
SWEDISH JAZZ

1947-1951



Sweden was idyllic at the end of the 1940's – a country that had managed to stay out of the war, a country full of optimism for the future. This was reflected in the jazz life in Sweden during these years. It was time to go abroad and see the world, now when the borders were open again. In 1947 clarinetist Åke Hasselgård (Stan Hasselgard) and trumpeter Rolf Ericson emigrated to the USA. Ericson was soon playing with name-bands such as Charlie Barnet and Woody Herman. On his return to Sweden in 1950 he was greeted as a hero. Hasselgard was featured in a septet with two clarinets, led by his idol Benny Goodman, no less! He also made some recordings under his own name and was named a future star by the American jazz press, but was tragically killed, when only 26 years old, in a car accident in November, 1948.

An important opportunity was offered to Swedish musicians by the Paris jazz festival in 1949. A hastily assembled all-star group, the so-called Paris-orkesteren (“The Paris Orchestra”) surprisingly was an overwhelming success. The participating musicians (1:20–21) were leading jazz stars in Sweden for many years, and three of them were still very active and popular in 1999: vocalist Alice Babs, clarinetist Putte Wickman and alto saxophonist Arne Domnérus (all three born in 1924). Both Wickman and Domnérus are heavily featured throughout this album, as sidemen as well as bandleaders. When Wickman formed his sextet in 1948, he and his arranger-pianist

Reinhold Svensson decided to turn away from the then-conventional Goodman style. Instead, they were eager to let their music be influenced by the latest jazz recordings. Thus they developed a sound very much of their own with elegant and sometimes very complex arrangements, none of which were written down because Svensson, being blind, taught the musicians to play them by ear (11:1–4). Domnérus was not only a member of Simon Brehm's small band (1:5–6) and Thore Ehrling's orchestra but also a soloist on alto sax and clarinet in great demand in many different circumstances. When he started his own seven-piece group in 1951 with Rolf Ericson as co-leader, it was one of the big sensations of that year (11:1). The Domnérus band, successively changing its personnel, held an important position in Swedish jazz for more than a decade.

Around 1950 the Swedish jazz scene developed rapidly and in many different directions. Lots of gifted musicians had plenty of venues around the country at which to play, and there were huge and interested audiences. There were jazz articles and reviews, not only in the specialised jazz publications Orkester Journalen and Estrad, but also regularly in weekly magazines and daily newspapers. The tabloid Expressen, one of the biggest in Sweden, presented each year its own all-star band, “Expressens elitörkester” (1:19). The solitary and state-controlled Swedish Radio made room for more jazz programs in its only channel and, in 1950, employed a fulltime jazz producer.

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Swedish jazz musicians often worked in gramophone, film and radio studios, besides their regular jobs at dance halls and restaurants. Even when they played for dancing the music was often pure jazz.

From being quite a distinct form of music, jazz gradually changed in the 1940's into subdivisions and different styles. The old swing music was still there when bebop began to establish itself and confuse the older musicians and parts of the public. Around the same time many youngsters started to discover and explore New Orleans and dixieland music of the 1920's, that previously had not been very well known in Sweden. Which style of jazz, old or new, that was most genuine and of the highest artistic standards, was intensely discussed in the "reader's forum" pages of the jazz magazines.

Some Swedish "New Orleans" musicians shared the romantic view that "true jazz" should be played without hi-hat or even saxophone, and they were not eager to use the latest improvements in recording technology. Some of their recordings from the late 1940's sound almost like the acoustic, pre-microphone recordings of the 1920's. When the young vocalist Brita Lindahl listened to old blues records of Bessie Smith and others, she did not understand English, but was emotionally affected and tried to sing in the same way, even if the words didn't mean more than just sounds (I:16). Some of the young traditional bands built up good reputations and high standards, such as Hep Cats (I:15), Black Bottom Stompers (III:6) and the bands led by Grav-Olle", Bunta Horn and Olle Sundh (I:16-18). Also some of the older professionals began to playing dixieland, at least occasionally, such as trumpeters Gösta Törner (I:14) and Olle Jacobsson (II:9), and the latter also composed tunes in the dixieland style.

Several new "modern" styles eventually also arrived from America, such as "progressive" and "cool" jazz, sometimes a bit above the heads of the audiences and even the musicians as well. Many bands mixed different styles in their repertoires, moving between bebop, dixieland and popular dance tunes when they performed on the radio or at dance venues. The

most famous was the dance-hall Nalen (National) in Stockholm, where two or three of the leading Swedish jazz bands performed each night. The orchestras led by Carl-Henrik Norin, Putte Wickman and Arne Domnérus were three of those which had long-time engagements at Nalen. Gothenburg (Göteborg), Malmö and other cities had similar spots, but very few recordings were made outside of Stockholm during these years, which is evident in this album.

The dance orchestras in Sweden were at most seven or eight-piece units, with a few exceptions in the form of big bands. In Stockholm big bands were led by Thore Ehrling and Seymour Österwall, both having been in business since the 1930's. Especially Österwall (I:25) had problems getting work and was forced to cut down his orchestra to an octet (II:18) In Gothenburg Malte Johnson led his orchestra at the Liseberg amusement park and was heard now and then in radio transmissions (II:13). So was Harry Arnold and his orchestra in Malmö. Arnold's band was one of few from the "provinces" that made gramophone recordings in Stockholm (I:4). Another was a local amateur orchestra from the small town of Fagersta (III:14) some 150 kilometers west of Stockholm.

All big orchestras were more or less influenced by the American big bands of Gillespie, Kenton and Herman. When tenor saxophonist, pianist and arranger/composer Gösta Theselius occasionally led his big orchestra at concerts and broadcasts in 1948-49 (I:10, 11) he manifested the younger musicians' desire to experiment with larger ensembles. Theselius later wrote the three-part suite *Three Without a Key* (III:21) for a quartet led by vibraphonist Ulf Linde and also the beautiful blues *Cream of the Crop* for the Swedish All Stars of 1951 (III:22).

Concert halls in the largest cities presented jazz events from time to time. Many American greats came to tour, and sometimes record, with Swedish musicians: Charlie Parker, Stan Getz, Lee Konitz, James Moody, Roy Eldridge were some of them. Foreign musicians, particularly American and preferably black, were heartily welcomed to Sweden by fans and musicians.

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The recordings by Domnérus and other leading Swedish musicians were issued in America during these years, on labels such as Dial, New Jazz, Prestige, RCA Victor and Blue Note. They often received excellent reviews in the *Down Beat* and *Metronome* magazines and were heard quite frequently on the jazz radio shows. However, due to restrictions from the American Federation of Musicians none of the Swedes could follow-up the rave reviews by performing in the USA, unless they immigrated there. Arne Domnérus was booked for three weeks at Birdland in New York in 1950, but was refused a working permit.

A special branch of the Swedish jazz market since the 1930's is "hot accordion". The veteran accordionist Erik Frank tried to modernize his playing, also in a tune from the oldest jazz times (11:5). Jularbo J:r (who was the son of a famous accordion pioneer in Sweden, Carl Jularbo, see VOL. 1 of this series) tried to do the same thing in a slightly boppish tune by guitarist Sten Carlberg (1:3). More modern accordion jazz can be heard by the younger players Lill-Arne Söderberg (11:11), Gote Wilhelmson (11:17), Johan Adolffson (11:18), all of whose music is more or less bebop-flavored.

Bebop became a sort of trend in the modern Swedish life-style during a rather short period. It was performed in both serious and humorous ways.

The Wallén brothers-accordionist Totty and singer Wille, toured in the "folk parks" with their group "The Wild Vikings" and presented their own burlesque Swedish version of *Bebop Spoken Here* (11:6). But the more genuine bebop, with fast tempos and intensive execution, was never dominant in Sweden. It might be that it didn't fit the "Swedish temperament", which seems to have been more close to the softer, cooler jazz style that came to Sweden a little later on, first in the form of records by Lennie Tristano and others, and then with visiting musicians such as Stan Getz and Lee Konitz, who both made extensive tours with Swedish groups in 1951. A mixture of cool jazz and swing became the most common jazz language in Sweden in the 1950's.

Jazz as part of commercial popular music an unexpected improvised solo in a pop tune – can be

heard already in the first volume of this series. In the 1950's, studio work of this kind was a welcome opportunity for many jazz musicians to earn extra money. When the young new member of Seymour Österwall's band, saxophonist Lars Gullin, wrote the arrangement of a Swedish version of the Danny Kaye movie-hit *Wilhelmina* (11:18), he had obviously just heard the new Capitol 78's released in Sweden with the Miles Davis orchestra, later known as the "Birth of the Cool" band.

Gullin very quickly established himself as a jazz soloist on baritone sax, a rather unusual instrument in this country, especially for jazz solos. Of course he had listened to Gerry Mulligan on the Davis recordings, but he soon developed a personal style, both in his solo-playing and as a composer/arranger. His *First Walk*, performed by a studio group under Putte Wickman's name in a radio recording (11:17), was written when his son took his first steps, but it can also be seen as Gullin's first steps in his own direction as a jazz composer. In the next few years his music would come even closer to the bitter-sweet melancholia of Swedish folk lore, which will be exposed in the following volumes of this series. ■