
SWEDISH JAZZ

1956-1959



During the first part of the 1950's, often regarded as the "Golden Years", many Swedish jazz soloists and their recordings became internationally recognized. By the end of the decade this happened more rarely. Of the well-known Swedish players, Lars Gullin was probably the one who lasted longest in international jazz polls. The diminishing interest in Swedish jazz was in part due to some high-profiled but artistically weak records that were produced by Leonard Feather and others for export and, rightfully, received negative reviews in American and other foreign jazz publications. Swedish jazz musicians, however, continued to develop, and one by one new profiles emerged. The jazz audience in Sweden was still comparatively large. The jazz magazines *Orkester Journalen* (oj) and *Estrad* each had a circulation of somewhere between 10,000 and 15,000. Some of the Swedish jazz records reached similar figures. However, the public's interest in rock 'n' roll increased heavily while at the same time the interest in jazz decreased. Jazz musicians were often hired to accompany Swedish rock stars, and many honking tenor saxophones on early recordings were in fact performed by well-known jazz players.

The formation in 1956 of the Swedish Radio Studio Orchestra was spectacular. This happened when the times for units of this kind were thought to be over. Even the well-established leader Thore Ehrling disbanded after 19 years, leaving Malte Johnson's in Gothenburg as the sole professional big band. Olle

Helander, head of the jazz department at the Swedish Radio, selected Harry Arnold to head a part-time 17-piece studio orchestra, consisting of the foremost jazz players in Stockholm. For the next nine years, Arnold's band would be making frequent broadcasts and occasional concerts, sometimes featuring visiting soloists. Quincy Jones' co-operation with Arnold's orchestra in 1958 was a highlight, resulting in a widely famous LP that has become a classic in Swedish jazz. Arnold's popularity resulted in many big band records, often made by the same musicians but under leadership of, among others, Arne Domnérus, Carl-Henrik Norin, Gösta Theselius, Bengt Hallberg, Gunnar Svensson, and, remarkably, the legendary New Orleans composer Spencer Williams, who was resident in the Stockholm area at the time.

The Stockholm dance and entertainment hall Nalen continued to be the main jazz venue. The mid-sized orchestras of Domnérus and Norin were regular attractions, but most other leading Swedish soloists and bands could also be heard there for shorter or longer periods, and a large number of American stars made guest appearances with the Nalen musicians. One of the most popular was clarinetist Tony Scott, who played at Nalen for almost two months in 1957. For him the piano player from the Domnérus band, Gunnar Svensson, wrote a new composition, first named *Topsy Turvy*, but re-titled *Topsy Theme* (11:13), which was a more suitable dedication to the dynamic boss at Nalen, Topsy Lindblom.

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One of the guests was trumpeter Rolf Ericson who, except for a Swedish sojourn 1950 to 1952, had worked in the United States since 1947, including a stint with the Woody Herman orchestra. In 1956 he returned to his native country with a handful of prominent bebop musicians for a summer tour in the “folk parks”. The band’s vocalist Ernestine Anderson became very popular and stayed in Sweden for six months, performing and recording with various Stockholm musicians. Ericson also made several record sessions, including one with American trumpeter Benny Bailey (1:5), who lived in Stockholm 1955-59.

In addition to Stockholm, Gothenburg had many interesting soloists and groups, not least bassist Gunnar Johnson’s quintet featuring tenor saxophonist Erik Norström and pianist Jan Johansson. They made several tours with Stan Getz, a frequent guest during these years. Getz also recorded with an all-star group featuring some highly individual arrangements by Jan Johansson, such as his treatment of *Honeysuckle Rose* (11:5).

Johnson and Johansson were occasionally in the Stockholm studios, but most of the jazz musicians in Gothenburg were rarely given the opportunity to record. Willy Lundin, for example, made one 78-rpm disc as accordionist in 1952 and one EP playing the alto saxophone in 1956 (1:3). A legendary Gothenburg profile was Östen Hedenbratt, the eccentric, elder brother of singer Sonya Hedenbratt. During his whole life he made only one official record, accompanying the American saxophonist Anthony Ortega on a Norwegian 78-rpm disc in 1954. In this album is a unique acetate recording of Hedenbratt, playing an original composition (11:7). Another private recording included here was made in Gothenburg on a July night in 1957. Pianist Jan Johansson, bassist Gunnar Johnson and drummer Egil Johansen, on a visit with the Arne Domnérus band, got together and captured some “free” improvisations on tape. This was probably Johansson’s way of making a playful comment on the avant garde art music of the day. Even with the tongue-in-cheek approach that is obvious here, it is remarkable that this kind of jazz was played in Sweden as early as 1957 (11:8).

The Domnérus and Norin line-up with trumpet and three saxes plus rhythm was typical for Swedish bands. Stock arrangements for this kind of formation were made by Gösta Theselius, Lars Gullin, Gunnar Svensson and many others, and played by orchestras all around Sweden. Åke Jonsson’s orchestra, based in Härnösand in the middle north, was the winner of many contests, including an amateur band competition arranged by the Swedish Television in 1957. Again, Jonsson’s unit never made any records; included here is a home-recording made from a broadcast (11:7). The track with Rolf Lindell’s septet (11:19) was also recorded off the air. Formed by musicians from the south-western part of Sweden, this band soon became professional, relocating to Stockholm and touring all over Sweden with a mixture of jazz, Glenn Miller-sounds and hit tunes. The young Malmö band (average age 18,4 years!) led by trumpeter Leif Uvemark is also heard from a radio recording, this time in a contest from a programme for youngsters (1:13).

The band executes one of Lars Gullin’s stock arrangements, originally recorded by the Arne Domnérus band.

Dixieland jazz was very popular, and English bands such as Chris Barber’s influenced new ways of playing it. The new sounds with more soft and subtle playing were featured by Story-ville Creepers (1:12), among others.

By way of Rolf Ericson’s American Stars in 1956, and a similar tour in 1957 by trombonist Jay Johnson’s quintet, the new hard-bop style was a heavy influence on young Swedish players, including the quintet Jazz Club ’57, featuring tenor saxophonist Bernt Rosengren, pianist Claes-Göran Fagerstedt, and vocalist Nannie Porres (11:9-10). Rosengren, soon to become a prominent profile, was also soloist and arranger in a short-lived big band with young Stockholm musicians (11:6). Together with trombonist Kurt Järnberg, he was chosen to represent Sweden in the International Youth Big Band performing at the Newport Jazz festival in Rhode Island and at the World-Exhibition in Brussels 1958.

Still in his teens Eje Thelin transformed from “wonder-kid” Dixieland trombonist to a leading modern

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soloist, fronting a quintet together with valve trombonist Lalle Svensson (I:11), inspired by the group that Jay Jay Johnson and Kai Winding had co-led a couple of years before. Trombonist Kurt Järnberg and saxophonist Rolf Billberg, two young Swedes working in a Danish big band led by Ib Glindemann, made some recordings while in Copenhagen (I:7).

Ib Glindemann is also connected to the singer who soon became one of the most famous Swedish names in jazz—Monica Zetterlund. She was only 19 when Glindemann's orchestra played in the “folk park” in her small hometown in 1957. She got to sing some songs, and was eventually hired to join the band in Copenhagen for the winter season. When the Harry Arnold band played a concert in Copenhagen in early 1958, the Stockholm musicians encountered her for the first time. She was soon engaged to sing with Arne Domnérus at Nalen, and with Arnold at the Swedish Radio.

Among the pianists emerging was Lasse Werner, who played with his Swedish group in Germany for a longer time. When he made his first EP record in 1959, he performed his own interesting compositions (III:9). Another young pianist, Rune Öfwerman belonged to the group of Nalen musicians, playing with the Carl-Henrik Norin and Hacke Björkstén bands. Independently he worked with a trio with a rather popular approach, his bluesy *Oldspice* (III:13), presented here in a concert recording, becoming a best-seller.

The Swedish Radio Company, from December 1955 with two channels, must have had good financial resources. Besides the Harry Arnold big band, the Radio employed several other orchestras, some quite large in size. One, simply called The Studio Orchestra, was led by Gunnar Lundén-Welden, who had been saxophonist and arranger with the Lulle Ellboj big band in the 1940's (VOL 5). He managed to mix light entertainment and jazz by way of an unusual group of reed instruments— including his own contrabass clarinet, plus strings and rhythm (III:16).

Among the new arrangers and composers were many in the ranks of the Arne Domnérus band. Bassist Georg Riedel became increasingly in demand as

arranger and composer for many groups and occasions. So was trumpeter Bengt-Arne Wallin, who was noticed especially for his Gil Evans-influenced music (III:17).

Recording techniques were further developed, and in 1958 stereo was suddenly a reality. The Harry Arnold orchestra and the Rune Öfwerman trio made the first jazz stereo recordings in Sweden during the spring of that year. Play-back singing, over-dubbing and tape splicing had been used by popular artists for some time, and now also jazz musicians began to make use of the new possibilities. In this album we hear Putte Wickman playing five clarinet parts (I:15), Åke Persson creating a four-part trombone section (I:21), and Ruth Linn and Pete Jacques sound like a large vocal group (III:18).

By the end of the 1950's there was a severe change of scene for jazz in Sweden. Although a lot of good music was still played and recorded, the interest for jazz was languishing. This was to have even more dramatic effects in the next decade. ■