



RONIN

press release: RONIN bass player Björn Meyer is leaving the band on friendly terms
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Focus and friendship - a change in Ronin's line up after ten years

Björn Meyer is leaving Nik Bärtsch's RONIN. Thomy Jordi will replace him.

After exactly ten years, the Swedish bassist Björn Meyer is leaving Nik Bärtsch's RONIN on friendly terms, so that he may concentrate again on his own projects. Swiss bass player Thomy Jordi, who has lived in Berlin, Tokyo, and has again settled in his home city, Zurich, will replace him. He's been a member of the RONIN community for a long time: as bass player with RONIN on their 2010 Tokyo tour and their 2011 US tour, and also in the Montags-series, often together with Björn Meyer. The transition, which in itself may be considered anything but normal in a constantly developing band like RONIN, is enough reason for a dialogue between Björn, Thomy and Nik.

NB: Björn, why do you leave RONIN after ten years of great and close teamwork? New plans with Prince?

BM: Believe me - it was a very hard decision to make ... and it took me a long time! Fantastic friends, great music, good team and a long term relationship - what more do you want? Over the last years however, my personal scratch book has filled up with ideas, which I simply haven't had time or possibility to follow up on. Fragments of new music, ideas for projects, new and old collaborations, development of my playing, instruments, techniques and so on - they are all screaming for attention and I really want to focus on that. Since many of the aspects I want to explore have no logical space inside RONIN and every day still only has 24 hours I had to make a difficult choice ... but Prince didn't call ... yet ... but I guess that as long as Rhonda is there it will not happen ...

NB: Your own projects are very ambitious. You are a founder of the Bazaarpool, the inventor of the style "Transglobal Tripfolk" with the Swedish trio Bazar Bla, you're a partner in Asita Hamidi's Bazaar and also play with well-known musicians like Anouar Brahem. All these projects seem to direct into a new form of "World music". How would you describe the connection of these bands, musicians and styles? What is your musical and social idea with Bazaar Pool?

BM: My understanding of music has always been influenced by a deep interest in musical traditions. At the same time I am fascinated by the possible combinations and transformations of sounds, playing techniques and instruments from all these different cultures. It has become an important source of inspiration for me to find respectful ways of combining very strong traditions with worldwide influences to make music, which is happening here and now. This urge to explore the common ground between styles and traditions without losing your roots or the individual flavour of each ingredient is also what connects the bands you mention and the participating musicians in Bazaarpool.

Any label you put on it will be as much right as it will be wrong - like calling RONIN jazz. "Transglobal Tripfolk" is one way of defining something outside the commercial realm of "World music" - but again: my idea was "Folkmusic on a Trip around the Globe" but some people will be disappointed that there are no obvious TripHop ingredients...

With Bazaarpool we have built up a network connecting artists who share similar ideas about traditions and development. It is very much focused on personal contacts and inspirational meetings resulting in interesting music and an exchange of ideas. There is a great potential in this, which I really want to put more time into!

NB: How do you see the time with RONIN and the way we all worked together?

BM: From our first trio sessions in Kaspar's cellar until now it has been a very inspiring development. Not only on a purely musical level but also on a personal, social and professional one - I have learnt a lot from everyone involved and it has been a great trip. RONIN has the rare ability to find solutions as a unit, without having to make too many compromises as a band or as individuals. As I see it one of the most fundamental strengths of any band.

NB: Thomy, you already played in many bands, in front of big pop audiences and also with great stars like Helge Schneider. But for your marriage in Tokyo you have chosen RONIN's Modul 27 as marriage song. Why this?

TJ: When I was looking for music to fit my traditional wedding ceremony in Japan, I didn't want to choose a song with a strong title or even with lyrics. I felt like that would sound like a shallow slogan for our future life. Your modules seemed perfect. They are open like an abstract poem, but yet strong in rhythm and clarity. And I liked the mixture of western funk and Japanese space. Finally, Modul 27 had the perfect walking tempo for the entrance of the bridal pair.

NB: As a teenager, I admired you as a young bass player in Zurich but didn't meet you in person until 2003 in Tokyo, by the way as a fluently Japanese speaking musician who even got a prize for a great novel translation into Japanese. Since then we had contact. Now you are back in Zurich and you once said that RONIN saved Jazz because the band offers radical new solutions for improvisation and groove music. What makes RONIN for you so interesting?

TJ: That was a very stupid comment of mine. Jazz doesn't need to be saved. It just seems to transform from an exploring art form to a more historical genre, like classical music.

However I do think, that RONIN offers radical new solutions for many aspects in improvised and composed music. Since the compositions avoid clichés by using minimalistic prime number-elements, you end up improvising in landscapes that you never walked before. These landscapes provide unambiguous clarity, which leads you to unambiguous playing - an aspect I often miss in traditional jazz-concepts, where the postulate of "free-interpretation" calls for arbitrary overplay. This clarity is similar to the one you find in pop music. But in RONIN's music, it is combined with a lot of space for interaction and improvisation.

The sound concept of RONIN is also unique. Each musician has great control and vision not only of the sounds he's producing, but also of the sound layers that develop in combination with other instruments. In these layers, the instruments merge like parts in a symphonic orchestra.

And last but not least, it's just great to play in a band, where every note around you sounds highly attractive and that grooves like hell! I think, it's the best band, I ever played with.

NB: We also played shows at our club EXIL in Zurich with two basses sometimes. You both seemed to inspire each other (and us) very much. How has this affected your playing? What do you appreciate in your colleagues playing?

BM: It has been great every time and since we never decided who should play what, we had to keep very open ears and really KNOW the material even outside the bass part! Something like: "aha - HE is doing that, then I'd better do something else...without destroying the composition...".

I have mostly reacted on how similar our way of understanding and approaching the music has been, but of course we are different individuals: each with our personal sound, choices of notes, timbres and rhythmical ideas. I think the biggest difference lies in our points of reference, though. For example the 29/8 beat of modul33 might be a quirky Indian tabla beat with a Swedish polska ending for me ... I think Thomy looks at it in another way, obviously resulting in a different flavour or dialect.

Thomy was one of the first bass players I came across when I moved to Switzerland in 96'. From the start I really admired his sound (Mmmmm!!), great time, strong articulation, clear lines and musicality - a certain way of putting the bass exactly where it should be, supportive without losing identity. Having spent more time together, I also grew very much to appreciate his open ears, humanity, professionalism and calm - a great bass player that I am very happy to have as "successor" in RONIN!

TJ: It is great to play with Björn. He is such a skilled and tasteful musician. When we started to experiment with two basses, he'd always manage to lead me through the songs, at the same time giving me a lot of space to try out the bass lines. In fact, he was teaching me the music of RONIN without words, just by playing.

I like the unison parts and octaves. Our basses sound different and merge nicely. Of course, the unison tends to be loud and rocky, so we have to be careful not to overdo it.

Björn is one of the few bass players in the world that has developed a unique style on the instrument. His concepts of sound and technique are highly personal and so are his interpretations of RONIN's modules. He is able to add his vision to the music, without changing the original idea of the song. And when he plays, he looks like one huge vibrating instrument, with an electric bass involved. Amazing!

I admire Björn not only as a bass player, but also as composer and bandleader. In his music, he seems to integrate many sources of traditional music, creating a beautiful, spiritual, modern world language.

Björn is a real master and I feel very much honoured, to succeed him in RONIN. May I be worthy! :-)

Ronin will play with both bass players on the "10 years RONIN Montags" on November 14th. Björn Meyer's official last concert and farewell event will take place on November 13th at Bee-Flat in Bern, the town where he has chosen to live and is happily married.

www.bazaarpool.com
www.thomyjordi.com
www.nikbaertsch.com