

Hasse Walli Biography

HASSE WALLI was born into a musical family on February 10th, 1948.

Hasse's father AARNO WALLI was a band leader, and played piano and accordion. His mother ANNE-MARIE was a singer, and musical activities were common in both parents' families. Hasse started playing jazz drums at the age of 9 and continued playing drums for 8 years. In 1960, at 12 years of age, he joined a jazz band which never performed in public.

Hasse started his performing career in 1962 with guitar band THE ISLANDERS, then played with THE ELECTRIC FIVE (1963) and THE NAMELESS (1964). He then suddenly switched to lead guitar in 1965, and joined THE TYPHOONS. In 1966 Hasse turned professional joining JORMAS, the top band in Finland at the time, and frequently toured Scandinavia.

In 1967 Hasse made his breakthrough as the first Hendrix-influenced improvising guitarist in Finland, with the band BLUES SECTION. At the same time he was also involved in several cross-over bands with jazz musicians, among others with composer and trumpet player OTTO DONNER.

On September 1st 1969 a serious car accident broke Hasse's left arm, and he underwent surgery which resulted in steel implants. This forced him to stop playing for several years, but a second surgical procedure in 1973 restored his playing ability.

In 1974 Hasse was a founding member of PIIRPAUKE, the first Finnish band to modernize folk music from Finland as well as other countries. The style of music, which nowadays would be called "world music", gained PIIRPAUKE wide popularity. Extensive tours followed in Scandinavia, Germany, Holland and Switzerland.

In 1975 the band recorded its first LP ("Piiirpauke", Love Records, LRCD 148). Hasse's guitar solo on the kantele-tune Konevitsan Kirkonkellot (Church Bells of Konevitsa) pushed the record into the TOP 10. This solo is considered a classic in Finnish guitar music, and the track has since been used in several feature films and documentaries.

Hasse recorded two more albums with Piirpauke in the mid 70's, and one in 1983 after a European tour.

Hasse Walli had worked as a studio musician since 1967, and also worked as a teacher in guitar playing, o.a. at The Theater School in Helsinki. He eventually quit all these activities in the mid 70's to concentrate fully on creative work. This led to a disastrous financial situation for several years, but Hasse never regretted the decision.

In 1977 Hasse started leading his own bands. That same year he saw BOB MARLEY live in Stockholm, and began studying Jamaican Reggae and Ska music. In summer 1978 Hasse played a two week festival in Havana, Cuba, and had a chance to play with several of the great Cuban bands. He also had a chance to jam with the famous saxophonist PAQUITO D'RIVERA.

In 1979 Hasse heard modern urban Senegalese music for the first time, mainly from cassettes recorded on location by his friend and colleague from Piirpauke, SAKARI KUKKO. This was a turning point for Hasse, and he started an intense study of Senegalese music.

From 1982 onwards Hasse spent the winters in Senegal, West Africa, studying the local music. He also learned by frequently jamming with the bands in the nightclubs of the capital Dakar.

Hasse played with most of the local bands in Dakar in 1982, including YOUSSEU NDOUR & LE SUPER ETOILE DE DAKAR, SUPER DIAMONO (with OMAR PENE), NUMBER ONE DE DAKAR, BAOBAB and XALAM 2.

Having first studied Senegalese music at home from records and cassettes for three years, and then for six years on location in West Africa, Hasse finally formed his first fully professional Mbalax style band, HASSE WALLI & ASAMAAN, in Dakar in 1988. The band included MANEL DIOP and MALANG CISSOKHO on vocals. Malang was replaced by RANE DIALLO in 1989.

The first engagement for the band was a two month residence in Dakar at Club RK 1, later known by the names Alize and Madison. There the band played every night during April and May 1988, refining the sound.

Hasse had already prepared for the first tour in Finland, Europe. The tour started in June, and was supported financially by The Ministry of Education in Finland. The main events were the concerts at the Kaustinen Folk Music Festival. The band also held their first course in Sabar drumming there, which later was followed by another during 1991. The Sibelius Academy of Music also arranged a course in 1990. The band also played regularly at a club in Helsinki, filling the place with an astounded audience, eager to dance to the new rhythms.

In 1992 Hasse formed a completely new line up of Asamaan (which means "the sky" in Wolof language). It included DOUDOU NDIAYE MBENGUE and MEISSA NIAN on vocals. The CD "TERANGA", recorded in April 1992, was a groundbreaking record with several new ingredients never heard in Mbalax music before. It also included the song "Bamba", which became a huge hit in Senegal.

Hasse Walli was the first musician to bring modern urban African music to Finland and Estonia, and his 8-piece Senegalese band toured Finland and Sweden widely between 1988-92, and also played concerts in London in 1990.

The economical crisis of 1993 hit Finland hard, and resulted in mass unemployment especially among young people. This made it impossible to arrange a 6th tour in Scandinavia with Asamaan. Thus Hasse returned to his blues-, rock- and Hendrix-roots and formed his HASSE WALLI POWER TRIO. Hasse also formed TALLINN LIGHTS, a 7-piece band in Tallinn, Estonia, with local young musicians.

In 1999 Hasse finished the building of his Analog Studio in Vantaa, Finland. The studio is equipped with state of the art analog equipment, including vintage Neumann microphones and EMT stereo reverbs.

In 2002 Hasse returned to Senegal and formed a new line up of HASSE WALLI & ASAMAAN. The band then went on an extensive tour in Finland in July 2002, to celebrate Hasse's 40 year anniversary as a performing artist.

Between 2007 and 2009 Hasse Walli has performed on stage in Dakar with the following Senegalese artists and bands:

VIVIANE NDOUR, YORO, PAPE & CHEIKH, MAME GOOR, MANEL DIOP, CHEDDO, MA SANE, MBAYE DIEYE FAYE, LES FRERES GUISSÉ, ABDOURAHMAN FALL and YOUSSEU CAMARA.

Recently, in 2009, Hasse formed a new band in Dakar with top Senegalese musicians. This band aims to make more fusion and synthesis of styles in Mbalax music. More news on this project will be found on Hasse's web site at the NEWS section.

Pioneering work, and several "firsts":

Hasse was the first guitarist in his country to do real improvisation on stage in 1967, with his band Blues Section, and was first in presenting modern blues and rock guitar sound with harmonic distortion.

From 1967 onwards, Hasse was the first studio guitarist in Finland to play with modern rock guitar sounds.

Blues Section's second single, "Hey Hey Hey" (1967), had the first guitar feedback ever recorded in Finland. Blues Section's first LP album was the first of its kind in Finland to be totally based on the members' own song writing, with most songs written by singer Jim Pembroke (later of Wigwam fame) and Hasse Walli.

In 1974, with the ground breaking group Piirpauke, Hasse developed a completely new style of guitar playing, which fitted the folk music base of the band. It was modal in nature, based mostly on so-called natural scales, which are found in folk music of many cultures all over the world, as well as in European church music.

In 1977, after having witnessed Bob Marley and The Wailers' concert in Stockholm, Sweden, Hasse began teaching Reggae rhythms to Finnish musicians. He soon formed the first band in his country that played real "One Drop Reggae" style on a professional level.

In 1978 Hasse was in Havana, Cuba, on a two week series of festival performances. There he was overwhelmed by the Afro-Cuban rhythms, jammed with several local bands, and became the first Finnish electric guitarist to seriously study Cuban music.

Having heard modern urban music from Senegal in 1979 for the first time, Hasse embarked on a long journey into West African music. Having studied the music at home for three years from records and cassettes, Hasse finally travelled to Dakar for the first time in January 1982. There he played with the local bands practically every night. The bands included Youssou Ndour & Le Super Etoile de Dakar, Super Diamono, Xalam 2, Baobab and Number One de Dakar.

Having studied West African music for six years during his numerous trips to Senegal and Gambia, Hasse finally formed his professional Mbalax band, "Hasse Walli & Asamaan" in 1988. Behind him he had 9 years of studying these tricky polyrhythms, and now he brought his new band to Europe, being the first musician to bring real virtuoso urban Senegalese music to Finland.

Hasse Walli is known to be the first white musician to master the tricky polyrhythmic structures of the modern Senegalese Mbalax style of music, which is based on the traditional drumming of the Wolofs.

Hasse's skills include mastering the local styles of lead and rhythm guitars, as well as composing and arranging the music. He has also brought new harmonies and structures that were not present in Mbalax music before.

Hasse's guitar solo on the studio version of the song Diamono Neexna (on the 1988 LP "Modern Mbalax", now released on the CD "The Best of Hasse Walli & Asamaan", HCD - 06) is the first real rock style guitar solo, complete with harmonic distortion etc, ever recorded in an Mbalax environment.

Hasse Walli was the first guitarist to introduce Be Bop Jazz style passages and guitar feedback into Mbalax music, on his song Crazy Rap (on the 1989 "African Sky" CD, now released on "The Best of..." CD).

Hasse Walli was the first to play Senegalese music on the radio in Finland. He made a 5 part series for the National Broadcaster YLE, and a 10 part series for Radio City in Helsinki.

Since 2000 Hasse has worked as an independent record producer. His latest releases, "The Best of Hasse Walli & Asamaan" (HCD-06) and "Historia of Piirpauke, Vol 1" (HCD-07), have been released in February 2008.

Press release by The Villa Karo Foundation:

"Hasse Walli was awarded the Villa Karo Bronze panther cultural award in Helsinki in June 2005. The award is presented to an individual, company or association who has excelled in bringing different cultures together, and breaking down racial barriers and prejudices. This was the 5th time that the Villa Karo Bronze panther cultural award has been presented.

Hasse Walli has been collaborating with African musicians for 25 years. Having spent lengthy periods of time in Senegal, Hasse was a big part of the cultural bridge that was fused between both Finland and Senegal.

Thanks to Hasse's hard work and dedication, the Mbalax music from Senegal became well known in Finland long before it became a world-wide phenomenon with the very well respected musical artist Youssou N'Dour."

In December 2005 Hasse was also awarded the Emma Golden Guitar award for outstanding contribution to the development of guitar music. The award was handed over at a reception at Katajanokan Kasino in Helsinki.

Hasse Walli is one of the most versatile guitarists in Europe, and he has performed worldwide in more than 20 countries.

For more information on Hasse Walli, please go to www.hassewalli.com and www.myspace.com/hassewalli. There is also a wealth of videos at www.youtube.com.

The story of Hasse's life and career can also be found in the book "Hasse Walli ja Appe Vanajas - Hehkuva Kitara", published in 1996 by Otava in Finnish (ISBN: 951-1-13836-7)