


Magnus Öström – touching the beautiful blue



Meeting Magnus Öström is a profound and moving experience. For in him, as in his music we see the power of the ultimate truth: to have loved and to have lost and to be able to love still.

Rose Paul of [St Pauls Lifestyle inc OVERGROUND SOUND](#) had  the privilege of interviewing Magnus Öström when his band performed at The Hub, Edinburgh on Sunday 24th July as a headlining act for the Edinburgh Jazz and Blues Festival 2011.

Face to face, person to person, body to body, all you want to do for this man is open up your heart so the vitality of its beat of life can join with his. But of course you don't -for that would hurt.

Magnus's now is still entwined with his then: anyone who saw the Esbjorn Svensson Trio ("EST") live will know of their brave sound – emotionally captivating, demanding and uplifting, a product of their skill and close camaraderie. Three years ago, the world was robbed of this when Esbjorn, the gifted pianist and childhood friend of Magnus, tragically died in a diving accident. His passing was too early by far, and will never make any sense or be okay.

Magnus entered the wilderness of grief. A harsh monotone landscape where nothing matters and meaning is gone. He didn't play for 6 months and no music was heard from him for two years. And this is right – this was how it had to be for you cannot love so much, lose so much and walk away unscathed. It is a testament to the profound and willing nature of this extraordinary man that though music is truly embedded in his mind and soul, he was thus musically silenced.

But when he did return to music he bore us gifts: Magnus tells of sitting at a piano and allowing his fingers to play – he felt they were plunged into streaming water and what emerged was “Ballad for E”. This song sounds like Esbjorn. You can hear in it the voices of both these men as if in intimate dialogue and ironically “Ballad for E” is alive and full of Esbjorn

The second song Magnus wrote was “Longing”. This song literally takes your breath away – it is a heart rending evocative piece, true to its title. It is gifted to each of us as a moment of love, which we may treasure and hold as our own.

“Thread of Life”, the album, which marked Magnus’s musical return, is simply astonishing. It is an eruption of loss, life and love captured and translated into music. Magnus feels Esbjorn’s passing keenly. Though his mourning is private and for him alone, nothing comes between his feelings and the notes. As his nakedness on the cover symbolizes, it is an album in which he stands personally bare, facing a life continuing.

Listen to his music, see him live and you will know the story of this incredible man. He plays with his whole self – he holds nothing back: his torso, hands, feet, arms and legs echo the rhythm of his mind and the beat of his soul. These were wrought in Magnus at an early age as he’d sway on a travelling bus feeling a tune and rhythm in the mechanical rendition of an engineered motion; and his mind was etched with sounds from his childhood – the industrial noise of a hospital bed side being lifted and falling – which he describes as a double-edged memory; the harshness of metal and the comfort of the care. These complex memories all haunt his music and are heard in EST’s music too – like in the occasional wild abandon of explosive screeches as the instruments let rhythmic rip.

Since allowing the music to return to his body, Magnus will

not falter. He will walk this rocky road and the distance will pass under the challenge of his courage. His life will not remain in the grey – he has a desire to give and his personal responsibility to those he loves will not allow him to sit down.

Magnus talked of the colour returning to his life – the mourning beginning to make space for living. His contemplations seem to own less pain.

One feels he is a man seeing again the glorious blue of sky and wondering about the beyond. At times when speaking we'd see glimpses of his natural and endearing mischievousness; we'll see this in his play no doubt – but perhaps that's for tomorrow, not today.

Ecstatically, we heard the shimmers of blue coming through in his new music – the last track of the night, the encore "Eternity" had a sense of celebration. The music has a different mood – it is still imbued with the magnitude of love, and characterized by complex and rewarding layers and structures – but it pulses with life – an ability to know joy is heard.

There is more: to live with losing something so profound, Magnus has dug deep. He has plundered the depths of his soul, and like glittering diamonds we hear accents of the products of his personal journey in the brilliance of his music.

As he sees in his mourning a friend for life, we can expect to hear yet another dimension to his sound – a depth of character that only a few can know – and fewer still can translate into music.

Magnus Öström, musical genius – welcome back to the beautiful blue.

Magnus Öström band – line up

Magnus Öström – drums/percussion

Thobias Gabrielson – bass guitar/keys

Andreas Hourdakis – guitar

Daniel Karlsson – piano/keys

