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**FILE UNDER: JAZZ / METAL-JAZZ**

**Bill Laswell**

*"Few people on this sphere truly deserve to be called a genius. But if the definition refers to one with a rare gift for transforming the intangible into the tangible and seamlessly combining that which is ostensibly disparate, then Bill Laswell may very well qualify."*

– *Innerviews*

**Raoul Bjorkenheim**

*"I first heard Bjorkenheim's guitar antics when he was with Edward Vesala's Sound and Fury, a band that took jazz into startling territories. Apparently, the Finnish drummer told him to 'toally obliterate anything that had to do with standard guitar', advice he has certainly tried to take to heart. His explorations...open strange, disturbing vistas where some notions of what electric guitar can/should do will be refreshed."*

– *Jazzitude*

**Morgan Agren**

*"...Agren is...a drummer's drummer who can flit from cool traditional jazz to proggy rock to howling Swedish metal, without dropping a stick, without batting an eye...If you've got a drummer in your family, pick these records up...He'll either thank you or give up his instrument forever."*

– *Popmatters*

If the British power trio **Cream** was the first guitar-led supergroup, **Blixt** is a 2011 aftershock. Five decades on, the sound is heavier and darker, the mix of ingredients more transgressive, the origins of the musicians more global, and the harmonic and rhythmic palettes more complex. But at the core of both Cream and Blixt is an unholy marriage of rock and jazz, riffs and improv, the viscera and the cerebrum. And both bands, at their most confrontational, can peel the ears clean off your head. There is even a real-time connection between the two groups. Blixt bassist **Bill Laswell** produced and played on **Ginger Baker's** 1986 album, *Horses & Trees (Celluloid)*. A longtime admirer of Baker, Laswell coaxed the ex-Cream drummer out of semi-retirement for the project.

Then again, who has Laswell not worked with over the last thirty years? The most internationally celebrated of the Blixt trio, Laswell – who began his professional life on the Detroit funk scene, before relocating to NYC in the late 1970s - has produced and/or recorded with a widescreen rainbow of artists. **Afrika Bambaataa, Grand Mixer D.S.T., Herbie Hancock, PiL, The Last Poets, Manu Dibango, Toure Kunda, Bootsy Collins, George Clinton, Daevd Allen and New York Gong, Bernie Worrell, Peter Brötzmann, Mötörhead, Zakir Hussain, The Ramones, John Zorn, Fred Frith, William S. Burroughs, Iggy Pop, Sonny Sharrock, Yoko Ono, Brian Eno, Trilok Gurtu, Buckethead, David Byrne, The Master Musicians of Jajouka, Mad Professor, Lee "Scratch" Perry, Ronald Shannon Jackson, Golden Palominos, Wayne Shorter, Sly & Robbie, Pharoah Sanders and Jah Wobble.** All have worked with Laswell - under their own names or with Laswell groups including **Material, Massacre, Last Exit, Painkiller, Praxis and Divination** - typically in a genre-mashing context or "collision," as his music was once dubbed. And that's only scratching the surface.

Talking of scratching, **Herbie Hancock's "Rockit,"** from the Laswell-produced album *Future Shock* (Columbia), was, in 1983, the first hit single to feature turntable scratching. Another early Laswell first (in a career strewn with invention and experiment) was the 1984 **Time Zone** single **"World Destruction"**(Celluloid), which paired the **Sex Pistols/PiL's John Lydon** alongside **Afrika Bambaataa**, two years before the **Run DMC/Aerosmith** collaboration, **"Walk This Way"** (Profile/Arista) broke down the mainstream rock/hip hop barrier.

As a remixer, Laswell also distinguished himself on *Panthalassa: The Music Of Miles Davis 1969 - 1974* (Columbia, 1997), on which he recalibrated the electric-era recordings Davis made with producer **Teo Macero.** And it is Miles Davis who provides a connection between Laswell and **Raoul Björkenheim,** Blixt's guitarist and the group's initiator. The year after *Panthalassa's* release, Björkenheim played on and contributed arrangements to Finland's **UMO Jazz Orchestra's Electrifying Miles** (A-Records, 1998).

Roughly the same age as Laswell, who was born in 1955, Björkenheim, born in 1956 in Los Angeles to Finnish parents, resettled in Helsinki in 1981, after graduating from the Berklee School of Music in Boston. He first came to notice mid-decade as a member of drummer **Edward Vesala's Sound & Fury** band, with which he recorded three albums, *Bad Luck, Good Luck* (Leo, 1983), *Kullervo* (Leo, 1985) and *Lumi* (ECM, 1986).

For Björkenheim, the words "sound and fury" have since continued to apply. They arch between the four albums he recorded, after leaving Vesala, with his own group **Krakatau – Ritual** (Hieronymous, 1988; **Cuneiform, 1996**), *Alive* (Hieronymous, 1989), *Volition* (ECM, 1991), *Matinale* (ECM, 1993) – up to and beyond his ironically double-entended solo album, *Apocalypso* (Cuneiform, 2001). Björkenheim had begun working with Cuneiform in 1996, when the American label reissued *Ritual.* Their second collaboration, *Apocalypso,* coincided with the guitarist's move to NY – and, unfortunately, with one of modern history's darkest events. A week before *Apocalypso's* release on Cuneiform, the 9/11 terrorist attacks on NYC and DC stunned the world. Despite its ominous entrance, the CD received widespread critical acclaim and, in 2002, was nominated for Scandinavia's prestigious **Nordic Music Council (NOMUS) Prize.**

*Apocalypso* was scored for thirty guitars, eight basses and four sets of drums, all played by Björkenheim. As *All About Jazz's* contemporaneous review of *Apocalypso* put it, "Björkenheim wields his instrument like a knife...sometimes he stabs, other times he engraves; or he might twist and jab, or simply scratch. Maybe it's just a Finnish thing, but brightness and Björkenheim just don't go together...Rest assured that *Apocalypso* does not once relent in intensity, even if quiet moments crop up occasionally... Truly glorious in its relentless blackness." *Blixt* is a more sonically, dynamically and emotionally varied affair than *Apocalypso,* but much of that review is as pertinent today as it was on publication. Björkenheim's most recent pre-*Blixt* release is *dmg @ the stone volume 2* (dmg/arc, 2008), made with bassist **William Parker** and percussionist **Hamid Drake.**

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Björkenheim first performed with Laswell in 1997, after the two had been part of the “virtual” group, **Phantom City**, produced by keyboard player and electronicist **Paul Schütze**, which recorded *Site Anubis* (Big Cat). The disc – which was recorded on a 16-track ADAT tape passed by Schütze between the contributing musicians – led to a live gig in Bern, Switzerland. “That’s when I actually met Bill,” says Björkenheim. “We got along well and soon I was asked to record a CD for **Innerhythmic** with guitarist **Nicky Skopelitis** [a frequent Laswell collaborator], produced in Bill’s Brooklyn studio. It was called *Revelator*, and featured some psychedelic songs which we pretty much composed together.”

Björkenheim moved to NYC in 2001, partly at Laswell’s instigation. “Bill had asked me to play in the road band of his Ethiopian wife, the singer **Ejigayehu ‘Gigi’ Shibabaw**. She had recorded a fantastic CD [*Gigi*, for **Chris Blackwell**’s Palm Pictures] which Bill produced, featuring Wayne Shorter, Pharoah Sanders and Herbie Hancock, with arrangements by **Henry Threadgill**. We played a few gigs, but then 9/11 happened and all touring plans were put aside. I kept in touch with Bill, however, and eventually I played a small tour with Gigi in 2002.”

“I’ve since recorded often at Bill’s studio in New Jersey, and once when I was in NYC after having moved back to Helsinki, I paid Bill and Gigi a visit. He played me some extreme rock that he had discovered, some of it pure shrieking noise, and I told him about this awesome drummer from Sweden, **Morgan Ågren**. I showed him a clip of Morgan and **Fredrik Thordendal**, from **Meshuggah**, on YouTube, and he liked it. From then on I acted as the conduit to get the project moving.” The Ågren/Thordendal project Björkenheim refers to was the heavy-in-extremis disc *Sol Niger Within* (for Ågren’s Ultimate Audio Entertainment label, 1997).

Younger than Björkenheim and Laswell by a decade, Ågren first recorded with Björkenheim in 2006, on *Box Studio I* (Rune Grammofon). “In 2005,” says Björkenheim, “I got an email out of the blue from **Philip Mullarkey** [a British film director living in Denmark], asking whether I wanted to do a recording and a tour with Morgan, keyboards player **Ståle Storløkken** and bassist **Trevor Dunn**. It didn’t take me long to say yes. The music was intended for a film with the working title *Box*; some of the footage is viewable on YouTube. It was thrilling to play with that band. I was hoping that the project was going to continue, but it just fizzled out, and no film has come out yet.”

In Sweden, Ågren is best known for his thirty year musical partnership with the keyboard player **Mats Öberg**. Mostly, the duo has worked together leading the **Mats/Morgan Band**, playing an innovative jazz/rock fusion style. In 1984, they formed a spin-off band, **Zappsteetoot**, performing **Frank Zappa**’s music. So impressed was Zappa by Ågren and Öberg when they guested with him at a 1988 Stockholm concert, that he invited the pair to the US to tour and record. Both were later among the players featured on the tribute album, *Zappa’s Universe* (Polygram, 1993), which won a **Grammy Award** in 1994, the year after Zappa’s passing. Ågren began working with Cuneiform in 2005, when the label released the Mats/Morgan Band’s CD, *Thanks for Flying with Us*. In 2009, Cuneiform released *Heat Beats Live/Tourbook 1991-2007*, a two-disc set that included a Mats/Morgan Band CD and a DVD spotlighting Morgan’s drumming. That same year, Ågren entrusted Cuneiform to reissue all Mats/Morgan Band albums originally on Ågren’s **Ultimate Audio Entertainment**. Cuneiform is reissuing a remastered version of Mats/Morgan’s *Live* CD at the same time as the **Blixt** release.

It was Ågren, says Björkenheim, who chose the group name **Blixt**. “It means ‘lightning’ in Swedish. I’d actually come up with it, but it was Morgan who picked it out of a list of possible names.”

The three members of Blixt first got in the same room together in September, 2010. “We played a gig in NYC at the **Bowery Poetry Club**,” says Björkenheim, “and then we spent two days recording in Bill’s studio. Morgan had paid me a visit in Helsinki the previous summer, when we talked about the material, and I reciprocated with a visit to Stockholm. That time, we recorded some jams, and out of those we extracted some of the main material for the CD. In the studio, Bill came up with his own parts, so although some of the riffs were pre-composed, the session was essentially an improvisational cooperation between the three of us. The two days he had for this first disc didn’t allow us a lot of time to polish things up, so it’s quite a raw and roaring proposition. There were very few overdubs, most of the material is completely live. Bill and **Bob Musso** mixed it, so there was some post-production involved, but a bare minimum.”

*Blixt* is, indeed, a raw and roaring piece of work. The most intense tracks kick off at levels with which most bands climax a jam – and keep on lacerating. “Black Whole,” “Moon Tune” and “Tools,” the pieces which start the disc, are full frontal assaults from the get go, racking up a tension which is only released by the ecstatic, primal riff which drives the following track, “Cinques Roulettes.”

But there is shelter and cooler heat on the disc too, and Björkenheim’s gift for novel sonorities is not confined to high decibel, shamanistic pyrotechnics. On “Shifting Sands Closing Hour,” his guitar sounds something like a West African balafon, and the trio takes on the mantle of a pared down gamelan, albeit one driven by Ågren’s urgent, urban pulse. On “Ghost Strokes,” the group starts out like a coiled spring, only gradually unleashing itself over the 8:26 playing time. “Invisible One,” longer still at 11:17, follows a similar, evolutionary trajectory. The three tracks are perfectly positioned near the center of the album.

For close on thirty years, Björkenheim and Laswell have been rattling the cage of normality, and shoulder to shoulder with Ågren, they break the bars and let the spirits soar.

*For more information on Blixt, see:*

**Bill Laswell:** <http://www.silent-watcher.net/billlaswell> – **Raoul Björkenheim:** [www.raoulbjorkenheim.com](http://www.raoulbjorkenheim.com) – **Morgan Ågren:** <http://www.morganagren.com>

## **PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**



Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available for download on [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com) in the “Press” section.

**WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT PREVIOUS RAOUL BJÖRKENHEIM / KRAKATAU RELEASES ON CUNEIFORM:**

**RAOUL BJÖRKENHEIM**

**APOCALYPSO**

**CUNEIFORM**

**2001**

“Originally commissioned for the Helsinki Juhlaviikot Festival, which called for 100 guitarists... Here, **Björkenheim 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. ...Björkenheim 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-entended *Apocalypso*.** Sometimes he stabs, other times he engraves; or he might twist and jab, or simply scratch. ...

... ***Apocalypso* 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, ***Apocalypso* 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 *Apocalypso* aptly fits... **Originally written for 30 guitarists, 8 bassists and 4 percussionists, Björkenheim'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 **Björkenheim'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... Björkenheim 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. ...

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 Björkenheim'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.** ...

**'Apocalypso' is composed of 9 sections and was originally commissioned...to be performed by a mammoth group of 42 guitarists, bassists and percussionists. Here Björkenheim 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...staccato hammerings... 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, *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. ... *Apocalypso* 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, “*Apocalypso*” 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, *Apocalypso* 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 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 adrenalin 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 *Apocalypso*... 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. ... *Apocalypso*, 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

“...dark orchestral colours in a rock setting. ... 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*

#### RAOUL BJÖRKENHEIM / KRAKATAU                      RITUAL                      HIERONYMOUS 1988 / CUNEIFORM 1996

“This is very strong jazz, thick with constant roll drums and a variety of horns, flutes and bones. But the real focal point is the blinding shrill guitar pyrotechnics – intricate and growling with creative feedback and distortion. Imagine Ornette Coleman with a strong John [Z]orn injection charged in a rock direction...like an ECM album with a shade more fury. **Blasting out of Finland, this great album from 1988 finally sees release in the USA...**”  
- Matt Howarth, *Those Annoying Post Brothers*, #54, Feb 1997

“The ritual in question could be the exorcism of all the adjectives that leap to mind when “jazz” and “Scandinavia” are paired off... *Ritual*...is a hotter, more raw proposition, expressionistically blowing the lid off Finnish stoicism. It is very exciting.

“Foot Talk” is the most invigorating and celebratory piece of music I've heard all year. Guitar strumming a big chord while the horns shake with a religious zeal, bursting with passion like Ayler on “Our Prayer.”... Tapio has a tremendous alto solo that bounces over the rhythm with great cunning, dipping in and out of a melody that Ornette would be proud of. Yes, Prime Time and the Decoding Society have to be mentioned here, as signposts for the uninitiated only, for Krakatau can't be written off as copyists. **Prime Time...have never made a record as focused as *Ritual*, and Björkenheim's writing merits comparison with Shannon Jackson's best...**

**Björkenheim's guitar style leans heavily towards feedback and distortion; his solo on “New Day” is a metal poem...In short, this is a vital and important record signalling the arrival of some world-class talents. Raoul Björkenheim and Jorma Tapio. Remember the names. “**

- Steve Lake, *The Wire*, Nov. 1989

“This is one of the best records I've heard in a few months... it's got a great metal grind – **Raoul plays guitar – that mixes Ornette with a bit of hardcore and free playing. The saxophonists... can sound scarily like Ornette, and, harmonized over a John Deere-goes-urban backbeat (two drummers), they ignore soloing in favor of fevered riffing. Raoul like[s] dense distortion and pig-howling sounds;** it all finds its place. Finns give good rhythm, I guess.”  
- *Musician*, Sept. 1989

“...this music is not cerebral, but instead highly rhythmic and full of energy... This is not a pale imitation of some American jazz-fusion band, but strong music that still shows a unique local style. The music has done very well among Finnish jazz fans...This is music worth listening to.”  
- Walter Schwager, *CODA*, #229, Dec. 89-Jan. 90

“Finland's Raoul Björkenheim combines feedback wrestling, strange jazz, and a heady dose of outside licks in a heady soup of practically indescribable music... he experiments onstage with constantly varying rhythmic structures and disturbing sonorities, **taking his band about as far from a traditional jazz trio format as one could imagine.**” - T.M., *Guitar Player*, Jan. 1991

“Raoul Björkenheim & Krakatau make tribal percussion-heavy, raucous fusion on *Ritual*, a reissue of the band's 1977 debut, never before issued outside of their native Finland ... they're over the top with squalling saxophones, biting electric guitar leads and two drummers pounding away. **Great rocking fun...**”  
- Stuart Kremsky, *IAJRC Journal*

“...Krakatau's first album, another interesting choice by Steve Feigenbaum for reissue. Krakatau now resides in ECM's stable since their third album... Raoul Bjorkenheim is just one of those intense guitarists, a man who just won't play it like you'd expect and wrings such tortured sonorities from his instrument. The music here is maybe more raw than the albums on ECM and thus more rocking... **for those who like the freer jazzier and more dissonant aspects of fusion, and if you're a guitarist you better sit up as this guy is a true original.**”  
- Peter Thelen, *Expose*, February 1997

**WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT PREVIOUS MORGAN AGREN RELEASES ON CUNEIFORM:**

**MATS/MORGAN BAND**

**HEAT BEATS LIVE // TOURBOOK 1991-2007 (CD+DVD)**

**CUNEIFORM 2008**

“Öberg, blind from birth, is a keyboard prodigy, while Agren is regularly voted into the top three best drummers in the world. The music is jazz-rock, echoing Zappa, but more often world/jazz-rock supremo Joe Zawinul, and his ilk. Bassist Tommy Tordsson aids the remarkable duo. The tracks, all live, range from heavyweight jazz-rock freak-outs in impossible-to-follow time signatures, to otherworldly Zawinul-esque divertissements. Öberg wrings some great sounds out of his synth...it does grip the listener, especially the insane piano/harp/drums/brass trip cut “The Bösendorfer of Advokaten.” The DVD collects sixty-five clips of Agren in action, ranging from studio work to sessions to live cuts. Excellent quality material, and an absolute must for drummers in any genre.”– Simon Lewis & Stephen Palmer, *Terrascope*, www.terrascope.co.uk, 2008

“With a collection of eight albums already and the experience of playing at concerts and festivals alike, Mats Oberg and Morgan Agren have a life long rush of musical genius behind them and they are not stopping there...the duo definitely have something huge going for them...**Jazz Rock must have... If you are a fan of any type of jazz music from Medeski Martin and Wood, Frank Zappa, or even trip hop artists such as Bjork or Massive Attack, you need to pick up this album for your collection. It’s a decision you won’t regret!**” [5 star] – Lisa Knapp, *Lucidforge*, www.lucidforge.com

“If your tastes run to the more experimental side of things, this is a disc you simply must have... **highly charged experimental jazz-fusion with doses of modern classical influences.** The musicianship of this duo is first rate; it’s absurdly complex at times yet on a dime will become minimalistic featuring tinkling keyboards and harmonica... it’s a musical roller-coaster. You will never quite know where the music will be going next because it defies traditional convention.”  
– Jerry Lucky, “My Progressive Rock World”, *JerryLucky.com*

“...this new live album...it’s a wide variety...**complex fusion, full of solos, blending-in folk and all sorts of other elements, with obvious influences like: Zappa/ Mothers, Mahavishnu Orchestra, Samia Mammamanna, in fact lots of jazz-fusion and RIO** type musicians are adapted and sewn into their lively concoction... The bonus DVD credited to Morgan Agren: *Tourbook 1991-2007*... collecting various Mats/Morgan gig extracts along with other bands, projects, and solo work, **does showcase his talent well in a wide variety of settings... he’s good, and with an original style.**”  
– Alan Freeman, *Audion*

“**Mats/Morgan Band produces a frenetic, musical stew that always intrigues and usually ingratiates... Equipped with jaw-dropping chops,** the band sometimes lets unbridled virtuosity get the better of it... But wait – sometimes the utter wild musicianship trumps everything: One finds oneself bowing in humble acknowledgement of genius bracketing whatever reservations one might have about the downright audacity of the proceedings (“Tuvas Rumba”). Other times (“Cry of Laika”) there’s such a pure folk sensibility operating, that grousing would be curmudgeonly without cause... if you’re all taken by **chops-heavy world/jazz/rock/classical fusion,** it’s certainly worth a listen.” – Jan Dennis, *Audiophile Audition*, www.audaud.com

“**Their music is influenced by jazz, classical, progressive rock, Magma, Frank Zappa, and jazz-fusion...** Most of the songs are very complex and are not in your standard 4/4 time...Mats uses a full range of keyboard sounds creating a very full sound. **Morgan's drumming at times reminded me of Terry Bozzio's** playing, where they play melodies and rhythm at the same time. He also changes where he accents the beats... and this gives a lot of color to his playing... The highlight of this package for me is the DVD... put together by Morgan Argen... There are over 70 video clips...of the Mats/Morgan Band, Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart tribute bands, Fredrik Thordendal (Meshuggah) and other jazz ensembles... really good close up shots of Morgan playing... **He definitely has his own style and adds a lot to the music he plays from jazz to metal. I could not recommend this DVD enough to anyone that plays drums or enjoys them... One amazing drummer!**” [4 stars]  
– Christian Bernier, *Sea of Tranquility*, www.seaoftranquility.org

“**The live DVD Tourbooks...opens with a tight shot of drummer Morgan Agren’s hands...poised over a vast drum kit...When he starts, his hands fly over the set, impossibly fast but light-tempered and playful. ...Agren is... a drummer’s drummer who can flit from cool traditional jazz to proggy rock to howling Swedish metal, without dropping a stick, without batting an eye... Heat Beats Live is...distillation of the pair’s technical proficiency and playful musicality,** augmented on about half the tracks by a full band. The disc starts with “The Return of Advokaten”, a prolonged, fast-paced three-way between Agren’s pulsing, storming rhythms, Oberg’s cool Return to Forever-ish keys, and Tommy Tordsson’s frantic bass. The keyboard takes all kinds of roles here, sounding like an electric piano, an organ and, briefly, a flute. **Yet it’s the the duel in the rhythm section that gives the cut oomph. You quite simply can’t believe that both of them can keep up with the pace and complexity... the most powerful cuts seem to be...the ones where Mats and Morgan go at it, just the two of them, their difficultly paced rhythms matching sometimes and intersecting at odd angles at others. You are struck first by the skill at work ... but then by the sense of play. There is a lightness, a giddiness, a trick-rider bravado to the stunts they pull, as if they themselves cannot stop grinning at what they have gotten away with... Your appreciation for Heat Beats will depend... on how well you tolerate fusion... but Mats and Morgan do it so skillfully that you have to set personal preferences aside.... If you’ve got a drummer in your family, pick these records up for him. He’ll either thank you or give up his instrument forever.”** [7 stars]  
– Jennifer Kelly, *PopMatters*, www.popmatters.com

“The CD/DVD set showcases the talents of Swedish drummer Morgan Agren. The live CD features Agren and keyboardist Mats Oberg playing their **unique brand of Zappa influenced jazz/rock,** while the DVD *Tourbook 1991-2007* show Agren... Both feature **great drumming from Agren** but “Tvingle” with the funky bass of Tommy Tordsson is the favourite track” [3 stars]  
– Brent Keefe, *Drummer Magazine*

“**A solid fifty two minute fusion jazz workout by this Swedish group of brilliant musicians,** and a feature-length DVD of footage from throughout their career.”  
– George Parsons, *Dream Magazine* #9

“Swedish jazz/prog rock outfit **Mats Morgan Band** owe a lot to the more exploratory flirtations between jazz and rock through the 60's and 70's, especially in **John McLaughlin’s Mahavishnu Orchestra,** and more significantly **Frank Zappa’s** work... **The controlled insanity of Zappa comes through in Heat Beats Live... Mats Morgan Band are successful when they go for sustained intensity... It would be criminal to ignore just how amazing the performances on this album are. The bass work is particularly notable.** Even though it undoubtedly evokes the jazz fusion of the 80's, particularly when slap is used, bass guitarist Tommy Thordsson ultimately proves to be a strong basis for the musical material above, particularly where Morgan Agren seeks more to add color and spectacle to the band’s structure ... how alive these players are in a live format and how well the style does come off when put forth with consistency and structural order. ... **Mats Morgan Band is totally ridiculous fun.**” – Marcus Whale, *The Silent Ballet*