



Newsletter December 2004

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1) Isildurs Bane & Metamorfoosi Trio live in Sweden

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, Isildurs Bane and Metamorfoosi Trio will perform two rare concerts in Sweden together. The dates are:

Friday, December 17th, Halmknippet, Karl XI's väg Halmstad, at 21.00

Saturday, December 18th, Jeriko, Spångatan 38, Malmö, at 19.00
www.jazzimalmo.com

The music performed will consist of pieces from *MIND Vol. 3*, a couple of IB-tunes in ways you never heard them before, exciting improvisations and some surprises.

The line-up for these concerts will be:

Luca Calabrese – Trumpet, flugelhorn
Jonas Christophs – Electric guitar
Franco Feruglio – Double bass
"Gicken" – Electric bass
Mats Johansson – Keyboards
Christian Saggese – Classical guitar and Chitarra
Kjell Severinsson – Drums and percussion

We are looking forward to your support on these dates. Trust me, you will hear some stunning music on these exclusive dates! Be there!!!

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2) The DVD

We are currently hard at work with our forthcoming DVD. Current operations include recording some brand new music at MP's

studio; editing live concerts; coming up with words to describe the IB-world; mixing; and loads of other things.

For those of you who were looking forward to enjoy the IB DVD this Christmas, we are truly sorry. We are currently looking at releasing it sometime during the first part of 2005.

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3) Mariette at Girls and Guitars seminar

IB's guitarist/vocalist Mariette Hansson was kind enough to help yours truly out at a seminar at the department of musicology at Lund University (my day job) earlier this month.

At the centre of this seminar were "girl guitars" by Daisy Rock guitars. Who better than Mariette to do a hands-on test on four guitars kindly lent to us by Fitzpatrick, the Swedish agent for Daisy Rock?

The seminar had many questions and managed to cover other interesting topics regarding women musicians in today's male controlled commercial music business. Mariette fielded all questions with knowledgeable answers and well-grounded arguments.

In the end, what Mariette was really looking for was a guitar in a traditional shape, but lighter, with a narrower fingerboard, thinner neck, in colours not traditionally associated with girls. Why not a "light" Stratocaster or Les Paul, she asked?

Make up your own mind. Go to:

www.daisyrock.com

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4) Profile of the month: "Lingon"

Name: Ingvar "Lingon" Johansson

Currently living: Just outside of Halmstad

Current occupation: A dockworker for 28 years.

How did you get your nickname ("Lingon" means lingonberry)?

It started when I was about nine years old I think. I had a blue cap with a red tuft. A friend of mine had a red cap with a blue tuft. Therefore Lingonberry and Blueberry.

Tell me about your early days, when you started playing:

Some friends of mine had a band in the early 70's. One of them was Mats Nilsson, who later played guitar with IB. At the time, he played bass. I listened to them and felt the urge to play music. My brother (who played with a band in our basement during the 60's) had a guitar that I had a go at. When Mats decided that guitar playing was more fun than bass playing, I was asked if I wanted to play bass. And I did.

When I started playing I listened mostly to hard rock such as Deep Purple, Status Quo, Nazareth, Uriah Heep, Thin Lizzy etc. My first album was Deep Purple's Made in Japan. It's still great!

You were one of the founders of Isildurs Bane. How did the band start?

Mats Nilsson, Mats Johansson, Jan Severinsson and myself were in the same class when we were teenagers. Jan's kid brother Kjell played in the band Amsaga with a neighbour of theirs, Bengt Jonsson. When they were in need of a bass player, I was asked. At the time, I played in a band called Vidas Heber with Mats Johansson, Mats Nilsson and a drummer called Stefan Dernbrant. Finally, a sort of fusion occurred between Vidas Heber and Amsaga and Isildurs Bane was formed.

How was Isildurs Bane run during your time with the band?

There were many strong opinions in the band. Mats Johansson spent an enormous amount of time composing, getting gigs and applying for grants. Eventually, he became a leader of sorts.

You composed "Marlboro Blues" together with Mats Johansson. How does that song sound to you today?

Well, it's the only song with my name on it. I suppose I have to accept responsibility for it. It was one of the first productions we used saxophone on. It doesn't sound too bad to me.

How come you didn't compose more songs for IB?

I am not sure. Self-consciousness I suppose.

You're the bassist on IB's first album. How do you feel about it today?

It was great to be a part of that and there are some good things on it. It turned out a bit flat on record, vinyl at the time. I think the music came over a bit better live with the lights and the flash bombs. It probably sounded better live.

Which were your influences while you played with IB?

To start with, during my Rickenbacker-days, primarily Chris Squire of Yes. But there was also a local band called Ars Nova. Their bassist played a Rickenbacker bass with an incredible sound. Their music was excellent too and after an Ars Nova concert, I wanted to play a Rickenbacker bass. I was completely hooked on the sound. Ars Nova's frontman, Sven Bertilsson, later formed Beauty, and Bengt Jonsson later played keyboards with them.

During my fretless days I was influenced by Jeff Berlin (from Bill Bruford's band), Percy Jones (Brand X), Jaco Pastorius (Weather Report), Ray Schulman (Gentle Giant) and Andy West (Dixie Dregs), just to name a few.

What equipment did you use with IB?

A Rickenbacker 4001, a Kramer fretless, an Acoustic 320 – 408 amplifier plus an Ovation 12-string acoustic guitar.

Last Christmas, we put up a Christmas-medley on our website for IB-fans to download. It featured Mats Johansson, Nalle Bondesson, Krister Larsson and yourself. How did that session come about?

During the early 80's, there were many bands in Halmstad, which is why people called the city the Swedish equivalent to Liverpool. Anyway, a radio station had a show scheduled about all the bands in Halmstad. This happened to be around Christmas. Mats Johansson was asked to arrange a Christmas medley. Since the radio show dealt with many bands it felt like a good idea to mix members from several bands. We rehearsed a few times and recorded for a whole night at Studio 38 in Getinge.

When and why did you part ways with IB?

In 1984. I don't think I left. I have a feeling I had to leave.

Which bands have you played with after IB?

I played with some cover bands for about ten years, but nothing serious really. In the end you get fed up with it, maybe because that kind of music isn't what you prefer listening to.

Nowadays I don't play at all. My instruments have been occupied by my son and his friends who have a band in the basement. The show must go on!

Have you kept up with IB's activities?

I watch them from a distance and haggle for a CD when a new album is released. I heard them at the arts night in Halmstad on September 11th. They sounded very good. The new members from a younger generation were great! I think MIND Vol. 2: Live is one

of my favourites. The sound and the musicianship is impressive. I seem to hear slightly more guitar on that record which I have missed on some albums. I tend to meet my former band mates when there's an IB concert in town.

In 1996, you played a few songs when IB reunited with some former members of the band. What was that like?

As soon as we started rehearsing, it felt like we didn't part ways in 1984. The same people, the same lingo. It was great fun!

Would you like to be part of an IB-session today?

No. I wouldn't have a place on the team, not even on the substitute's bench.

One thing Kjell and Mats always say when your name comes up is "he never played any mistakes". Any comments?

Did they make mistakes? I have always tried to play things I can manage. Hence no solos on my back onstage.

What's your relationship to music today?

I don't listen that much to music and I'm not looking things up either. I have no idea what to look for. You never hear anything interesting on the radio, do you? If you aren't in the business, you won't find anything new. The old heroes will have to do.

Do you miss playing music?

Honestly? In a way, I am over it. I am a listener again. I listen to the boys in the basement!

Could you tell us an IB anecdote?

We did some live radio shows during my time with IB. The host of the radio show "Tonkraft" had this to say about IB in 1981:

- Isildurs Bane is a band that will continue to play its music persistently a long time after every pop group in Halmstad has broken up or reformed ten times over. The boys in Isildurs Bane are stubborn!

He was right.

Mats was very happy that Lingon took time to answer my questions and wanted to comment on his former band mate. Mats had this to say:

You have to bear in mind that Lingon has always had a very stable personality, and that really reflected in his bass playing.

When we reunited for our 25th anniversary in 1996, I think I can speak for everybody that we were quite surprised by Lingon's bass playing. As solid as ever! He has a talent for bass playing, and I can't see him play any other instrument even though I am sure he could play more or less anything.

Lingon is a bass (se Regarding bassists below). This type of musician will be hard to find in the future. Lingon was very much a bassist of his time, a typical 70's bass player.

I remember Lingon as being as faithful as a dog, faithful to his bass and taking a humble stance to ideas and suggestions. Every now and then, he was a bit lazy, but never messy. He was a very good friend who I think about and miss every now and then. That's what happens when you end up not playing together anymore.

I can't agree with Lingon being fired or forced to quit the band. My impression was that he started having other interests and that love meant a lot to him at the time we parted ways. Perhaps his shyness made us help him on his way since the rest of us thought he had lost interest. Had it been today, we would have gotten a substitute for a year or so. I truly feel sorry if Lingon felt he was thrown out of the band because I know that Janne, Kjelle and myself really liked – and still like – this very secure bass player.

I think Lingon and myself shared musical tastes to a larger extent than the others in IB. I especially recall our speech in defence of Allan Holdsworth while on our way to Kalmar in 1981. I am convinced we were damn right about it too! Or do you (Kjelle, Bengt Jonsson and others) still think that Holdsworth has intonation problems? Lingon and myself even liked Henry Cow, which was the equivalent of throwing up on the bus at that time.

I think it's a shame that Lingon didn't compose more. He probably would have done so to a larger extent today, simply because things have changed. We have high hopes for his son though. Failure isn't everything. I think Lingon could write great music with his bass as the main instrument. Which is what I've always looked for in bassists. If I were to ask him to tune his bass like a cello he would've thought I was mad. I suppose he was a bit of a traditionalist, but a damn fine one and a good bass player. I know I speak for everyone when I say that!

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5) The story behind the song: "Open"

Open was composed in the middle of the night, approximately at three o'clock. Mats had decided to write a theme that was beautiful and he had Björn J:son Lindh's amazing themes in mind when he composed the piece.

- I wanted to write something Swedish-sounding and decided not to repeat myself in an obvious way. As it turned out, the version of Open we perform with Metamorfoosi Trio is much better constructed in its shape.

Mats had some problems with the backgrounds before he decided to play his Kurzweil 2600 through a bunch of pedals where the Mutator (an analog filter) was the centrepiece.

- Some like the sound and I attempted it again in the middle section of Idea [also on MIND Vol. 4: Pass]. Our good friend Franco Feruglio said that he had nothing whatsoever against having a K 2600 at his home in Penango, but he didn't like my sounds!

With IB, Kjell, Klas and Christof have developed the song to something more rhythmical in the most positive sense of the word, for which I am most grateful.

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6) Regarding bassists

By Mats Johansson, composer and occasional synth bassist

"Had August Strindberg been alive today he would have played electric bass in a rock band" some writer in a major Swedish newspaper wrote not too long ago. I don't believe a word of it! Strindberg would never have been satisfied with that position. He had an intense relationship with music even if some of his quotes are blunt, sarcastic and contradictory. For instance:

- Next to small children and flowers, music is the most dreadful thing.

One day in August 1908, Strindberg had a different opinion. He was at odds with the fundamentals of music and its compositional structures:

- Were I to compose, I would throw music theory out the window.

Judging by this quote, you would think that Strindberg had a radical view on music, but on the contrary, his taste in music was rather conventional. I must admit that there is a possibility that Strindberg could have been an interesting bassist after all, but in that case it would have been due to his progressive thoughts on art in general which he constantly dwelled on. But electric bassist? No, that sounds absurd. At least to my ears.

But there are extraordinary bassists. In *Ur en ofullbordad självbiografi* (From an Unfinished Autobiography) by Carl-Olof Anderberg tells a story about when he asked a double bass player if he enjoyed playing Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler*, which happened to be on the repertoire at the time.

- Hell yes, a fucking great bass part!

I suppose I should have mentioned it to begin with: I love bass! There is something peculiar and fascinating with low notes. They

seem to live a rumbling life of their own where they create vibrations that make me segue into my next anecdote.

During a rehearsal with a symphony orchestra the conductor, Sir Thomas Beecham, heard a tubaist play a wrong note with a wide vibrato. Beecham's response was immediate:

- Thank you very much. Would you please be so kind as to flush now.

I got my first shot of bass just after the mid-70's. Weather Report were in town for a unique appearance at the theatre in Halmstad. This was just after the legendary album Heavy Weather had been released. It was almost painful for a music loving teenager to walk around in a filled foyer and be aware of the fact that you were about to witness a part of music history. And there he was, all of a sudden, only ten metres from where I was sitting: the bassist Jaco Pastorius, with a bare chest and his hair in a long pony tail playing the jazz hit Birdland for real. Needless to say, no one could resist being moved by this remarkable bass player. I would go so far as saying that there is no young bass player who hasn't been influenced by Pastorius' playing. Any bassist who disagrees with me doesn't understand his or her own influences. What impresses me most is not only the bass playing in itself, but the evolutionary thoughts by musical geniuses in general.

Jaco took the frets out of his Fender Jazz Bass himself and developed a new way of playing, but above all a new sound. The bass was no longer an instrument solely a part of the rhythm section, but also an exciting solo instrument. Tony Levin (of King Crimson, Peter Gabriel etc) is another bassist who has tried to develop and coordinate sound and technique. For instance by putting sawn-off drumsticks on his fingers. If you want to listen to a very odd and artistic bassist, look no further than Percy Jones (of Brand X). He is a weird man within that type of music, especially when he plays with his rhythm buddy Phil Collins. He still surprises me with his soap-stumbling bass playing on productions which are 25 years old by now.

Recently, I have started asking music colleagues about why they have chosen bass as their main instrument. Apparently the question is provocative, at least by judging from their facial expressions. In all honesty, there are lots of instruments to choose from. My questioning has led to slight irritations and long pauses, and I have ended up with answers that haven't been convincing and haven't satisfied my hunger for knowledge. Some of my subjects even claimed to have been lured into the bass playing underworld. Others maintained that they never meant to end up this way! My own encouraging hypothesis is that the softness in the players' soul gets an airing through the hard sound, and after the unconscious introduction, things have just carried on from there. Nobody understood what I meant. Frank Zappa was more to the point:

- Electric bassists are often failed guitarists, degraded to that task after a band meeting in a garage when they were 13 years old.

Dear Lord, it sounds as if they were involved in some kind of drug habit, but even if it isn't that bad, there are tendencies of addiction

with bassists. My experience of bassists is that they are faithful to their bass under all circumstances and that their collaboration with the drummer or percussionist is as natural as taking your dog for a walk in the evening.

I would like to think that the future of the bass lies in experimentation and that more bassists compose music focusing on the bass. The bass is no longer a one-dimensional instrument. You can just as well play electric bass as double bass, electric double bass, synth bass or why not tuba? I seem to notice more girls playing electric bass. I impatiently wait for female – and male – cellists to double on electric bass but using the same tuning as on the cello. I have a feeling it will sound angular, problematic and beautiful. All the usual rock 'n' roll tricks can no longer be used traditionally and therefore, things could get rather interesting. I want to see results! I am an impatient soul, at least when it comes to bassists.

Development and performance have never been easy subjects. To quote Henri Rousseau:

- Picasso, you and I are the greatest painters of our time, you in the Egyptian time, and me in the modern time.

A response

By Thomas Olsson, musicologist

What makes a good bassist? Most people would probably answer something along the lines of:

- Someone who holds the rhythm section together, along with the drummer of course.
- Someone who covers the low frequencies.

People on the dance floor sometimes are guided by the bass when dancing, others seem to propel their cars by subwoofer power, but is that all there is to it?

Most bassists seem to be content with playing fairly dull rhythmic patterns with note choices governed by the chords played by the other musicians. But some bass instruments are capable of playing chords too, like the bass guitar for instance. And there are many melodically minded bassists who weave magic around a vocal line or a soloist. Mats mentioned Pastorius, Jones and Levin. I would like to add legendary bassist Jack Bruce and UK session players Pino Palladino and Mo Foster to that list. Interestingly enough, they are all highly accomplished fretless bassists.

My hypothesis is that if one puts a spanner in the works or takes the less obvious way, things can turn out more interestingly than if you go for the obvious solutions. Same thing with effects, tunings or unconventional instruments. Why not play slide on the bass? Tony Levin is a good case to make my point. As far as I know, he has played the following bass instruments: electric bass, double bass, electric double bass, fretless electric bass, 3- and 5-string electric bass, stick bass, tuba and bass synth. I am still waiting for him to pick up the bass saxophone. This flexibility offers Levin a

wide-open field when he's required to come up with a bass part.

I agree with Mats that the cello is an underused instrument in an electric context. Over the last ten years or so, the cello has become one of my favourite instruments. But I would like to point out that using a cello tuning on a bass instrument is already standard among stick players. The range increases dramatically and since you have two fretting hands on a stick, new possibilities abound.

But the problems for bassists are not necessarily confined to what they can do. A lot of it lies with what the fellow musicians allow the bassist to do.



A very dynamic bass duo – Franco Feruglio and Fredrik “Gicken” Johansson making their minds up on which bass to play.

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7) If you like IB, you'll like...

Gentle Giant's DVD Giant on the Box!

This is a fairly recent release, but much appreciated. The DVD consists of two concerts originally transmitted on German and American TV stations in 1974 and 1975 respectively. Additional material includes a photo gallery, guitar & drums footage of In a Glass House and an Italian documentary called Baroque & Roll.

Having never seen any footage of Gentle Giant live, I was very excited when I received it. But I was probably more excited after watching it! Obviously I knew that this was a band that could play the socks off most other bands, but seeing them do so on film certainly adds another dimension. The picture quality isn't what one is used to by today's standards, but the music more than makes up for this minor flaw.

But don't take my word for it. Take Kjell's and Mats'. They are not only happy owners of Giant on the Box, they have actually seen Gentle Giant live and kicking at Olympen in Lund on September 19th 1976. Their bassist friend Lingon was there too. Here's what they have to say about the concert and the DVD.

Lingon: The best concert I have ever seen. I remember them switching instruments constantly on stage, even in the middle of songs.

Kjell: The concert in Lund was a remarkable performance. As it turns out, I had forgotten most of what happened at the concert, but watching Giant on the Box many memories came back to me. Gentle Giant stage presence was astonishing. I expected to see a bunch of introverted multi-musicians with their backs against the audience. But I was wrong and had one of the best concert experiences of my life. It was a full-on show with a gung-ho attitude coupled with an easiness that was incredibly well-synced with the lighting.

What's on Giant on the Box gives you a good idea about the phenomenal musicality of Gentle Giant. Unfortunately the DVD is rather boringly produced, but on the black and white Italian documentary you can see that their live shows were well planned.

Mats: I agree with Kjell. One of the best concerts I have had the fortune to attend. I remember two things in particular. First of all, what Lingon mentioned, the constant changing of instruments. I think they played something like 25 instruments all in all. Secondly, I remember a contradictory feeling after the concert. On the one hand I was overwhelmed and felt like I should quit playing music because I would never even come close to these guys. On the other hand, I got a huge kick out of seeing the band which inspired me to continue playing, more than ever.

Finally, I must mention Kerry Minnear, the band's keyboardist. A completely unique player. Nobody plays the clavinet like he does. Or the Moog for that matter. He was changing sounds, flicking switches and turning knobs all the time, sometimes while singing. Subtle changes in sound combined with a master's touch. Still one of my main influences as a keyboard player even if I don't think I sound anything like him.

Gentle Giant's Giant on the Box may not be readily available, but you can order it from the official Gentle Giant website:

<http://www.gentlegiantmusic.com/ggm.html>

or from our good friends at Just for Kicks in Germany:

<http://www.justforkicks.de>

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Best wishes and a very merry Christmas from Isildurs Bane!

Thomas Olsson
Newsletter editor

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