
SWEDISH JAZZ

1952-1955



Volume 6 of this series showed the quickly multiplying development of Swedish jazz, especially during the years 1949-51. With the present album we are in the midst of what has been called “The Golden Years” of Swedish jazz. A great number of recordings were made, many that feature a rather small circle of well-known musicians, such as alto saxophonist and clarinetist Arne Domnérus, baritone saxophonist Lars Gullin, clarinetist Putte Wickman, trombonist Åke Persson, pianists Bengt Hallberg and Reinhold Svensson, and a few others. Because of the international acclaim for their music, they could record quite extensively and their records evidently sold well.

To a large extent the Swedish jazzmen of the 1950's earned their living playing for a dancing public. Many worked more or less every day, on tours or long-term jobs that could continue for months. The full-time musicians in Stockholm also made studio recordings for film and record companies, and for the national broadcasting company, which expanded from one to two channels towards the end of 1955. They also began working for the Swedish television which started on a small basis around the same time.

American jazz stars on tour played the concert halls in the largest cities. These were, for instance, big bands such as Basie, Kenton, Herman, and Hampton, and during one and the same year, 1954, the vocal stars Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday and Sarah Vaughan. Many famous soloists also came to Sweden – as solo

attractions or as part of package shows such as Jazz At The Philharmonic – often playing and recording with Swedish colleagues.

The bebop style, and the “progressive” and “cool” experiments in Swedish jazz around 1950 somehow seemed to fade away. In 1952 the trend was more towards the swing music style of the previous years combined with ideas and impressions from Parker, Getz, Mulligan, the new Count Basie band and, soon to come, the American west coast jazz movement. All the name bands in Sweden played this “modernised swing music” which was acceptable both for listening and dancing.

It is amusing, by the way, to note the strong effect the writing of Shorty Rogers had on the Swedish jazz composers during a short period in the mid-1950's. His sometimes monotonous but effectively rhythmic riff tunes had influenced both Reinhold Svensson's *Meet the Lobster* (III:12) and Rune Ofverman's *Shortly* (III:13) as well as many pieces written by Georg Riedel. The latter was soon to become one of the foremost composers in Sweden, expanding from jazz into other musical areas as well.

Some of the leading bands in Sweden were headed by Arne Domnérus, Carl-Henrik Norin, and Putte Wickman. Wickman's sextet with clarinet, vibraphone, guitar and rhythm had many Swedish equivalents, most of them with Benny Goodman tunes in their repertoire. None of them matched the originality

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of Wickman's group, this being largely attributable to Reinhold Svensson's elegant arrangements. The revival of swing from the 1930's and 1940's and the undiminishing popularity of the Goodman type of jazz made the vibraphone as an instrument more popular than ever.

Lars Gullin was not a part of the swing revival, although he had started playing clarinet, influenced by Goodman and Artie Shaw, ten years earlier. As a baritone saxophonist, arranger and composer, he continued to develop his own style. His music often had a bitter-sweet atmosphere, unique for jazz – but not dissimilar to that of Swedish folklore – and Gullin was acclaimed internationally for his profound originality. In 1954 he was elected “New Star” in the American jazz magazine *Down Beat*'s critics poll, and he toured Europe as a soloist, playing with leading musicians in London, Paris, and other cities.

Bengt Hallberg also received attention abroad for his piano solos with their fluent lines, and also for his clever compositions. He had the ability to move easily between different styles and modes of expression, and yet there was a typical Hallberg touch to everything he did. In an interview in this booklet he says that his piano idols were (and still are) such disparate stylists as Teddy Wilson, Bud Powell and Lennie Tristano. He considers classical music and jazz as being very much the same – with the difference that jazz is a form of “instant” composing.

Aside from the Goodman sextet concept, the most common type of instrumental combination in Sweden was one trumpet and three saxes, occasionally also a trombone, plus rhythm. The most well-known band of this kind was led by Arne Domnérus, and during the entire 1950's it played every week, except for summer tours, at the dance hall Nalen in Stockholm. Another similar band led by tenor saxist Carl-Henrik Norin was also featured there on a regular basis. Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city, had its equivalent in a formation led by drummer Kenneth Fagerlund.

As previously, the Stockholm musicians dominate the recorded material from the early 1950's, but for this volume in the Swedish Jazz History Series we have

had access to more examples featuring Gothenburg players. Primarily, Bengt Hallberg and his colleagues in the Fagerlund band, especially bassist Gunnar Johnson and drummer Fagerlund himself, frequently visited the Stockholm recording studios.

Nils-Bertil Dahlander, another top drummer from Gothenburg, led a popular quartet with vibes, guitar (played by the new talent Rune Gustafsson), bass and drums. They toured with vocalist Sonya Hedenbratt, also from their home town, and made recordings in Stockholm (11:13, 20). Dahlander, sometimes known as “Bert Dale”, emigrated to the USA in 1954, and played ever since on both sides of the Atlantic.

Trumpeter Sven Sjöholm led another popular band in Gothenburg for many years, but this never made any commercial records. We have found some acetates from broadcasts with dance music, displaying fine jazz qualities (11:25, 26). The number one dance band in Gothenburg during the 1940's and 1950's was Malte Johnson's orchestra, a big band that made its first records in 1955 (11:14, 15).

During these years, Sweden had only one full-time big band beside Johnson's, and that was Thore Ehrling's orchestra in Stockholm (11:17). Both played a suitable mixture of popular hit tunes and jazz-orientated dance music.

A few other recordings in this album feature semi-professional combinations from smaller towns, such as Bosse Lidén's (11:13) from Borås, some 100 kilometres east of Gothenburg, and Thor-Ebbe's (11:12) from Kalmar on the south-east coast. A few years later the 16-year-old piano player and arranger in Thor-Ebbe's band, Bo Nilsson, became internationally famous as an avant garde composer of chamber and symphonic music. Tenor saxophonist Sören Månsson had a quite big dance band in Gävle some 200 kilometres north of Stockholm. It made just one record, one side of which is included here (11:3). Another young amateur group, pianist Leif Kronlund's sextet from Stockholm, had a chance to record a few sides after winning the amateur band contest at the Paris festival in 1952 (11:4). Kronlund later became a well-known bandleader.

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Pianist Lennart Nilsson, from Helsingborg in the south, made his mark on some “live” jam session recordings with Charlie Parker in 1950, but never recorded commercially. He is featured here in a radio recording with Nils-Bertil Dahlander (11:2). Another talented pianist was Leif Asp from Gothenburg, featured in his sole jazz recording (11:5), made shortly after his move to Stockholm – he then studied classical music at the conservatory and spent most of his further career as an accompanist for popular singers. In 1954 Bengt Hallberg made the same move from Gothenburg to Stockholm, for studies at the conservatory with some of the prominent serious composers.

A Swedish jazz anthology from this period would not give the true picture without the inclusion of swinging accordionists'. Willy Lundin from Gothenburg made his debut in 1952 with the Domnérus rhythm section (11:1); a few years later he recorded again, this time on alto sax. Lill-Arne Söderberg, also featured in earlier volumes, is heard here together with the Swinging Swedes (11:15), a sextet with Ove Lind on clarinet. Lind was for many years indeed one of the most swinging Swedes. In the Swedish Radio vaults we have found a session with “Jazz a la Teddy Wilson”, featuring Lind in the company of pianist Rolf Larsson, tenor saxophonist Gösta Theselius and trumpeter Bengt-Arne Wallin (1:12). Another radio recording has the saxophone combination of Arne Domnérus and Carl-Henrik Norin together with the new baritone saxist Kettil Ohlson in a “cool” version of *Love Walked In* (1:16). Ohlson was soon leading his own dance orchestra.

We have also included a large dance orchestra led by veteran bandleader Lulle Ellboj at Tivoli in Copenhagen during the summer of 1954. It combined unknown young players with some very famous ones, of whom the most surprising star was Lars Gullin. Ellboj announces a feature for Gullin, the “slow foxtrot” *Without a Song*, arranged by Gösta Theselius. This is an amateur tape recording off the radio from one of the band’s dance broadcasts (11:3).

Another live recording but of professional standard features the Hacke Björkstén quintet (11:9), a group

of Gothenburg provenance but which around this time moved to Stockholm. It was made at a Charlie Parker memorial concert at the Stockholm Concert Hall. Together with Björkstén’s frenetic tenor sax we hear the trombone of Christer Fryklöf, a musician of whom only a few recordings exist on account of his untimely death at a young age. He was succeeded in the Björkstén group (11:18) by Åke Persson, previously with the Domnérus and Simon Brehm bands.

Besides being a leading jazz soloist, Persson was a great practitioner of crazy humour, which is evident in his mixture of English, German and Swedish languages in a Dixieland parody with Domnérus, *Tisdag* (Tuesday) *Morning Bias* (blow) (11:8). Another humorous track, regrettably comprehensible only for those who understand Swedish, is a lecture on the fictitious jazz star Cooleridge Candy, performed in a stage revue by the popular entertainer Povel Ramel (11:7).

Traditional jazz, New Orleans and Dixieland, were popular among the youngsters and many of the schools in Stockholm and other cities had their own bands. A typical example is Pygmé Jazzband (11:22), the members of which were in their early and mid-teens, one of them being the later-to-become-famous trombonist Eje Thelin. Another child prodigy was 13-year-old tenor saxophonist Jan Henning from Östersund in the mid-north, playing with the Stockholm elite (11:23).

The now-classic recording of *Stockholm Sweetnin'* (1:15) can be seen as a symbol for the high-calibre Swedish jazz of the time, with musicians of international reputation. The names of Hallberg, Gullin and Domnérus were well known by American musicians, and when the Lionel Hampton big band arrived in Stockholm in 1953, three young members of its trumpet section, Quincy Jones, Art Farmer and Clifford Brown, were enthusiastic about the opportunity to make recordings with the Swedes.

As Hampton had explicitly forbidden his musicians to record when “off-duty”, this session took place secretly during the night. Jones wrote the beautiful tune and the arrangement, Farmer played the first and Brown the last trumpet solo. When Metronome made these recordings in 1953, the heavy and fragile 78s

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were in the process of being replaced by light micro-groove 33 rpm LPs and, especially in Europe, 45 rpm EPs. The latter had room for more music per side than 78s, which immediately was reflected in the extended length of the performances.

From 1954 onwards a new kind of music arrived from America. At the beginning it was regarded as an extreme, and therefore most likely short-lived, kind of jazz: rock 'n' roll. In Sweden it was jazz musicians who first played this style with the heavy back-beat. Trumpeter Ernie Englund (born in the USA) recorded *Crazy Man Crazy* (11:9), and Arne Domnérus and singer Gunnar "Silja-bloo" Nilson made their version of the rock anthem *Rock Around the Clock* (11:24). Times were changing again ... ■