

SWEDISH JAZZ

1965–1969



The late 1960's were eventful years in Swedish cultural life. There were many significant changes in society with a marked increase in political commitment among the grass roots throughout the country. This social climate also affected parts of the jazz scene in Sweden. The year 1968 in particular has a symbolic meaning for its manifestations of student insurrection and revolt. The spirit of the times also included a show of solidarity with oppressed people everywhere. In the same year, so-called Alternative Christmas activities were organized for the deprived and lonely and some of the leading Swedish jazz musicians made contributions by way of their music.

Aesthetic values were also changing rapidly. In a 1966 radio program, Gothenburg saxophonist Gunnar Lindgren discussed the methodical aspects of contemporary jazz including form, scales, modes and free improvisation. Lindgren also performed his twelve-minute suite "Messiaens fåglar" ("The Birds of Messiaen"), dedicated to the French composer – an obvious ambition to present jazz as art music. One year later Lindgren was back on the same radio show. During this time there had grown an increasing awareness of what was happening around the world and in particular the Vietnam War. Many Swedes, including Lindgren, were emotionally affected by these developments. This time the discussion was less focused on musical theory and more concerned about how listeners could be influenced by the emotional values of

music. Lindgren's new music had titles like "Besvärjelse över världsvälten" ("Invocation on World Famine") and "Musikunderhållning i bombplan" ("Musical Entertainment in a Bomber Plane").

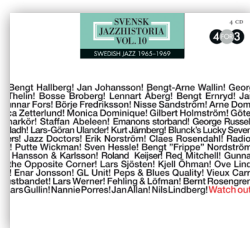
This approach had many similarities with the American jazz known as "The New Thing". Trendsetters such as Coltrane, Shepp, Ayler, Taylor and Coleman were influencing many Swedish musicians. All of them executed more or less free and open forms, often in combination with political or spiritual messages. At the same time, the meaning of the word "jazz" was becoming more diffuse than ever.

It is almost impossible in an anthology of this kind, on four cds, to give a fully representative view of Swedish jazz from the latter part of the 60's. One of the practical difficulties is that many of the recorded pieces were around 20 minutes long. The many different styles, from the older Dixieland to the new avant-garde, were played around the country by musicians of all ages. Trumpeter/composer Staffan Kjellmor endeavoured to give traditional jazz a rather more modern flavor with his Jazz Doctors (11:11), while the young members of Kustbandet went back to the Harlem big bands of around 1930 for their inspiration (14:5), emphasizing exuberance rather than perfection.

Mainly because of the sparseness of jazz activities in Sweden, some of the foremost Swedish soloists during these years, alto saxophonist Rolf Billberg, tenor saxophonist Bernt Rosengren and trombonist Eje Thelin, found engagements abroad. Both Billberg and

SWEDISH JAZZ

1965–1969



Rosengren played a period in the Danish Radio Big Band and Thelin was appointed to a teaching post in Graz, Austria. While remaining in Sweden, or during trips abroad, some musicians explored new roads with music from other countries. For instance, trumpeter Bengt Ernrød and pianist Jan Wallgren were already in 1964 specializing in Indian ragas (I:7), long before the Beatles were incorporating Indian sounds into their music. Saxophonist Gilbert Holmström and bassist Sven Hessel were influenced by traditional Greek folk music (II:3, III:5). The musicians in the group around pianist Lars Werner often performed as musical actors in theatre productions and their music also contained many surprising and seemingly spontaneous “happenings” (IV:6).

However, not a large number of new soloists appeared, although two in particular were highly regarded: pianist Bobo Stenson and bassist Palle Danielsson (born in 1944 and 1946 respectively). Both were soon to be recognized on the international jazz scene, as did saxophonist Lennart Åberg. Much of the professional jazz in Sweden was played by musicians in the Stockholm area. One of the foremost, in regard to both quantity and quality, was Arne Domnérus together with his group.

Alto saxophonist/clarinetist Domnérus had been one of Sweden’s most renowned soloists since the early 40’s and one of the most famous bandleaders since the early 50’s. The Domnérus septet consisted of some of the leading musicians in the country and they mastered a broad musical spectrum that covered many circumstances without a loss of integrity. A great part of the repertoire was composed by two Swedish musicians who were much in demand, pianist Jan Johansson (I:13) and bassist Georg Riedel. New venues for the Domnérus group in the late 60’s included concert halls, performing with symphony orchestras, and in churches together with choirs (IV:9).

Baritone saxophonist/composer Lars Gullin also began working in similar musical areas after a couple of difficult years of drug problems. He was the first jazz musician to receive a lifetime grant from the Swedish Government and he settled down in a rural area in the south of Sweden to concentrate on composing (IV:10).

The city of Gothenburg also had some avant garde groups led by people such as trumpeter Enar Jonsson, tenor saxophonists Gilbert Holmström and Gunnar Lindgren. The latter’s quintet was for a time named Gunnar Lindgren In the Opposite Corner, later simply Opposite Corner. This kind of collective group name was obviously influenced by pop and rock groups. The Uppsala quartet led by tenor saxophonist Roland Keijser changed its name to Arbete & fritid (“Work & Leisure”), thus accentuating its Swedish origins.

Only a few of these new groups were offered any opportunities to make record productions during these years. The record companies seemed to have forgotten that there was a music form called jazz in Sweden, concentrating mainly on pop and rock. On the whole there was very little in the way of jazz being produced, but thanks to the comprehensive archives of the Swedish Radio we are fortunately able to present some of those “unrecorded” groups in this collection.

The national Government-owned Swedish Radio had at the time three non-commercial radio channels and one TV channel (expanding to two in 1969). The Swedish Radio’s music department had a progressive and broad-minded jazz policy conducted by two producers, Bosse Broberg and Inge Dahl. Broberg, a well-known trumpeter, often with the Domnérus group, was the man behind the 12-piece ensemble known as the Swedish Radio Jazz Group (Radiojazzgruppen), which was built on the foundations of the Domnérus band. The Radio Jazz Group was for many years an important ensemble, not least in the late 60’s executing new music into larger forms, most notably by composers like Jan Johansson, Georg Riedel and Bengt Hallberg (III:1–3).

Happy Jazz, please! That was the recommendation on a sign close to the music stage in the jazz-pub Stampen, situated in the Old Town of Stockholm and which opened in 1968. This was a main venue for traditional jazz and swing, often featuring such musicians as clarinetist Ove Lind and vibraphonist Lars Erstrand (III:4). Suddenly those almost-forgotten styles became popular again. Around the same time big bands, which had become almost obsolete, began to make a revival. Trumpeter Rolf Ericson, who had

SWEDISH JAZZ

1965-1969



played for many years in the U.S. in a host of famous big bands, led his own 17-piece orchestra for a year or so (III:15). Many of the new big bands in the country were made up of enthusiastic amateur musicians of mixed generations, and in many cases the connection was to education. Trombonist/trumpeter Kurt Järnberg led such a band in the northern city of Gävle (IV:11).

Besides guest appearances by many leading American soloists and bands, there were also a few Americans who settled in Sweden for shorter or longer periods. Great impact was made by the composer, theorist and pianist George Russell (who after a few years moved to Norway). Russell led a sextet of Swedish (and Norwegian) musicians and also worked with his advanced big band music, for example with the so-called Emanon Big Band, which consisted of young Stockholm players (II:5). He also gave seminars and courses based on his theory that he called "The Lydian Chromatic Concept". Of great importance were also the sojourns of trumpeter Don Cherry and drummer Al Heath, and when Cameron Brown came as an exchange student, he revealed himself to be a fine bass player during his stay. Singer Monica Zetterlund met Steve Kuhn while on a visit to New York and enticed him to come to Sweden in 1967. He lived here for some years, playing with his trio, many times together with Zetterlund. In 1968, Red Mitchell arrived and was to stay for almost the rest of his life. He had a great influence on the Swedish jazz scene as a bandleader, bass player, pianist, vocalist and songwriter. Others who also settled here were percussionist Sabu Martinez and drummer Leroy Lowe. Other musicians such as trombonist Ron Myers and saxophonist Bill Barron lived here for shorter periods. Although he was living in Copenhagen, the tenor saxophonist giant Dexter Gordon often made tours around the country with young Swedish musicians.

In the circle associated with Don Cherry could be found Bernt Rosengren and his group as well as the Turkish trumpeter Maffy Falay who came to Sweden in 1960. Falay contributed extensively to the repertoire by introducing the exotic melodies and irregular

rhythms of his homeland. This was also accentuated when his fellow-countryman, percussionist Okay Temiz, also settled here at the end of the decade. The beautiful Turkish tunes found a special place in the music life of Sweden for some years, especially when Falay a little later started his own group, Sevda.

Accordingly, some of the music played in Sweden in the 60's included different kinds of fusions between jazz and folk music, both Swedish and foreign. There were also other mixtures such as jazz and classical or pop and rock. In this borderland could be heard the "pop-duo" Hansson & Karlsson, with organist Bo Hansson and drummer Jan Carlsson playing a free-form type of improvised music (III:8). Another popular organ player was Kjell Öhman who executed a more swinging style (III:13). The Swedish blues singer Peps (Persson) combined jazz and rock elements in his modern type of blues (IV:3).

All these different kinds of jazz and jazz-related music went through considerable functional transitions during the 60's. Some of it was being adapted as dance music, but most of it functioned as music primarily for listening to. The circumstances could vary according to the venues, which included jazz restaurants (like the famous Gyllene Cirkeln – The Golden Circle – in Stockholm), pubs, concert halls, museums, theatres, cellar clubs, churches and so on. The universities were also involved in presenting jazz music. The tradition of jazz festivals began to become established both in Stockholm and in some of the provincial towns such as Umeå in the north.

In 1967 an extensive sociological survey was undertaken revealing that around 10 % of Swedes in the ages 16 to 70 had a documented interest in jazz music. Among jazz strategists, including both musicians and members of the public, this knowledge generated action, within and outside of new or already-existing organizations, to revitalize jazz life. Their ambitions were to work with cultural political lobbying and as pressure groups. This encompassed jazz education at all levels in regular schools and music conservatories. All this was to give the year 1969 the promise of being one of the healthiest and most vital ever in the history of jazz in Sweden, and there were great hopes for Swedish jazz in the 70's. ■