

SWEDISH JAZZ

1931-1936



The first volume of Svensk Jazzhistoria (“History of Swedish Jazz”, Caprice CAP 22037) reflects the growth of jazz in Sweden during the twenties. Inspired by English and white American dance music, the Swedish musicians took up improvising and began to play the new and exciting syncopated music. At the onset of the thirties, there was already a “second generation” of young, jazz-oriented players to, more or less, take over. They can be heard in this album as can some of their ten-or-so-years-older colleagues from the twenties, who were still active and important during the new decade.

The great American stock market crash of 1929 had dire repercussions around the world, and also affected the music and entertainment business. Although costs for records and record players were reduced, the number of recordings decreased heavily during the first half of the thirties. The record companies were mainly interested in dance music with a “happy touch” and in hits from musical shows. Jazz could be accepted in dance halls and sometimes on the radio, but rarely on record. There were short improvised solo passages of 8 or 16 bars on a few popular recordings. Some of these “hot” solos have indeed special qualities and give a hint of the jazz vocabulary in Sweden in the early thirties.

Even more than in the twenties, bands and musicians from Stockholm predominate as the record companies were situated in the Swedish capital. There were good jazz musicians also in other parts of the country,

but they went unrecorded at least during the first part of the thirties. The tracks included in this album are the most typical and interesting examples from a jazz point of view, chosen from a big bunch of Swedish “fox trots”.

At only 22, Håkan von Eichwald formed what is considered the first regular Swedish big band in the fall of 1930. The 11-piece orchestra played at “Kaos”, a big and fancy dance restaurant in Stockholm, and also recorded a large number of popular songs, including waltzes and other things far from the field of jazz. Happily, however, the band also got the chance to perpetuate a few jazz items, the best of which were also issued in Germany. In 1931 and 1932, von Eichwald and his crew made successful tours to Germany, Switzerland and Czechoslovakia, and the leader was billed as “Der Schwedische Jazz- könig” (The Swedish King of Jazz).

Belgium-born brothers Frank and Albert Vernon, who had settled in Sweden in the twenties, also had a top-ranking band in Stockholm around 1930. They succeeded von Eichwald at “Kaos” but, unfortunately, didn’t get to record much. When they did, it was purely in the popular vein. On a couple of sides, though, there are some nice alto saxophone solos by “Sax-Jerker” alias Erik Eriksson (1:11-13).

A different kind of alto playing, although in a similar environment – in fact the very same Swedish hit tune – can be heard in Folke “Göken” Andersson’s orchestra (1:14). The soloist is probably Sten Westman,

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one of the most legendary and mythical musicians in early Swedish jazz. He rarely recorded and this seems to be the only known sample of his saxophone playing, which was considered very advanced for its time. Owing to tuberculosis, he was eventually unable to blow his horn for a long time, but he recorded a couple of sides as an accordionist – listen to his version of *Blue Room* (11:26). Later, he emigrated to the USA, and he died there in the early forties.

One of the most popular Swedish band leaders in the thirties was Gösta Jonsson. His orchestra always included good jazz musicians and the repertoire consisted of pure jazz (although never on record) and popular tunes. However, Jonsson's renowned sax trio is heard in a jazzy chorus on a track here (1:15). The arrangement is by alto saxophonist Charles Redland, who was an important jazz man in Sweden at the time and a versatile musician, playing many different instruments with great skill. He makes a surprising appearance as a "hot" soloist in the corny hit by "Sjömanspojarna" ("The Sailor Boys") (1:21). In this typical Swedish popular song in the style of the 20's you can also find an early "hot" accordion solo by Nisse Lind. Furthermore, Redland can be heard in his own *Atlantic Stomp* (11:6) and Lind is featured in some of his own recordings (11:2-4, 13)

The name Arne Hülphers is associated with many titles in this album. His orchestra was the most distinguished of the Swedish jazz bands in the thirties. Hülphers played piano with von Eichwald at "Kaos" and took over the band in 1934, and the place changed its name to "Fenix-Kronprinsen". Already late in 1933, however, Hülphers was the leader at a record session with members from the band, together with violinist Folke "Göken" Andersson. The example in this album (1:17) has some Ellington moods. Half a year later, Hülphers' band recorded *Harlems Ros* ("The Rose of Harlem", 1:23), which the newly founded Swedish jazz magazine *Orkester Journalen* acclaimed as one of the best Swedish foxtrots ever done in "the American fashion". The featured soloist is Zilas Görling, the outstanding tenor saxophonist in Swedish jazz at the time. The band's performance of a real "Harlem" tune,

Will Hudson's *Harlem Heat* in a stock arrangement (1:24) is also included. Furthermore, Hülphers made lots of records anonymously, as "Dansorkester" (Dance Orchestra) only, for department store labels. One example is *You Are a Heavenly Thing* (11:9) sung by saxophonist/crooner Olle Thalen. *Ösregn* ("Pouring Rain", 11:17), recorded in 1936, is composed and arranged by trombonist Miff Görling and on the other side of the 78 record was *West End* (11:16) written by trumpeter Thore Ehrling. By this time, Hülphers' band had developed a sound and an ability to swing that very few European orchestras could compete with. A sensation and the best Swedish jazz record so far, said *Orkester Journalen*.

In 1933, the Swedish radio obtained the facilities for recording acetate discs. Still, however, most programs were direct transmissions for many years to come and there are but a few examples of Swedish jazz bands on radio acetates from the mid-thirties. The oldest of these, of spring 1934 vintage, was recorded by the "T.O.G.O." band as a sound check before a broadcast, and exemplifies how a jazz standard, Ellington's *Rockin' in Rhythm* (1:18), could be performed in Sweden at the time. T.O.G.O. was in fact an amateur band but reinforced by some professional musicians for this occasion. The earliest "live recording from a dance spot was made in the summer of 1934 with Helge Lindberg's band from Gröna Lund, the big amusement park in Stockholm. The musicians were mostly members of Arne Hülphers' band, free for summer vacations (1:22). One successful broadcast in 1935 presented Sune Lundwall's Palais Orchestra; the band had its home stage at the dance hall "Bal Palais" in Stockholm. *Sweet Sue* (11:5) is played in a most joyous version. Included are also a few minutes from a radio lecture on jazz (1:26), regrettably enjoyable only for those who understand Swedish.

Sonora, the only Swedish-owned record company in the thirties, eventually made a considerable venture on jazz. It started with "All Star Orchestra" playing original compositions by Thore Ehrling and Miff Görling (11:10-12). Sonora also published the music and printed stock arrangements for the many local bands around the country.

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Both the records and the sheet music with these first tunes sold well, which encouraged the company to concentrate on genuine jazz.

Benny Carter, visiting Sweden in 1936, made two sides with a Swedish pickup band (11:20–21). Shortly afterwards, Sonora began to record the best Swedish jazz soloists in jam session groups, with bassist Thore Jederby as the double driving force, as a leader and as a swinger. Jederby was not only the first real jazz bassist in Sweden but also became a powerful personality in Swedish jazz life.

Thus started “the swing era” in Sweden and a wider acceptance of jazz in its purer forms. Up until the mid-thirties, black American music was generally considered exotic and amusing. Or even dangerous and demoralising! When Louis Armstrong visited Sweden in 1933 and had a tremendous success among the younger fans, almost all Swedish newspapers wrote in very racial terms about an animal’s cry from the jungle and about music from a mad house, not worthy of a cultivated nation. Armstrong had been preceded by Valaida Snow, who sang and played trumpet in a “Negro Revue” in Stockholm in 1930, and a visit by Sam Wooding and his Chocolate Kiddies in 1931. After Armstrong came several American visitors, and they even performed with Swedish musicians: violinist Joe Venuti in 1934, tenor saxophonist Coleman Hawkins in 1935 (playing one week with Arne Hülphers’ band) and Benny Carter in 1936. The Swedish musicians proved themselves to be skilled jazz players, the jazz audiences kept growing, the interest in jazz developed and deepened and although some would have liked to stop it, the new music was unconquerable!

The production of genuine jazz recordings increased rapidly, too, after 1936, and in the third volume of this series, we deal with many interesting and exciting items from the Swedish swing era. ■