

WHAT THE PRESS HAS SAID ABOUT

RAOUL BJORKENHEIM/ECSTASY *OUT OF THE BLUE* CUNEIFORM 2015

"There is a side to modern jazz where...cross-fertilization, is the norm...jazz fusion, prog rock, postmodern material...and more commingle. **Guitarists such as Nels Cline, Bill Frisell and Sonny Sharrock... Finland's Raoul Bjorkenheim is another guitarist who tackles disparate, but somehow connected, improvisational ground.** ...*Out of the Blue*... Several tracks showcase Bjorkenheim's electric guitar, and are paced with tinges of rock and toughened jazz. Opener "Heads & Tales"... Bjorkenheim's amplified tone has more in common with Jeff Beck than, say, Wes Montgomery.... Mainstream and unconventional jazz meet headlong on..."Roller Coaster," ...a 21st-century twist on Carl Stalling's cartoon music.

A Nordic sensibility is silhouetted during "A Fly in the House of Love," which has a meditative soundscape. Lyytinen generates a Jan Garbarek feeling on the oboe-like zurna ... while Huhtala switches to arco bass ...and Bjorkenheim and Ounaskari create a gamelan-like garnishing... via prepared guitar ..."Zebra Dreams," ... has an African undercoating. ... ***Out of the Blue* is unambiguously a Cuneiform Records album. Fans of the label will have an idea of the eclecticism and adventurism which saturates *Out of the Blue*. This is material which is engaging, bristly, combines old and new, and is unpredictable. 4-stars**"
-Doug Simpson, *Audiophile Audition*, www.audaud.com

"Finland based virtuoso guitarist returns with excellent world music infused new set.

Born in the US but with strong Finnish roots..virtuoso guitarist Raoul Björkenheim has shuttled between the two countries physically and musically, absorbing further influences from places as diverse as Turkey and southern Africa en route. ...he teams up...under the Ecstasy moniker with Finns Pauli Lyytinen (bass, tenor and soprano saxophones plus Turkish mey), youthful bassist Jori Huhtala and celebrated drummer Markku Ounaskari. **Their sound is marked by virtuoso guitar licks, rapidly shifting tempi and a frequent sense of nervy tension...on Uptown with its Hendrix-meets-Cream wailing bluesy guitar, driving bass and snarling sax.**

There's versatility too.... **The slow Latino inflections of Heads And Tails' extended guitar play hints at Al Di Meola,...while Quintrille oozes cool Coltrane swing as Bjorkenheim's guitar melds with the Eastern wind sound of the mey.** An Eastern influence also marks A Fly In The House Of Love...

...sense of control...laces most of the album...

...the 10-minute closing track **Zebra Dreams – an admirable blend of mid-tempo township jive guitar that sweetly morphs into something jazzier that nods to Pat Metheny, with Nordic sax filtering at various points into the groove."**

-Norman Miller, *Bearded*, <http://www.beardedmagazine.com>

"...on-the-edge and indefinable... Finnish guitarist Raoul Björkenheim's eCsTaSy. While the quartet, fueled by the muscular bashing of drummer Markku Onuskari, explodes with blowtorch intensity on the free-jazz opener, "Heads & Tales," they settle into the **infectiously funky second-line groover "Quintrille"** with harmonic chemistry. ... The four collectively explore on the **free-jazz freakout "Roller Coaster,"** recalling some of Ornette Coleman's experiments with his electric Prime Time band, and the album closes with the **mesmerizing African-flavored "Zebra Dreams,"** which has Björkenheim's prepared guitar **sounding like an ancient mbira or thumb piano.** [Rating: 3.5 stars]

-Bill Milkowski, *Downbeat*, May 2016

"...Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Ornette Coleman...that music was great was because the musicians had something original to say, or an original way of saying what they meant. To listen to current players repeating the ideas of the innovators just seems pointless... I'd much rather hear someone trying something new. Case in point: Raoul Björkenheim and his band Ecstasy. **I love their self-titled debut from 2014, and this new effort is right up there with it in quality without rehashing the same stuff.** ...*Out of the Blue* is one of my favorite new releases in jazz this year, consistently interesting and never predictable."

-Jon Davis, *Exposé*, www.expose.org

"Guitarist Raoul Bjorkenheim's tone is pretty identifiable. It's laser pointed but fuzzy, tough but brittle, and his group Ecstasy brings out the best of his playing. ...a close connection with Bjorkenheim's earlier...group Krakatau. Like with that ensemble, Bjorkenheim is working with a quartet that features a range of woodwinds and percussion instruments... With Ecstasy, **we hear the intervening years of working with...Scorch and with Blixt honing the focus and ferocity of his playing.**

...Like...Krakatau, there are moments here where the textures and rhythms of world music shine through...

Bjorkenheim's latest delivers on a great jazz rock filled vision. Like the surreal cover...the guitarist brings and element of surprise...his juxtaposing of rock, jazz, and free elements. **4.5/5 stars"**

- Paul Acquaro, *The Free Jazz Collective*, December 7, 2015

"Top Records of 2015...The past year was a banner one for modern guitar. ... **Raoul Björkenheim *Out of the Blue* [Cuneiform] Raoul made the list last year and this year's release is equally stellar."**

- Michael Ross, *Guitar Moderne*, www.guitarmoderne.com

"Out of the Blue...album from Finland's Raoul Björkenheim eCsTaSy...vast, wide open spaces peopled only by the footprints of sparse guitars. **Wholly instrumental and largely improvised, it is nevertheless so tightly bound that structure is seldom far away,** even when Björkenheim's guitar is being tied down with alligator clips ("A Fly in the House of Love"), and the **textures are less redolent of dark Nordic nights than they are the cluttered mysticism of lost Asian ritual."** - Dave Thompson, "Cuneiform Records - Thirty-plus Years of Essential Listening", May 5, 2016, *Goldmine*, www.goldminemag.com

“Deadpan surrealism graces the cover of *Out of the Blue*... a lean, shirtless man is seen on horseback ... inside a vintage Polish kitchen. ... the image beguiles on its own terms... also applies to the musical contents within. **The electric-guitar-led quartet moves inside and out, from free jazz to Finnish blues to Scofield-like angularity to many other points between idiomatic poles. And somehow, they make poetic sense of it all.** Although Björkenheim establishes himself as the leading voice –in cohesive cahoot with saxophonist Pauli Lyytinen, acoustic bassist Jori Huhtala and notably intuitive drummer Markku Ounaskari - ***Out of the Blue* is a whole made of integral parts. A narrative logic pervades the enigmatically charming album,** which begins with... mostly improvised “Heads and Tales,”... The song cycle concludes seven tracks later with the muted percussive hypnosis of the west African-influenced “Zebra Dreams.” ... **Björkenheim and company hint at jazz-world references – the Scofield-like slink of “Quintrille,” the skittering Ornette Coleman-inspired melody of “Roller Coaster” – and weave them into wild flights of fancy. But something distinctive and self-defining is at the core, like a horse in the kitchen.”**
- Josef Woodard, *Jazziz*, Spring 2016

“Ever since Edward Vesala’s 1987 release *Lumi*, the utterly distinctive guitar of Raoul Björkenheim has been ever present in my life. ... 2014’s eCsTaSy (Cuneiform) signalled a return to the... more structured improvisational forms of Krakatau... [Out of the Blue] opens with the slowly rising *Heads & Tails*; a languid melody... **Think of Garbarek’s Tryptikon or Afric Pepperbird.... Quintrille, by contrast, is the kind of off-kilter bar-room boogie that Krakatau often included in their repertoire... before the deeply meditative ballad *A Fly In The House Of Love*. Using alligator clips to “prepare” his guitar, he creates an almost Balinese effect, heightening the album’s abiding sense of mysticism. Uptown is pure Mingus and showcases Björkenheim’s take on Hendrix, *You Never Know* provides a wistful and almost cinematic interlude, Huhtala’s *OLJ* rides a heavy Krautrock beat, *Roller Coaster* doffs a cap to Ornette, and the closing soundscape *Zebra Dreams* slowly reveals a deep pool of reverie. Björkenheim’s idiosyncratic track sequencing only accentuates the album’s impact... Harking back to the early roots of today’s European free-jazz, *Out Of The Blue* is a work of great profundity. 4 stars” – Fred Grand, *Jazz Journal*, Feb 2017**

“Bursting out of the Helsinki avant-jazz scene, the guitarist Björkenheim and his band eCsTaSy has Pauli Lyytinen’s Brötzmann-like feral tenor horn to help crank up the decibels to 11.”
– Selwyn Harris, *Jazzwise*, October 2016

“**Raoul Björkenheim’s guitar-playing always seems informed by a composer’s instincts and sensibilities... *Out of the Blue*... combines a sense of old-fashion wonder with an aggressive modernism...** ... certain pieces emerge as almost cinematically graphic. ... The raw emotion of *Heads and Tales* and the apprehension... in the *House of Love*... is immediate and powerful. ... a psychological drama of immense import unfolds... **The emotional nakedness and unnerving attention to detail recall the seminal recordings of the Jimi Hendrix Experience.** ... **Björkenheim and eCsTaSy bring orientation and direction without sacrificing sensuality or mystical aura.** ... an almost uncanny variety of touch, tone production and judicious glissandos and bending of notes. **The result is a recording that is audaciously original, yet recalls the contemporaneous keening of voices in Northern Europe.** ... discs warranting the highest praise are those that persuasively introduce new music, that chart new interpretative territory for a work or that demonstrate something fresh and heretofore unrecognised in music long familiar. ... **Björkenheim’s and eCsTaSy’s contribution in this release could scarcely be more generous.”**
- Raul da Gama, *JazzdaGama*, January 31, 2016, jazzdagama.com

“Critics have heaped lavish praise on guitarist Raoul Björkenheim’s curious brand of improvised jazz, and understandably so, even if commonly drawn parallels (Ayler, Coleman, Coltrane, Mahavishnu, Hendrix, Fela, et al.) only serve to underscore the audacious yet ultimately elusive nature of his music. *Out of the Blue*... will help burnish the band’s growing reputation for creative synthesis and spontaneity.
... Björkenheim... with eCsTaSy’s renowned drummer Markku Ounaskari, bassist Jori Huhtala and saxophonist Pauli Lyytinen... **exploring a multidimensional sound that embraces expansive soundscapes, Nordic/noirish vignettes and jarringly kinetic interludes... nothing is more engaging than “Quintrille,”... sleek harmonies, bluesy phrasing, impassioned soprano sax and ebullient rhythms, or as profoundly Zen as “A Fly in the House of Love,”... resonating with exotic tones and colors. The Hendrix connection comes into sharp focus on “Uptown,” ... *Out of the Blue*... offers new discoveries and fresh perspectives with each spin.”**
- Mike Joyce, *Jazz Times*, January 14, 2016

“... Raoul Björkenheim and his eCsTaSy quartet has delivered a wonderful and refreshing improvisation-based album with *Out of the Blue*. ... His playing on this album ranges from exotic to nordic to Hendrix. ... **Each track has a very distinct texture and story to tell.** ... The group... embraces their Finnish roots with the distinctly Nordic sounding track, “Roller Coaster.” Other tracks like “Uptown” and “Quintrille” feature Björkenheim’s distinct blues and Hendrix influenced improvisation style. **The improvisational communication on *Out of the Blue* is top-notch. ... Raoul Björkenheim and the eCsTaSy quartet seamlessly blend “inside” and “outside” playing in *Out of the Blue* to create an experimental jazz album for the likes of even the more conservative jazz listener.”**
- Alex Frank, *KJHK*, February 7, 2016, www.kjhk.org

“...modern jazz that looks to mix melodic song forms with longer collectively improvised tracks. ... “Quintrille” with the music sounding fast paced and knotty... Björkenheim’s effects laden guitar then takes center stage for a short wild solo, before everyone returns together under some superb saxophone playing. “Uptown” is hot right off the bat... There is a very interesting rhythm from Ounaskari on “OLJ”...making the music ominous and foreboding. Big slabs of electric guitar, building edifices of noise and then suddenly... silence. ... **The band works very well together, moving through sub-genres of jazz as a cohesive unit. ...and Björkenheim’s shows his chops in areas from progressive rock to abstract improvisation. And you can’t beat that album cover.**” - Tim Niland, *Music and More*, October 20, 2015

“THE BEST OF THE REST... Raoul Björkenheim / eCsTaSy – *Out of the Blue*: Visceral, vivid and uncompromising,... Raoul Björkenheim and his eCsTaSy band continue to conjure up a new set of fresh ideas for each track, and leverage an ample supply of intuition and musicianship to make it work right.” - S. Victor Aaron, “S. Victor Aaron’s Best Of 2015 (Part 3 Of 4, Avant Garde + Experimental)”, *Something Else!*, January 2, 2016

“Honorable Mentions–New Releases ... Raoul Björkenheim eCsTaSy – *Out of the Blue* (Cuneiform)”
-“Best of 2015,” *The New York City Jazz Record*

“...*Out of the Blue*...includes eight tracks of majestic jazz with the attitude of rock, clearly influenced by some of the greats of the '60s & '70s. At times you'll hear bits of Pangaea era Miles Davis, John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix, Terje Rypdal, and the Tony Williams Lifetime, with Björkenheim's screaming, often times fuzz soaked licks stampeding over nimble jazz rhythms and wild sax explorations from Lyytinen.

...the lengthy "Heads & Tales"...seems to take the early '70s Miles Davis influence of deep rhythms and acrobatic guitar & sax solos, borrowing as much from rock and jazz as it does blues. ... "Uptown" is *Out of the Blue*'s clear jazz-rock, a vibrant, catchy number fueled by scorching guitar & sax solos, and the menacing "OLJ" sees metallic guitar chords eventually give way to squonking sax and **blazing lead guitar that recalls John McLaughlin, Robert Fripp, and Terje Rypdal.** ...

...impressive jazz-rock, as eCsTaSy show they can go full steam ahead into either jazz or rock, or settle nicely somewhere in between. **Wonderful ensemble playing, killer guitar work, stunning sax...sure not to miss this one. 4/5 Stars”**

- Pete Pardo, *Sea of Tranquility*, December 27, 2015, www.seaoftranquility.org

“...Raoul Björkenheim’s eCsTaSy quartet has been testing the limits of what’s possible when experimental rock and free-form jazz are put into a supercollider. ...this band showed cohesion and telepathy rare in a band where volatility reigns supreme.

... “A Fly In The House Of Love” paints a desolate soundscape, creating a mysticism based heavily on timbres as Lyytinen moans away on a zurna and Huhtala’s low, bowed bass resembles a baritone sax.

For the funky piece “Uptown,” Björkenheim releases caustic shards of blues-based guitar that transport right back to his work with the Scorch Trio. ...“OLJ”, an imposing jungle rhythm mated with death metal declarations...

Visceral, vivid and uncompromising, *Out of the Blue* picks up where *eCsTaSy* left off. ...eCsTaSy band continue to conjure up a new set of fresh ideas for each track, and leverage an ample supply of intuition and musicianship to make it work right.”

- S. Victor Aaron, *Something Else!*, December 23, 2015, www.somethingelserreviews.com