



Newsletter September 2004

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1) A short report from IB's concert in Halmstad on September 11th

On Saturday September 11th, Isildurs Bane performed most of MIND Vol. 4: Pass at Diezel in Halmstad. Some of the songs had never been performed live before and some songs were rearranged for the occasion. It was also the first concert to feature the talents of Mariette Hansson on guitar & vocals and Linnea Olsson on cello & vocals, hence the new arrangements on some songs.

Since it was a special occasion – Mariette and Linneas debut with IB, most of MIND Vol. 4 performed live and a hometown concert – we decided to film the occasion for inclusion on our forthcoming DVD. This was too good an opportunity to miss, even though it could mean that the DVD will be delayed until early next year. If the moment presents itself, you have to grab it firmly! Arguably, the moment was in the case a bit shaky during the time leading up to the concert. Klas had been ill, Mats was still suffering from the flu and Mariette was fighting a nasty throat infection. Being the troopers that IB are, they soldiered on brilliantly!

It is always reassuring when you get a good crowd, and at this date, people were coming in busloads! Diezel was packed with people! After a subtle start with a heavily rearranged version of Heal followed by Arch, the band was firing on all cylinders. The obvious focus for many were the additions of Linnea and Mariette, and the added a great deal to IB, both musically and visually. But we shouldn't forget the regulars: Kjell was – as always – rock solid and Gicken proving himself as a tasteful soloist while still holding down the deepest bottom end you'll ever need. Mats, although putting in a low key performance visually as always, still surprises us with new subtle ways of interpreting his own work. Jonas and Christof were basking in the bright lights, taking the lion's part of the musical attention while Klas was well busy behind his large arsenal of percussion instruments.

Afterward, people lauded the band and the new line-up. It was especially nice to hear former IB bassist “Lingon” raving about the concert. A great start for a new way of doing things!

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2) The website: www.isildursbane.se

Are you looking for the lyrics to MIND Vol. 4: Pass? You can find them under Downloads

Some photos from our latest gig are distributed here and there, especially in The Ataraxia Report.

Have you read all our newsletters? The ones you are missing can be found under News.

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3) IB T-Shirts sold out

All our MIND tour T-shirts have sold out, but we still have a few “Gluggman” T-shirts left. We are currently looking into a new design for our T-shirts and will let you know about it as soon as they materialize.

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4) Profile of the month: Christian Saggese

Christian Saggese, guitarist extraordinaire with Italian master improvisers Metamorfosi Trio, is this month’s profile. Everyone that has heard him play should realize how magnificently he plays, something that is made even more obvious when you get the privilege of hearing him perform live. A winner of the prestigious Segovia guitar competition, Christian is one of the best guitarists you are ever likely to hear. I am not exaggerating. As if that wasn’t enough, he is also a painter (digital and on canvas) and a very funny and really nice guy. Get MIND Vol. 3, get Christian’s solo CD *My Favourite Things* and check out his website <http://web.tiscali.it/saggese.chitarra>



Name: Christian Saggese

Living in: Asti, Italy

Please tell us something about your musical background.

– I began playing guitar when I was eleven years old, thanks to my brother Elenio (he played in a rock group at the time). My first idols were Eddie Van Halen, Jimi Hendrix and Ritchie Blackmore. After my initial lessons with Elenio (who now plays electric bass), I took some private lessons with Candido Lodezzano from Asti. Later, I studied at the Alessandria Music Conservatory, receiving my diploma in 1994 under the guidance of Angelo Gilardino.

Please tell us about some other projects you have been a part of outside of Metamorfosi Trio.

– I play recitals and I am a member of a classical guitar quartet (I play the first guitar part) called the Angelo Gilardino Guitar Quartet. I also play duets with the American flautist Marlina Kessick. But no constellation gives me the same satisfaction as when I play with Isildurs Bane!

How did you get involved with Isildurs Bane?

– I first met Mats in Italy (without Metamorfosi Trio) and I made him listen to a Metamorfosi Trio demo-CD jam-packed with free improvisation. He liked it a lot!

who plays on all the IB records that Schaffer plays on plus *MIND Vol. 4*) appears as an arranger on the *ABBA* album.

On a more serious note, the subject was brought up to discussion during the late 1990's when the so called "Swedish Music Miracle" happened. Basically, several Swedish artists and groups all of a sudden had a brief international career (Roxette, Cardigans, Eagle-Eye Cherry, Meja etc.) and media researchers, economists and musicologists started looking into this. I recall being at a seminar in 1996 where a few explanations were suggested: many young Swedes took music lessons in school; Swedes are very thorough and good at copying things, the artists that were exported looked good (or were made to look good); most Swedes have a good grasp of the English language [I am not entirely convinced, just listen to ABBA's eurobabble]; Swedes tend to have an analytical side, and by using this the musicians can figure out formulas and compose songs that fit the requirements. No food was mentioned.

And a brief question from Malin from London:

– Will you release a new album this year?

No. We are working very hard on finishing our DVD at present, and although Mats gave me some demos to listen to the other day, this is very much work in progress and work that has to progress.

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6) Regarding Culture and its departments (part one)

By Mats Johansson, composer

Europe is a magnificently long-winded continent in many ways. When culture is to be supported, the economic means very rarely go straight to the project that is to benefit from it. Instead, a huge colossal cultural department is created, which in turn hands the money out to what is regarded as interesting at that very moment in time, based on the current cultural agenda. And there are many departments. In Sweden we have Statens Kulturråd (The Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs), Konstnärsnämnden (The Arts Grants Committee), Svenska Institutet (The Swedish Institute) and assorted EU-funds just to mention a few. I have nothing against departments, organizations or institutions – IB and myself have been very fortunate to get funding from most of these organizations – but it is getting to the point where it is difficult to work, to compose.

The applications are often so complicated that artists have to seek assistance from competent administrators who in turn have to consult experts to even fill in the application forms. Meanwhile, the artist is on the dole and gets dole money. In addition to that, he or she should apparently feel ashamed! In Sweden, this is solved by creating a new institution: a job centre for people working with culture. To qualify for this grand world you have to be an established artist or formally trained. Preferably have a job really.

The cultural job centre cannot find work for you, so they remain a slow resuscitation machine that can easily cause a sane person to break down in no time. I have never met an

administrator at the job centre who has any real work experience within culture or the labour market. Why? I have no idea. But I do know that voices were raised at the employment agency when a former artist was a possible candidate for a position as administrator!

Sure, many administrators are nice and understanding, but where is the double competence that should be required? Now threats are made and the artist who is on the dole is living in constant fear of being taken out of the labour market and put into a new institution – the “dole guarantee” – which is just a sister organization to the employment agency. Simply a premonition. There is still no work to be found, if there would, you wouldn't go to the agency, would you? At the same time, research tells us that culture is a resource in our society. A successful concert or theatre performance will affect restaurants, hotels, taxis and grocery stores, that will in turn pay taxes to the government.

Here's the next shock: Swedish research shows that dole money is an important part of the Swedish music export, a venture that has become one of Sweden's greatest assets on the international market. Oh my God, bloodrush! I suppose that was the worst scenario. Everything is turned upside down all of a sudden. Can you hear the sound of administrators running right, left and centre? Composers are actually writing music while getting dole money and by doing that, they are helping Sweden to move forward more than the wood and steel industries are at the moment. And here comes another organization: the union. They say: hold your horses! You can not work while you get unemployment benefits, which in practice means: go back to bed.

The more you fish in these muddy waters, the more you realize that you need a completely new way of looking at culture in Sweden and Europe. I honestly don't think that Sweden is any worse than any other European country, but this can hardly be a yardstick for the way culture politics should work in future.

Finally, a suggestion. Let the Swedish rights organization STIM hand out 100 000 Skr (approximately € 10 900/£ 7 500/\$ 13 000) to, say, 1 000 Swedish composers within all types of music. Their task will should be to compose music. After a year, an assessment should be made. I am certain the results would be astonishing, and the money would be delivered back with interest!

A response

By Thomas Olsson, musicologist

First of all, I would like to underline what Mats wrote just to clarify IB's position: IB have benefited more from grants and funds than most electric groups (for lack of a better description) in Sweden. We definitely appreciate that, no doubt about it. We are speaking from an insider's point of view.

But the problem remains. Where to find funding if you want to compose and play music that lies outside of the mainstream? It's a catch 22 situation when it comes to touring: to get booked, you generally need to be well-recognized and sell loads of CDs or have the support of a major record company that is taking good care of you. And how do you get to be a well-recognized name? You tour and sell CDs. If you are an independent record company – and

Ataraxia productions certainly is – there simply is no money at all to spend on fancy promotion.

This is where grants and funds come in. Most of the Swedish classical and jazz musicians are supported by grants and funds in one way or the other. Luckily, IB are regarded to be on this cultural level. But the funds and grants are limited, and there are many good acts in Sweden who deserve support apart from IB, good riddance to them. If you get enough funding, what are you supposed to do? You have to go on the dole of course, like anybody else would.

And here's an important aspect of the problem. For most people working with music, music is not only work, it is your life. If you work with accounting for instance, you wouldn't normally have accounting as a hobby, would you? But you may go to a concert in the evening, or listen to a record when you come home with your head full of figures. If you work with music, it is not unlikely that there is no clear distinction between what you get paid to do and what you do for free, a blurred distinction between work and time off. This complicates things when you have to go on the dole and are not allowed to work. Currently there are no solutions, but we have to keep on struggling through the systems nonetheless.

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7) If you like Isildurs Bane, you'll like... Björk!

I can highly recommend Icelandic singer/composer Björk's brand new CD *Medulla*. Based around the possibilities of the human voice, Björk uses her own voice in imaginative ways, but complements it with other people's voices (including Mike Patton, Robert Wyatt, a British Choir and an Inuit Choir) and sampled voices. Although you will probably find this CD in the pop/rock section in your local store, there are very few albums in the same section that uses vocals in such a challenging and experimental way, yet at the same time in a highly musical way. A lot of the time *Medulla* is quite avantgarde melodically and harmonically, but not without beautiful moments. For those of you who like the "La Sagrada Familia" suite from *The Voyage*, this could be the record of the year!

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Best wishes from Isildurs Bane!

Thomas Olsson
Newsletter editor

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