

# Tour Scotland May 1999

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## Wednesday 19th of May 1999

anxiously I look around the departure hall of the Scandinavian seaways in IJmuiden (Netherlands). About a 100 middle-aged bikers, their shiny machines parked before the entrance, drink beer and coffee. What would they be in real life? Dentists, insurance salesmen, waiters or gynecologists. In their worn-out hippie outfits they will cruise around the Highlands, their annual break from their application forms, fillings, filthy wineglasses and echoscopes.

the boat crossing is remarkably quiet despite or maybe as a result of the many forms of entertainment that is being offered. An East European singer whose voice has a remarkable resemblance with the voice of Fran Fine from the Nanny tries to brighten things up with a phonetic interpretation of 'the rivers of babylon'. the leader from the band, called the pink panther, tries imitate the boney M dancer's movements while announcing the tune.

## Thursday the 20th of may

Usually it takes a little while to get used to a new country. Yuri never got used to Norway so far, despite of our four tours. In an average Norwegian bar a carefully kept bottle of Chivas Regal is displayed on the top shelf where it remained intact for at least 20 years. Nobody can afford to drink it. Now we are in a little village between New Castle and Edinburgh. It's noon, four local Scottish men are drinking beer with whiskey. Drinking is part of the culture here and the government doesn't try to restrict it by adding huge taxes to alcohol. Also the strict closing times of pubs as we know them from England don't apply here in Scotland. Edinburgh. For some reason I was more nervous for this tours than others. The first concert is always a test. What will the audience's reaction be? Enthusiastic, puzzled, happily distant or no reaction at all. The club we play at has recently been relocated. The new cellar which is also a danceclub is transformed for the occasion in a jazzclub. Candles, tables and chairs.

I'm enthusiastically greeted by a big man who asks me if i remember him. That's tricky. To be polite I take a change. "Yeah sure I do. You where the driver from last year". Wrong guess. A little less enthusiastic he tells me he is the jazzcritic from the biggest Scottish newspaper, the Herald. We play well that night, luckily. The audience is shouting and whistling. A girl in the first row with black pigtails screams enthusiastically.

The atmosphere is messy and cozy at the same time. Just like in a small village in Norway it's custom here to give a cd away through a lottery using the entrance tickets as lots. We play an encore and there is some more cheering. The enthusiasm of Jim, the organizer, is tempered when he finds out they forgot to get the money for us. His excuses go on for at 15 minutes but the solution is easy. The sound engineer will come to our guest house and bring the money the next morning. I'm still at breakfast when he arrives. He is talking to the hostess of the guest house, raving about the concert from yesterday. She happens to play recorder and is very interested.



The bacon and eggs drop as a stone on my stomach (translator's note:famous dutch expression) this morning. Here in Mr and Mrs Brown's guest house, with a barking sheppard and their grandchildren running around, we're having breakfast while mr. Brown tells us his stories about his former career as a trumpet player in Big bands. Hard to believe when you see him on his slippers, a spitting image of George of George and Mildred. All the rooms here, including mine, are painted pink combined with flower design wallpaper and wooden ornaments along the sides.

Our first day off yesterday was well spent. After all, it is a beautiful country here. We drove up north, direction the highlands, looking for that completely unknown whiskey distillery. We drove through forests, pass sheep and Lochs. we discussed the depth of the lake of Loch Ness and it's monster. Yuri is not very impressed by my knowledge of this subject that I gathered looking at documentaries on tv. He doubts my statements about the immeasurable depth of the Loch.



After 3 days of guest houses it's nice to be in the anonymity of a hotel. In Stirling we didn't play in the original club either but in the local theater. Since there is not much audience and Caroline (a woman of the Scottish Touring collective who I met last year) sits on the first row with her 6 weeks old baby, we don't play too loud.The introduction of 'True colors' is lively accompanied by baby sounds. The six people in the audience are relatively hard to convince of what we do but when we play "Nothing rhymes" from Gilbert O'sullivan there is an unexpected shout of approval from the audience. Since Gilbert's homeland is Ireland this looks promising for our concerts the coming days when we will visit Belfast and Dublin.



### **23rd and 24th of May, Glasgow**

Every tour is different. Normally the fatigue hits us after four days, travelling many hours a day, little sleep and irregular meals. This time I get a little restless since we only played two concerts in four days. What to do on a day off. The new Star wars movie is not out yet in Scotland and the exhibition in the modern art museum is still the same as last year.

Later that day we meet Neil, the organizer of the concert in Glasgow. He seems relatively hip compared with other people we met so far. Maybe it's because of tradition of the school uniforms or maybe there is also another reason why most English people lack good taste for clothing.

After dinner Neil takes us to a pub. I notice again how easily I adapt to the general habit of drinking large amounts of alcohol. Never before have I spotted such an interest with this trio in pubs and it's collection of Malt whiskeys and beers. My main interest is Guinness though.

Our concert the next day is also in a pub/restaurant. Although it's not a custom in the Netherlands, here it's good practice to combine a jazzconcert with a dinner. Last spring during a concert in London I was still puzzled by wineglasses on a table just under my chinese cymbal. This time I don't hold back. This shows when during Neil tells me enthusiastically that my drumsolo has been absolutely the loudest drumsolo to date. After the concert people tear down the trio's posters from the walls and line up to get them signed. An American lady wants it signed to send it to her son in

california. Maybe a good omen for our coming tour along the West coast in the USA.

### **25th and 26th of May, Belfast**

The guinness and whiskey of the first night in Belfast demand their toll this morning. After a restless night I'm abruptly awakened by the phone. Sleepdrunk I pick up the phone, a voice from seemingly very far responds. "Hello, welcome to our program, you are live on the Georgian radio now Sir". Is this a dream? Is this a practical joke from one of my colleagues? Then the first question: "What do you know of Georgia, sir?". Before I could answer the question the line broke down. After a minute the phone rings again and I am asked the same question. This time I have time to answer. Suddenly I remember the e-mail from Miheil Titsishvilei that I received just before we left for Scotland. We will play at the jazzfestival in Georgia.

The telephone rings for the third time. "Do you have something to say to the people of Georgia Sir?"

"Yes, I have!" This answer doesn't seem to be sufficient because the question is repeated. It's a strange interview. For a moment I have the feeling something isn't right here. Is this really a radio station I'm talking to or is it some kind of new liberation army that will use my answer, with new questions, during our concert to start a revolution and throw over the government and use me as their new ruler. I dream away, living as a king in the mountains of this country where people live until they reach the age of 180, free and far away from the bureaucracy of the former Soviet Union.



**Wednesday night 26th of May.** The kick off from the Eurocup final Soccer and the start of our concert in

Belfast. although it's not very busy, Brian's reflective thought concerning the expected amount of audience has not been realized. Brian, the concert promotor from our concert in Belfast, a real Irishman, gloomy yet cheerful at the same time, with a big sense of humor, predicted:

"Men like football."

"Women hate jazz."

"We are fucked."

People do show up, mainly women though. Would the second line be untrue? Or is this the proof that we actually don't play jazz.

During the break a cd is given away to the lucky winner; a blond australian girl in a long black leather jacket with a tongue piercing. After the concert I talk with her about scuba diving, our music, which she enthusiastically describes as deconstructing punkjazz and the possibility of her to take the trans siberian express to Buthan. That night I dream of a concert in Georgia visited by Irish girls only, their fire red hair blind me. I keep my eyes firmly shot.

### Thursday 27 May



After the we passed he border between North and South Ireland we drive on small roads through the hilly landscape of Ireland. Because the ferry took us directly to belfast city it's only now that I feel that we're in Ireland.

In Dublin everything feels far away, almost like being in china. The smells in the street, the people, the shops. I really regret that we cannot stay here longer than one day.

JJ smith, the club we play at tonight, reminds me of the Alto in Amsterdam. It's packed and smoky like in a real jazzclub. Maybe it's because jazz was forbidden in this country in the fifties by the church and thus has no tradition here but the people react differently than most jazz audiences. Although it's very quiet during the songs people shout and clap enthusiastically after the songs and try immediately to pick up their conversations until the next song starts. One of the 20 cd's we sell that night is to a elderly man who buys it for his daughter, Isobel.

### Bath 29 May

The climax at the end. Although we had a bad experience on a former tour, the last concert would be an open air concert for 120 000

people but it rained cats and dogs and the concert was canceled, i feel confident that this concert will work. Ben and Kirsten, from our distribution company, came to the festival to meet us and take us out for dinner. We talk about our new release and the promotion, everything seems to be right this time. The next day we play in the Guild Hall, a beautiful large victorian room with enormous chandeliers and huge paintings. It reminds me of the big hall in the Uffizi museum in Florence. I am sure now, this will be the highlight of the tour. After the show we sell our 24 last cd's in 4 minutes. A nice girl with an orange top wants to take us to Oxford for a jamsession. An old lady whit big glasses comes to see us, we talk about Tony Oxley. Three small japanese want to have their picture taken with us. We stand behind them and smile. The critic of the independent bought the cd instead of asking one for free.

That night we listen to the other bands. The atmosphere reminds me of Canada where we played two years ago. Everything feels very informal and positive. While announcing the end of a concert of an Italian duo, the festival director Nod Knowles triples over a bunch of newspapers left behind by the pianist scattered around the piano.



Olive Millon, organizer of the Jazzfestival in Glasgow tells me she would like to work for another festival for a few years, a festival in Italy for example. Like this organizers could tour the world as well and get fresh ideas for their programs. Maybe an idea for the next Dutch Jazz Meeting.

