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Bio information: **MATS/MORGAN**

Title: **[SCHACK TATI]** (Cuneiform Rune 385) Format: CD / DIGITAL

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**FILE UNDER: ROCK / FUSION / AVANT-PROGRESSIVE**

**Zappa's Swedish Protégés Come of Age on the Boundary-Bashing Album, *[schack tati]*,  
Mats/Morgan's First Album of New Material in Five Years**

The album *[schack tati]* isn't just another batch of tracks churned out in an assembly-line studio. If anything, it's part hothouse flower and part mythical beast, grown and nurtured in the magical greenhouse that is drummer **Morgan Ägren's** dream studio. "In 2006 I moved to a house in the Swedish archipelago. Our garden had a little house in it, which I rebuilt as a studio," he explains. The tracks he and keyboardist **Mats Öberg** toiled over in that idyllic garden setting have an air of endless possibility to them. In the rarefied -- one might even dare to say magical -- environment, where a blind keyboardist can beat a sighted drummer at chess (see the winningly quirky album cover), it's apparently also possible for the disparate stylistic strands of the band's sound to wind together with nary a tangle. It's hard to envision another set of circumstances under which *[schack tati]* could have come together.

*[Schack tati]* is the first release to be created in Morgan's magic dream lab in the middle of the archipelago, and in that almost otherworldly spot, the influences of the outside world were free to commingle with the duo's wildest imaginings. Traditional Swedish music could cross-pollinate with rock, jazz, techno, pop and anything else the sonic explorers cared to cook up in their artistic safe house. And while world-class musician Morgan is widely regarded as a virtuosic "drummer's drummer" (#1! in Modern Drummer's 2010 Readers' Poll), his role here -- despite contributing countless dazzling percussive moments -- is more that of a musical alchemist, invoking the power of his unique recording setup to take himself and his partner on a one-of-a-kind musical journey.

Though *[schack tati]* bears aural echoes of everything from jazz fusion to heavy-duty prog rock, World Music, and electronica, it was the demanding compositions of **Frank Zappa** that were the young Mats and Morgan's first bond. Both men were childhood prodigies, Mats performing in public by the age of 7 and Morgan, blind from birth, beginning to play keyboards at age 3. Mats was 10 and Morgan 14 when they first concert together in 1981, tackling material by Zappa among others. By 1984, the Zappa-loving youngsters had started **Zappesteetoot**, their own tribute band honoring the maverick American guitarist/composer. The band, which earned an impressive following in Sweden and Norway, achieved the ultimate goal when they attracted the attention of Zappa himself. Mats and Morgan's musical hero was so taken with their interpretation of his work that he ended up offering his mentorship, as he'd done for so many budding musical giants in other eras. The Swedes were involved in the 1991 **Zappa's Universe** concerts, video release and album (featuring the Grammy-winning version of "Sofa"), and in Zappa's 1993 **Orchestra of Our Time** show in New York City.

Sadly, Zappa left us in December of '93, but he had inspired Mats and Morgan to forge their own musical identity together, and by 1996, they released their debut album, *Trends and Other Diseases*, on their own **Ultimate Audio Entertainment** imprint. The **Mats/Morgan Band**, which would also come to include Morgan's brother **Jimmy Ägren** on guitar and bass, **Tommy Tordsson** on bass, and keyboardist/clarinetist **Robert Elovsson**, released six albums on their own between 1996 and 2002. 2005's *Thanks for Flying with Us* was Mats/Morgan's first release for **Cuneiform Records**, followed three years later by *Heat Beats Live*.

The dizzying mix of sounds that whirls its way through *[schack tati]* (with typically wry humor, the title is a pun on the Swedish word for "chess" and the French filmmaker **Jacques Tati**) was years in the making. Morgan discloses, "This was a fantastic chance to have a good studio nearby. So I spent endless hours building it up, changing gear, testing a million microphones, preamps, etc. After quite some time, I had a really good studio. It is also the first time that I've had access to a studio that close to where I live. During the last four-five years, I also spent a lot of time recording for others. The last musician I recorded for was **Devin Townsend**. But all the rest of the time, I spent recording for myself. In addition to *[schack tati]*, I've also been recording my first solo album, which will be called *Batterie Deluxe*."

Mats and Morgan's endlessly unpredictable offering flits freely from the **Terry Riley**-plays-Eurodisco stomp of opening track "**Rubber Sky**" to the glitchtronica-gone-fusion of "**Walk Here**," the languid ambient jazz of "**Mr. Piccand**" to the frenzied polyrhythmic mindf\*\*\* of "**Rappel**," the Zappa-in-a-meat-grinder intensity of "**Russian Tourists Not in Line**" to the of the closing title track. Yet for all of the album's eclecticism, there's an odd kind of coherence to the whole thing. Morgan light-heartedly observes, "This one is more focused -- my wife says -- but it is. We got a bit older. And our sound got better. *Everything* got better maybe!"

Musical maturation is probably one piece of the puzzle, and the indefinable essence of the Swedish archipelago is another. But at the core of what makes *[schack tati]* tick, you'll find two titanic talents. In addition to his achievements under the Mats/Morgan banner, Ägren has played with everyone from prog-metal master **Fredrik Thordendal** (of **Meshuggah**) and Indian violinist **Neyveli Radkrishna** to avant bassist **Bill Laswell** and electronic innovator **Squarepusher**, and will be seen sitting in with **Adrian Belew**, **Tony Levin**, et al in the **Crimson Projekt** this summer 2014 in Germany and Italy. And Mats is a *sui generis* artist -- he's the only one around who can do what he does, let alone understand how its done, melting genres into each other at will and alternating between fleet-fingered solos and richly atmospheric textures. Ultimately, then, *[schack tati]* is about friendship, magic, individuality, and a willingness to wander wherever the muse might lead. Musically enchanting, *[schack tati]* affirms Scandinavia's 21<sup>st</sup> century role as hothouse for some of the most inspired jazz/rock fusion on the international scene.

*For more information on Mats/Morgan:*  
[www.morganagren.com](http://www.morganagren.com) - [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)