
SWEDISH JAZZ

1940-1942



The early 1940's saw a great change in the Swedish world of jazz compared with the 1930's. Even though Sweden was never involved in the Second World War, the hostilities that raged beyond the country's borders contributed, nevertheless, in many different ways to this change. The War would leave its mark on all political and social life for the immediate years to come.

Sweden suddenly became isolated from the surrounding world. Due to a lack of foreign visitors and a very limited import of, e.g. gramophone records, the country was forced to be self-sufficient in the area of music too. The only real contact with the outside world at that time was via radio. People tuned in every chance they got to radio stations all over the world, and the two Swedish jazz magazines gave short wave information every month about which frequencies broadcast jazz programs on regular basis.

There was an increased need for jazz and dance music, as well as for other forms of entertainment, during these troubled times. Since all orchestras lost many of their regular members because of the draft, many a young amateur musician was given the chance to play in professional contexts. In this way a good number were launched on meteoric careers.

During the 1930's the two leading Swedish orchestras had been Arne Hülphers and Håkan von Eichwald, but their epoch was now virtually at an end, at least as far as jazz was concerned. The two new big names among the dance orchestras of Stockholm were

now Thore Ehrling and Seymour Österwall. Each led his own big band, but with different styles of playing. Ehrling's was characterized by elegant, well-arranged and perfectly executed big band music, while "Seymour's Orchestra" (which it was usually called) played a more enthusiastic and "stompy" sort of music with a lot of improvised solos.

Among the most prominent of the smaller groups was Sam Samson and his Septet, who played in a style influenced by both Ellington and John Kirby. On a few occasions he was also the leader of a large studio orchestra. Miff Coding was also among the biggest names of the epoch, not least as an arranger. For a while he led a band with the unusual combination of two trumpets, a trombone and a saxophone plus rhythm.

Of the smaller groups, the one which received perhaps the most attention was Svenska Hotkvintetten (The Swedish Hot Quintet), with guitarist Sven Stiberg and violinist Emil Iwring as leading soloists.

The group started as a Swedish version of the Quintette of the Hot Club of France, which featured Django Reinhardt. The Swedish quintet worked mainly as a studio combination and made only a few concert appearances. Sven Stiberg soon began to write imaginative arrangements, sometimes with two parts for Iwring's violin and two guitar parts, which gave the group a personal profile. (Towards the end of its existence Emil Iwring was replaced by the violinist and clarinetist John Björling). Incidentally, Sven Stiberg

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was a musician who was in great demand in many contexts, as is demonstrated on this album. He is also the first Swedish jazz soloist to feature the electric guitar (1:12). He is without a doubt one of the finest Swedish jazz soloists of all time.

Some musical impulses came also from Denmark, in the form of recordings and a tour in 1942 by Svend Asmussen's Quintet. The group's swinging style and relatively advanced arrangements exerted an influence on a number of small Swedish bands. Iwring and the younger violinist Hasse Kahn each got together his own ensemble, and both became very popular. Another group that received a good deal of attention was the accordionist Erik Frank's Quintet, with elegant arrangements by pianist and vibraphonist Allan Johansson.

There was a large production of Swedish gramophone records during these years of self-sufficiency at the beginning of the War. (Fewer recordings were made after 1942, mainly because of a lack of materials). When we looked for musical material for this album we found more than 700 jazz recordings from the years 1940-42, including private acetate discs. In this album we have tried to reflect breadth as well as quality by including popular Swing hits typical of their time, youthful amateurs and a number of Swedish "jazz classics".

The majority of the jazz recordings from these years were done by Sonora, which was the only entirely Swedish-owned company. Guitarist Folke Eriksberg and bassist Thore Jederby were frequent musicians on these records and were also preeminent figures in Swedish jazz during the whole decade of the 1930's.

Multi-instrumentalist Charles Redland demonstrates, as in the preceding volume, what a superb jazz soloist he is on the clarinet, alto sax, baritone sax (1:1), marimba (1:2), vibraphone (1:24) and – the trumpet (1:16). (An example of his excellent trombone playing can also be found in VOL. 3). Otherwise, one of the biggest names of the 1930's, Gösta Törner is still the most important trumpet soloist in Swedish jazz during these years, which is reflected in many numbers on this album. But there are also a great many other fine trumpeters here, as well as able soloists on other instruments.

If anyone deserves special mention, it is the singer Alice Babs. She was only 16 years old when in 1940 she was given the leading role in the film, *Swing it magistern* (Swing it, Teacher), which was a smashing success. Alice Babs now became the idol of the youth, not only in Sweden, but also in the other Scandinavian countries. The private recording of *Diga diga do* (1:3), especially, where Alice Babs sings and plays the piano together with a couple amateurs her own age, bears witness to her qualifications as a jazz singer. She was still 15 years old when the recording was made. *Diga diga do* was a part of Duke Ellington's repertoire, and Ellington's became Alice Babs' favourite orchestra. In the 1960's she started singing with Duke himself, and he wrote melodies expressly for her in his famous sacred concerts.

The Stockholm orchestras dominate this album, but there are examples here too of "provincial bands". The most prominent in the country's second largest city, Gothenburg, was led by Åke Fagerlund, who is represented by a number here featuring trumpeter Sven Sjöholm, also the arranger and composer of that tune. The Royal Swingers was the name of a youthful group from the university city of Uppsala, not far from Stockholm.

This band won an amateur orchestra competition in Stockholm in 1941, and the soloist who received the most attention was clarinetist Åke Hasselgård. Seven years later he had his breakthrough in the USA under the name of Stan Hasselgard, but shortly thereafter he was killed in an automobile accident. When the Royal Swingers did recordings for the German record company, Brunswick, they had to change the name, since English names and titles were not allowed. For this reason the pianist could show off with his name on these records (11:24-25).

The recording with Sune Löfgren and a military orchestra (1:17) is somewhat special. It contains the music of soldiers from the southern tip of Sweden who were stationed in the country's far north near the Finnish border, during the cold winter of 1940-41. The orchestra belonged to the so-called "Entertainment Squad", which had the task of entertaining the Swedish soldiers up there. They also gave jazz concerts for the civilian populace. The orchestra consisted of

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amateurs, and it gives a hint of how an ordinary local Swedish band could sound.

A couple further examples with young amateur musicians are included. The 17-year-old alto saxophonist Arne Domnérus “sticks out” in Blue Lou with a group of youngsters (1:15). A more semi-professional group with 19-year-old trumpeter Rolf Ericson can be heard in a calm and gentle ballad (11:16). Ericson too would have an international career, and he has played with a number of prominent American orchestras.

These aural samples are taken from privately recorded acetates, with defective sound reproduction and they are not even always complete. Another example is “The Juniors”, consisting of school kids between the ages of 15 and 20 (1:4).

On the other hand, the young blind pianist Reinhold Svensson got to do a regular recording for the Sonora label (11:13), and other prominent young soloists had the chance to participate in different contexts. Tenor saxophonist Gösta Theselius recorded with Thore Jederby’s studio group (1:12) and was permanent in Sam Samson’s band, mentioned earlier. Theselius also became an important composer and arranger. Another tenor sax soloist, composer and arranger who made an unusually quick breakthrough at that time was Carl-Henrik Norin. He was practically unknown when he got the chance to substitute in Thore Ehrling’s orchestra in the summer of 1941, and he would remain in the band for a good many years as one of its leading soloists (11:6, 11:26).

Just as during the first two decades of jazz history in Sweden, there were extremely conservative forces during the War years who saw Swing music as an invention of the devil and something outrageously immoral. Many politicians and so-called musical personages tried in different ways to hinder the “dangerous influence” of jazz music. They wanted, for instance, to cut down on the number of evening dances. The Swedish Radio had a very restrictive attitude toward jazz, especially the more genuine what was called “negroid” styles. They broadcast mostly a soft and sweet music played by the Radio Dance Orchestra.

There were discussions about Swing in the daily

press throughout the whole country, often prompted by the “phenomenon of Babs”. In many places throughout Sweden contests in Swing singing were organized and many a hopeful young girl did her best with the aim of being just as good as Alice Babs – but the latter remained “the one and only”.

Despite the fact that the years 1940–42 were dark, one can also discern a positive faith that better times were in the offing. And this is especially evident from the music on this album – which is anything but gloomy. ■