

“Originally commissioned for the Helsinki Juhlaviikot Festival, which called for 100 guitarists... Here, **Bjorkenheim performs and multi-tracks all guitar, bass and drum parts for a sequence of works that seem to herald the advent of doomsday.** ...the guitarist sports an enviable technique whether utilizing a slide to make his axe weep atop thumping rhythms or when executing fiery and often scathing single note leads. ...rippling harmonics, textural dreamscapes and moaning choruses. ...Bjorkenheim is an adventurous soul who possesses a distinct craft...”

- Glenn Astarita, *All About Jazz*, December 1, 2001, www.allaboutjazz.com

“**Guitarist Raoul Björkenheim wields his instrument like a knife on the ironically double-entred *Apocalypse*.** Sometimes he stabs, other times he engraves; or he might twist and jab, or simply scratch. ...  
... ***Apocalypse* does not once relent in intensity, even if quiet moments pop up occasionally. It's something of a testosterone-rich performance, remarkable...** Ever since his appearance on Krakatau's landmark debut, *Ritual*, in 1988 (a true masterpiece of guitar experimentalism), Björkenheim has made himself known as something of a rebel. ...he adopts pounding tribal rhythms as a foundation for otherworldly excursions.... he uses every tool at his disposal to color notes... Those colors just happen to be penetratingly dark... He may enter into a temporary dream state... Or he might assemble a squad of coordinated piledrivers for the heaviest dark metal you've ever heard... the composition seems quite flexible... Björkenheim's “solo” lines wiggle and squirm, twisting and winding their way along uncharted territory. ... pensive moments...have a sense of foreboding. A most unusual disc, ***Apocalypse* manages to be both brilliant and apocalyptic at the same time. It stands among Björkenheim's best work... pure, undiluted Björkenheim...truly glorious in its relentless blackness.** With 42 voices, it's got the depth to really penetrate. Like a knife.”

- Nils Jacobson, *All About Jazz*, October 2001, www.allaboutjazz.com

“...This Finnish guitarist and composer has never been afraid of the big gesture and *Apocalypse* aptly fits... **Originally written for 30 guitarists, 8 bassists and 4 percussionists, Bjorkenheim's decision to record the work as a solo...piece is nothing short of heroic. It is simply a triumph.** By turns languid and aggressive, laconic and terse it is a work of stark contrasts held in tension by **Bjorkenheim's depth of vision and sheer technical brilliance.** ...

**A plethora of guitars produce a huge range of tone and texture:** soaring slide, unearthly metallic arpeggios, sitar like drone, chordal vamp, bowed strings and heavy throb... Bjorkenheim has dragged the ruins of an ancient edifice into a high-tech laboratory and created **a hybrid that has identity, meaning and significance.** It is pan cultural: the title track...mixes gamelan with King Crimson like Frippery to produce a truly original soundscape as guitars scream in an act of catharsis and percussion stomps wildly. ...”

- John Cratchley, *Avant*, #62, December 2001

“This Finnish composer's works for percussion and one-man guitar orchestra are **sonic playgrounds**, as he blends joyful melodies with little surprises that leap from the mix. **The opening "Oracle" and closing "Last Oracle" frame the disc with slide-guitar melodies that twist like sidewinders until they cross minefields of feedback and noise.** ... Björkenheim's love of the possibilities of digital delay is in evidence everywhere...his guitar mimics the qualities of drops hitting puddles...he uses an E-bow and...effects to re-create a mournful cello. And at times, he just stomps. "Circles" uses repeating loops of guitar and thunderous drumbeats to move from metal crunch to delicate pointillism to braying industrial tones...

What's hip about Björkenheim — beside his embrace of rock-and-roll attack — is **his concentration on tone.** ... **Björkenheim's signature sound seems as blue and wailing as Peter Green's, yet he's game for employing a half-dozen guitar sounds for a single piece to cover as much of the spectrum as possible. That makes for a wider emotional range...a fretboard feast.**”

- Ted Drozdowski, *The Boston Phoenix*, May 30, 2002, www.bostonphoenix.com

“**I first heard Bjorkenheim's guitar antics when he was with Edward Vesala's Sound and Fury, a band that took jazz into sometimes startling territories. Apparently, the Finnish drummer told him to 'totally obliterate anything that had to do with standard guitar', advice he has certainly tried to take to heart.** ...

**'Apocalypse' is composed of 9 sections and was originally commissioned...to be performed by a mammoth group of 42 guitarists, bassists and percussionists. Here Bjorkenheim does it all by himself, a one man virtual ensemble. ...primal...other-worldly... furious and intense.** The title track... Pounding, metallic percussion propels...harsh, angular guitar while other guitars chatter and howl...creates a storm that teeters on the edge of feedback and occasionally topples over it. ... **For density it recalls, to my ears, some of Miles Davis' most electric work.**

But it isn't all flat out sonic attack. Not quite. 'Rain' is an impressionistic take with notes spinning and echoing while 'Lament' has the guitars sounding more like cellos... This is, however, completely shattered by the opening of 'Circles' with its...staccato hammerings from guitar followed by swooping trebly feedback. ...

**...if your tastes incline to Pat Metheny or Wes Montgomery this may not suit. ...his explorations are compelling and open strange, disturbing vistas where some notions of what electric guitar can/should do will be refreshed. [5 stars]”**

- Paul Donnelly, *the BIRDpages record review & JAZZITUDE*, 2011

“...guitar virtuoso Raoul Björkenheim...musically erupts with his own explosive multi-instrumental dub orchestra of guitars and cataclysmic jungle of mind trips. **The cover art...a macro shot of a human eye, is the portal... The listener gets sucked into...a black hole of sound...where guitars stretch beyond their human limits. ...Björkenheim, like the great Caspar Brötzmann, lunges right at your throat with his guitar and stops...anything can happen without warning.** ... Björkenheim is highly inventive, dangerous, correct, clever and an extreme pleasure to listen to.”

- Roman Sokal, *Exclaim!*, March 27, 2002

“...While the guitar is the main focus of the work, the percussion and bass both play important roles as Björkenheim's atypical rhythm section. ... **The rhythms are...world-beat sounding...** Several...pieces have a very trance-like quality about their rhythms and beats — especially the 9-minute title track. ... He is a truly unique player who smoothly combines...heavy rock, jazz, avant garde, ethnic...often in the same piece. ... *Apocalypse* is definitely worth checking out.”

- Mike Grimes, *Exposé*, #24, April 2002

“... This time out, it's all Björkenheim. ... **Björkenheim's interests lie...to the sonic possibilities of the guitar as sounds rather than traditional notes.** He uses slides both on bass and guitar, and often the noises are mangled... The drum parts...focus on throbbing toms, slow and moody as on

“Sages” or faster and building to an incredible frenzy on the title track. ... My favorite is undoubtedly **the title track, which features a chorus of chunky rhythm parts and a wild melody voiced in octaves... like Snakefinger on steroids, and an edgy solo...like Henry Kaiser in a really bad mood.** This track alone is worth the price of admission.”  
- Jon Davis, *Exposé*, #24, April 2002

“... Adapted from his own orchestral arrangements, “Apocalypse” is now a self performed multi-part piece of gloom and doom. ...by down scaling...the challenge is in how to preserve the intensity of the original live performance made by 42 musicians. ... **On the short transitional piece, “Rain” the guitarist gets a bit introspective which reminds me of Terje Rypdal’s work on ECM... The title track is purely the centerpiece of the entire work; with the main theme stated by a grungy lead guitar break like many of Adrian Belew’s solo works... At times, the presentation is a bit like free jazz icon Derek Bailey’s explorations...**...but...an identifiable structure is in place. ... Overall the nine tracks embody a fierce anger where the composer shows more than adequate restraint.”  
- Jeff Melton, *Exposé*, #24, April 2002

“...**not unlike...Terje Rypdal, his guitar sound practically radiates a sunny, below-zero chill-laden energy.** ...the passion is there, but the usual “hot licks” style common to most jazz, rock and blues doesn't apply. ... **This is dense, glacial music - think Terje Rypdal and King Crimson (at their Discipline'd Red-est) collaborating on re-scoring some Hitchcock movies. Bjorkenheim has chops so sharp you could get cut if you got too close, but his technique serves the music, not his ego. If you can think of the guitar as a six-stringed orchestra instead of just a solo or instrumental voice, Apocalypse will send you into orbit.**”  
- Mark Keresman, *Jazzreview.com*, December 2001

“...when listening to it, you would never suspect this was not forty-two musicians playing together. The composition displays many different facets of the electric guitar, each part having its own distinctive sound and mood... **The overall effect is an impressive tour-de-force of guitar playing... this album...aims for the senses not the intellect.** ... When his massed electric guitars hit a riff on the title track (and centrepiece of the work) overlaid with screaming soloing, the sense of excitement is tangible and it is impossible to resist the adrenaline surge it produces.”  
- John Eyles, *Sonomu.net*, Mar 18 2002

“...**the sound here is massive: wide, instrumental vistas of truly alien, expansive sound. A nine-piece suite, it plods along with clanking, tribal drums, textured by guitar that alternates between the stuttering crunch of Ride the Lightning-era Metallica and the sour, de-tuned style of Marc Ribot.** Punctuated by wind chimes, odd, tin-sounding percussion, and some real “Land-of-The-Rising-Sun” gong action, there’s the steady flow (within each track and as a whole) of monolithic, well-oiled machinery. ... A great soundtrack to a sci-fi movie that doesn’t exist, this’ll make you wonder what it would’ve been like had Mr. Waits enlisted those Neubaten fellows to compliment Ribot’s work on *Bone Machine*.”  
- Peter Aaron, *YOURfLESh*, Spring/Summer 2002

“**Finnish guitarist Raoul Bjorkenheim...has just been nominated for the Nordic Nomus prize for his album Apocalypse... It's an ambitious magnum opus premiered with 42 players at the 1995 Helsinki festival.** On the recording, Bjorkenheim plays everything himself: bass guitars, acoustic guitars, bowed guitars and the plinky noises...on the wrong side of the bridge. ... Apocalypse, chundering away over the kind of beat once favoured by Gary Glitter, generates the most heat, with a great guitar solo. Bjorkenheim has stamina, and his command of sheer noise is impressive...”  
- John L. Walters, *Guardian Unlimited*, March 1, 2002

“... **Raoul Björkenheim is an innovative sound sculptor creating instrumental masterpieces with foundations in rock and jazz.** ... This piece was realized 1994-5 as a commission for the Helsinki Juhlaviikot Festival and originally intended for 100 guitarists. Björkenheim’s final piece is for 42 musicians: 30 guitarists, 8 bassists and 4 percussionists. This 2000 recording...features Raoul performing all parts in the studio as a virtual ensemble.”  
- Tom Schulte, *Outsight*

“...dark orchestral colours in a rock setting. Originally scored for live performance by 42 musicians, this studio version features Bjorkenheim alone, employing densely multitracked guitars and percussion. **There is a remarkable integrity across the nine sections of this multimovement suite, its repetitive pent up energy sustained for almost 30 minutes before the guitar histrionics of the title-track offer a highly-charged release. ...a bold...experiment that shows that there is a future for the guitar orchestrations well beyond those of Rhys Chatham and Glenn Branca.**”  
- Chris Atton, *RUBBERNECK*

“...my choices as Top 20 albums for 2001...Björkenheim, Raoul Apocalypse (Cuneiform Rune)...”  
-Tom Schulte, *Caustic Truths!*, Issue #82