



"Perhaps I am a bit of a drama queen, but sometimes a little drama is called for."

It was just under a year ago that former **Nauru** frontman **Axel Lundén** caused quite a stir by abruptly vanishing in the middle of a summer festival tour. The preceding event, which a German audience witnessed first-hand, certainly set the scene for his departure: a clearly hostile exchange between Lundén and guitarist Onni Nilsson broke out onstage with punches flying and a brief interlude in which Lundén left the stage, only to be coaxed to return some minutes later by the chanting of a flock of fans desperate to enjoy the rest of the show.

Then came the rumours: an image surfaced in which Lundén, who is blind in his left eye, appeared to be holding a pack of ice to his good eye after the set's eventual completion. Some hours later, the Nauru singer went from possibly blind to missing in action. With more festival appearances looming on the horizon, the band was left

in the dark about whether they would even have a singer for said upcoming shows. Nilsson, claiming their frontman was in the throes of a mental health crisis, made appeals to the public, calling for anyone with information about his whereabouts to reach out to local police.

Not three days later, Lundén was spotted providing backing vocals at an Attax show in Prague, a band that Nauru once called their 'sister-band', having toured together for several years in the outfit's early days, Lundén's partner Micke Berg being a founding member. Legend has it that once Nauru caught wind of the whereabouts of their singer, they announced his immediate termination... via **postcard**? It all seemed stranger than fiction. And perhaps it was. The record of those murky last days of Nauru are marked by myth and exaggeration, Lundén argues. Now, as he launches a new chapter of his career with his debut solo album **Dramadrottning** (Drama Queen), he sits down with our own **Mark Aspen** to reveal all.

Rockit Rag: What actually happened on stage that day in Leipzig?

Axel Lundén: Well, what started as a petty show of disrespect from Onni ended in an unfortunate act of violence. I was attempting to tell the crowd a little story about the song we were about to play and Onni started to play over me, essentially to shut me up. Tired of his efforts to silence me and prevent me from being any kind of real frontman, I marched over and yanked out his guitar cable. Then, as I walked back to my mic, he tapped me on the shoulder and when I turned to face him, he took a swing at me. Nearly hit me right in my good eye; I could have been left completely blind by that incident. Thankfully, he only grazed my cheek. So that was when I walked off. I'd already had enough that day. It wasn't only that display, there was a buildup. But that was the last straw. Which, I guess made me look like a drama queen. At least that's what Onni called me at the time. 'Quit being a drama queen!' Thus the album title. He meant it as an insult. I thought I would just own it. Perhaps I am a bit of a drama queen, but sometimes a little drama is called for. I spent my entire life letting people like Onni walk all over me, but when the easy victim finally grows a spine and starts defending himself... that's libel to piss off any perpetrators of abuse.

RR: Are you saying he was abusive?

AL: Yeah. I am. He was like an abusive boyfriend minus the bad sex. By the way, that supposed photo with the ice to my face was just me wiping away sweat with a towel backstage. I moved out of the way just in time; I was more stunned than I was injured. The reports that I was blinded were quite bizarre, actually. Like, do you really think I'd go back onstage? Did nobody notice the ease with which I waltzed over and located my microphone once I returned?

RR: Then what happened? After you came back and finished the set?

AL: I quit. And I didn't mince words.

RR: So then you just disappeared?

AL: No. There were other things going on behind the scenes. The next morning, I got a pretty serious text message from Jon Ammon, the singer for Attax. Then it was like, well, I have nothing more to do here, but I'm needed elsewhere. So I took the next train to Prague without hesitation.

RR: But why didn't you tell anybody where you were going?

AL: I had already told Onni I was never setting foot on stage with him again. There was nothing more to say to him. If he didn't take me seriously, that's on him. The way I saw it, I had no place in that band anymore, and getting out was the best decision I had made in ages. I understand people were concerned and later pissed off once they found out where I was... and I regret not being more forward with my plans, but I wasn't in the right headspace. There was a personal emergency. I saw no other options, really.

"He saw an opportunity to hook the press with a dramatic narrative and ran with it. He does it all the time. And he calls me a drama queen!"

RR: So, that whole thing about you being a danger to yourself...

AL: That? (laughing) That was almost comical. That's not to say that I don't have issues. I've shared my struggles with anxiety with the fans; I've been very open about that. As a teenager, I was probably depressed. But... suicidal is something I've never been. I swear, Onni will do anything to draw attention to Nauru. He saw an opportunity to hook the press with a dramatic narrative and ran with it. He does it all the time. And he calls me a drama queen!

RR: So there was never any genuine cause for concern?

AL: The funny thing about his claim about my mental health was that I actually took off to be of support during someone else's mental health crisis. I don't want to go into details because it's not my story to tell. The members of Attax are very closed-lipped about personal matters. But I left a terribly shitty situation to help save a life and I don't regret it for a moment, nor will I ever. My only apology goes to the fans who were clearly disappointed by the cancellation of the rest of our festival appearances and upset to hear that we disbanded before they could see us one last time.

RR: Was the thing about that postcard legit though?

AL: Oh yeah! Onni really did overnight a postcard from Roskilde with one of those 'Wish You Were Here' motifs. He told me to go fuck myself and that he'd see me in court. Very wholesome. I use it as a beer coaster.

RR: You're obviously not on speaking terms with the other half of Nauru, but you maintained your relationship with Jens Backlund.

AL: Absolutely. He was never anything but a stand-up guy, and he was nearly as miserable toward the end of Nauru as I was. He didn't blame me for leaving. In fact, you may have noticed that he played bass on this first solo record of mine.

RR: You also recruited your partner Micke as a drummer for your solo project. But he's known primarily as a punk drummer. Isn't that an unusual choice?

AL: I don't believe so. He's an excellent drummer, and he has a far broader set of musical interests than one would likely imagine. And this probably sounds sappy, but one thing I've always despised about touring was being apart from him. This gives me the best possible excuse to drag him along with me! Besides, let's not forget that Nauru also started out in the punk scene. So, in the same way, you might call me a punk singer and Jens a punk bassist! We have all evolved.

"Onni really did overnight a postcard from Roskilde with one of those 'Wish You Were Here' motifs. He told me to go fuck myself and that he'd see me in court... I use it as a beer coaster."

RR: Is it true that you actually started writing the material for this solo record before you parted ways with Nauru?

AL: Yes. I was looking for an outlet for some new songs I was working on and Onni just wasn't interested in them. He didn't think they were indie rock enough, didn't see any opportunity for commercial success. Which is kind of hilarious, considering the record has done quite well! He was actually really pissed off when he realised I was recording solo material on the side, that I wasn't just willing to throw away songs he deemed unworthy of Nauru's attention. It was just one more thing that drove a wedge between us.

RR: So what's next for you?

AL: Well, Micke and I are finally getting married! It wasn't a choice of ours to wait eight years; we have the Swedish state to thank for that. But it's about time every couple who wants to marry has the right to do so. I really hope the U.K. will follow suite. As a gay man who lived in the U.S. for most of my upbringing, I'm actually proud to live in a country where I can marry the love of my life. Even if I am slightly bitter that it took this damn long! Other than that? Touring is next. And I'm already working on my next solo record! It's a highly productive, almost joyful period I'm experiencing right now. **I'm finally free. I really couldn't be happier.**

