

An Interview with Toscho of Blues Company: I Definitely Created Something Different, with a Lot of Balkanesque Feeling.

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Toscho & Blues Co.

The Blues Company from Osnabrück, Germany is neither a hodgepodge of rank beginners nor – to borrow business lingo – a group of new business starters. Rather, they are a team of artists who have made their mark, musicians with experience and know-how aplenty. The musicians at work here have long since ensured that the name of their “company” is a recognized “seal of approval”. In a nutshell, “Blues Company” stands for German’s longest-running and most successful blues band. And with each new recording, with each concert, these pros underscore that their passionate love affair with the blues is burning brightly as ever.

Since the '60s, the blues have inspired practically every generation of enthusiastic young, white musicians. Blues Company itself hasn't been around quite that long. The band started up its blues crusade on 20th May 1976. That was the day they first climbed on stage to fire up the audience into twelve-bar frenzy. After countless other live missions, they proudly celebrated their first 35 years in the spring of 2011.

Initially, Blues Company concerts were not just a mix of fun and hard work. They were pioneering events. Because until Blues Company came to be, blues in Germany – performed by professional bands – quite simply didn't exist. What did exist were tours by American blues greats, who often enjoyed higher esteem in Europe than in their homeland.

The Company itself has demonstrated tremendous staying power - and Todor “Toscho” Todorovic, the band's co-founder as well as singer, guitarist, composer and sound freak makes sure of this. The bluesman was born in 1951 in Lingen, in the Emsland region of northern Germany. His parents, who were born in Yugoslavia and who had fled to West Germany after the Second World War, gave their son a variety of opportunities to expand his musical horizons. And what Toscho learned from them and from grand old men of the blues including B.B. King and Muddy Waters would one day become the lifeblood of “his” Blues Company.



Toscho not only plays the blues, he lives and breathes them. Blues without compassion would be unthinkable. Thus for years the band's leader has organised benefit events both large and small in his adopted country. For his commitment to social concerns, the city of Osnabrück awarded him the Public Service Medal in 1993.

Because the blues are performed live, Toscho has worked unceasingly on his image as an entertainer. It is pure delight to watch his facial reactions to a catchy refrain, to see how he electrifies the crowd with a breakneck guitar solo or entrances his listeners with a lush melodic figure, how he wakes emotions with his distinctive, dark voice. And with experienced band members at his side. The current line-up – in effect the core band – includes second guitarist Mike Titre (member of the band since 1980), Arnold Ogrodnik on bass and organ and Florian Schaube on drums.

[Interview by Michael Limnios](#)

Q: Toscho, when was your first desire to become involved in the blues & who were your first idols?

A: *I started playin guitar in an exile – Yugoslavian folk orchestra. We where playing for a folklore-dance group, lead by my father..*

As we practiced in the Osnabrueck Youth House, I found out that there was a small Jazz club in the basement. You have to know: in those days (the early/ mid 60's) you could not BUY jazz and blues records in Germany so easy. So, real music lovers used to meet in that little jazz club, bring their own records and everybody was listening to music...

There I heard my first blues record: B B King, Live At The Regal and was thrilled by the tone of that guitar and by the voice ,also.

Q: What was the first gig you ever went to & what were the first songs you learned?

A: As I said before: I was first more into traditional Yugoslavian folk music. That dance group traveled and played all Europe. Although we were amateurs, we did around 50 concerts every year, as far as Greece

I remember that, on one of these folk dance festivals in Belgium I had the chance to hear a LOUD, electric R&B band. (Hammond, Drums, Guitar, Bass and Vocals.) I think they were from England, but I don't remember their name... I must have been 12 or so ...



Q: Which was the best moment of your career and which was the worst?

A: Hard to say: there have been so many fantastic gigs – I mean, we played around 3500 shows, so far...

I'm have a good time ev' ry time I'm on stage !

But I do remember one show in Luxemburg, where we opened for B.B. and a fantastic gig in an ancient amphitheater on Cyprus ...

The worst was definitely the day my father died, but I had to play a festival in Holland the same day....

Q: I wonder if you could tell me a few things about the story of “Blues Co.”, how that came about? Tell me about the beginning of Blues Co. How did you choose the name and where did it start?

A: It all started way back in spring 1976. At that time I was studying classical guitar and playing in a dance band, to make a living.

One day I got a call: Cleanhead Vinson was coming to town and they needed a blues guitar player to work with him.

That's where I met the organizer, Christian Rannenberg, a 17 or 18 year's old blues piano player from Osnabrueck.

On that day we made an appointment for a little rehearsal, I brought 2 friends with me and soon after that first meeting we got the chance to play on a student's party.

There we made some contacts, got a few offers and so on and so on

A couple of months I was playing in both bands: the dance thing and the blues band..., but soon I decided to give the Blues a try and quit the dance band

That was the best decision I ever made

The first few months we were playing under Christian Rannenberg's Name, 'cause he already had some posters, but after more and more people started to call ME Christian, we decided to change the name.....

Q: Of all the many albums the Blues Co. made, what was your favorite?

A: Hard to say: ask a parent who of his child's he loves the most



Q: Are there any memories of Blues Co. which you'd like to share with us?

A: *Too many. I actually wrote a whole book with anecdotes, unfortunately released only in German*

Q: Why did he think that Blues Co. continued to generate such a devoted following?

A: *I really don't know .Maybe one of the reasons is, that we always tried to make good sounding records and always tried to put something NEW into that music.*

The Blues is an untold story. Although its more than 100 years old, it goes on and on because creative musicians all over the world are trying to improve it and try to put it to another level...

Q: What does the BLUES mean to you & what does Blues offered you?

A: *BLUES is the music where I can express myself the best. I am able to put all my thoughts into the lyrics and than try to complete the words playing an improvisation*

Q: What do you learn about yourself from music?

A: *Passion and self-discipline*

Q: I wonder if you could tell me a few things about the story of German Blues Scene

A: When we started to play the Blues professionally, there was only one band before us ...

Now we have hundreds and hundreds.... Amateur and semi Profs and at least 40 – 50 bands, playing on a professional level.

We also have many, many American and English blues bands coming over ...

So, the live scene is on a very high level...

Q: How was your relationship with the other local blues bands?

A: Here in Osnabrueck we do have a very vital blues scene... This town is often called “The Blues Capital “of Germany...

For example: we do have around 50 PROFESSIONAL blues players around, and we meet every Monday night in a big club for a jam. So every Monday night there are 250 -300 listeners/ blues lovers and many pros and no pros...



Q: If you go back to the past what things you would do better and what things you would a void to do again?

Well, I think I did most things right ... maybe I should had to find a music high school where I could study Jazz and not classical guitar, but: the where none in Germany in 1971

Q: What's the worst record you ever bought & what was the last album you bought?

A: I don't (or don't want to) remember the worst but I bought one today: a young German blues band from Hamburg named WellBad..... It's their 1st album...

Q: Which of historical blues personalities would you like to meet?

A.: Freddie King!!! He died the year we started -1976- and I am still a HUGE fan

Q: Three words to describe your sound & your progress

A: Tone, words, passion....

Q: When did you last laughing in gigs and why?

A: I am laughing on every gig. I have fun playing and love to hear my colleagues

Q: Which artists have you worked with & which of the people you have worked with do you consider the best friend?

A: To be honest: I' m not so good in names. Although we played many long tours all over Europe, especially in the 70th I hardly can remember all the names... but John Heartsman, who unfortunately died some 10 years ago was not only a musician I could play with "blind", but also a very kind and warm person. I miss him.

Q: Describe the ideal rhythm section to you?

A: Not LOUD but powerful, attending.

Q: Where did you pick up your guitar style?

A: Because, as I said before, when I started playing Blues I did 'nt had blues records at home. So I had to visit friends , who had some , listen, then go back home and try to find out what these guys where playing by memory...So I definitely created something different , with a lot of balkanesque feeling and lines



Q: In which songs can someone hear the best of your guitar work?

A: I really can't tell. To be honest: when we finish a recording I don't listen to that stuff no more. Only, if we decide to play one of our older songs live. Than I have to learn them again ...

Q: From whom have you have learned the most secrets about blues music?

A: From all the great musicians I had the honor to play with. And: I am still learning

Q: What do you feel is the key to your success as a musician?

***A: An older colleague told me once: don't forget: what we are doing is show business,
2 words: show and business***

Q: Who are your favorite blues artists, both old and new? What was the last record you bought?

A: B.B., Albert and Freddie King

As I said before: WellBad

Q: When it all began for the blues in Germany?

A: Actually with us, or, to be honest, maybe a few years earlier...

Q: What characterizes the sound of Germany blues scene?

A: Hard to answer. I think there are so many different bands around, that there is no German Blues..



Q: What are the main influences of Blues in Germany, do you think that is the scene of UK or U.S.?

A: I think it was more the American influence. We had many us- blues -musicians playing big and long tours in Germany over the years. I think, they have been the biggest influence...

Q: Which is the most interesting period in Germany blues scene and why?

A: It's always the current time, because everyday new music is written, played and recorded and ready

to put the Blues on the next level...

Q: What's been their experience of touring in Greece; do you have a message for the Greek fans?

A: You know what: we really have fun to play everywhere, but: I feel that you people in Greece (as well in former YU) have a different approach to Blues.

I think it is because we have the same musical background I' m talking about the Ottoman Empire and their musical influence on us, which could be heard as well as in your Rembetiko as well as in the Bosnian "Sevdalinka "..... That's all so close to the origins of the Blues....

And that's why I feel your different access, every time I had the pleasure to play in Greece

Q: Some music styles can be fads but the blues is always with us. Why do think that is?

A: The good thing about the Blues: I changes all the time and that's why he stays fresh, new and interesting for the consumer

Q: How do you see the future of blues music?

A: The public interest goes in big waves... maybe we need a new push to get the kids, again. But I' m sure: it will happen...

Q: What mistake of blues music you want to correct? Give one wish for the BLUES

A: No mistakes, maybe failed approaches but no mistakes!

My wish: a younger audience

Q: Are your dreams fulfilled?

A: YES! But I still feel the creative fire in me and would like to continue to write and perform this music, I love so much, as long as I stay healthy....

