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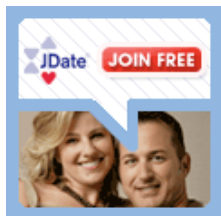
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# THE ARTS

2007-03-30

## Film: Björn Türoque rocks 'Air Guitar Nation'

By Naomi Pfefferman, Arts & Entertainment Editor



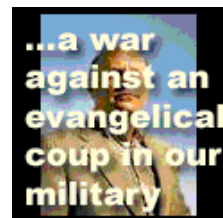
Björn Türoque, one of the stars with extreme "airness"

Dan Crane struts onto the stage, hurls off his sunglasses, rips his T-shirt to shreds, and rocks his way through a knee-sliding, tongue-flicking performance so awesome that groupies' squeals drown out the amps.

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They're cheering so loudly you'd think Crane represents the second coming of Jimi Hendrix -- except that his guitar "performance" is sans guitar.

This self-proclaimed "nice Jewish boy from Denver" stars in Alexandra Lipsitz's documentary, "Air Guitar Nation," about aficionados who mime strumming to songs by actual bands such as Motorhead. The tongue-in-cheek, exhilarating film follows Crane and others who hope to make the 2003 air world championships in Finland. "Nation" particularly spotlights the rivalry between Crane and C-Diddy (a.k.a. David Jung), whose convulsing fingers and kung-fu moves make him a perpetual winner.

Crane -- whose stage persona is Björn Türoque (pronounced B-yorn to-RAWK) -- is the perpetual runner-up. He is regarded "as a sort of Dan Marino-Jay-Z figure: Fantastic ability, highly beloved, but never quite able to win the big one," the Village Voice wrote last year.

"I'm the perennial bridesmaid of air guitar," the wry, erudite Crane says over tea -- not beer! -- in Los Angeles recently (OK, he has a cold). But Crane -- and Türoque -- know how to please a crowd. "Bjorn's the kind of sexy, glam-punk performer my 8-year-old self imagined a rock star should be; a hard-drinking, hard-partying, groupie-laying god," Crane says.

"You have to embody that fantasy for yourself and for the audience," he adds. "That's what we call, 'airness,' the moment you transcend the genre, and people feel they're in the presence of a star."

Apparently, the jury is out on the importance of airness. One CNN anchor proclaimed the genre "the stupidest thing I've ever seen." London's Sunday Times called it an art that "has exploded into a huge spectator sport."

Crane doesn't think air guitar is stupid. It helped him quit his boring computer job a few years ago. And his cocky stage persona is an empowering alter ego for a guy who says he can be mellow and easily embarrassed.

"As a kid, I was mortified when my older brother would walk in on me air guitaring," Crane says. The penalty for catching Dan in the act: "My brother would beat me up."

"In the eighth grade," he continues, "I got spit on by a punk guy at a Black Flag concert, who said I looked too preppie to like the music. He was bigger than me and had a mohawk, so I just let it go."

The fictional Türoque would not have tolerated such impertinence. "Bjorn is like my protective shield from the torments of the world," Crane says, feigning melodrama but implying a partial truth.

"He probably has some Jewish blood, because he's always the underdog," Crane adds. "It's perfect that he's the chronic second-place guy, and that he keeps on persevering, just as the Jews did throughout history."

Crane's mother, Nancy Conrad, says her son has been air guitaring since age 2, when he began entertaining the family at Jewish holiday



gatherings (and jumping on his bed so fiercely that the wooden slats fell out of the frame). "Instead of asking 'Why is this night different from other nights' on Passover, I would have liked to perform Elton John's 'Saturday Night's Alright (For Fighting),' Crane quips.

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Conrad says Crane dutifully attended religious school, "chanted his bar mitzvah haftarah beautifully," earned early admission to Wesleyan's film program and good money in the computer field -- while performing real guitar in various bands.

But by the time Crane was in his early 30s, he loathed his day job so much that he descended into a premature midlife crisis. Then, he says, a friend told him about the air guitar circuit in 2003 -- "and the late-night partying in hotel rooms and the air groupies, which fed into my childhood rock star dreams."

## Krinsky Yesh Shabbat

The software producer immediately began practicing for the New York regional competition: "I'd turn my song up loud -- during the day, because I respected my neighbors -- and I'd sometimes videotape myself in my underwear so I could see all the muscles rippling." He perfected the Jimmy Page high-kick, the Pete Townshend windmill and the Keith Richards cigarette toke -- as well as expressions such as the "Oh my god, I rock!" face (this involves a sudden, eye-bulging look of surprise at one's musical prowess).

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In what sounds like deliberately ironic stoner philosophizing, Crane says his style borrows from Nietzsche and the minimalist sculptor Richard Serra.

"Air guitar is the most abstract, the most minimal of all art forms, because how much more abstract can you get than an invisible guitar?" he says. "And Nietzsche suggested that the more abstract the art form, the more thoroughly you must seduce the senses to accept it. So air guitar is the most abstract of all art forms, and therefore the most seductive. You must seduce the audience to accept that you're playing the guitar."

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Crane has parlayed his assorted seductions into a book, *To Air is Human: One Man's Quest to Become the World's Greatest Air Guitarist* (Riverhead, 2006); into a budding career as a film composer (he wrote the original music for "Air Guitar Nation"), and as a journalist for publications such as The New York Times. He's now retired from competitive air guitar, although he remains a staunch supporter of the genre.

"To err is human," he says, briefly morphing into the swaggering Türoque. "To air guitar, divine."

"Air Guitar Nation" opens March 30 in Los Angeles.

*Click the BIG ARROW to view the 'Air Guitar Nation' trailer.*

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