these things happen, and we are grateful for it. Our music is still the centre of our attention. But we have learned how to play the advertising department against the entertainment editors on the newspapers, pointing out that we won't advertise unless the paper does a good job promoting the concert before and writing about it afterwards. The responsibility of dealing with this promotional work is something we tend to leave with the advertising department of the newspapers for dealing with within the company. That's good customer relations. If the project is big enough, there is never trouble, if you only have patience and do not criticize the parts involved, because if you do, the whole situation can come back at you harder and faster than you would like it to and cause great pains for you. A hurt music journalist is one of the most fierce and dangerous a musician can come up against. The punishment frequently lasts for life.

Sweden is in no way a good country for musical journalism, and we will never have a Sinatra,

Presley, Zappa or Joplin. We will have to make do with “Snoddas” [a sportsperson who recorded the odd novelty record in the 1950’s]. Swedish media will make sure!

A friend of mine told me that a certain type of Indian music has to survive for three generations before it can be performed publicly. In our musical sphere, dominated by Top 40-music, even three weeks seems like a long time. What if these ideas were applicable to the environment, cars or paintings? Music is a nature phenomenon in constant flux, but I am pessimistic about man’s ability to preserve the magical power of music in a decent way. The media industry has a great responsibility at a time when music is consumed in a multitude of ways, previously unheard of.

PS. I would like to estimate my term of punishment as distained upon me by Media Inc.: 3-5 years of total silence, unconditional withdrawal, knives in the back, and after that a place in an institution through articles by the odd substitute reporter. I hope that the children and grandchildren of the journalists will pardon me and let my creative thoughts run free.

Thomas’ response:

Ever since people started reviewing music regularly in the early 19th century, tensions between musicians and composers on the one hand and music critics (or media in general) on the other hand have always been present. One has to bear in mind that the music critic is always a person. He/she will inevitably experience bad days (espresso machine broken, traffic jams, separations) and good days (pay rise, sunny days, separations), and even though – in an ideal world – these things should not affect a review, the facts of life tend to shape the finished work of the music critic. This is to defend and explain the daily work of a person writing about music. The same could be said about the musician or the composer. Or anybody.

Let’s also remember that the commercialization of musical life – if we are to take an extreme view of the word commercial – started the very day someone decided to charge people for performing publicly. The selling of sheet music, recordings, LPs, CDs and DVDs is a commercial act, and therefore any music that is sold in any way can be regarded as commercial. In theory at least. In practice, things look slightly differently. Jazz, which is nowadays regarded as a narrow field of music, was once accused for being commercial. Rossini was looked down upon in the early 19th century for being populist, now people dress up to go to the opera houses around the world to listen to his works. Most, if not all, of the transformations from low status to high status (or high to low as it were) has occurred through the mediation of media (and politics). The whole rock music industry – including people who are regarded as renegades such as Dylan, The Clash and Neil Young – is based on commercial availability. Since the fifties, recording companies, radio, newspapers and TV have been a necessary part in the development of rock. In other words: no media, no rock history as we know it today.

When Mats writes about being able to discuss music with the audience in the 70’s, he is right, but this still happens with Isildurs Bane. In Verviers, Klas had a learned discussion with a member of the audience about Stockhausen’s percussion music. Similar situations occur all the time, wherever IB perform. I convinced that this is largely due to the fact that IB’s fans are actually interested in music. This is one of the reasons for us recommending music that we think may interest you in our newsletters.

Now onto the other side. The music critics. When I talk to people about music reviews and music critics, the response I generally get is more or less the same: lack of trust and lack of interest. The only exception being owners of record shops and record company sales people i.e. people who are part of the music industry. Even though I was too young to analyse the music business and its relationship to media in the 60's and 70's, from what I have gathered from reading on the subject, I think Mats is mostly right. But remember that there was another side of music in those days too. Musicians suffered from being ripped off by managers, had to perform under lousy circumstances and were cheated by record companies then too. And when the 70's came around, many journalists writing about rock music had their political sympathies to the left, and this was reflected in the media. The leftist ideology that was an important part of the music business at the time does not advocate commercialism (please see above for the problems with the word commercial). When the music and media industries went global during the 80's, things had changed. Ideology went out of the window and the results can be seen today, when music has found new channels, some good and some bad. You can surely find several examples yourself. If you want to read about the dirty side of the music business, read Fredric Dannen's book *The Hit Men*.

A difference from the 50's, 60's and 70's is the introduction of what the American sociologist George Ritzer named McDonaldization of society. This basically means that a number of social organizations in society – the music industry for example – are being organized along lines similar to the infamous McDonald's company. The main dimensions of this new part of the music industry are: efficiency, calculability, predictability and control. In a recent interview in *The Independent*, Peter Hammill said much the same thing: "The music world has gone IKEA – one size. And I'm a bespoke furniture-maker. Not selling many, and only to people who find me."

There are further problems with media apart from McDonaldization, I find. A very big problem is that for some reason, anyone with an interest in music – provided he or she has the right connections – can write about and have opinions on music in a public forum such as newspapers, radio or TV. Very rarely do you find an art critic who hasn't undergone some sort of training in art history. Or a radical example: would you employ someone with an interest in woodwork mending your roof? If the answer is yes, you may as well stop reading here, because from now on things get worse.

I am writing this from a Swedish perspective, but in most cases media is, by and large, the same throughout most of the world. But one thing we certainly do have a problem with in Sweden is that general knowledge about the arts has gone downhill very quickly since the sixties. The other day, I discussed Hieronymus Bosch and Keith Haring with a regular Joe. Relatively few people in Sweden would have had this discussion. It has nothing to do with economy, but cultural capital, to use a term coined by Pierre Bourdieu. Cultural capital is not regarded as an asset in Sweden, even if you apply for a position where it should be. It follows that we get rock music critics who really do not know the first things about music. If you don't believe me, reach for the nearest music magazine or daily newspaper and read a couple of reviews. Do they really tell you anything about the music? I am sure you can find out how the new album compares to a previous one, and perhaps what the lyrics are about, and maybe whom the singer is dating at the moment. But what does the music sound like?

In order to write about music, you have to know something about it. At least that's my opinion. If you don't, but still enjoy listening to music, perchance from a trainspotter's point

of view, you have to go for what you know. And as long as your thoughts are not aired in public under the heading of “expert”, it’s fine by me. I feel very strongly about music, and I know many others who share my feelings no matter which type of music were are talking about. Let’s not get fooled by cretins.

Should you be interested in reading more about music and media, I suggest you read parts of Simon Frith (ed.), *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies. Volume II, The Rock Era*. Routledge, London & New York 2004.

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6) Music on the tour bus

This month’s recommendations come straight from the tour bus. Some styles of music suited this tour bus better than others, and since the speakers and motor noise made sure that there was no bass register our listening was somewhat guided by this. This is some of the music (and films) we enjoyed while driving to, in and from Italy earlier this month:

The Big Lebowski (DVD)
Jimmy Bryant & Speedy West (compilation CD)
Deep Purple – Bombay Calling (DVD)
Jerry Douglas – [a brilliant CD, but I forgot the title]
John Hiatt – The Tiki Bar is Open (CD)
Hipp Hipp (DVD) [a Swedish comedy show]
King Crimson – Eyes Wide Open (DVD)
Prince – N. E. W. S. (CD)
Knut Reiersrud – Blå Koral (CD)
Esbjörn Svensson Trio – Live (DVD)

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Best wishes from Isildurs Bane!

Thomas Olsson
Newsletter editor

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