



Transnational Studies in Jazz

SWEDISH JAZZ IN THE UNITED STATES

SWEDE AND COOL

Mischa van Kan



Swedish Jazz in the United States

Swedish Jazz in the United States: Swede and Cool traces and analyzes the dissemination and reception of jazz from Sweden in the United States during the period of 1947–1963. It maps the networks through which Swedish record companies exchanged recordings with their American counterparts, establishing an American interest in Swedish jazz at a time long regarded as a predominantly American era. Exploring these Swedish-American exchanges—rather than the canonized names in jazz—shines a light on new perspectives in the genre, clarifying the ways in which Swedish jazz was adapted to the American market and how it was understood in an American context. The result is an opportunity to consider the challenges national borders present in a global jazz world while reflecting on the genre’s expanding transnational reach during the 1950s.

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Series Foreword

Since the 1990s the study of jazz has changed dramatically, as the field continues to open up to a variety of disciplinary perspectives and critical models. Today, as the music's meaning undergoes profound changes, there is a pressing need to situate jazz within an international research context and to develop theories and methods of investigation which open up new ways of understanding its cultural significance and its place within different historical and social settings.

The Transnational Studies in Jazz Series presents the best research from this important and exciting area of scholarship, and features interdisciplinary and international perspectives on the relationships between jazz, society, politics, and culture. The series provides authors with a platform for rethinking the methodologies and concepts used to analyze jazz, and will seek to work across disciplinary boundaries, finding different ways of examining the practices, values and meanings of the music. The series explores the complex cultural and musical exchanges that have shaped the global development and reception of jazz. Contributors will focus on studies of the music which find different ways of telling the story of jazz with or without reference to the United States, and will investigate jazz as a medium for negotiating global identities.

Tony Whyton
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This book focuses on a period of time that I, myself, have not experienced first-hand. Therefore, in addition to the indispensable interviews with those who lived through the period, various collections at institutions that safeguard the cultural heritage of jazz comprised an important prerequisite for accessing and understanding its history. I particularly want to thank the following institutions that I visited and consulted for this project, and from which I have received a great deal of help: the former music department at the National Library in Helsinki, Finland; Jazzinstitut Darmstadt in Germany; the Institute of Jazz Studies at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey; the New York Public Library; and the Centre for Swedish Folk Music and Jazz Research in Stockholm, Sweden. I also want to thank Peter Dahlgren and Karin Wergel for access to Claes Dahlgren's archive as well as Matthew Snyder, who was kind enough to ask George Avakian some questions on my behalf.

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Introduction

During the late 1940s, discussions of Swedish musicians, ensembles, and music scenes began to appear in the American jazz press. An increasing variety of recordings that were made in Sweden were issued on the American record market and sold to an American audience, and during this period, the term *Swedish jazz* became a meaningful category in the United States. The primary aim of this book is to trace the dissemination of Swedish jazz in the United States during the period 1947–63 and to analyze its reception among jazz audiences and critics. Another goal is to examine the complexity of Swedish jazz, considering the ways in which it became regarded as a distinct style or sound and exploring the ways it was perceived in different places. I also want to use the reception of Swedish jazz in the United States to consider how the idea of what jazz was in a global context began to change in this period. Connected to this are wider questions about the links between music and nation-states, especially in relation to notions such as nationality, ethnicity, and race. First, I focus on how Swedish jazz entered the American record market and how it became noticed. Second, I consider the meanings that were associated with Swedish jazz in the United States.

To understand how Swedish jazz emerged in the United States, the book will trace the central actors that mediated this transnational exchange. Not only did the people involved make agreements about selling Swedish jazz records, but they also influenced the ways in which Swedish jazz was presented to the American market. This book investigates the various ideas that were connected to Swedish jazz and how these ideas changed over time. As jazz was generally regarded as a quintessential American product at this time, a thought-provoking point of discussion is how American observers thought that Swedish jazz related to American jazz.

The story of Swedish jazz in the United States began when the Swedish clarinet player Åke Hasselgård moved to the United States in 1947. Trumpet player Rolf Eriksson made the Atlantic crossing the same year, and both were noted in the press as jazz musicians.¹ Their journey coincides with the revival of tours by American musicians to Sweden following the end of World War II. Over the next 15 years, there was a particular interest in jazz from Sweden among Americans. This interest peaked in

2 Introduction

the early 1950s and resulted, for example, in 23 issued records in 1953. By the end of that decade, however, the number of imported jazz records from Sweden began to decline. For example, in the early 1960s, pianist Jan Johansson recorded a series of EPs, which were also issued on LP in 1963. Although these recordings were highly regarded in Sweden (his LP became the biggest-selling jazz record in Sweden), in the United States, this work was not issued or noted.

The practical definition of Swedish jazz in the United States that I have used in the following discussion is that the music was recorded in Sweden and issued in the United States during the period in focus (1947–63). This selection leaves out certain recordings that can also be considered as belonging to Swedish jazz. For example, the recordings Åke Hasselgård made in the United States in 1948 are regarded as part of the American jazz scene rather than the Swedish one. Drummer Nils-Bertil Dahlander, who used the name Bert Dale in the United States, also released an LP called “Skål” (Verve MG-V 8253), which was “imported” from Sweden but recorded in Los Angeles in 1957. These recordings are excluded from the figures of Swedish recordings sold in the United States, as they focus on a transnational exchange of jazz recorded in Sweden. They were, however, relevant for the American understanding of Swedish jazz and are therefore included in the discussion here of how Sweden and Swedish jazz were made meaningful in the United States.

The difficulties of defining the national borders of a jazz scene—the grouping together of jazz musicians, their recordings, and all the other activities related to them, according to specific practices, qualities, or characteristics—become evident here. By discussing Swedish jazz as such and in relation to its transnational connections in the United States, these national borders are constructed in this book as well. The analysis, however, also engages with the challenges of following national borders in the definition of Swedish jazz, and these are discussed at length.

This book is indebted to the shift in jazz scholarship that promotes an interdisciplinary approach for studying jazz, often referred to as *new jazz studies*. The critical approach to the jazz canon, as advocated by Scott DeVeaux (DeVeaux 1991) and the discursive turn in the study of jazz, represented by Krin Gabbard’s (1995) and John Gennari’s (2006) critical investigations of jazz criticism, have all been indispensable for developing an understanding of jazz, both inside and outside of the United States. These works have challenged the established narratives of jazz and opened the door to critical examination of the canon and its construction.

At the same time, jazz scholars all over the world have shown the relevance of local, non-American jazz cultures. Much of the existing research on jazz scenes in Europe, however, has primarily focused on the local importance or adaptations of jazz. In discussions of jazz outside of the United States, the global importance of these local scenes is often limited to jazz appreciation; the musical production of jazz outside of the United States is often only deemed important on a global scale in the late 1950s,

when bossa nova had its breakthrough, or in the 1960s, when European musicians took free jazz into new directions.

The Construction of Swedish Jazz

The specific perspective of the book—the American dissemination and reception of Swedish jazz—raises the importance of avoiding the proclamation of a musical essence that would define Swedish jazz as such. Instead, it focuses on how Swedish jazz was distributed, sold, and received in the United States and how these processes constructed an American idea of Swedish jazz. This does not mean that Swedish jazz does not have any musical characteristics; because it appeared on records in the United States, it could be listened to, but the musical characteristics do not directly answer the question of how Swedish jazz was understood in the United States at the time it was introduced. In other words, the book investigates how ideas of Swedish jazz and related understandings of nationality, ethnicity, racial affiliation, and gender, among others, were constructed in the United States, rather than existing as an essential part of Swedish jazz music.

Rather than seeing these categories as comprising an essence, this book investigates them as performative actions that produce, reproduce, regulate, and confine American ideas or fantasies of Swedish jazz. Because the networks through which Swedish jazz was disseminated in the United States were different from those in Sweden, ideas of what Swedish jazz is became different in the United States from those held in Sweden. By following Swedish jazz as it crossed the borders to the United States, this book raises the importance of transnational perspectives on jazz. The arguments herein follow the thinking of scholars like Micol Seigel (2005), who have argued that historical research should not be confined to national borders, but should critically relate to them, and that jazz scholarship needs to consider that the object of study does not fit neatly into a single set of borders. Instead, it crosses borders in various ways and directions; it disregards them, disputes them, and even abolishes them. This affects not only the music but also the various ideas of what it means to be Swedish, which—based on how these ideas are presented to specific audiences—can be interpreted and received in different ways.

A transnational perspective also means that this book critically explores ideas of how Swedish jazz relates to American jazz and jazz from other European countries. These processes of inclusion and exclusion also reveal the ideologies connected to jazz in the United States. One of the ways in which American jazz ideologies can be investigated is through a focus on the racial imagination connected to Swedish jazz and jazz, in general. This concept, introduced by Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman, theorizes how bodies are thought to be different and regards the ideas of these bodies as constructed based on ideologies. They define racial imagination as “the shifting matrix of ideological constructions of difference associated with body type

and color that have emerged as part of the discourse network of modernity” (Radano and Bohlman 2000, 5). Although primarily aimed at investigating ideas of blackness in music, the concept can be used for exploring the perceived or imagined whiteness of Swedish jazz musicians. This racial imagination influences ideas about different bodies as having certain characteristics, which has implications for musicianship in jazz.

This study also considers the way jazz—a culture that has been traditionally dominated by men and in which women have been forced into specific roles—is connected to gender identities. More specifically, it is interesting to ask what specific masculinity types are associated with Swedish jazz. As Barbara Ehrenreich argues, it might not be the predominant notion of masculinity at that time—or rather, “not the power lawn mower, but the hi-fi set in mahogany console” (Ehrenreich 1983, 50). Masculine role types can be connected to Swedish jazz listeners, as well as to how Swedish jazz musicians were described in the American jazz press. What kind of American man were record companies targeting as an audience for, and consumers of, Swedish jazz? How did these men deal with the cultural expectations imposed on them, and how did this relate to Swedish jazz? Is there a connection here to the collapse of the ideology of men as breadwinners?

As most Swedish jazz musicians did not get permission from the American Federation of Musicians (AFM) to perform in the United States, Swedish jazz became a meaningful category of music in the United States despite the absence of visits or tours of Swedish musicians. The lack of live performances indicates that it was not only musicians comprising the relevant group of actors who established the idea of Swedish jazz in the United States; there must have been other actors involved and other forces at play. The most important imperative then is to follow Swedish jazz and the various actors involved as they moved across the borders, implementing Swedish jazz as a meaningful presence in the United States.

The construct of Swedish jazz exists as a result of the efforts of a great number of people. It involves a world that not only includes jazz musicians but also, for example, the manufacturers and distributors of records, critics, and so on (Becker 1982, 2–5). It is not an aim of this book to downplay the role of the Swedish jazz musicians, but it is worth realizing that it was not only the artists who established the genre; many other people were involved—for example, those who developed the packaging of the records or who wrote about the music. This way of seeing jazz as a part of a larger art world is central to my use of the term *jazz world* or references to the existence of a specific Swedish or American jazz world; it encompasses all the various actors and debates about what is and is not jazz.

The understanding that many different people were involved in the scene, in addition to objects and media (such as records), packaging, and magazines, indicates the existence of a wider network around Swedish jazz. In response to this, Actor-Network theory has provided the inspiration to map this network and investigate how it connects the various

objects and actors involved. Actor–Network theory situates this historical study of the music within a cultural history of interactions, where all actors contributing to the network are considered, and not just the aesthetic objects, as Benjamin Piekut has pointed out (2014, 207–08).

Latour’s rejection of a (post-)structuralism that already knows the shape of the objects it researches debouches into a quest for empiricism as he asks, “Where are the structural effects actually being produced?” (Latour 2005, 175). To avoid reproducing pre-determined ontologies, such as the now established idea of a specific Nordic tone that is typical of Swedish jazz, the primary inspiration that this book has taken from Actor–Network theory is its requirement that the research stays close to the actors and follows how networks, through the involved actors, create different realities. Before conclusions are drawn about the dissemination and reception of Swedish jazz in the United States, the involved actors should have a chance to give their accounts.

Actor–Network theory is often criticized for missing habitual patterns of associations that are widely distributed, such as race and gender. With its incentive of “following the actors” (Latour 2005, 68), there is a risk of only reconstructing ideas from the actors who spoke the loudest. A critical approach to the network is thus necessary to avoid reproducing thoughts and ideas from the period in focus. As Piekut argues (paraphrasing Latour), “associations do not hold together because they are true, but *because they hold together* we say that they are true” (Piekut 2014, 200). The collected material related to the dissemination and reception of Swedish jazz in the United States is central to this book. This empirical material is allowed to exist in its own specific way and will be presented as such. After it is presented, however, it will be discussed with a focus on several key issues that allow for critical engagement with the accounts.

The following chapter traces actors in the network through which Swedish jazz came to the United States and lets them speak. It engages with the points of contact between the Swedish and the American record industry in the postwar period and describes how Swedish recordings came onto the American record market. The chapter identifies the different actors involved in this network and traces their actions, mapping how they relate to other actions. Based on this media attention, I discuss how Swedish jazz was received as such—a Swedish form of jazz in relation to an American form of jazz at a time when the idea of jazz as a more global phenomenon was rising. Finally, the chapter focuses in more detail on the extent to which Swedish recordings were available in the United States in the period in focus.

The second chapter discusses the analysis of liner notes and record covers that I put to use in four detailed case studies of Swedish jazz records that were issued in the United States. After that, a broader variety of records that include Swedish jazz is discussed in relation to hi-fi culture and the new masculine identity that arose in the 1950s. This section widens the case studies to the broader material of records with Swedish jazz and

identifies other Swedish phenomena to which Swedish jazz was related in the United States and investigates what was thought to be the Swedish jazz audience in the United States.

Chapter 3 engages with the topics that the previous chapter has indicated to be of importance. By critically engaging with central concepts of nationality, ethnicity, race, gender, and hipness, it offers different perspectives as it engages with a more general image of Swedish jazz in the United States. The chapter also examines the ways in which Swedish jazz is related to the ideologies of jazz that are shared by some of the central actors in the jazz world.

In the concluding chapter, I return to the central aims of this study and discuss the extent to which it has provided answers that are relevant beyond the particular case study of Swedish jazz. I deal with the risk of simplifying the idea of the jazz world by following national borders, and I argue how the contacts between Sweden and the United States were relevant for both countries. Finally, I engage with the different ways this exchange was made meaningful in both the United States and Sweden, and how the idea of Swedish jazz was different in Sweden than it was in the United States.

Note

- 1 Both musicians changed their names when they were in the United States—Åke Hasselgård took Stan Hasselgard as his new name and Rolf Eriksson started to write his last name as Ericson.

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1 Swingin' Swedes in the United States

This chapter maps how Swedish jazz entered the American record market and traces several actors and their actions in this process. It identifies the central sites of discursive formation and maps the associations that are connected to Swedish jazz. I analyze how particular historical and economic circumstances directly influenced Swedish-American contact and explore the actions of American jazz critics and other actors in the jazz world, such as those working for record companies. I will also analyze the relationship between American and Swedish jazz as it was conceptualized in the American jazz press and detail the extent to which Swedish jazz entered the American record market.

The period in focus is not a historical vacuum, and the notion of an existing jazz scene in Sweden was not unique to the postwar era. Duke Ellington, for example, wrote his “Serenade to Sweden” after visiting the country in 1939.¹ Around World War II, the American jazz press was silent about jazz from Sweden; however, after the war, reports about the jazz scene in Sweden became more frequent than ever before, and it is this period that is in focus here.

1.1 Jazz and Sweden after the War

What were the earliest mentions of Sweden in the specialized US jazz press? And what kind of interest was there in the United States for jazz in Sweden and, from a larger perspective, in Europe? The dominant US jazz magazine *Down Beat* reported on the situation of jazz in Europe throughout the 1940s, and in 1940, it published a report from Great Britain with the header “The War May Kill Jazz in Europe” (Holloway 1940, 6). Instead of fearing for the lives of Europe’s inhabitants, jazz critics seemed more concerned about the state of jazz. European countries became divided into those that were occupied and those where jazz still could be heard: “Only the Swedish, English and American stations still broadcast hot music” (Holloway 1940, 6).

When the United States became actively involved in the European war, Americans in the army who were interested in jazz reported about the jazz situation in Europe, especially in the geographical areas that were