



## **Newsletter January 2005**

In this month's (very short) newsletter, you'll find:

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### **1) A message on the future**

2004 may have seemed to the outsider like a quiet year for Isildurs Bane. As a matter of fact, it hasn't been a quiet year. On the concert front, yes. We haven't played many concerts in 2004. But we have played in Portugal, Italy and Sweden. And we have a completely new website, built from scratch.

Instead we have worked very hard on future projects, first and foremost our forthcoming DVD. This has required far more time and effort than we had expected. One option was to film a concert, mix it and release it. This is all fine and well, and you can be certain that there will be such material released featuring IB. But we wanted to do something in the MIND tradition, working with the materials available and adding things to it. This takes time, but we hope you will find that it was worth it when you see the end result.

Our collaboration with Metamorfoosi Trio will continue. We would be completely out of our minds (no pun intended) if we let this project go. Large amounts of time, money and love have been invested in this Swedish-Italian project and we feel honoured to share the stage with these remarkable musicians. We plan to release some freshly recorded material and perhaps try different ways of working together. One way of doing this will happen next year, when Christian Saggese will record his second solo album, this time for Ataraxia records. The music will differ from his first – excellent – CD My Favourite Things as far as the repertoire and setting goes. We are currently discussing ideas, but I know that this will be a truly mind-blowing recording.

During the first half of next year, we will be busy with workshops at schools. This is something we have been doing for many years, but now seems like a good time to share some of our experiences from the more recent years. The music industry has changed a lot on the administrative side and on the technical side. Having stayed independent from major labels and keeping up with technology

seems to have been the right decisions for us. And we believe many people – especially young musicians – can benefit from hearing about how you can do things differently from what is recognized to be the norm.

As mentioned in last month's newsletter, we are looking at working with orchestral music again. If this becomes a reality, and it certainly looks promising, it will happen in 2007. All will be revealed as soon as the news are fit to print in this very newsletter.

In the meantime, remember to check our website for old newsletters, old issues of Regarding music, old featured on band members past and present, and Mats' Ataraxia report (at your own risk, you will not be the same after stepping inside the Ataraxia area). Go to [www.isildursbane.se](http://www.isildursbane.se)

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## **2) The DVD**

Isildurs Bane's DVD will be released on Monday, February 28<sup>th</sup> 2005. A release party will be held on Friday, February 25<sup>th</sup> 2005.

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## **3) Workshop at Löftadalen's folk high school**

Isildurs Bane will hold a workshop at Löftadalen's folk high school on January 11<sup>th</sup> 2005. It will be an all-day workshop that deals with everything from IB's musical backgrounds via good advice to young people to more musically specific things. A mini-concert ends the day.

We are very happy to have support from Region Halland in co-arranging this and future workshops.

<http://home.swipnet.se/loftadalen/>

<http://www.regionhalland.se/>

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## **4) Isildurs Bane & Metamorfofi Trio live in Sweden**



Isildurs Bane & Metamorfoosi Trio at Halmknippet, Halmstad  
Left to right: Mats, "Gicken", Jonas, Kjell and Luca

During four very intense days, we had the honour of having our good friends Metamorfoosi Trio as guests in Sweden. Apart from rehearsing, recording and meeting people the magnificent seven (Christian, Franco, Luca, "Gicken", Jonas, Kjell and Mats) shoehorned two concerts into their busy schedule. One concert took place in Halmstad, at Halmknippet on December 17th, the other in Malmö, at Jeriko the following evening.

Aside from a recording session, this was the first time this constellation played with two bassists. But why not? There has been two guitarists from the start, and like Christian and Jonas, "Gicken" and Franco are very unlike as players quite apart from the fact that the former performed on fretless electric and the latter on double bass.

The two sets consisted of material from MIND Vol. 3, a new take on IB's rearrangement of Viking Dahl's The Asylum, "Celestial Vessel" from MIND Vol. 2, "Open" from MIND Vol. 4, a bass duet and a couple of solo pieces for guitar performed by Christian.

The pastoral opening of "Open" performed by Christian and Luca with Mats supporting immediately set the mood. This song has taken on a new life in this version with different qualities from the original version. After this soft introduction, a mighty version of L'évento introduced the audience to strong dynamics while the musicians navigated between the composed and the improvised parts masterfully.

What amazed me, having been present at the rehearsals, was that a piece like "The Coachman" sounded one way in the rehearsal room, another way on stage in Halmstad, and yet another way in Malmö. All the takes were great, but this really shows how much improvisation can change a composition. A song like "The Sculptor", which is based more or less completely on free improvisation is expected to change from day to day, but many of the songs did in fact come in different shapes when the guys were on stage playing.

Even if the IB fellows talk about playing with Metamorfofi Trio as a learning experience, their contributions should not be disregarded. For example, with this new line-up, Kjell and "Gicken" make up a rock solid rhythm section which frees Franco to do his thing a lot of the time without having to think about holding down the bottom end.

But there are no ways around the fact that Metamorfofi Trio are truly extraordinary musicians. The astonishing interplay between Franco and Luca during an open section in *The Asylum* made the hairs on my arms rise. As did Christian's solo performances (he played the finale from Alberto Ginastera's *Sonata, Op. 47* and Astor Piazzolla's *Oblivion*, transcribed for guitar by Christian). And Luca's solo in *The Coachman*, and his melody part in "Celestial Vessel"... I could go on and on, they are soooo good!

Other highlights included a bass duet between Franco and "Gicken", the Luca-lead unplanned encore in Malmö and the wonderful sound engineered by Jan Severinsson, who always delivers the best sound available.

The amazing quality of the concert performances came as no surprise of course. Which is why we recorded both concerts. Don't be surprised if there's a new CD with *Isildurs Bane* and Metamorfofi Trio out next year. I won't promise anything, but music this good just can not stay unreleased.

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## 5) Regarding Percussion(ists)



By Mats Johansson, composer and occasional percussion programmer

I don't know how many times I have asked a percussionist to shut up, so we can talk about important things eye to eye. There is a saying attributed to the people on the island of Tonga: "The drum doesn't make as many noises as the mouth." An interesting saying

worth considering, but unfortunately erroneous. A percussionist can – if he or she is inclined to – make one hell of a noise and therefore has a singular capacity to make a person's thoughts and sense vanish. I have been affected many times, sometimes in a positive way, sometimes in a negative way. But the drumming spirit has become a natural part of my everyday life.

Maybe a percussion instrument was the first musical instrument, created when the earth was created – via the Big Bang. A true prehistoric instrument well rooted in its own tradition of volcano eruptions, earthquakes and hurricanes. Percussion instruments are hidden in the souls and dispositions of mankind. To me, percussion instruments are also connected to a psychological force. Rhythm is an individual experience, and what can be meditative and relaxing for me can be unbearable and stressful for you.

People have always gone off to war supported by the manipulative and meditative rhythms of percussion instruments. In a letter to Swedish writer Ola Hansson, August Strindberg (a very famous Swedish writer) wrote in 1890: "With drums and banners, the May 1<sup>st</sup> demonstrations walked like asses to scare themselves to better conditions of living."

Frank Zappa is best known as a composer and guitarist, but he was also an avid percussionist and composed lots of music for percussion. He noticed that some of the drummers he employed had an attitude of "I play drums because I'm an ANIMAL!" When August Strindberg used a similar expression ("I was the animal") he meant something completely different: a drunken stupor. Or perhaps Zappa was referring to the same state?

Do you think I dislike percussionists? Do you think I am in need of enemies? Absolutely not. I think of the percussionist as the most genuine music lover. The percussionists who are my friends always run amok with my music collection. They excitedly take CDs out and leave them on the floor while looking for another CD. They laugh loudly without being ashamed, play a record for 30 seconds and croak, "Listen to this, listen to this!" Then they put another album in the CD-player and put themselves in a transcendental state. This procedure repeats itself over and over, and I promise you the enjoyment is entirely kind. They truly adore music in all its forms. I am impressed and am currently giving them a standing ovation – in time of course!

You can develop a nice and slightly theatrical language with percussionists ("put some more oomph in the bass drum, Clever Trevor"), which can be liberating sometimes. This vocabulary lies somewhere between free improvisation and strictly composed music. Should you say something similar to a classically trained violinist, you would risk your friendship with this person. Forever. The hierarchies and authority of the classical tradition should not be underestimated.

I have had the great pleasure for many years to play together with two excellent percussionists, Kjell Severinsson and Klas Assarsson. More than once, it has dawned on me that percussion should be a compulsory subject in school along with chess. Within the domains

of chess you work with concentration, mathematical calculations, decision making and develop a feel for structural changes. With percussion you develop your manual skills and your sense of rhythm in speech and movement. To connect chess and percussion would result in a different way of looking at people's resources and development. Who can realize this? The Swedish minister for schools Ibrahim Baylan? I don't think so.

The composer John Cage considered the word music to be appropriate for sounds from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, whereas 20<sup>th</sup> century music should be described as organized sounds, which to a large extent supports the sound arsenal that percussionists carry with them. We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and see amalgamations between technology and tradition where there is a place for experiments within the field of contemporary music for the percussionist without a loose beard, funny hats or red noses (why do people persist with dressing up percussionists every now and then?).

There has never been more music composed for percussion than in our time. The musical elements that were discovered, taken care of and developed by composers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century (rhythmic, melodic and intervallic structures for instance) is being taken further with new technology such as loops, stylistic mixtures and people with different cultural backgrounds. Maybe that is why percussion works so well with other art forms.

I believe that the percussionists who are open to new technology belong to the musicians that stand the greatest chances of surviving without compromising their artistic integrity due to the flexibility inherent in most percussion instruments. Many older percussionists are sceptical and feel provoked by the technical developments that are flooding the market. Experience can easily lead to paralysis. Unfortunately, I cannot think of a cure for this. You have to find an oasis of your own if you want to enjoy life in today's technological world. For the percussionist, modern technology means development, possibilities, survival and artistic progress. (Now it's your turn to applaud.)

Personally, I always try to find a healthy mix of whatever I can find. If I want to go back in time I take my red moped and go five minutes straight into the woods. All of a sudden I am back in the 1930's. Fantastic, hardly anything has changed. I pick up my G4 laptop and write the final lines in an environment where percussion was born and should have been lost a long time ago.

## **The response**

By Thomas Olsson, musicologist

If you google on musician +drummer +jokes you get 34 800 hits. Replace drummer with guitar or violin and you get fewer results. On the other hand, replace drummer with piano and, hey presto!, you get 50 300 hits. A bit surprising since the drummer is usually at the butt end of not only his sticks, but also of many jokes. Such as:

Q: What do you call a drummer in a three-piece suit?

A: The defendant.

Q: What did the drummer get on his IQ test?

A: Saliva.

Q: What do you call a person who hangs around the musicians of the band after the show?

A: A drummer. (Mind you, I have seen this joke being answered with "A vocalist" too.)

So why do people make fun of percussionists or drummers? Off the top of my head, I can think of a handful of reasons:

- Percussionists hit their instruments
- Percussionists hit animal skins (at least they used to)
- Percussionists are regarded as wild and animal-like
- Percussionists are usually thought of as drummers only playing untuned percussion

These statements are – in most cases – completely wrong, of course, as anyone who ever met Kjell or Klas (or Simon Phillips, Dennis Chambers, Gregg Bissonette or Trilok Gurtu) can verify.

Sure, they hit their instruments, but so does pianist Cecil Taylor, guitarist Pete Townshend, keyboardist Keith Emerson (even stabbing one of his Hammond organs), bassist Michael Anthony and countless others. I have yet to see a drummer setting fire to his drum kit (although Keith Moon probably did it at some point).

Well, what if percussionists use animal skins? Most drummers use heads made of plastic based materials anyway. Which strings do you think baroque violinists use? Steel? Guess again. Most people – not me, but most people – eat meat and have no problem with that. Why should playing music on animal skins be a problem then? Besides, there are a large number of percussion instruments that don't use skins, and never have used skins (vibraphone, cowbell, triangle, gongs etc).

And then there's the myth about the wildman drummer. A person looking and behaving much like Animal from the pit band in the Muppet Show. Sure, there have been and still are crazy drummers like Keith Moon, Cozy Powell and Nicko McBrain (is that really his correct name?) who live and feed the myth. But you also have more reflective and thinking drummers like Neil Peart, Tony Oxley, Max Roach, Elvin Jones and Bill Bruford. Hardly madmen. After all, a percussionist is great to watch onstage. He or she moves about, there is actual physical movement, they may even sweat! And I am sure you can think of many guitarists who are just as wild (or at least give that impression) as any drummer you can think of.

Many percussionists are drummers and play no other percussion instruments. So what? I would rather hear a good drummer do a drum solo than hearing some egomaniac guitarist waste my time with too many clichéd rhythmically even phrases. Playing a drum kit well is something you work on all your life, just like a violinist.

Furthermore, many drummers do play tuned instruments. An extreme example would be Gary Husband. Everybody who has heard his out-of-this-world drumming with Allan Holdsworth that if it was any scarier, he would be twins! But there's more. He is an astounding pianist too!

And then there is the fascination for drumming. Many well-known musicians dabble with percussion, and some of them are really good too. Saxophonist Joe Lovano and keyboardist Chick Corea are two excellent examples. Every member of The Art Ensemble of Chicago played percussion from time to time. Sun Ra required that every member of his Arkestra – and there could be many of them – would be an able percussionist.

I really enjoy listening to a good drummer. In fact, I even make an effort and pay money to do it. Ten years ago, I found myself at the Zildjian day in London. At one point, the MC asked the audience if there was anybody in the audience who wasn't a drummer. According to the show of hands, I was the only non-drummer present. Nevertheless, I still remember it as a great show. Years ago, when home compilations on tape was still an everyday occurrence, I used to make tapes of my favourite drum solos. By now, I feel I can even confess to owning CDs featuring nothing but drums by Terry Bozzio, Jon Hiseman, Mickey Hart and The Drummers of Burundi. And believe me, they are magnificent!

From my personal experience, drummers are not untamed beasts. On the contrary, many of the drummers I have had the pleasure of meeting or playing with have been very practically minded, often preoccupied with setting things straight, preparing things and worrying about not being rehearsed enough. I would say a drummer would probably be the person in a band best suited to deal with administrative things such as bookkeeping and planning in general.

Is there a place for percussionists in today's musical world dominated by programmed percussion? Anyone can program a drum pattern, can't they? Of course. But give me an experienced, spontaneously interactive percussionist any time, and you will also get music that breathes, moves and swings!

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## **6) If you like IB, you'll like...**

Giovanni Maier's Mosaic Orchestra vol. 2. Beautiful chamber jazz in a modern style by this Italian septet. It oozes class, style and professionalism (and that's just looking at the cover). Put the CD on and you're off with a serene zen-like piece of adorable music. Before the final track, you have heard cool jazz, bop, free jazz, impressionistic art music, a Zappa-esque vibraphone dominated piece and then some. The range of these musicians is most impressive.

Our good friend, trumpet player extraordinaire Luca Calabrese blows his horn and shifts from playing beautifully, intensely and

delicately within a solo with ease. I knew that he was going to play well. He always does. Which is why he is a world class trumpet player. Period.

But Luca keeps good company. Double bassist Giovanni Maiers playing is mature, never overstated and his compositions are a cut above most jazz compositions. A good melody is never far away, but he never makes the music uninteresting or boring, on the contrary, it is full of surprises. Another good thing: he knows that he doesn't have to play at all times. Sometimes no note is the right note.

Giorgio Pacorig plays some wonderful piano that reminds me a bit of the late great Bill Evans. He really shines on "Velika Pricakovanja". I can hear Claude Debussy himself nodding in approval in his grave. The vibes player Saverio Tasca is probably the best mallet player I have heard in recent years (next to Klas Assarsson, of course). Overall, the team playing is brilliant and I get the impression that Maier knows his group very well, because the parts are performed in a way that seems to suit the players' style perfectly.

This CD comes highly recommended! If you have trouble ordering this from your favourite dealer, go to the record labels homepage:

<http://www.artesuono.it/>

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Best wishes and a happy new year from Isildurs Bane!

Thomas Olsson  
Newsletter editor

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