

Tour Tbilisi Georgia

October 2000

Written by Tony Overwater

Tbilisi(again)

Turkish airlines. Above the black sea. 00.05 local time. We are on our way to our second visit to Georgia (not in the USA but a part of the former USSR). Last year we played here on the first jazz festival in 20 years. We promised to come back and we do. It was quite a struggle this time. With the theme of the festival being guitar this year, we planned to go with a German guitarist for the occasion but he had to cancel at the last moment.

memory lane

While we fly to Istanbul we discuss the possibility of making a video collage of our travels the last five years. Five years ago we did our first big tour to Norway and filmed it on video. We have been doing this ever since just like the reports we write. We have many hours of video. Specially the first tour is about 3 hours of tape. Mostly shot through the front windshield of the camper we rented. Bumpy roads, snow and mountains.

Many memories come to mind. Personal crises we went through during the tours. Band crises we had. Laughs and cries, hours of driving, talking, dreaming. Outdoor concerts with thousands of people, jazzclubs with two visitors who left during the break. It's only been 5 years but it feels like a lifetime. Yuri and I got children in the meantime, Joost and Yuri got married. I separated and found a new love. Five star hotels with swimmingpool and sauna, dirty rooms above pizzeria's where we slept with our clothes on so dirty it was. Camper accidents, new friends, temporary loves, hello's and goodbye's. As we remember the moments we relive them and look forward to future adventures.

we arrive in Tbilisi with a bang! One of the roughest landings ever. I feel it in my spine. We arrive at 3am and the plane is filled with Georgians, some diplomats and journalists. We are surprised to meet some Dutch artists from a theatre group and we make plans to meet the only day off we have tomorrow. The airport, much like last year, is hectic. Even at night. right at the airplane there are limo's with darkened windshields, angry looking men that look like the typical kgb agent in B movies. A lot of shouting and yelling.

Mr PC

At the customs we also meet another festival artist, Philippe Catherine, a well known jazz guitarist from Belgium. The organiser wants us to play with him. But we start of on the wrong foot. PC asks us what kind of music we play and I answer something like modern jazz, contemporary jazz. It works like a red drape on an angry bull. Modern jazz doesn't exist and if it does it is that old fashioned freejazz from the sixties. He goes on and on insulting and working out some deep unexpected frustrations. We try to let him in peace. He seemed such a nice gentle man at first. The next day he apologises and we accept. No problem. But at dinner we start to discuss the israelian Palestinian issue, a light subject we thought, and end up in another pointless discussion. I guess some people just don't fit. I must say I like him but maybe he is not used to colleges who don't avoid serious discussions. We have nothing to lose, no heels to lick, we are our own scene and therefore independent and without fear for loosing 'friends' and thus work. We love to go all the way when we talk. Right to the centre. No subject is sacred.

The day of the concert we have about 4 tv interviews and they all ask the same questions. 'Some words about Georgia please, some words about the festival'. We're supposed to say how great everything is. That is clear. They just want to hear it again. Luckily everything is great. The food the wine, the festival, the audience, the atmosphere. After the concert, which was better than last year, we sign pictures and cd's. We decided to sell the cd's for 5\$ otherwise nobody can afford it. It's a hit. A girl comes to me and introduces herself as the girl who wrote me the e-mails after last years concert. I do remember. I don't get that much fanmail. I'm flattered, of course, but I don't really know what to say. She wants to come to Holland to study jazz. I try to give her some good advises. What can I say.

Jamsession time, in he Beatles club. Joost and I jam on drum and bassguitar with local musicians. I love to feel like a popmusician from time to time. At the moment I really enjoy making music that makes people happy. It's like the basic function of music. To make people happy let them live in a slightly different world for a moment. It makes me feel useful and gives me pride. it's 2.30 am now. I am in bed ready to go to sleep. I don't want to waste to much time. I put the alarm clock early. We're going to a Georgian bathhouse here in

town in the morning.

a good scrub

we've been to a bathhouse before, in Syria, but this one is different. The smell is unbearable. Only afterwards we find out it's the sulphur that makes this smell of rotten eggs. It is supposed to be healthy. We decide to skip the massage, afraid for injuries, and just take the scrubbing. The guy who does the massage and the scrubbing looks like a Georgian wrestler. He scrubs the top layer of our skin looking more and more disgusted by the dirt that comes off our skin. Even if we take a shower every day there is apparently more dirt on our skins than we realised. Haven't felt so clean in years.

Misha, the organiser of the festival, takes us to the same church that we visited last year. We really wanted to go back because we hardly had time last year to look at it. Together with Nathalie, one of the Dutch actors of the theatre group we wander through the church, looking at the fresco's and listening to the singing of some of the priests.

Before we go to the concert of PC Misha takes us to restaurant Stuttgart again, one of the festival's sponsors. White wine, red wine, Georgian Champagne and Georgian vodka are the main courses it seems. We make a toast on every glass we drink. To Georgia, to the festival, to peace, to all the beautiful women on the planet. Our newly found friend Nathalie is keeping up with no visible signs of fatigue. The quite rough vodka becomes smoother after each glass. Misha is the perfect host of the perfect festival. He hasn't slept for 3 days. He does everything alone. Picks up the artists from the airport, drives them around, organises and fetches instruments and cables, takes the artists out to dinner and even on a touristic trip and brings us back to the airport. What a guy.

After the concert we go to the Beatles club again. The house band is playing. A Beatle look a like group that covers all the Beatles big hits. 'The Old tbilisian', the local wine, continues coming to us in big quantities. For a non drinking band we're trying hard to change our image. I play some tunes with the Georgian drummer star George Salagishvili. He had even more wodka than us but we're doing fine playing. I feel horribly handicapped on a bassguitar though, specially playing jazz, but still it's fun to play.

4.20 am

Misha picks us up to bring us to the airport. We just had 2 hours of sleep and our heads feel like they are made out of solid wood. So this is what they call a hangover. Quite a new experience, But it was worth it. Filled with new enthusiastic plans we say goodbye to Misha and promise to stay in touch.