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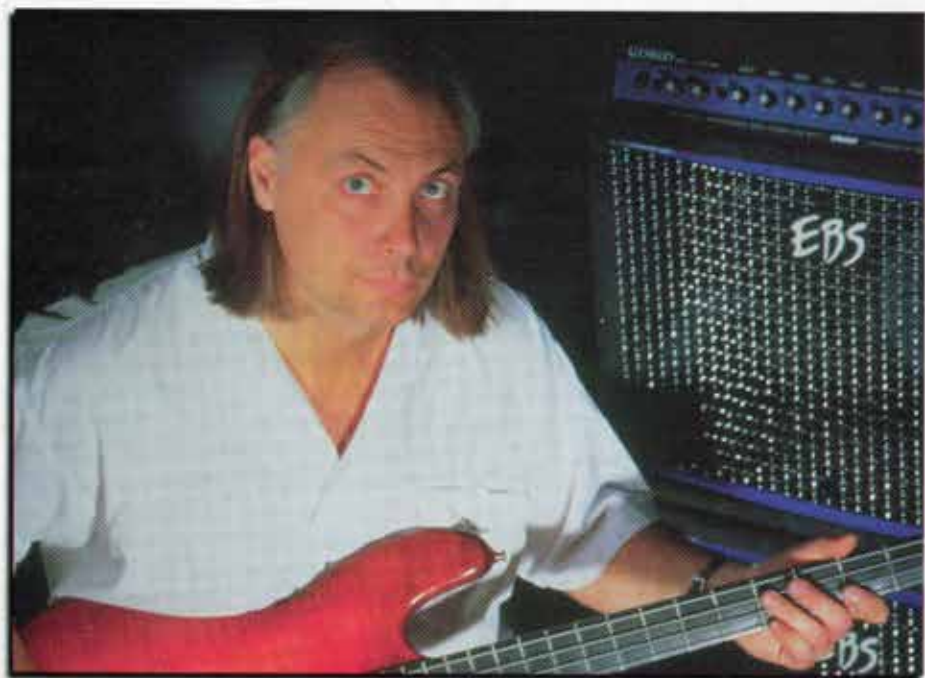
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World Scene

Finnish Phenom Jan-Olof Strandberg

by Dale Titus



Ever since I reviewed Jan-Olof Strandberg's CD *At The Music Box* (Bass Frontiers Vol.4, No.2), I knew I had to interview him. Not only did I want to know more about the man behind the bass, but I wanted to know more about the music scene in Finland. It was this curiosity that inspired me to talk with Jan-Olof, and it was a very enlightening conversation, indeed.

As I was to find out during the interview, Jan-Olof was born in Helsinki, Finland in 1956. His father played the drums and one of his cousins actually became a famous Finnish guitarist. Being surrounded by this musical creative energy led Jan-Olof to pick up the bass at a young age. "I started out at fourteen," says Strandberg, "but it wasn't until a few years later that I really got serious." And get serious he did, with an active gig schedule and regular recording sessions.

Previous to my interview with Jan-Olof, Bass Frontiers publisher Jim Hyatt traveled to Finland and met with him. Upon Jim's re-

turn he told me how impressed he was with not only Jan-Olof's musicianship, but also his great family values. Jan-Olof shines with pride and love whenever you ask him about his family, which consists of his wife Sinikka, his daughter Tanja Marita (age 21) and his son Jan Thomas (age 13). In fact, you could say that Jan-Olof's family is his greatest composition.

So I now proudly present my conversation with Jan-Olof Strandberg.

Could you describe the music scene in Finland?

Sure. The music scene is quite good in comparison to how many people live over here. In almost every big city we have music festivals during the Summer time. Pori Jazz is probably the best known internationally. Nowadays we also have a chance to see most of the big names on their tours, like the Rolling Stones or Michael Jackson. In Helsinki there are about five to ten clubs that have live music almost every day. Those clubs hire mostly local bands, though.

Finnish musicians are very good, and I believe we are starting to have some kind of a

Scandinavian sound over here.

How have you been able to make a living as a professional bassist within that scene?

I must tell you, in a way I haven't. I work with my wife at the Bass Center in Helsinki and then I do clinics and demos for EBS and Neuser world wide. EBS is a Swedish company manufacturing high quality bass equipment and Neuser is a Finnish/Slovakian company manufacturing top basses. I am very much involved with these companies as an adviser, too. I gave some ideas how to build one of the Neuser basses.

Then I have my own band with whom I will be touring a couple times a year. I also play on my friends' records every now and then. When I have time I teach as well. Basically everything I do has something to do with music.

How would you describe yourself as a player?

As a player I am still learning all the time. I just love to listen to music and meet musicians. I like to listen to African music as well as Indian music and I really hope you can hear some Scandinavian influences in my playing. I have to admit that I have also been very influenced by American music, but what can you do? Right now I am very excited about music again and would really much want to learn as much as possible.

How did you develop your style?

I think that style comes from influences, experiences, and with time. I did not plan my style, I just played the things I wanted to play, and when you do that enough you have a style! In the '70s I studied Classical music in the conservatory of Helsinki. I played double bass and mostly with a bow. At the same time I also got very influenced by Jazz and I loved to listen to Miles Davis, Dave Holland & Jan Garbarek. When you study Classical music you learn a certain kind of discipline of how to practice and the importance of how to create a good tone and control over your instrument.

To me technique is not about playing fast, it's more about having control over your instrument. I approach the instrument more like a bass guitar instead of just a bass. Bass can be played by several instruments like tuba, double bass, keyboards or drums but, of course bass guitars are used most of the time for playing bass. What I want to say is that it's good to understand the nature of your instrument. With a bass guitar you can play double stops, bend the strings, do wild guitar like vibratos, chords, and so many things that are just natural for bass guitar. To me the bass guitar is not a replacement for the double bass. You must also notice that double bass was made for bowing, not to be played finger style! Double bass is a great instrument—and

I love it—but it's a totally different instrument.

One thing that really impressed me in the 70s was when I saw Paco de Lucia and John MacLaughlin playing acoustic guitar, it was so musical and they had such a command over their instrument. That kind of touch was something I was looking for in my playing. From there on I started to work on my technique with the Classical school of discipline but with fingerings and technique that would work on bass guitar.

What did you learn from recording your first CD that has helped to make your new CD better?

One thing I learned is to trust myself. Music is so much a question of taste and you can do a song or a whole record in so many different ways, not necessary better or worse, but different. I learned also not to be shy with the high end. I am also much more aware of how much different strings, basses and amps can change the character of one song.

Where are you recording your new CD?

My new CD is basically recorded at the Musicbox studio in Pargas, Finland. Some overdubs are recorded in Helsinki and the part where Armand Sabal-Lecco is featured was recorded in Los Angeles.

How will the new CD be different than your last one?

On the new CD the bass is more in the front and I experimented a little more with the bass sound. I am also using my new Neuser piccolo bass on a few tracks. I recorded most of the bass parts stereo and I doubled some riffs. On most of the tracks I used my Fafner to get the nice tube distortion for high end and the EBS1-V2 for low end. The CD includes more live playing, too!

How have you been able to maintain such a great relationship with your family while at the same time pursuing a career in music?

If you give something you get something! That goes with everything in life. If you love your children, they love you. If you love your wife, she loves you. You have to prioritize things. When the children are young it's important to stay home and take care of them as much as possible. Children can not wait for you, they grow up. Your music career can wait, if you need to choose.

It is a question of not being too selfish. You need to do your thing, too, but there is a time for everything, if you have the patience to wait for it. The harmony in life is the most important. It's not about the dollars. I admit it's easier with the money in the bank, but without harmony you can get lost! I will be very happy if I can continue to do records in the future, even if the sales are not that good. I do not need be the best or the baddest in anything—I am quite happy now. ▼

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