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Interview with Bas Verdin

We had a quick chat with Bas Verdin, a Belgian artist who is currently making a tour around Yorkshire!

1. What inspired you to start making music?

Actually, I'd be lying if I told you I knew what inspired me. It's just that if I imagined a world without music that I feel myself connected to, it'd be a world without me. It seems that I rather need a reason to start doing things other than music, whereas making music is a reason-in-itself for me. In music, be it only a minority of music as a whole, I find things which cannot be expressed otherwise or explicated, and which are more important. The contrast with what is called the real world is quite big in my opinion. The world outside is like a Batman movie without a Batman. I wouldn't say that this man is a major influence for Ice King, but he has that in common that there's a certain calling from within to transcend the man behind and the daily world drenched in dullness. Even though I'm an admirer of quite a few musicians, what comes out when I make music doesn't seem to resemble to them too much. When composing, it feels like grasping the songs which are already there inside, instead of trying anything. I find myself most inspired while isolated.

2. Are any of your family musically talented?

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Sure, it's hard to find someone in the family who doesn't play the music in some way or another. I'm beginning to realize though that there is at least this big difference between me playing the music and them: I don't play any music that I didn't compose myself as a matter of fact, while they're only composing to a very small extent I'd say, unless they're very good at hiding it. Of course, it's difficult to tell whether it's a matter of talent as in "nature", or on the other hand "nurture". Which reminds me of a second big difference: they've had musical education, where I myself didn't really. For the record: I was expelled from the music school at the age of 8, due to insubordination. However, it was just my obedience to the art of music as I see it. It still is by the way.

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3. What is your favourite artist and album?

As mentioned earlier, the overlap isn't all that obvious between what I listen to and what I play myself. This seems to confuse many, who think that Ice King is a metal band, which it isn't, because it's neither metal or a band. What I listen most to, is indeed metal though, melodic metal. I've even had a record shop specialized in this genre, and wrote a book about it, called Heavy Matters: A Treatise on Metal, Music and Society. Too bad my top favourite band nr. 1 has only made 2 albums, and has been on hold for over a decade: Lost Horizon. Their albums "Awakening the World" and "A Flame to the Ground Beneath" remain the fastest way to goose bumps for me.



4. Do you get nervous before performing on stage?

People think I'm joking when I say this, but there's an important truth in it: I feel more nervous in the audience than on stage. On stage, you're more in control than anyone else, barely anything unexpected happens, you just have to press the button "play" and you start playing what you've been able to practice from top to bottom, being yourself in a language that is yours, without being cut-off, having the best view and overview, etcetera. None of these in the audience. When everything is being organized well, it's a real pleasure, but I've noticed that most organizers in 2016 don't organize half of what they or their predecessors did in 2006. It's occurred a lot this year, that I didn't even know all that's necessary on the day of the concert itself, which makes me quite nervous indeed, or rather irritated. Just before the concert I like to retreat somewhere at the back, but this has got more to do with recovering from all the sensory input these places bring, and getting in the right state of mind for the piece of art to come.

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5. Did you want to be a musician growing up? If not, what did you want to be growing up?

My first concern as a child was growing up as such. Not so much for me, as for the others to be honest. Only as an adult, I found out that many apparently never grow up. Also, I've always found it a strange thing to identify a job with your whole being. As if you're nothing before, after or without a job that's being paid, and as if you can't be many things. Even the one who's called a musician, can be totally different from the other musician, so that a certain bookkeeper can have more in common with the one musician, and a certain architect with the other, than both musicians in relation to each other. So perhaps, who you are is more important than what you are. I've had some idols with respect to this: John Stuart Mill, Ulysses S. Grant and Christopher Lee, to name just a few buried ones.



6. How long have you been in the music industry?

The first gig I gave was in 1996, as the singer-trombonist even of the band I had back then called Fuzzball. It seems that I've never stopped concerting ever since. It's counter-intuitive for me to speak in terms of music industry though. When I hear industry, I associate it with selling your soul for the sake of material benefit. I've seen many take this path, but I've always made sure I never did myself. If I did

something primarily for material benefit, I'd never use or let's say misuse music for that purpose, nor any other form of art. I see art as a sacred and spiritual thing on its own, not in a religious way, which stops being art as soon as you contaminate it with other criteria than art itself. That's why I think that many so-called amateurs, who do something else than music for their living or should I say surviving, produce better music than the so-called professional musicians and their industry.

7. Were you pushed towards playing music as a child or did you pick it up yourself?

I've never been pushed towards playing music, or towards anything else in fact. So, I must have pushed myself. I was lucky enough though to having been exposed to good music from the cradle, and probably even before that, not in the least because my father is an organist, quite renown in the meantime. It seems that nothing really changed: in my youth I got the label "different" and I played music, which is exactly what's still happening now, both.

8. What are your favourite hobbies? (Other than music of course).

Other than Ice King, I do have a metal band with my brother, called Fireproof. So there isn't that much time left. Especially since the actual making of the music takes only 10% of what you are to do as a musician nowadays. Nonetheless, I spend quite some time philosophizing with my books or palls, examining epic movies or series, playing board games, or anything really that involves critical thought, imagination and travelling through time.

9. What are your personal goals for the future?

What concerns Ice King, I have composed two albums which haven't been recorded yet. So, this is definitely on my to do-list for starters. I'm aware though that this is kind of tragic, since albums in general are barely being bought anymore or closely listened to, and many don't seem to be able to concentrate on something for more than 1,5 minute even. For the long term, my main goal is to never stop making my music as long as I physically can. If it gets rewarded, all the better, if not so, so be it. Also, I'm eager to do plenty concerts all over the globe. I've got the impression that the place where I come from, Belgium, is far too parochial and petty for a project like Ice King. But then the grass is always greener on the other side.

10. Do you have any unique talents or skills?

Well, I get to hear that being unique precisely is my talent, almost in any field so it seems. However, I never set originality as a goal, it's rather a logical consequence of inadvertently staying true to yourself. And yes, this "skill" traditionally tends to get me into trouble more than anything else, as society's owners prefer us to be numbers in a row, easy to label and simple to subdue. My message to all of you who care to read this stuff until the end: let's be a letter instead, so together we can make sense. As a paradox, I'm not too bad at imitating people, their voices and their way of talking.

About the Author



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