

## **EBU's Vice-President Pertti Nurmi reminiscences**

In its starting point 15 years ago, the Blues Foundation, the "umbrella organization" that has been operating in the USA for a long time, served as a significant reference framework and guide for the European Blues Union (EBU). My still ongoing EBU career began right at the beginning of the EBU organization. In the conferences held in the early years of the EBU (Parma, Notodden, Hondarribia, 2008–2010), the aims and future activities of the organization dedicated to European blues music were discussed and defined. In the working groups formed at these meetings, I participated in the work of the "Organization" and "Event" committees. I was later elected to the board of the association at the first "General Meeting" of the EBU in 2011.

Getting involved in the activities of an international blues community like the EBU came at a very suitable time for me mentally. After all, I had been an FBS and Blues News activist for no less than 40 years, i.e. practically my entire adult life, during which in the last decades I was responsible for the editorial work of the Blues News magazine together with the late Juhani Ritvanen. Juhani had been ill for a long time and his condition worsened even more in 2011–12, until he left us in the fall of 2012. The last magazine we put out together was the fall 2011 Blues News 250th anniversary issue (BN-4/2011). We created the BN-5/2011 magazine that followed, together with Pete Hoppula, who had already been working as editor-in-chief of Blues News for a long time. After that, Pete immediately took the entire lay-out work of BN on his own, not so wide, but known to be extremely efficient shoulders. I tend to say that in past decades Juhani Ritvanen was responsible for 80% of the magazine's layout work and my own 20% was the final layout of the magazine. From 2012 onwards, Pete has done 100% of the layout work.

In any case, the timing was suitable for me - after the death of a close, long-time BN friend, it was perhaps even necessary mentally to leave working at Blues News behind and start facing new prospects and, with them, interesting new challenges. As a result, over the last decade or so, I have found a new close blues family in EBU, within which numerous solid friendships have been born.

The first president of the European Blues Union was Thomas Ruf, the figurehead of the German Ruf record company, who was also the original creator and prime mover of the EBU. Along the way, in the middle of the 2010s, Ruf no longer enjoyed the full trust of the government due to the excessive visibility of his own record company in the EBU's public profile. After him, Davide Grandi, a lively and charming Italian lad, has served as the EBU's president.

The previous vice-president of the EBU, Frenchman Jean Guillermo, who was awarded the EBU's "Lifetime Achievement" award in 2018, left the board during the 2019 general assembly, after which the EBU board elected me as the new vice-

president. I was really very proud and taken by the appointment, not least because Jean Guillermo is one of the nicest and warmest persons I have ever met - a true French gentleman.

The EBU's most significant and outwardly visible activity is the coordination of the annual European Blues Challenge (EBC). In its early years, the EBU organized the respective competitions itself, but in recent years the practice of "leasing" the event to be organized by a local organization has proven to be a more efficient procedure. Generally, these organizing parties are local blues organizations that pay the EBU the agreed "leasing" fee and mutually benefit from all ticket sales and other income from organizing the event.

In practice, the EBU board meets physically twice a year. Without exception, of course, always in connection with the Blues Challenge event, and also usually in the latter half of the year, with the basic idea of gathering in the homeland of the organization organizing the next EBC competition. In addition, we hold two-hour video conferences once a month on average.

In order to organize future EBC events, there has usually even been genuine competition between different organizers. That's why the organizers for the next two years have already been fixed, at least tentatively. Next year's (2024) competition has been agreed with Zaandam in the Netherlands, and for 2025, the destination is likely to be the beautiful Croatian beach town of Split.

In addition to the EBC, the EBU also has other activities. Perhaps the most important thing I would point out is the organization of playing sessions for young, developing, future blues musicians. Such training sessions have been held, e.g. in connection with Norway's Notodden blues festivals and in the USA by the Pinetop Perkins Foundation. In addition, the EBU has applied several times for support for its activities through the European Union's Creative Europe funding instrument. So far, it hasn't happened, but even now we have a new application in the works. I have been quite actively involved in this endeavour.

The European Blues Union is not a "fan club", but in practice the membership consists of entities closely related to blues music - organizations, promoters, festivals, record companies, publications, blues musicians, etc. Of course, the EBU's doors are open to anyone, even individuals who experience the European blues scene and even want to participate in its promotion. The EBU's annual membership fee is 100 € or 200 €, depending on the size of the "turnover" of the organization represented by the member. Excluding the biggest blues festivals, the membership usually pays that 100 €. In exchange for the membership fee, members receive free entrance tickets to the annual EBC competition. In addition, they have the right to participate in the EBC elections of their own country and the right to vote in the EBU general meetings.

Due to the membership structure, the EBU's membership is not very large, hovering somewhere between 100 and 150 annually. In this context, I can proudly advertise that we Finns have been active in the EBU functions, because for example, in the number of members last year, we are at the peak of the statistics with 12 members.

You often hear people asking, "what would I get from the EBU by joining", when the correct reciprocal question would rather be "what could you give to the EBU". After all, we are fundamentally an ideological non-profit association. So why not join the European Blues Union to network with like-minded blues friends. For example, the annual EBC events have always been very warm friendly gatherings alongside high-quality music.

The instructions for joining can be found on the EBU website, [www.europeanbluesunion.com](http://www.europeanbluesunion.com), and of course you can also contact me directly ([perttinjurmi@gmail.com](mailto:perttinjurmi@gmail.com)).