

Bebop Jazz Enters Sweden

I. Jazz History in Sweden

In 1895, Sweden's King Oscar II sponsored a tour of his nation by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, a black American choir from Fisk University of Nashville, Tennessee. This group performed a program of blues, spirituals and ragtime numbers that enthralled audiences across Scandinavia. The following year Bern's Saloon, a Stockholm nightclub presented Geo Jackson's Ten Colored Minstrels to large curious audiences and the seeds for what would become jazz music were planted in Sweden.

Audiences across Sweden wanted more of this new music and Swedish musicians were fascinated by the syncopated rhythms. Musicians tried to imitate the beat and tonality of this African-American hybrid music. In 1899 in Göteborg, a group calling themselves "Kronoberg" recorded their version of one of the black American's tunes, Georgia Cakewalk, onto a wax cylinder. The group was made up of an E-flat cornet, a B-flat piston cornet, two trumpets, three alto-horns, 3 baritone-horns, piccolo, four or five B-flat clarinets, an E-flat clarinet, tuba and bass drum.¹ The recording quickly became popular across Sweden and Norway.

By the turn of the century, more black American acts were being brought to Sweden. Circuses began including black minstrels to please Scandinavian



¹Jan Bruèr and Bengt Nyquist, liner notes, Svensk Jazzhistoria Vol. 1, Varning för Jazz!, Caprice Records (Stockholm) 1998, 2.

audiences. It is recorded that Anna Hoffman-Uddgrens's International Variety Circus and Cirque

Moderne often played at Stockholm's South Zoo. An early film was made of some of the Afro-American musicians in these circus performances once again feeding the peoples desire for the new black music.²

The first Swedish recording of a ragtime melody "Hiawatha" was made by Svea Livgardes' musical group. While the song was done as a march, they stomped out a syncopated rhythm that was not your typical Swedish march tune.

Apart from the black minstrel groups that toured Sweden, little real "black" music was heard. Most of the recorded music to reach Sweden from America prior to World War I was in the form of "a second-hand white version which was built more on the popular dance music from the 1910's (one-step, two-step and foxtrot), than on the black improvised music."³ Recordings by Swedish bands from this period contain very little of anything that could be classified as "jazz" by today's standards. Rather than improvised melodies, Swedes tended to imitate the melodic lines and solos from the American recordings. When the word "jazz" first appeared in Sweden in 1919, it was an indistinct term used to describe the new dance music of the times in general. Although the 1920's were called "The Jazz Era" in Sweden, Jazz was more of a "fashion concept" than a musical form. By the mid-1920's, however, true jazz was finding its way into Swedish popular music. This Swedish jazz developed as a result of impulses from many sources, not the least of which were recordings and visiting musicians from the U.S.A.

²Hans Eklund and Lars Lindström, Jazzen I Stockholm (Stockholm, Stadsmuseum Natur och Kultur, 1983) 15.

³Jan Bruèr and Bengt Nyquist, Svensk Jazzhistoria Vol. 1, Varning för Jazz!, 65.

Undoubtedly, there are certain national individualities in every country's jazz musicians; influences from folk music and national popular music. It could therefore be interesting to follow the development of Swedish jazz and how it came to be; when the first improvised solo pops up in a revue number or in a corny popular song, played in a strutting foxtrot rhythm.⁴

The earliest influences on the Swedes that dared improvise a solo were white Americans such as trumpeter Red Nichols, saxophonist Jimmy Dorsey, violinist Joe Venuti and trombonist Miff Mole. A large percentage of the "American Jazz" to reach Sweden came via radio programs originating in England.

In 1925, an all-black orchestra under the direction of Sam Wooding played for two weeks in Stockholm and the interest in "black" music was rekindled. By around 1930, American recordings by blacks like Louis Armstrong, King Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton and Bessie Smith began to arrive. At this same time, a bitter debate arose in Sweden regarding this "new" music. Many influential Swedes, along with the Swedish Musicians' Union, condemned jazz and wanted the government to forbid the import of this "infectious disease." This viewpoint didn't soften through the early 1930's. But as the demand for jazz music grew, public opinion turned around and members of the Musicians' Union even arranged "propaganda" concerts of Swedish jazz. In part, acceptance of jazz by the Musicians' Union came about because motion pictures with sound put such a large number of musicians out of work. Many of these men went over to playing jazz and other dance music to survive.

With the acceptance of jazz by polite society, soloists became more daring and original in their improvisations. Musical groups grew in size, became better rehearsed and more creative in their musical

⁴Jan Bruèr and Bengt Nyquist, Svensk Jazzhistoria Vol. 1, Varning för Jazz!, 65.

arrangements. Solo space for individual musicians was expanded and Swedes began playing a more pure jazz equal to their American idols and counterparts.

In the mid-1930's, Swedes followed the American trend toward large dance bands that featured jazz soloists. Black performers were still somewhat of a novelty to audiences and much of the influential music of the day still came via radio broadcasts from England and recordings imported from America. The young listeners, however, took an open-minded stance, flocking to concerts by black American jazzmen such as Louis Armstrong and Benny Carter.

While the Swedish press criticized what it called "animal cries from the jungle" and "music from a mad house, not worthy of a cultured nation," the audience of young Swedes grew. Swedish musicians clamored to make recordings with visiting American jazzmen. Top American players like Coleman Hawkins, Joe Venuti and Benny Carter performed with Swedish orchestras or toured with Swedes in their own back-up band. Music historian Jan Bruèr tells us that "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!"⁵

In the later half of the 1930's jazz reached the provinces as well as the major cities with American bands touring around and across Sweden. Jimmie Lunceford played an extensive schedule through the Swedish countryside in 1937, followed by the Edgar Hayes band in 1938 and, just before the outbreak of World War II, Duke Ellington in 1939. Youth in small towns and large were bitten with the jazz bug and small community bands added American jazz to their repertoire. Although his band didn't go to Sweden, Count Basie became well known through his recordings and many young Swedish pianists began to play with a distinctive "Basie" style.

⁵Jan Bruèr and Bengt Nyquist, Svensk Jazzhistoria Vol. 2,"HOT"-epoken, 61.

Uninterested in politics, many Swedish jazz musicians lead a very pleasant life oblivious to the unrest gathering over much of Europe. Suddenly, in September of 1939, everything changed. Although Sweden remained neutral Swedes could not avoid being affected by the international political situation. American records no longer reached the shores of Sweden. Radio music broadcasts were fewer and contained much less of America's musical happenings. Everywhere else in Europe was focused on Germany and The Third Reich. Advancing German armies proclaimed jazz to be an enemy of German culture and the German people. Hitler vowed that jazz music would be stamped out in Europe.

II. The Coming of the Be-boppers

During these war years, while Sweden was cut off from American influences, jazz was going through some significant changes. Two young jazzmen, John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie and Charles Christopher "Yardbird" Parker met at a "jam" session at Minton's Playhouse, an after-hours nightclub in New York City. Parker and Gillespie began experimenting with the chord changes to standard tunes. They tried basing their improvisation on the upper notes and harmonic extensions of the chord changes, rather than the accepted basic harmonic triad. In an effort to slow others from imitating their creations, they often played tunes at a breakneck speed. This new jazz sound, referred to as "BeBop," was generally played in smaller size groups. As the All Music Guide to Jazz describes it:

By comparison with earlier jazz styles, bebop was somewhat faster, and its melodies had more erratic contours, its lines scurried over, under and around the notes of the accompanying chords more than swing style lines, which had more frequently used the chord notes themselves. Bebop tunes were the most syncopated of any jazz style, and the improvisations had more ideas per solo. The effect was more agitated than swing style. Bebop's emphasis on instrumental virtuosity

exceeded the level of most swing style improvisers, and many bebop players approached the virtuosity of swing standouts Roy Eldridge, Art Tatum, and Benny Goodman.⁶

The bebop style caught on quickly among New York jazzmen and, as these musicians toured around the states, spread across the country. Soloists in the big dance bands began experimenting with bebop solos, and soon big bands like those of Woody Herman and Billy Eckstein were boasting bebop arrangements as well as soloists in the new style.

This new music was only available, however, to live music audiences. The American Federation of Musicians had earlier in 1942 put a recording ban in effect that kept bebop music out of the record stores. The recording ban was to last nearly as long as the war itself, further isolating Swedish music fans from this new American jazz form. A few Swedes got some hints about the music to come as they listened to military short-wave radio entertainment broadcasts directed at the American and British forces.

As the war ended in Europe and the American Federation of Musicians lifted the recording ban, a limited number of recordings of the new jazz style began to find their way to Swedish shores. It was a time when young Swedes were becoming more and more “U.S.” oriented. Near the war’s end in 1944, one of the most popular recordings in Sweden had been singer Alice “Babs” Nilsson with Thore Ehrling’s Orchestra performing a song by Povel Romel entitled “One-Hundred per cent (All American).” Although sung in Swedish, the tune expressed the feelings of many young Swedes at the time. By the winter of 1946, polls conducted by jazz magazines like Orkester Journalen found Bebop and traditional Dixieland jazz to be the expressed favorites of younger Swedish audiences.

The fall of 1946 also marks the return of touring U.S. jazzmen with Don Redman’s orchestra making the first performance in Sweden of any American band since 1939. Redman mixed in some

⁶Ron Wynn, ed., All Music Guide to Jazz (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 1994) 9.

limited bebop ideas, with soloists like tenor sax man Don Byas and trombonist/vibraphonist Tyree Glenn. Byas and Glenn, however, were primarily swing players who had only a passing interest in bebop, not a serious passion. The first true bebop oriented band reached Göteborg on December 15, 1947. Lead by former Woody Herman bassist Chubby Jackson, the group was called the Fifth Dimensional Jazz Group. Jackson proceeded the group, arriving in Stockholm in November to organize his tour. He was unsure just what musicians he would bring over and wanted to test the Scandinavian waters before committing himself. There was talk of including a dancer or a female vocalist, but after observing the young folk's passion for bebop, Jackson decided on a band of young musicians, all of which also exhibited a passion for the new musical style. The group was made up of 20-year-old trumpeter Conti Condoli, saxophonist Frank Socolow, age 24, vibraphonist Terry Gibbs who was 23 and pianist Lou Levy, just 19. Jackson himself, 29, and 30-year-old drummer Denzil Best were the seniors of the group.

Chubby Jackson's band made several trips to the recording studios in Stockholm and performed a live show over Swedish radio in addition to touring the country:

“We have been treated like royalty,” wrote Chubby Jackson in *Metronome Magazine*, 1948, about his Swedish tour. “I visited clubs, dance halls and met most of Sweden's top musicians. Younger or old, all wanted to learn the secret of playing bebop. They dig Charlie Parker and Dizzy back! Such interest in bebop I have never seen in America. They face it for what it is – a new phase of jazz.”⁷

Dizzy Gillespie's big band followed close on the heels of Chubby Jackson arriving in Göteborg on January 26, 1948. The band had experienced a rough Atlantic crossing and arrived

⁷Lars Westin, liner notes, *Bebop Enters Sweden 1947 – 49: Dizzy Gillespie, Chubby Jackson, James Moody*, CD, Dragon of Sweden (Stockholm) 1997.

24-hours behind schedule and still slightly green with seasickness. The first Göteborg concert was scheduled for 8:30 that evening. The ship carrying the band entered the harbor around 10:00 p.m. A tugboat brought the band to the pier as quickly as possible and the concert went ahead – two and half-hours late. Most of the audience waited, wanting to be among the first in their country to hear these legendary performers. Over the following two weeks the Dizzy Gillespie Big Band covered much of Sweden, playing concerts in Stockholm, Örebro, Borlänge, Västerås, Gävle, Storvik, Norrköping, Malmö, Trarvel, and Prague.



Be-bop master Charles “Bird” Parker sits in with Lars Gullin, Simon Brehm and Rolf Larsson at Lindeska Valven in Stockholm, 1950.

Everywhere they played, the band was a big hit. Bandleader Gillespie states in his autobiography that “all over that small country the Swedes really dug the music.” He further states, “It wasn’t just the young crowd we’d get in the States, but people from six to sixty! We even saw old people on crutches

applauding and hollering. And the audience wouldn't stop until I put up my hand to announce the next tune. And then they'd be so quiet you could hear a pin drop. Musically everything was beautiful.”⁸

Elmon Wright, a trumpeter with Dizzy's band, agreed that they were treated beautifully and that Sweden was “a heck of an experience.” He reports that fans would meet them at the train station and follow them all over the towns, often waiting for them outside their hotels. Wright continues:

It got to be a bug there for awhile. But like I say, afterwards, I understood. Actually, they'd never seen black people before, but they love us, you know? Curiosity. And they'd wanna invite you to their house; they wanted you to stay. `You spend the night with us?' Beautiful people; we had a lovely time. Especially during that time, 1948, yes it was beautiful.⁹

One of Gillespie's star soloists, tenor saxophonist James Moody, was so taken with European audiences that he returned after the tour to live in Europe. He expatriated first to France, then moved to Stockholm. Moody had played in an U.S. Air Force band during the war and had finished his tour at a base in Greensboro, North Carolina where he encountered extreme racial prejudice. Moody found that a local café near the base was happy to serve German war prisoners who were furloughed into town, but they refused service to black soldiers in uniform.

Moody joined Dizzy's band upon leaving the Air Force and quickly became known as a great bebop soloist, but the prejudice he had witnessed in the service of his country continued to haunt him. When the band was so well received in Sweden and then across Europe, Moody felt he had found the place he wanted to remain and live, where he could be accepted first as a man and musician, not simply as a black man. French and Swedish jazz musicians alike were happy to welcome Moody into their ranks.

⁸Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, To Be or Not to Bop (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979) 328.

⁹ Dizzy Gillespie with Al Fraser, To Be or Not to Bop (New York: Da Capo Press, 1979) 329.

Ironically, it was James Moody's work in Sweden that brought him renewed fame in America.

Metronome Records of Sweden entered an agreement with Prestige Records in New York to market Sweden's jazzmen to the U.S. Two of the great bebop record albums imported in the Jazz from Sweden series were "James Moody's Greatest Hits" in 1949 and "More of James Moody's Greatest Hits" in 1951. Both long play recordings featured James Moody fronting a band of Swedish musicians well known in their own country, but little known in America.

A few jazz fans remembered Moody as the tenor soloist with the earlier Dizzy Gillespie band, but what now caught their attention was James Moody, the amazing lightning-fast bebop tenor man playing a slow ballad on the alto saxophone. At the first recording session, baritone saxophonist Lars Gullin, a sideman on the Moody date, listened to the playback of some ballads they had taped. Gullin told Moody they songs sounded "okay" but suggested Moody might improve his sound if he played alto sax instead of tenor. Gullin just happened to have an old alto sax of his own in his car, which he loaned to Moody, and the songs were recorded again. James Moody's Swedish recording of "I'm in the Mood For Love," played on Lars Gullin's old alto saxophone became an overnight top seller in America, and brought James Moody back home to New York. Jazz critic Ira Gittler years later explained it that "There is a peculiar attitude held by some Americans that something imported from Europe (even a native American jazz musician) is preferable to its U.S. counterpart."¹⁰ Whatever the case, the bebop jazzmen of Sweden helped make James Moody a star in his own country.

Fame crossed the ocean in both directions in those early years after the war. Two Swedes, Åke "Stan" Hasselgård and Rolf Ericsson, were to gain fame on the American jazz scene as disciples of bebop. Both men, already somewhat known in Sweden, found greater fame by traveling to America.

¹⁰Ira Gittler, liner notes, James Moody and the Swedish All-Stars Greatest Hits!, CD, Prestige Records, 1966.

Stan Hasselgård, born in 1922, received a clarinet for his sixteenth birthday. Three years later, while studying English and Art history at Uppsala, he won an amateur contest with a jazz group called The Royal Swingers. Hasselgård continued his studies while playing music as a sideline. In the summers, he played jazz professionally at some of Sweden's dance halls and resorts. He was soon to be considered one of the nation's top jazzmen. In March of 1947, Hasselgård had the opportunity to accompany members of Don Redman's orchestra, which was visiting Stockholm. Young Stan was exposed to bebop ideas and, although he was still primarily a "swing" style player emulating his idol Benny Goodman, Hasselgård found he had the technical ability to play bebop as fast as anyone.



Åke "Stan" Hasselgaard solos along side his idol, Benny Goodman in a New York concert, 1948

On graduating from Uppsala, young Hasselgård boarded the ocean liner Gripsholm headed for New York. His study of the English language made it easy to get around New York. He quickly found his way to The Famous Door, a Manhattan nightclub that featured jazz trombonist Jack Teagarden's band:

It was Hasselgård's first night in the Big City after a week at sea. The step he had taken wasn't by far as big musically as it was in miles or kilometers. Hasselgård, in fact, felt quite at home in the sextet led by Teagarden, who invited him to the stage on several occasions. "To play with (pianist

Sanford) Gold and (drummer Morey) Feld isn't far at all from what I'm used to from working with Swainis (Thore Swanerud) and Bertil (Frylmark),” he commented in a letter.¹¹

From New York, Hasselgård traveled to California where, in December of 1947, he recorded some tunes for Capitol Records and developed his style to a pronounced bebop flavor. The Capitol sides were “well received” in the jazz world. Benny Goodman heard this newcomer and became curious. By early '48, when Hasselgård returned to New York, he was developing a reputation in American jazz circles. His idol Benny Goodman sought him out and offered him a position in one of his own small groups.

“Benny must immediately have felt that here was a clarinet player, far more personal, far more interesting than any of the other clarinetists around, Goodman-influenced or not.”¹² Benny and Stan played side by side through the summer and fall of 1948 with other bebop stars like tenor saxophonist Wardell Gray and pianist Teddy Wilson. Recordings were made of this new Goodman Septet, including special government V-Discs to be aired to servicemen in Europe over the Armed Forces Radio Network. Soon Hasselgård was leading his own quintet at New York's Three Deuces Club on 52nd Street billed as “The be-bop king of Sweden.” Unfortunately, Stan Hasselgård's career was cut tragically short. The band decided to drive to series of jobs in California and, on November 22 near Decatur, Illinois, their car rolled over on an icy road. The 26-year-old be-bop king of Sweden died instantly.

Rolf Ericsson was also born in 1922. Already an accomplished trumpet player at age 11, Ericsson decided on a career in jazz after an uncle brought him to one of Louis Armstrong's Stockholm appearances in the early '30's. Ericsson's education was playing in many of the finest Swedish dance bands. When Americans began touring Sweden again in 1947, young Rolf decided he needed to go try

¹¹Lars Westin, liner notes, Stan Hasselgård, Cottontop 1946 – 1948, CD, Dragon Records, 1998

¹²Anders R Öhman, liner notes, The Permanent Hasselgård 1945 – 1948, CD, Phontastic Records, 1988

his luck in the land that produced so many great jazz players. Meeting up with Stan Hasselgård in New York, Rolf accompanied him to California where, after a few rough months, he landed a spot in the trumpet section of Charlie Barnet's big band. Rolf also toured America in the bands of Woody Herman and Charlie Ventura, two ensembles with a decided be-bop flavor.

In 1950, the Herman band brought Ericsson to New York where he was asked to fill in for trumpeter McKinley "Kenny" Dorham in Charlie Parker's quintet. "Yardbird" Parker was very impressed with Rolf Ericsson's playing and Parker decided to tour Sweden with Ericsson. Following the Parker tour, Ericsson found himself much in demand in his native land and he stayed for over a year performing with all Sweden's finest jazzmen and leading the house band at Stockholm's Nalen club.

In 1952, Ericsson again returned to California to play with be-boppers Dexter Gordon, Curtis Counce and Harold Land as well as in the big bands of Woody Herman, Stan Kenton, Maynard Ferguson and Harry James. He also became a well-known figure with the house band of The Lighthouse jazz club in Hermosa Beach, California. Over the years, Ericsson has been popular in both nations and has frequently moved back and forth to take full advantage of his international popularity. Ericsson continued creating great be-bop based jazz right up to his death in June of 1997.

III. Lars Gullin and Alice Babs Nilsson

Because of its popularity with the youth, many of Sweden's jazz players tried to emulate the bebop sound. While many became proficient "Be-boppers," the undisputed master of the medium in Sweden was Lars Gullin, a young baritone saxophonist and veteran of many local Stockholm dance bands.

Born Gunnar Victor Gullin at Visby on the island of Gotland on May 4, 1928, Lars states that he was touched by music as early as age three:

“Några kilometer från järnvägsstationen där vi bodde, fanns en liten folkpark med en gammeldansband av trä. Musiken kunde höras ända hem till oss. Det var en liten orkester med bl.a. fiol och dragspel som spelade ‘Den gamla moraklockan’, som var populär på den tiden. Jag kommer också ihåg att de spelade ‘Den gamla spinnrocken’. Jag stod alldeles stilla och upplevde det hela så intensivt, och jag sade till pappa att ‘när jag hör någonting så vackert, så känns det som om jag ville börja gråta’. (“Just a few kilometers from where we lived, by an old railroad station, there was a small folk-park with an old dancing floor of wood. The music could be heard all through our house. There was a small orchestra with violin and accordion that played “The Old Mother’s Time,” which was popular at the time. I also remember them playing “The Old Spinning Wheel.” I stood very still taking in the intense experience, and I said to Pappa that now I belong to something so beautiful I feel I will weep.”)¹³

Soon young Lars was studying piano, then violin and accordion. At age 13, he took up the bugle to join a local military band, where he later switched to the clarinet. At age 19, he moved to Stockholm planning to become classical pianist and composer. To support himself, Lars began playing piano in the bands at local dance clubs. Soon he was coaxed to play alto saxophone and clarinet in the dance bands as well. Within a year, bandleader Seymour Österwall aided Lars in acquiring a baritone sax and moved him into the baritone saxophone chair of his orchestra.

Lars still held out hopes for a classical career, but found himself more and more drawn to local jazz jam sessions. Then in 1950, the first two 78 records of the Miles Davis Nonet with Gerry Mulligan on baritone saxophone arrived in Sweden. Lars became serious about jazz as a career, and was soon

¹³Keith Knox and Gunnar Lindqvist, Jazz Amour Affair, En bok om Lars Gullin (Stockholm: SvenskMusik, 1986) 9.

being mentioned as a new star in Swedish jazz. Lars found every opportunity to meet and play with visiting American be-boppers like Lee Konitz, Zoot Sims and even “Yardbird” Parker himself.

American sax-man Lee Konitz developed a strong friendship with Gullin on his visits to Sweden. Gullin had listened extensively to the recordings of Lee Konitz and, when Konitz first came to Sweden in 1951, the two found they shared a sort of mutual admiration. It was a friendship that was renewed several times over the ensuing decades. The influence of Konitz the man as well as Konitz the musician set Lars all the more solidly into the be-bop genre.



Baritone saxophonist Lars “Lasse” Gullin

In the first years of the 1950’s Gullin’s records began to sell well in America and England. A scheduled tour of America was, however, never accomplished because Gullin admitted to heroin use and could not be granted a visa. In 1954, on the strength of his records alone, Gullin was voted the best new jazz star on baritone saxophone by Down Beat magazine in New York.

Gullin toured around Europe with the quartet of Americans, trumpeter Chet Baker and pianist Dick Twardzik, enjoying success across Germany, England and France. Baker was extremely impressed by Gullin’s fluid technique on the big baritone. In a 1985 interview Chet Baker told Swedish jazz critic Pär Rittsel, “The only baritone player that I was aware of was Gerry Mulligan. When I heard Lars, I thought, Jesus, there *is* another way of playing the baritone!”¹⁴

¹⁴Pär Rittsel, [Chet Baker Interview 1985](http://www.algonet.se/~rittset/jazz/Chet%20talks.htm), The Lars Gullin Society website, <http://www.algonet.se/~rittset/jazz/Chet%20talks.htm>

The French tour, however, ended in disaster. Pianist Twardzik didn't show up for a recording session. Lars went to Twardzik's hotel and found him dead of an overdose, the blood-filled hypodermic needle still in his arm. Twardzik was only 24-years old. It has been speculated that Gullin and Baker might have gone on to great things together, but Twardzik's death cut short the tour. Lars returned to Sweden and Baker to America. Gullin continued playing bebop and cool jazz, recording with other stars like Stan Getz, Rolf Ericsson and James Moody. But in his composing, Gullin started experimenting with the Swedish folk tunes he remembered from his boyhood:

“Det är rena bluesmelodier – de flesta av dem är inte komponerade i vanlig mening. De har hållits vid liv och utvecklats från generation till generation av svenska spelmän. Det finns en sällsam melankoli och längtan i musiken, som också återfinns i den svenska naturen – det känner man i musiken från många landskap.” (“These were pure blues melodies – most of them, I believe, were not written out. They were full of life and changed from generation to generation of Swedish players. There's a happy melancholy and a longing in the music, like you find in nature around Sweden – a man can feel many landscapes in the music.”)¹⁵

Jazz based on folk music pulled strongly at the hearts of Swedes and others were soon copying the idea. Lars was now not only the bebop king of Sweden, but also the founder of a whole new jazz sound unique to the cold northern clime. In 1955 and '56 his celebrity increased across Europe and his name started appearing in Swedish history books as the man who created “true Swedish jazz.”

Gullin's drug use, however, began to take a toll on his health. He was also developing a reputation of unreliability. Clubs and concert promoters across Scandinavia and Europe were hesitant to book Lars' group as they couldn't count on him to show up. Drug use and poor health also kept Lars

¹⁵Keith Knox and Gunnar Lindqvist, Jazz Amour Affair, En bok om Lars Gullin (Stockholm: Svensk Musik, 1986) 9.

from the recording studio. Gullin attempted a comeback in 1959 moving to Italy where he recorded with local Italian jazzmen and renewed his association with American Chet Baker. The re-emergence was brief. Within a year, Gullin was reduced to the role of janitor in a Copenhagen, Denmark jazz club.

Gullin attempted several more come backs, but each time drug abuse interfered. Gullin lost his teeth, a real tragedy for any horn player, before he finally realized that heroin had to go from his life. Finally, in the late 1960's, Lars got his life back on track, began creating great music again and appears to have conquered his drug habit. As he quit the drugs, however, he gained a considerable amount of weight and eventually, in May of 1976, his heart gave out. Lars Gullin was dead at age 48.

Although he had some long periods in which he created little, Lars kept his ability to play great jazz. Recording done only months before his untimely death demonstrate very fine jazz ideas and an amazing command of his instrument right to the end.

Alice "Babs" Nilsson also ranks among Sweden's top artists that embraced the new jazz sound from America. A child protégé of the Swedish film industry, Alice at age sixteen starred in the 1939 film "Swing It Magistern" where she acquired the nickname "Babs." One of the greatest men of jazz, Duke Ellington, talks about Alice Babs in his autobiography as he found her voice to be a magnificent Ellington instrument. In the Duke's words, "This voice embodies all the warmth, joy of life, rhythm and tragedy that, for me, is the innermost secret of jazz."¹⁶

Born in 1924 in Kalmar, Sweden, the young Alice is often photographed as a teen-ager playing drums or vibraphone as well as singing with dance bands. Before Alice, Sweden had very few singers influenced by jazz. Young Alice obviously had a feeling for the music as well as an exceptional voice.

¹⁶Frank Hedman, liner notes, Alice Babs: Serenading Duke Ellington, LP, Prophone, 1975.

According to jazz historian Jan Bruèr, “now for the first time the nation had a singer who approached American swing music with the right feeling.”¹⁷



Alice “Babs” Nilsson plays a melody for accordianist Erik Frank’s Quintet; Sven Gustafsson-Garder, Allan Johansson, Romeo Sjöberg, Erik Frank and Johnny Bossman, April 1942

In 1944, Alice recorded a song entitled “One Hundred per cent (All American)” with Thore Ehrling’s orchestra voicing the feeling of many Swedish youths that they were very taken with all things from the U.S. After the war, when be-bop oriented jazzmen came to Sweden, Babs mastered the art of “Scat” singing using her voice like an improvising instrument. Her 1959 recording Alice and Wonderband on, Swedish RCA Records, boasts two great be-bop style solo tunes, “No word blues” and “No name blues.”

Although Babs’ English pronunciations were not very good, she had only studied the language for a couple of school terms, she became the voice of American jazz to the many be-bop fans of Sweden. In 1963, Babs performed with Duke Ellington for a Swedish television program, beginning what was to be a long collaboration with the Duke. Alice acknowledged that Duke had been a mentor of her from the start of her career via his many phonograph records. Alice recalls that Duke also encouraged her at their first meeting “He said: You can do it - and you found out that you could.”¹⁸

¹⁷Jan Bruèr and Bengt Nyquist, Svensk Jazzhistoria Vol. 3, Rytin och Swing, 57.

¹⁸Frank Hedman, liner notes, Alice Babs: Serenading Duke Ellington, LP, Prophone, 1975.

Babs toured with Duke often through the rest of Ellington's life. She performed with the Ellington Orchestra across Europe and America. In 1968, she was the soloist for the premier of Duke Ellington's "Second Sacred Concert" in New York. In 1973, she joined Ellington at the Newport Jazz Festival and later that year performed as chief soloist for Duke's "Third Sacred Concert" in London's Westminster Abbey. At Duke Ellington's New York funeral, Alice Babs voice filled the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine singing the song "Heaven."

To this day, Alice Babs continues to perform both swing and modern jazz with many of Sweden's jazz greats, young and old alike. Her voice is still very fine and her rhythm and musical sense of humor are both as excellent as when her career began. Although she is not as well known in America, she is certainly as master of jazz music.

IV. Expatriates and Dual Citizens

In the 1950's and 1960's, a number of Americans chose Sweden as a base of operations. Some took up temporary residence, but others chose to become citizens of Sweden or its neighbor, Denmark. Some were of Swedish decent, like Stan Getz and Jack Norén but others were Americans fed up with racial or other political issues in the U.S.A.

Probably the best known musician to expatriate was tenor saxophonist Stan Getz. Born February 22, 1927 in Philadelphia to recently immigrated Swedish parents, Getz began playing in big bands as a teenager. As many musicians were off serving in World War II, there was a shortage of good musicians at home. Getz got experience with name bands like Jack Teagarden, Benny Goodman, Woody Herman and Stan Kenton. By 1949, he was a bandleader in his own right. While on tour of Sweden in 1951 with his own band, Getz met and married a Swedish girl.

Like many jazzmen of the time, however, Getz began experimenting with drugs. He was soon addicted to heroin with his drug use taking a toll on his music. In 1954, Getz attempted to rob a pharmacy in Seattle to obtain drugs. The woman behind the counter in the drug store laughed at him, telling him she didn't believe he had a gun. Getz panicked and fled, but later telephoned the pharmacy to apologize for his attempted hold-up. The telephone call was traced to Getz' hotel room, he was subsequently arrested and he attempted suicide by drug overdose as the police were at his door to take him away. Getz wrote a long letter to the editors of *Downbeat Magazine* explaining and apologizing to his many fans for his actions. In his letter, he said he'd had enough of narcotics and was going to change his life. As he told *Downbeat* in his letter:

When I came out of the coma three days later, with a breathing-tube inserted in my trachea, I realized that the doctors at Harbor Haven County Hospital had other ideas. God didn't want to kill me. This was his warning. Next time I'm sure he won't let me live. As I lay there alive, not wanting to live because of what I had done to my loved ones and all the people who had tried to help me, the nurse came in with a good many letters, telegrams, and 'phone messages – all saying the same thing. They told me not to despair, that they admired my music, that I should pray as they were praying for me, and, most important, that they forgave me.¹⁹

Drug addiction proved more difficult to Getz, however, than he had anticipated. With his wife pointing out that drug addiction was considered a medical problem in Sweden, the Getz family moved to the south of Sweden and Stan became a fixture on the Scandinavian jazz scene. He found plenty of work in the dance halls and summer gardens around Stockholm and other Swedish cities. Eventually, Getz became a regular fixture at the Montmartre Jazz Club in Copenhagen, just across the Baltic from his

¹⁹Stan Getz, letter to the editor of *Downbeat Magazine*, 21 April 1954.

Swedish home. By the end of the 50's, Stan moved his family over to Denmark and then, in the early 60's, they moved back to America.

While in Sweden, Getz told Jazz Review critic Nat Hentoff about living in Scandinavia “for a professional musician and his family – the Scandinavian life is unprecedentedly relaxing and fulfilling. There is, first of all, a marked decrease in the high speed tension that characterizes more and more of American urban life.” He goes on to cite national health care, low unemployment and the fact that one doesn't need a new car every year to achieve social status as positive features of Scandinavian life, summing up that the system “Enables anyone to be treated by the best doctors free of charge.”²⁰

With the help of the Scandinavian health care system, Getz appears to have overcome his heroin addiction. On his return to the U.S. he became a bigger star than ever. What brought him his ultimate recognition was, however, music he found in Brazil. The Bossa Nova craze of the early 60's put Stan Getz in front of the largest possible jazz audiences in both America and across Europe. Although he overcame his heroin addiction, Getz continued to have problems with alcohol and he died of liver disease in 1991 at his home in Malibu, California.

Another Swedish American jazz star, though lesser-known in American circles, was Chicago-born drummer Jack Norén. Right after the war, in 1946, 17-year-old Jack traveled to Sweden to visit his father's family. Young Jack was already proficient in the be-bop style of drumming and found he was popular at local Swedish jam sessions. Jack also found himself in demand as he spoke good English as well as Swedish and could serve as interpreter between locals and visiting American musicians like Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker and Lee Konitz. Jack chose to stay in Stockholm. He soon had a permanent position as drummer for the dance band of brothers Seymour and Arthur Österwall, the house band at Stockholm's Nalen jazz club.

²⁰Nat Hentoff, liner notes, Imported From Europe – Stan Getz, LP, Verve Records, 1958.

Jack Norèn was hailed as the first modern-styled drummer on the Swedish music scene. In 1950, he was voted Jazz Musician of the Year in Sweden. The next year, Jack teamed up with baritone saxophonist Lars Gullin further solidifying his place in Sweden's music history. Jack was the drummer on many of the recordings that brought Lars Gullin to the attention of an international jazz audience.

Gullin's first wife, Berit, credits Jack Norèn with instilling the self confidence Lars Gullin needed to become a major performing artist:

Han hade inte något riktigt självförtroende, kanske var det något som han aldrig fått i sin barndom. i varje fall såblev alla de här dragen i Lars personlighet förstärkta. Sedan kom Jack Norèn in i bilden, jeg antar att han var den bästa trumslagaren vid en tiden. Jack var tuff och rökte hasch or erbjöd Lars lite att pröva. Och sedan starkare saker. Under hela den här tiden var Lars och Jack bästa kompisar. (He <Lars> had no self-confidence, perhaps there was something missing in his childhood. In various personal downfalls he was made to doubt his own abilities. Then Jack Norèn came into the picture. I believe he was the best drummer around at the time. Jack was tough and smoked hashish and offered Lars some to try. It helped Lars gain his self-confidence and from that time Lars and Jack were the best of companions).²¹

Jack Norèn lived and performed in Sweden through most of the 1950's when he returned to his native Chicago. He played for awhile with Pianist Eddie Higgin's trio and led various groups of his own around the American mid-west, but never gained the stature in America that he enjoyed in Sweden and across Europe.

Trumpeter Ernest "Benny" Bailey, born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1925, was a member of the Dizzy Gillespie band that toured Sweden in 1948. Benny liked what he found in Sweden. He enjoyed the open

²¹Keith Knox and Gunnar Lindqvist, Jazz Amour Affair. En bok om Lars Gullin (Stockholm: Svensk Musik, 1986) 36.

racial attitude of the Swedish fans and the reception that jazz received in the small nation. In 1953, he returned to Sweden with the band of vibraphonist Lionel Hampton. He quickly decided that Sweden would be a much happier place to live and work and returned after the Hampton tour finished to make his home in Stockholm.

Benny had been brought up in a musical family, his mother playing piano and his father, saxophone. Bailey studied music at Cleveland's Central High School, but began his real education on the road at age 16 with big bands of Bullmoose Jackson, Scatman Crothers and Jay McShan. By the time that he expatriated to Sweden, he was a seasoned section player and one of the finest soloists in the new be-bop style. Benny was in demand all over Europe and quickly became a featured performer with Harry Arnold's Swedish Radio Band. Benny was also a fixture at jazz festivals all over Europe and often toured and soloed with the 17-piece jazz band of Kenny Clarke-Francis Boland from 1961 to 1972.

Although he has made brief trips back to the U.S. to play with Quincy Jones and others, Bailey prefers life in Europe and currently resides in Amsterdam. His playing is still strong and very much in demand all across the continent.

Reed-man Sahib Shihab was another American who left his mark on jazz in Sweden. Born Edmond Gregory in Savannah, Georgia in 1925, Sahib was one of the first American jazzmen to embrace the Muslim faith (1947). An excellent saxophonist and one of the first musicians to play in the be-bop style on the flute, Shihab is best known for his work on the baritone saxophone.

Young Edmond Gregory began traveling professionally with road bands at age 13. When he was 16, he was able to enroll in the Boston Conservatory. By the late 1940's, Gregory had become Sahib Shihab and was exploring the early concepts of be-bop with one of its founders, Thelonious Monk.

Shihab first came to Sweden in 1959 with the band of Quincy Jones. From that point on, he made his home base between Stockholm and Copenhagen, Denmark. From 1963 to 1972, Shihab held down

the baritone saxophone chair with the Kenny Clarke – Francie Boland Big Band. He was also very much in demand across Europe and recorded with Sweden’s own baritone sax genius Lars Gullin.

Diagnosed with lung cancer in 1988, Shihab returned to the U.S. and died in Chattanooga, Tennessee in October of 1989. Shihab pioneered a style of playing flute while humming a harmonic tone that became popular in the 1960’s. He had a full, brash sound on the baritone, often taking the big horn down to the bottom of its low register for effect. He played in a strong be-bop style right up to his death.

A later expatriate was Keith “Red” Mitchell. Red toured Sweden in 1954 with a group that included Singer Billie Holiday. It is reported that Red shared a taxi with Miss Holiday on a sightseeing venture around Stockholm. Holiday asked, “Take us to the slum area, I want to see the slums!”²² The cab driver replied that Stockholm had no slums. This reply made a permanent impression on young Mitchell. He would think about it often over the next few years as he watched racial and economic unrest in the larger American cities. Born in New York City in 1927, Red studied piano. The U.S. Army band in Germany in which Red served in 1946 suddenly found itself without a string bass player. Red was asked to learn the bass and fill the position. From that time on, the bass became Red’s primary instrument. After his release from the army, Red began touring with big bands including Chubby Jackson, Charlie Ventura and Woody Herman. In 1954, he settled in Los Angeles where he found steady work in the motion picture and television studios as well as work with various “West Coast” school jazz groups. Mitchell also co-led his own be-bop style band with saxophonist Harold Land. From the many well-known jazz-men he accompanied, including Charlie Parker and Red Norvo, Red picked up the be-bop style in his playing which complimented the “West Coast Cool” he helped to pioneer.

²²Lars Westin, liner notes, Mitchell, Milder, Kellaway Live in Stockholm, CD, Dragon Records, 1993.

By the late 1960's, Red was growing tired of work in the studios. He wanted to concentrate more on jazz, but the new British Rock and Roll music was the sound in demand. As Swedish jazz critic Lars Westin had retold it:

Disappointed about the (American) political and social developments, he joined the Peace and Freedom (political) Party. At the same time, however, he felt that he unwillingly contributed to the increasing commercialism and the violent atmosphere in American society by working on TV commercials and in music for the movies. Therefore he decided to move away from it all and make Sweden his home base.²³

Red was serious about the move. By night, he played with Swedish jazz musicians in clubs and concerts while by day he attended school to master the Swedish language. Westin reports that "In a short time, he spoke our language fluently."²⁴ Red also provided inspiration to many young Swedish musicians both musically and personally. He performed in large and small groups throughout Sweden and Europe. He also returned to his piano roots when other work wasn't available, playing and singing in piano bars around Stockholm. Red became not only a Swede, but also a full time jazz player. He stressed that the key to good music, as in life itself, was "communication." To broaden his musical palette, Red experimented with tuning his bass in fifths, in the manner that a cello is tuned. This gave him a wider range and a fuller sound for jazz improvisation. Also, like Jack Norèn before him, Red became a communication link between Swedish players and visiting Americans, translating their conversations and ideas.

Red Mitchell remained in Sweden for 24 years. In 1992, his health deteriorating, Red moved to Salem, Oregon to join family members. He died there of a stroke in November of that same year. He left

²³Lars Westin, liner notes, Mitchell, Milder, Kellaway Live in Stockholm, CD, Dragon Records, 1993.

²⁴Lars Westin, liner notes, Mitchell, Milder, Kellaway Live in Stockholm, CD, Dragon Records, 1993.

a legacy of great recordings. Among his large volume of work are solo piano recordings, solo bass recordings, duets with both Swedish and American jazz luminaries and recordings with larger jazz groups. Although a late comer on the Stockholm jazz scene, Red's influence was probably as great or greater than any other American born artist.

V. Jazz in Sweden Today

Social structures, as well as social and political attitudes in Sweden have helped jazz to flourish in Sweden as in much of Scandinavia and Europe. Government sponsorship of the arts along with an education system that teaches music appreciation also aids in creating a climate where young people are exposed to all types of music, not just that which is commercially popular. In many ways, jazz music has fared far better in Sweden than in its native America. Most towns, no matter how small or remote, have a town band and most these town bands play swing and jazz music. Larger towns and cities are quite likely to sponsor a local annual jazz festival where musicians from around the nation perform as well as visiting jazz stars from America and the European continent.

Jazz in Sweden today owes a sizable debt to the be-bop music America exported in the 1940's, 50's and early 60's. While America by the mid 60's had largely turned away from jazz as a popular commercial format, young Swedes continued to play the music of Dizzy Gillespie and Charlie Parker and a commercial market for jazz continued to exist if not flourish throughout Sweden. As Mike Zwerin commented in the *Oxford Companion to Jazz*, "Americans taught the Europeans to play it. Once they learned, they distilled and added to it until they felt they no longer needed Americans hanging around

²⁵Zwerin, Mike. Jazz in Europe: the Real World Music . . . or the Full Circle, ed. Bill Kirchner, The Oxford Companion to Jazz, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000) 534.

taking their gigs.”²⁴ Zwerin adds that Swedes like Lars Gullin, Åke Persson and Stan Hasselgaard “copied American mistakes as well as attributes. They accepted the risks as well as the rewards of the lifestyle and they died young.”²⁵

In Sweden, bebop style jazz along with big-band swing has continued to hold audiences’ attention over the past forty years, and remains popular today. Three generations of jazz musicians continue the tradition. Jazz seniors like saxophonist Arne Domnèrus, guitarist Rune Gustafsson, pianist Charlie Norman and Alice Babs play today along side musicians that followed them from the 1960’s and ’70’s like saxophone master Bernt Rosengren, organist Kjell Öhman, along with trumpet kings Jan Allan and Allan Botchinsky. These men are often joined, as well as bettered, by the new generation of jazz stars including names like sax-lady Amanda Sedgewick, drummer Fredrik Norèn, pianist Elise Einarsdatter and tenor-man Joachim Milder.

“Jazz is still a music for intellectuals, minority music, not for everyone,” Mike Zwerin tells us. “But more people in more places than ever are dealing with it, and it gives them a great deal of joy.”²⁷

For a nation of its relative small size, Sweden has produced a disproportionately large number of world-class jazz musicians and provided a home base to many more. Beside the Americans mentioned in the above text, others from around the world have found Sweden the globe’s most conducive climate for the creation of jazz music. World jazz musicians now residing and playing regularly in Sweden include Turkish-born players trumpeter Ikmet “Maffy” Falay and drummer Okay Temiz, Czechoslovakian bassist

²⁶Zwerin, Mike. Jazz in Europe: the Real World Music . . . or the Full Circle, ed. Bill Kirchner, The Oxford Companion to Jazz, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000) 541.

²⁷Zwerin, Mike. Jazz in Europe: the Real World Music . . . or the Full Circle, ed. Bill Kirchner, The Oxford Companion to Jazz, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2000) 545.

and composer Georg Riedel and Cuban drummer Louis “Sabu” Martinez. Although he returned to his native Norway shortly before his death in 1991, tenor sax-man Bjarne Nerem spent most his life playing jazz in the Stockholm area.

Jazz fever caught Sweden from the start. Swing music from the 1930’s and ’40’s fanned the flames. But the Bebop style that followed the Second World War put the small Scandinavian nation of Sweden on the music map of jazz history, where it remain to this day one of the world’s top locations for excellent creative improvised music.

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