



ON BLIXA !

Blixa Bargeld is in a hurry. He keeps fretting about his need to return to his hotel in order to move his belongings elsewhere. He is pissing me off. I must surely be deluded because somehow I think a musician would consider it a compliment when someone takes the time to interview him, especially when it's his people who have suggested the interview and the interviewer has accepted the challenge because of a respect for his talent. I mean, after all, it's a real bitch to get free publicity, isn't it? If it wasn't for my admiration for Blixa the artist, I'd tell Blixa the man to disappear, but one of us has to try to act professionally. Besides, I know I'll get the last word.

I begin by complimenting Blixa on "Haus der Lüge" the newest recording by his group, Einstürzende Neubauten (Collapsing New Buildings). It's one of their strongest albums, all of which are excellent. There's just something about apocalyptic sermonettes surrounded by bleak noise and shouting, with the occasional love song rising amongst the ruins, that makes my skin tingle. The fact that it makes most people's skin crawl is probably the reason the group has never been even vaguely commercially accepted. But they've never sounded dated either.

"To do what I'm doing," says Blixa, "I need a lot of ignorance and I need a lot of self-confidence and I have to take the energy from this

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**Photographed by
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self-confidence and the energy from this ignorance. I know, I don't need to be modest, that what I'm doing is rather timeless compared to a lot of other things that I saw getting famous in a short time and getting unpopular in an even shorter time." We both have a nice laugh remembering one such "talent," Steve Strange. According to Blixa, after Strange's pal, producer/musician Rusty Egan saw Neubauten in a London studio, Strange tried to gain credibility for himself by drilling a table and a piece of corrugated iron on a talk show, dressing in black leather and recording a horrible song, "The Anvil," as, obviously, an homage to, not a rip-off of, Neubauten. "But he doesn't know that we played on his piece of corrugated iron after he put it down. So he remembers his glorious day when he still thought he was famous, because 'The Anvil' was already his way down."

Years later Strange asked Blixa to work on a project with him. "I could compose something for him and I could play and bang-bang metal and he could sing. This he proposed to me in the villa of some boutique-chain owner in Berlin where he was staying in the cellar at the time." Blixa's getting excited at the recollection. "I play background banging metal and he's gonna sing his stupid lyrics because he thought this might be his way back to stardom." This was two years ago. Blixa turned him down.

"I divide music into two kinds: valuable things, and they're not called pop music, and things that haven't got any value, and that's called pop music." "What if you all of a sudden became popular?" I ask. "Would you then, automatically, cease to have value?" In other words, I disagree with him. "I'm talking about pop music, not about being popular," he says. "Pop music means music without value, but it's timely." Funny, I always thought that pop music was short for music that was popular. Must be mistaken.

"What's the value of *your* music?" I ask. "I was basically talking about ignorance and the energy my ignorance feeds off, which is the misery and the fall-down of people that rise up. Stardom. Pop music. Even if they sell a gold record and buy themselves a house... they probably sit in their house while nobody remembers their record."

Speaking of people rising up, did he, being based in Berlin, experience the collapsing old wall? It seems that when it happened he was with Nick Cave in a recording studio located on an empty street of abandoned shops. "When we came out of the studio, it was totally dead, and suddenly it was filled with people. It was the middle of the week and the middle of the night. The changes happening there at the moment are so incredible. It was so incredibly fast." He feels the "wall pickers" came up with the ultimate Christmas gift of 1989.

Continuing on this eve-of-destruction theme, I ask to hear Blixa's side as to what caused Einstürzende Neubauten's last New York show, at the Palladium, to be shut down. That night, I was the deejay up in the Todd room. I had just put on a tape in order to go downstairs to see their performance when I was told it had been halted because Neubauten had set the stage on fire and was trying to destroy the club. "They shut us down," says Blixa. "No, we were not destroying the place." He says the band did set a small, controlled fire. "That was our disruptive period and we did that everywhere, especially in America because it was very funny to see how Americans are so afraid of fire." After the fire was extinguished, according to Blixa, the bouncers went "berserk," turning fire extinguishers on the band. This made the audience a bit grumpy, and it got uglier when the curtain began to come down. "I layed down on the stage with my head on the edge ready to be guillotined by the iron curtain, and the rest of the band were on their knees playing. The audience tried to pull me... from the stage. The bouncers in the back tried to put me back on the stage." Blixa says the band was then locked in their dressing rooms, and that some members

of the audience were allegedly beaten up and thrown down some stairs, resulting in a few broken limbs.

Yes, our Blixa does love the occasional drama. Others seem to like casting him in them as well. The night before our interview, I caught a bit of him in a terrible film, *Dandy*. He was in a lot of the movie, I guess, but I left after about fifteen minutes of torture. He agrees that it was a disaster, but says the director kept asking him to do more and kept giving him more money, so what the hell. He was also in Wim Wenders' acclaimed *Wings of Desire*. "I don't talk about that movie. I have a lot of criticism about what he does, actually."

Blixa doesn't want to be regarded as another rock star who tries to make films. He once ran a cinema, but his interests now are in soundtracks. He doesn't, however, mind the occasional guest spot in good independent projects. "I'm happy to support them in that way as long as the films are good." Coming up is the part of Hamlet in an East Berlin radio production of Heiner Müller's wonderful *Hamlet Machine*. "We're probably going to support with our music. It doesn't even need our support. Müller's big enough. They actually tried to get Laurie Anderson to play Ophelia. I don't know if it worked out."

Throughout our talk, Blixa constantly asks about the time and repeats his need to get to the hotel. I want to strangle him, but instead forge ahead.

Blixa says that lately he's been mainly listening to the Kronos Quartet and a Swiss band called Young Gods. "They do live drumming, samples and singing." Sampling is also at the center of Neubauten's next project, due after the second part of their retrospective (covering their records from 1985-90) is compiled and after Blixa returns from recording in São Paulo with his old cohort, Nick Cave. "It has nothing to do with the musical culture," he says of the Brazilian project. "This is not a Samba record." I guess David Byrne can breathe easier.

But, back to the sampling. There will be 250 samples on a CD called *The Wonderful World of Einstürzende Neubauten*. Blixa describes it as "... just all these short bits, drum sounds, all these different kinds of things for other people to use. It's better to sell it to them since we're having them use them anyway." Depeche Mode, for one, did this on "People Are People." Blixa doesn't mind being sampled if credit is given and the song is good. "It's a matter of recycling. It's a very ecological idea. The only things we've ever sampled is Neubauten and Shostakovich."

I wonder whether people have ever told him what they like about his music. "Of course. They always tell me something very personal about them. I'm basically a blank space. They project things on it." "What do you want from your music?" "I want something to happen with myself. It's a ritual. I'm not doing it for the audience. I'm not doing it for a reason to sell a record. I want something like I'm trying to lose control. If that's popular, okay, but it's not popular."

Blixa asks the time again. I let him escape. By this point, I've divided artists into two kinds, valuable, and they're not rude, and those without value. I've had enough of the fallout from his ignorant, self-confident energy, and I have to agree with him—he is a blank space.

The next night I'm at a club opening. It's pouring. And because a water pipe has burst, the Fire Department is only letting press inside, through a side door. I'm inside, but I go to check the main door to see if part of my party has gone there by mistake and find myself stuck outside in the rain. I can't find them. Just then, Blixa and his friends appear, trying to get in. I greet him. He stares through me. "It's Anita. I interviewed you yesterday." He looks past me, but gives me a hug. I turn and walk past security. Blixa gets stopped. He's explaining that he's "on the list." Security doesn't care... the pipes and the Fire Department and all. I guess I could stop and help, but, well, I'm in a hurry to return to my friends inside. I'm sure Blixa will understand. D