



Bio information: **RAOUL BJÖRKENHEIM / eCsTaSy**

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**FILE UNDER: JAZZ / IMPROV**

**Free Flights and Soaring Song Forms from the  
Finnish Guitar God Raoul Björkenheim and His Transcendant Quartet  
on Their Second Album  
*Out of the Blue***

eCsTaSy is usually an all too fleeting experience offering the briefest glimpse at transcendence. But a heightened sense of consciousness and discovery manifests throughout *Out of the Blue*, the transporting second album by composer and guitar maestro **Raoul Björkenheim** and his extraordinary Finnish quartet **eCsTaSy**. *Out of the Blue* is Björkenheim's fifth album on **Cuneiform**, and a tremendously satisfying follow-up to the band's 2014 debut *eCsTaSy*.

Featuring the celebrated drummer **Markku Ounaskari**, Björkenheim's longtime partner in sonic exploration, and the young and dauntingly prolific bassist **Jori Huhtala** and saxophonist **Pauli Lyytinen**, eCsTaSy has forged more than a signature sound. Over the course of five years the musicians have honed a supremely interactive modus operandi marked by unstable textures, rapidly shifting meters, and emotionally charged melodic flights. Earthy, pristine and unmistakably **Nordic**, the music evokes the grandeur of Finnish landscapes and the hothouse intimacy of a tight-knit Helsinki scene where the musicians regularly convene to refine their volatile sound.

"I always felt there's something special about having a band," Björkenheim says. "An all-star session can be good too, but the thing I'm missing nowadays in jazz is really good bands playing together tightly, turning on a dime together, and especially improvising together."

On *Out of the Blue*, the quartet explores two disparate but complimentary strategies. The shorter tracks are song-like pieces based on fairly straightforward forms, while the longer pieces evolve through group improvisation. The opening tune, "**Heads and Tales**," represents that latter case, with its elliptical harmonies and unhurried melody that only truly reveals itself at the end of the piece. Free jazz is often stereotyped as furious blowing, but this is Finnish free improv, cool, judicious and unabashedly introspective. Which isn't to say that Finns don't know how to party hearty, as the second track, "**Quintrille**," taps into a rollicking boogie feel with echoes of pianist **Keith Jarrett's** 1970s trio with **Charlie Haden** and **Paul Motian**.

No piece better captures the singular sonic realm carved out by eCsTaSy than the meditative soundscape "**A Fly In the House of Love**." Most conspicuously, Björkenheim prepares his guitar with alligator clips, bringing out overtones that bring to mind the ringing cadences of a Balinese gamelan metallophone. While slyly alluding to **Anaïs Nin's** famous novel *A Spy In the House of Love*, the piece isn't so much erotically charged as hypnotically seductive, a shimmering mood enhanced by the exotic tones of Lyytinen's oboe-like zurna, an instrument associated with folk music across the Near East, Balkans and Caucasus.

"I'm very aware of gamelan music and using that mystical soundscape," Björkenheim says. "This piece is quite visual, and even though the title came after we recorded it, it does have this feeling of watching everything that's going on."

The mood switches again with the brisk, pulse-quickenning **Mingusian** blues "**Uptown**," a piece built on Ounaskari's deep but utterly individual feel for the pocket. The brief atmospheric interlude "**You Never Know**" paves the way for the cinematically sweeping "**OLJ**," a majestic but ominous theme in search of a malevolent space invader (that almost sub-audible rumble comes from Lyytinen's bass saxophone). While not thematically connected to "OLJ," the next piece "**Roller Coaster**" certainly sounds like a straight-ahead jazz number with its DNA scrambled by a jolt of gamma rays. A brief but zany tune featuring some sprightly Björkenheim prepared guitar, piping soprano sax, and quicksilver Huhtala bass work, it's a delirious sprint over broken ground.

The album's longest and most ambitious track is also the closer, "**Zebra Dreams**," a stream-of-consciousness sojourn deep into the bush. Developed via bandstand experimentation, the spacious soundscape hints at southern African vistas with Björkenheim's guitar ringing like a sacred Shona mbira (thumb piano). Somehow, the album's previous excursion seems to lead up to this final journey, a prime example of the rapidly fading art of programming an album to enhance the impact of each track.

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“We tried different sequence ideas, and I am hoping that people will put the record on and listen from beginning to end,” Björkenheim says. “Instead of ending with a bang, I like the idea of a dreamscape that you can fall into, and then hopefully listen to the record again.”

Born in Los Angeles in 1956 to Finnish parents, Björkenheim spent the first 15 years of his life in California and New York surrounded by artists (his mother is Finnish/Russian actress and singer **Taina Elg**). In the early 1970s, Raoul moved to Finland, where he devoted himself to the guitar.

He made his most important early creative alliance in his mid-20s when he came into the orbit of the great Finnish jazz drummer **Edward Vesala**, who introduced him to new improvisational systems. By the early 1980s, Björkenheim became a key member of Vesala’s pool of players, performing on three of the drummer’s albums including the classic 1987 **ECM** session *Lumi* by the sprawling ensemble **Sound And Fury**.

“Vesala was a strong influence when I was starting out as a jazz musician in the 80s,” Björkenheim says. “I had heard him many times live, most memorably in duet with **Tomasz Stanko** in ’75. His recording *Tryptikon* for **ECM** with **Jan Garbarek** and **Arild Andersen** is one of my talismans to this day. That record proposes a music influenced by the free jazz of **Ornette** and **Ayler**, but tempered by a gorgeous Nordic sensibility and an ear for freetonality, combined with an extended use of dynamics.”

By the end of the 1980s, Björkenheim was ready to strike out on his own, and he made his first major contribution as a bandleader with **Krakatau**. Krakatau’s first album, 1988’s *Ritual*, was released in Finland only by **Hieronymous**, as was its 2nd, 1989’s *Alive*. Not long after, Björkenheim reformed the group with all new personnel, the incarnation that gained international acclaim in the early 1990s with two **ECM** recordings, *Volition* and *Matinale*. Björkenheim worked in composer **Paul Schütze**’s densely orchestrated ensemble **Phantom City** and collaborations with New York guitarist **Nicky Skopelitis**. He also wrote and performed arrangements of music from **Miles Davis**’s electric period with **Finland's UMO Jazz Orchestra**.

In 1996, Björkenheim began working with Cuneiform, which reissued Krakatau’s *Ritual* on CD with supplemental recordings and released it internationally. His 2nd Cuneiform release, a solo album titled *Apocalypso* in which the guitarist played parts originally written for 42 musicians, coincided with **Björkenheim’s** 2001 move to New York City—and, unfortunately, with one of modern history’s darkest events. A week before *Apocalypso*’s international release, the 9/11 terrorist attacks on NYC 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**.

Between 2000 and 2008, Björkenheim recorded four albums with **Scorch Trio**, featuring bassist **Ingebrigt Håker Flaten** and drummer **Paal Nilssen-Love** (both from Norway). In 2007 he recorded with bassist **Trevor Dunn**, keyboardist **Ståle Storløkken**, and drummer **Morgan Ågren** under the title **Box**, a project initiated by filmmaker **Philip Mullarkey** to record and play live as part of the art/film project *Box. Shadowglow*, his album with drummer **Lukas Ligeti**, came out on **TUM Records** in 2010. And in 2011 Cuneiform released *Blixt*, featuring the jaw-dropping power trio with bassist **Bill Laswell** and drummer **Morgan Ågren**.

Since his 2008 return to Finland, Björkenheim has continued collaborating with Finnish musicians (UMO Orchestra, **Kalle Kalima** and **Markus Holkko**) while also maintaining productive contacts with New York free jazz stalwarts **William Parker** and **Hamid Drake**. Though the band hasn’t released an album yet, Björkenheim is deeply committed to **Triad**, a Finnish power trio with double bassist **Ville Rauhala** and drummer **Ilmari Heikinheimo**. But Björkenheim’s primary creative outlet these days is **eCsTaSy**, a quartet built on the foundation of his long-time friendship with **Markku Ounaskari**.

Drummer **Markku Ounaskari** is veteran of some of the most memorable Finnish groups of the past two decades. He’s gained new visibility recording for **ECM**, including his first solo album, 2010’s *Kuára*. A confederate of such international jazz stars as Polish trumpeter **Tomasz Stanko**, French guitarist **Marc Ducret**, the late great Canadian trumpeter **Kenny Wheeler**, and alto sax legend **Lee Konitz**, Ounaskari has played with all virtually almost all the major Finnish jazz figures. In 2014 he was given the **Yrjö prize**, the most prestigious jazz award and the biggest acknowledgement that a jazz musician can receive for his or her work in Finland. “Markku is a lyrical player who has the capacity for high-energy explosions as well,” Björkenheim says, “so with him in the crew we’re aiming for that wide dynamic/emotional range.”

Saxophonist **Pauli Lyytinen**, 32, is part of the band’s youth wave, a prolific recording artist who leads or co-leads a diverse array of ensembles, including **Elifantree**, **Equally Stupid**, **Pauli Lyytinen Machinery**, **Kauhukakara**, **Laponia Improvisations Experiment**, and **Skalle & Sharon**. “He’s a musician and composer with an obsession for tone color and experimental techniques, creating a sensation with his fluency on the Bb family of saxophones, from bass to soprano,” Björkenheim says. “In music ranging from hardcore free to experimental pop, Lyytinen has been inventing new roles for his instrument, often limiting himself to the role of accompanist. In this quartet, he gets a chance to spread his improvisatory wings.”

At 31, bassist **Jori Huhtala** is the youngest member of the band, though he’s already firmly established himself on the international scene through his work with heavyweights like **David Liebman**, **Tim Hagans**, **Jukkas Uotila** and **Tim Ries**. At home, he’s in constant demand as a sideman with top Finnish improvisers such as **Verner Pohjola**, **Eero Koivisto**, **Kari Ikonen**, and **Jari Perkiömäki**, and in the ensembles **Big Blue**, **Kvalda**, and **Jussi Fredriksson Jazz Wars**. For Björkenheim, his powerful bandstand presence “echoes of **Miroslav Vitous** and other past masters.” He met Lyytinen and Huhtala during his teaching duties at the **Sibelius Academy**, and was inspired by their playing to create this quartet, though he’s the first to acknowledge that eCsTaSy is just part of their expansive creative output.

Speaking of his esteemed bandmates, Björkenheim notes that “They have their own bands, and they’re actually doing much more without me,” he says. “I’m mainly focused on eCsTaSy and Triad. Instead of putting out 10 records a year, these days I prefer something that’s more focused and complete.”

Anyone who’s followed Björkenheim’s career won’t be surprised by the depth, humor, and high-wire improvisation on *Out of the Blue*, but the album leaves no doubt that the guitarist hasn’t lost his gift for creating strikingly beautiful music while reaching unexpected destinations.

Listeners impressed by Björkenheim’s wondrous recordings will be floored by eCsTaSy’s powerful live performances. Björkenheim’s band, which has toured in Finland and played at such European jazz venues as **Porgy & Bess** (Vienna, Austria), is an amazing live unit. Notably, eCsTaSy has also performed at numerous jazz festivals in Scandinavia and Europe, including **Tampere Jazz Fest** (Finland), **Festival Emergences** (Tours, France), **D’Jazz Nevers Festival** (France), **Tallinn Music Week** (Estonia), **Nasjonal Jazzscene** (Oslo, Norway), **Eskilstuna Jazz Festival** (Sweden) and many more. eCsTaSy is currently planning shows to celebrate the release of *Out of the Blue*.

**For more information on Raoul Björkenheim / eCsTaSy:**  
**[www.raoulbjorkenheimeCsTaSy.net](http://www.raoulbjorkenheimeCsTaSy.net) – [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)**

### **PROMOTIONAL PHOTOS**

Digital [High-Resolution] versions of these images are available on the Raoul Björkenheim artist page @ [www.cuneiformrecords.com](http://www.cuneiformrecords.com)



### **WHAT THE PRESS HAVE SAID ABOUT**

#### **RAOUL BJORKENHEIM / eCsTaSy**

**eCsTaSy**

**CUNEIFORM RECORDS**

**2014**

“...Guitarist Raoul Bjorkensheim is one of those musicians whose albums are always the subject of eager anticipation. ... His playing is both emotionally cathartic and intellectually gratifying. ... Bjorkenheim’s latest project, an all-Finnish group called *eCsTaSy*...on their self-titled debut, Bjorkenheim indulges in the most lushly melodic, emotionally direct music he’s documented since his days as a member of Edward Vesala’s Sound and Fury band. ...*eCsTaSy*’s music is a rolling torrent of free jazz, African polyrhythms and hardcore punk attitude. ...musicians who value passion and visceral expression over the mere display of chops. ...That said, every member of this group is a complete monster. The album opens with “El Pueblo Unido”, a soaring, anthemic, rhythmically free piece that recalls some of Charlie Haden’s work with the Liberation Music Orchestra. ... A brawny, tightly- composed post-post-bop piece, “Sos” gives saxophonist Lyytinen and Bassist Huhtala and an ever-shifting backdrop for expressive... improvisations. ...There’s a wry humor to these improvisations that make them a real pleasure to listen to. ..Replete with rapier-sharp improvisations, quick-witted compositions, and dangerously addictive interplay, *eCsTaSy* provides... maximum musical chills and thrills.”

-Dave Wayne, *All About Jazz*, September 6, 2014

“...*eCsTaSy*... is a metal-jazz hybrid quartet which integrates jazz, avant-garde and free improv. ... The 45 minute, nine-track outing opens with the furious *El Pueblo Unido*...Bjorkenheim’s aggressive electric guitar is at the forefront, with liberal use of sustain, controlled feedback, and heavy metal flourishes. ...*Sos* has a rock and groove-based foundation...Lyytinen is afforded ample room and space to display his chops, sometimes providing a Coltrane-esque brashness. ...The foursome can be as forceful as a fanged viper with a bad attitude, but it’s not all screams, bites and lacerations. ...The cinematically shadowy “Deeper” is suffused with Huhtala’s dark arco bass, Lyytinen’s breathy bass sax, Bjorkenheim’s whispery effects and Ounaskari’s spectral percussion.”

-Doug Simpson, *Audiophile Audition*, July 20, 2014

“S. Victor Aaron’s Best of 2014 (Part 3 of 4), Avant Garde + Experimental Jazz): ... it’s hard to keep the annual Best of 2014 Avant Garde & Experimental Jazz list down to a manageable size. ... In choosing thirty of the best, I nevertheless left off some really good ones. ...THE BEST OF THE REST: ...Raoul Bjorkenheim/eCsTaSy-eCsTaSy: eCsTaSy roams just inside and outside the perimeter of jazz, and virtuosic players subscribe to the gospel of impulse as much as they adhere to even the outer regions of the genre.”

- S. Victor Aaron, *Something Else*, December 11, 2014

“...he’s firmly grounded in the European avant-garde that developed in the 1970s, but...also...American free jazz of the Ornette Coleman variety as well as ...Chicago style.... Combine this with a love of fiery blues-tinged rock guitar...  
...he’s back on the Cuneiform label...company of multifarious sax man Pauli Lyytinen and the rhythm section of bassist Jori Huhtala...and veteran drummer...Markku Ounaskari. All three are improv veterans...well quipped to keep up with an imagination as

darting as that of their boss. ...”SoS” ...is...the work of the Bjorkenheim heard with the Scorch Trio. ... It’s a terrific track, reminiscent of some of his best material but entirely original and never less than compelling. ...“As Luck Would Have It”...begins as a showpiece for Huhtala’s acoustic bass skills and then develops into a hard-hitting and funky exercise that’s one of the album’s nastiest and most skillfully delivered compositions. ...”The Sky is Ruby” closes out *eCsTaSy*, ... Bjorkenheim’s most ferocious soloing of the album. ...It’s a powerful closer to a set of songs that’s unpredictable at every turn. ...Bjorkenheim shows admirable control, only letting loose when the occasion dictates, and a keen eye for properly utilizing the talent he’s assembled. ...Raoul Bjorkenheim seems just as energized as ever.”

–Leonard Pierce, *Burning Ambulance*, January 1, 2014

“...It seems that every time I come across this cat, I’m listening to some of the most exciting, edgy and intelligent music experimental jazz has to offer. ...Saxophonist Pauli Lyytinen, bassist Jori Huhtala and drummer Markku Ounaskari complete this potent quartet. ...they are incredible intuitive and selfless virtuosos... ...“El Pueblo Unido” packs the sonic sax/guitar spiritual wallop of Sonny Sharrock’s masterpiece *Ask The Ages* but instead of a Coltranian patter, it channels Ornette Coleman through a Nordic folk strainer... Bjorkenheim, like the 1970’s version of Terje Rypdal, portrays...moods through the language of a rock guitar. ....“Threshold” is a pensive occasion for Lyytinen to apply a soul-immersed tenor to the rolling rhythms of Huhtala and Ounaskari. ...I’ll be damned if Raoul Bjorkenheim didn’t start another project that turned to gold. *eCsTaSy* may have capitalization in the wrong places but it hits all the right notes.”

–S. Victor Aaron, *Something Else*, January 21, 2014

“The *eCsTaSy* trio...encompasses the fire of the Scorch Trio and improvisational power of the Kalabalik Trio with some of the orchestral vision of the UMO Orchestra’s *Primal Mind*. ...it’s not quite the size of an orchestra but the guitarist’s compositions and arrangements think expansively. ...“El Pueblo Unido” kicks things off in a soaring fashion. ...The guitarists biting tone is big and rises above the rhythm section in a tradition that I would liken to Terje Rypdal’s more rock oriented output. ...“Threshold” ...reminds me of the atmospheric fusion of early Weather Report. It’s great to hear Bjorkenheim, who has been delivering power trio based recordings, add some additional sonic elements. Each piece seems carefully composed to get the most out the instruments, but leaves plenty of room for the musicians to stretch out.”

–Free Jazz Collective, 2014

“...a heady mix of open free jazz and psychedelia – or if you like, avant jazz rock. ...Bjorkenheim...gives you his dynamic, sonically expanded full frontal attack and all three others of the band have a kick and flourish to their playing...It’s a matter of serious avant soundings and original frameworks for smart and out blowing. ...fans of electric exploratory outness...will find this a compelling set. Recommended!”

–Grego Applegate Edwards, *Applegate Guitar and Bass Blog*, June 16, 2014

“Raoul Bjorkenheim deserves guitar hero-status, yet he has somehow – despite the bracing quality of his playing, as urgent and lyrical as it is change-taking – eluded the recognition he deserves. ...He does really well in improvisationally expansive small groups, from the mighty Krakatau to the Scorch Trio to a hot summit with William Parker and Hamid Drake. ...Having listened for nearly 20 years, I can say that his debut from his new quarter *eCsTaSy* is one of the strongest things in his catalogue. ...In the range of materials they engage and their broad texturalism (not to mention their instrumentation), this group recalls Krakatau more than it does Bjorkenheim’s recent power trios. They open with a soaring reading of “El Pueblo Unido ...the guitar/tenor interaction is positively bracing in its fraught lyricism. ...Crunching, stuttering “Sos,”...is the most muscular among these fairly terse pieces...In many places here, a strong sense of musical freedom contrasts deftly with rock riffage and swagger. ...Perhaps best of all are the lilting pieces “As Luck Would Have It”...the rubbery groove “No Delay,” and the swinging “The Sky is Ruby.” In a just world, these would be dance hits. ...this terrific set...will hopefully garner the attention it deserves.”

– Jason Bivins, *dusted in exile*, September 5, 2014

“...powerful and engaging...The first minute or so of ‘SOS’ tells you everything you need to know about the album. There is jazz, rock, fusion, world music, old and new colliding, and more. None of it particularly mainstream, and none of it is boring. ... At times it feels like there are at least a half-dozen players involved, as each musician brings a vast palette of soundscapes and sonic possibilities. The guitar sounds carried me from Bitches Brew through John Abercrombie’s *Gateway* through Mahavishnu in the 80s and straight into the modern era, never feeling trite or over-done. ...‘Quick Hit’ Song: “El Pueblo Unido” – an amazingly energetic song with an anthemic feel.”

– Michael Anderson, *Gear Diary*, February 10, 2014

“Ecstasy recalls the thornier side of the ECM Records catalog, especially the works of fellow Scandinavians Edward Vesala and Terje Rypdal. Bjorkenheim attacks the guitar the way the late great Sonny Shar-rock did – like Coltrane and Ayler “attacked” their saxophones (mad-fierce aban-don) – yet blues is never very far away. There’s also the chunky focus of pre- Mahavishnu John McLaughlin and the searing wit of Frank Zappa. The way RB cross-pollinates between jazz and rock recalls fellow traveler Nels Cline...oblique swing, gnarly noise, predictably unpredictable, swell.”

–Mark Keresman, *Icon*, July 2014

“El Pueblo Unido”...sounds like nothing less than a lost Ornette Coleman theme delivered by Sonny Sharrock’s *Ask the Angels* band. ...fiery and visceral...*eCsTaSy* is his fourth release for Cuneiform, and...draws on his progressive-rock chops and free-jazz execution, with surprises around every corner. ...The key to the album’s excitement lies in the group interaction; Pauli Lyytinen plays both tenor and soprano with a force that holds its own alongside Bjorkenheim’s guitar. And the leader’s role is primarily as a conduit for feeling, able to leap from yowling leads to melodic textures without turning either situation into an opportunity for indulgence. *eCsTaSy* ends too soon, a delightful rarity in these days when more often means less.”

–Mike Shanley, *Jazz Times*, July 29, 2014

“Guitar Moderne Top Records 2014 ... Raoul Bjorkenheim *eCsTaSy* ...Appearing on the scene between Rypdal and Aarset, Bjorkenheim is an example of...Scandinavian guitarists push the envelope. His *eCsTaSy* band’s Ornette meets Jimi meets Fela sounds recalls his ‘90s power quartet, Krakatau.”

–Michael Ross, *Guitar Moderne*, 2014

“The band communicates on a very high level and revels in bringing the exciting spiritual jazz sound of the late 1960’s into a thoroughly postmodern setting. “El Pueblo Unido” opens with a blast of raw saxophone and cathartic guitar in an exciting Sonny Sharrock-esque manner... Solo bass opens “As Luck Would Have It” and then guitar, saxophone and drums fill in... On much of the album he is very generous in giving space to his band mates, but he takes the wheel and stomps on the gas here... “The Sky is Ruby” powers the album to an excellent finish... a lengthy solo that is very exciting and well built, hopefully we will be hearing more from him soon. Bjorkenheim... spraying hot metal notes and combining with Ounaskari’s drums to develop an overpowering sound that ends this excellent album in glorious fashion. “

–Tim Niland, *Jazz and Blues*, January 24, 2014

“Perhaps the most distinguished Vesala alumnus was the one first to detach from the leaders bearhug and set up on his own – Raoul Bjorkenheim. The guitarist’s first group as leader was Krakatau... Despite the boiling hot drive of most of the group’s pieces, influenced by Cream, Lifetime, The Jimi Hendrix Experience... there was a lyrical side to the guitarist’s playing as well...  
...The group on eCsTaSy is similarly configured, with Pauli Lyytinen on saxophone and kalimba, Juri Huhtala on base and Markku Ounaskari providing as convincing an extension of Vesala’s stratified approach as any we’ve heard since the great man’s passing. ...  
“Sos” ...is cast in a tight, hectic neo-bop form, reflecting... Bjorkenheim’s early debt to Eric Dolphy. Huhtala even does a convincing Ron Carter solo. The improvised “Deeper” moves closer to the slow free-jazz of Sound and Fury... This textural and dynamic variety is one of Bjorkenheim’s great strengths. ...eCsTaSy is as carefully put together as a great pop set. ... The other impressive thing about Bjorkenheim is that his groups...[are] proper groups with strong individual personalities as well as a clear collective aesthetic.  
...Huhtala is integral to the sound and mixed well forward. The saxophone man plays well in some very u-saxophonic keys and Ounaskari is... a player of serious lineage and considerable originality. ...The title’s well chosen. ... Excellent.

– Brian Morton, *Point of Departure*, 2013

“What a neat little album of freakouts! Nine of ‘em there...none of them longer than six and a half minutes, ...any type of guitar/sax/rhythm squalor you could ask for. ...The album’s first song “El Pueblo Unido” alludes...to Sonny Sharrock’s iconic *Ask the Ages* album. Bjorkenheim’s fills and solos here are gorgeous diatonic things that cascade their notes into mountainous heaps. As with Sharrock, Bjorkenheim’s guitar digs through effects and tone color, searing for transcendence. He’s less interested in melodic or harmonic invention...eCsTaSy mixes straight-up tunes with noisy experiments... There are more tune tunes, including a 9/8 funk with some wicked slide guitar, but just as important are what I’ll call the skronk tunes. Be warned, the band never descends/ascends into full-blown skronk mode. They instead give you little self-contained packages of radness... Finding just the right tone color seems to be a Bjorkenheim specialty...he’s paced this one very well...Bjorkenheim and friends...know how to put together an album.”

– Josh Langhoff, *Pop Matters*, February 19, 2014

“Raoul Bjorkenheim has been known for some time as one of the most creative guitarists, composers, and improvisers of our age and has been known to transcend the spirit and power of “Jimi Hendrix and Sonny Sharrock to Finland’s distant shores”. ...Aptly titled eCsTaSy, the ensemble is named after the intense sense of energy and presence cultivated together.”

– Nickabitia, *Sound Colour Vibration*, January 26, 2014

“...this versatile quartet...do not disappoint. ...The swaggering funk of *As Luck Would Have It* weaves emphatic saxophone, wailing guitar, and a madly assertive bass and drum team into a formidably propulsive track, one of the highlights of the disc. ...Bjorkenheim’s playing as been consistently impressive in a number of different contexts, and this latest venture is no exception. A great release, highly recommended.”

– Stuart Kremsky, *Mr. Stu’s Record Room*, October 2014

“You won’t require any of that mosh-pit “substance” being used so frequently these days as you scope out Raoul’s high-energy guitar work (he’s joined by saxophonist Pauli Lyytinen, bassist Jori Huhtala and drummer Markku Ounaskari in a sonic adventure you will never forget! The fantastic, “As Luck Would Have It”, is enough to make the entire CD worth the purchase price – Super bass intro on this one! For jazz that explores the outer regions (while still remaining very accessible), you’ll love...” “No Delay”... give Raoul & his friends a MOST HIGHLY RECOMMENDED...”

–Zzaj productions, 2013

“Spotlight: Raoul Bjorkenheim... The first profile I ever did for *Guitar Player* magazine was about Raoul Bjorkenheim. ...was stunned by his Hendrix meet late era Coltrane approach. ...Like Bill Frisell, he has a distinctive, recognizable style that nevertheless fits in a variety of contexts. ...

Bjorkenheim: ...The music of my new quartet, Ecstasy, puts new demands on me as an accompanist, including playing both rock-type rhythmic figures and riffs, and sensitivity following Pauli Lyytinen’s sax or Jori Huhtala’s bass lines. Since we don’t use set forms as in most jazz...I have to really listen closely so as not to destroy the harmonic implications of their solo lines. For this I have worked a lot on ear training, ever since 1978 ... any so-called “original” music is really a filtering and reassembling of all the music a composer/improviser has heard during his/her life. It all affects what is conceptually possible to convey. Coltrane said some beautiful things about us, so without directly quoting him, I’d say my main mission in music is to elevate the spirit of the listener, to transport them to a brighter space. I want my audience to undergo a catharsis of sorts, to burn away its troubles for a brief instant and give a huge dose of positive energy. I want the person who has been to my concert or heard my recording to feel lighter and stronger. I’m aiming for an inner spiritual reaction to my music. ...The musicians I play with today are so inspiring and dynamic that I don’t have a longing for brief collaborative projects. I think the result of a band playing together a lot and actually spending days/weeks rehearsing is the best route for what I want to achieve.”

– Michael Ross, Interview with Raoul Bjorkenheim, *Guitar Moderne*