

TYPOLOGIES OF THE NORTH: MEDIATING ‘NORTHERNESS’ IN JAZZ IN SCANDINAVIA

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Abstract

In this article I examine some of the ways that accounts of jazz in Scandinavia have been focusing on a taxonomy of features most often associated with folk music and the remote geography of the north. I focus on specific musicians and collaborations from Norway, Denmark, and Sweden in the second half of the twentieth century, to explore issues of folklorism and landscape, questioning the degree to which perceptions of ‘northernness’ in jazz have been paired with notions of nationalism. I conclude by looking at the extent to which elements of neo-traditionalism were at play in diverse forms of cultural practice in the late twentieth century, examining the inward-looking folklorism often associated with ‘the Nordic tone’.


Keywords: *The Nordic tone; Jan Garbarek; Scandinavian jazz; Northernness*

The only worry I have about this LP is that you dismiss it as an example of ‘Norwegian jazz’ before listening. Nothing could be more wrong. Take time to listen to Nerem and you will find that his tenor saxophone playing is directly out of the American tradition.
(Petersen 1984)

It is not really my tradition [...] The so-called ‘standards’, are not my standards. I don’t feel a close attachment to that music, music that’s made for Broadway shows. They’re great compositions, but I’ve never had an urge to use that music as the basis of my playing. (Bourne 1986, 27)

I begin with these two very different images by way of introducing what seems to me a significant connective among observations that, although obviously linked by a common subject (jazz by Norwegian artists), in other ways range rather freely. Placed as they are in a chronological order, for some they may show a certain progression, an *evolution*, if you will: a word that carries its own ideological burden in jazz. In the first we have Bjørn Petersen’s sleeve notes to Bjarne Nerem’s album *This Is Always*, firmly positioning the saxophonist’s music within a particular North American jazz aesthetic. The second is from an interview with Jan Garbarek, the Norwegian saxophone icon whose music, commentators agree, is responsible for introducing the world outside Scandinavia to a particular northern sensibility in jazz, ‘the Nordic Tone’ (Nicholson 2010), but whose sonic outputs present all kind of idiosyncrasies that resist easy assimilation into this or that orthodoxy. Of course, the seeming simplicity and directness of expression included in both observations masks layers of complex ideological strands, and of often contradictory meanings that are difficult to unravel. Perhaps because of the prevalence of the term in the public press, for example, or

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because few scholars have engaged with jazz in Scandinavia, attempts to outline a single definition of ‘the Nordic tone’ have proven impossible. Likewise, defining a place for Garbarek in the history of jazz has never been a straightforward task; it was only until recently that, in the thousands of books written about the history of jazz, one had to look in later chapters for post-1960s jazz and its fusions for fleeting references to Garbarek and the other members of Keith Jarrett’s celebrated European quartet. Even then, allusions to musical outputs from Garbarek and jazz musicians from Scandinavia were blatantly put under the vague category of ‘world jazz’: a distant and exotic cousin, only faintly related to ‘America’s classical music’.

With changing times and mores, because of audience demand and critical acceptance, the worlds of jazz are no longer a saucerful of secrets, and collaborations that otherwise attracted little attention have come to the fore. The twenty-first century has seen jazz festivals celebrate cross-cultural collaborations from all over the world and, even more recently, promoters have expressed a keen interest in presenting music with a clear label and national identity, whether that is jazz or an ‘authentic other’. Thus, ‘Nordic jazz’, ‘Mugham jazz’, ‘Balkan jazz’ and other such denominators have gained more and more attention on an international and commercial arena. Scholars have, of course, followed these developments and jazz music from other parts of the world has been pushed from the periphery of musicological enquiry to the centre of attention. As a result, there have been significant advancements in documenting jazz in Scandinavia. Fabian Holt, as part of a larger effort to locate jazz in the world, explains how jazz in Scandinavia became associated with ‘home’ as a place of sensory construct that ‘always involves music’, noting that it can demonstrate its potential in ‘new forms of transnationalism in modernity’ (2016, 52–53). Francesco Martinelli’s *The History of European Jazz: The Music, Musicians and Audience in Context* (2018) surveys jazz in Europe: the focus is historical and includes thorough accounts of jazz in the Nordic region by Tore Mortensen (‘Denmark’), Jan Bruer (‘Sweden: 1919-1969’), Måns Wallgren (‘Sweden: 1970-2000’), Juha Henriksson (‘Finland’), Bjorn Stendahl (‘Norway’), and Vernhardur Linnét (‘Iceland’). Christopher Washburne explains that a number of extramural actors have played an important role in shaping Danish jazz into an independent and self-consciously Eurocentric expression. Washburne situates his examination within the context of ‘pan-European developments as well as the transnational dimensions that have been essential to jazz since its inception’ (2010, 124). John Ward examines the role that the internet has played in the underground global dissemination and preservation of jazz recordings from Northern artists (2011). Taking a wider perspective, journalist Luca Vitali has written one of the few monographs that focus on jazz in Norway (2015). The author identifies ‘the beginning’ of jazz’s Eurocentric expression in the role of U.S. musician George Russell, who is often portrayed as a jazz evangelist, a prophet without whom jazz in Norway would not have had its contemporaneous outlook. This seems, at first glance, problematic. Russell’s influence on jazz is undeniable and Vitali does well to highlight the cult status that important U.S. musicians enjoyed across the pond, but the particular discussion further mythologizes music and musicians, something from which jazz performance has routinely suffered since its very beginnings. Michael Tucker’s study of Jan Garbarek (1998) weaves

together a remarkable amount of musicological enquiry to discuss the work of the Norwegian jazz icon. I conclude this brief and partial historiographical excursus with Stuart Nicholson (2002; 2005; 2010), who has offered a sustained discussion of ‘the Nordic tone’. This is an issue taken up by Haftor Medbøe (2012) to challenge the essentialist ideals that confine jazz music to national borders.

Building on frameworks established by these authors, in this article I am concerned with how musical outputs by a range of artists across Scandinavia have been described by references to the region’s remote geography. I concentrate on the second half of the twentieth century, when important album releases were instrumental in imprinting ‘the Nordic tone’ – this perceived invisible force that seems to unite jazz production from across Scandinavia – in the consciousness of the broader public. To this end, I focus my analysis on ‘northernness’ in jazz by exploring how the patently monotonous demarcation of geographic location or nation in front of the term ‘jazz’ may refer to sonic difference but, more importantly, embodies a plethora of political, social, and cultural forces at play. In so doing, I attempt to summarize what are otherwise heavily loaded categories: I begin with race and ‘otherness’ in early jazz in Scandinavia to explore the various approaches taken towards jazz and its usability in questioning (or enriching) the rhetorical fabric attached to the philological enterprise of ‘northernness’. I then move on to explore cultural policy and the economies of jazz in the region, as well as a perceived aesthetic magnified by the press and its relationship to a dominant national(ist) meta-narrative. I conclude with a brief discussion of how these perceptions are communicated through folk music, technology, and typography. For my purposes, I engage with several paradigms from the Nordic region, but focus most prominently on examples from Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. In this process, it is important to note, I have no intention in generalizing across populations from Scandinavia, nor do I subscribe to the association ‘Scandinavian’ or ‘Nordic’ jazz, but I do trust that narratives of ‘the Nordic tone’ were modelled on similar prototypes. Instead, where and when necessary throughout this article, I focus on more localized musical production and, like Holt, move from distinct moments to parallel national situations in the second half of the twentieth century, to highlight ‘an increasingly powerful identity of transnational Scandinavian and Nordic fusions that move beyond the pastoral models of the past and invoke a more abstract, placeless relation between music and North Atlantic wilderness’ (2016, 54). The elasticity of boundaries and meanings that I sketch here extends to the ontology of repertory and genre that has haunted jazz since its very beginnings.

Listening to the music, imagining ‘the other’: A brief history of jazz in Scandinavia

Jazz has for a long time now occupied a significant part of Scandinavian cultural life. From the first recordings of African-American music made in Sweden in 1899, ‘Cake Walk’ by the Kronoberg Society Regimental Band conducted by Erik Hogberg, to the Swedish entertainer Ernst Holf’s 1919 recording of his ‘Swedish Jazz Band’, as well as the first jazz acts to arrive in Norway, the English ‘Feldman’s Jazz Band’ and ‘The Five Jazzing Devils’, jazz has proved instrumental in articulating meanings and identities in

Scandinavia (Stendhal 2018). What did audiences understand by the term when it first appeared? Much like in the rest of the world, jazz was used to describe anything new, a trendy term often associated with frenzy music, forcing George Gershwin to admit as early as 1926, and only a few years into ‘the jazz age’, that jazz was used to denote so many different things it had ceased to have any definite meaning (Wyatt and Johnson 2004, 98). Equally, Anne Dvinge notes that the Danish public had a rather ‘hazy concept’ of what jazz was (Brown et al. 2014, 59). This ‘haziness’ resulted in jazz having an ambiguous relationship with taste hierarchies, high and low culture, as it developed an ability to bring together audiences of diverse economic backgrounds. Its attraction, Johan Fornäs explains, was ‘built upon the fact that large groups of musicians and dancing listeners were at the time looking for difference, novelty and surprise, and for cultural forms capable of expressing the new sensibilities and values of modern urban life’ (2003, 208). Olle Edström notes that in 1920s Sweden public dancing became increasingly common in restaurants and ballrooms. He explains that ‘the activity of going out dancing was often phrased as *att gå ut och jazz* (to go out and jazz). For some time, *jazza* generally meant “to dance”’ (2013, 481).

How did audiences and commentators of the time respond to the popular *jazzdansen* craze that had caught hold of the Nordic countries and the rest of the world by the end of the First World War? As these things often go, jazz was not immediately accepted. For the more conservative commentators of the time, jazz was vulgar, uncivilized, and its hedonism was seen as a threat to local morality and culture. Stendahl recounts the racist reception of the ‘Five Jazzing Devils’ in Norway in 1921 (2018, 238). Mortensen describes the ugly, racist and primitivistic accounts associated with Louis Armstrong’s visit to Denmark in 1933 (2018), whose first Swedish tour in the same year received a similar reception (Fornäs 2003). Equally, Washburne (2010) describes the hateful critiques that the international and interracial membership of Egberth Thompson’s group attracted in the Danish press. This is no surprise, perhaps, given the fascist sentiments and racial ideologies brewing in the region. Jazz was, after all, a culture originating primarily from African-Americans, disseminated widely by black and Jewish people and, to a lesser extent and in Europe, Gypsies. In the years leading up to World War II, traditional enemies of jazz, whether influenced by racist doctrines or not, joined the Nazi anti-jazz campaigns for their own purposes. Musicologist Theodor Adorno for example, who, as a Jew and one-time composition student of Arnold Schonberg, was in the process of losing his teaching privileges at the university but hoped to retain his influential position as critic for various musicological journals, was widely critical of jazz. Adorno not only cited approvingly National Socialist politicians such as Baldur von Schirach and Goebbels, but also mounted a scathing attack on jazz, applauding the imminent governmental prohibition against it (Kater 1989, 14). By 1937, in anticipation of the first climactic persecution of Jews in November the following year, verbal assaults on jazz as a Jewish cultural by-product became more vituperative, without forgetting the African-American contribution. For Max Merz, a fanatically *volkskisch* preceptor, the fight against jazz turned into an obsession (Kater 1989). He began lecturing audiences far and wide across the nation. For him, jazz was the symptom of an ‘inner crisis, which has touched the entire white race’ (1937, 16). Such

thinking saw jazz as the antipode to a music anchored solidly in a Nordic heritage (Blessinger 1938). Among the most controversial attacks that jazz received on racial grounds came from Nazi Erik Waller who saw the music's African-American imprints and the popularity of Jewish-American musicians as a threat to local morality and values (for more detailed readings see Bruer 1977, 3; Kater 1989; Fornäs 2003, 224; Brown et al. 2014, 66).

Conversely, for the more progressive critics, jazz was seen as a way to liberate local audiences from cultural conservatism. Fornäs notes that in their attempt to cope with modernity young Swedes interacted with what for a moment seemed to be its ultimate expression (2003); jazz was, after all, the music of the younger generation as much as rock 'n' roll and pop were to be later on. Jazz was a nation-defying and global popular music, one that became associated with the Harlem renaissance and the black civil rights movement, prohibition and the war effort, high fashion and Art Deco, sexual liberation, short skirts, and cigarette-smoking women (Brown et al. 2014, 57). For a good part of the twentieth century, it offered to youth platforms for resisting forces of repression and racism, of rising social inequality, and of hyper-capitalism, even though it became inextricably bound up with some of these same social dynamics (Chapman 2018). Some admired the blackness and sensuousness that jazz culture embodied, as opposed to the white and cerebral traditional Scandinavian values. In primitivistic rhetoric, songs and lyrics celebrated the happy swinging black folk, transposing blackness onto other ethnic minorities: Romani (Gypsy), or Sámi ('Lapps') people (Fornäs 2003; Brown et al. 2014). This is evident in the poem of the Swedish writer and national icon Artur Lundkvist (1906-1991):

Play Negro, black brother!
You new Christ, redeem us with your shining saxophone!
Set the flesh on fire,
Bestow us with that primordial bliss and smell of earth in the morning—

Stun us!
Deliver us from the ordinary, from what has been and what is,
From all the memories, all the deeds, from the thousands of years of
civilization—

Fornäs explains that Lundkvist's 'articulate primitivism, was a marginal position in the Swedish mainstream at the time, even if beliefs about racial primitivism were widely echoed in popular culture in less programmatic ways (Brown et al. 2014, 59; for a more detailed reading see Fornäs 2003).

Key here to understanding how the music was received in Scandinavia is a discussion of how persistent the European drive towards transatlantic 'othering' was for a good part of the twentieth century. As much as jazz was 'the music of urban modernity' it was also a template of exoticism (B. Johnson 2002, 41; for a similar reading see Fornäs 2003). This contributed to the reception of Scandinavian (and, to a broader extent, white) musicians as more intellectual than traditional black bearers of jazz culture (for a similar reading see Brown et al. 2014). Within this context, Scandinavian musicians

offered an antithesis to the ‘noble savage’ myth that had tortured jazz since its early days, a prejudiced rhetorical practice that had foundations for arguments about diasporic forms of African music as essentially rhythmic, which guided the interpretation and analysis of jazz for most of the twentieth century. Ronald Radano (2003) has traced the origins of this sort of essentialism to early European writing about the African continent, in which perceptions of savagery and primitivism were linked to African dance and musical performance, highlighting the civility and supremacy of white cultural products. Extensions of this ‘noble savage’ Enlightenment motif typified French jazz critiques during the interwar period, especially the idea that unique musical ability resided in the biology of African descendants (Jackson 2002). The institutional centre of early French jazz criticism, Hugues Panassié, Charles Delaunay, and Robert Gofin, had strong links to the primitivistic movement. For them, the primitive was something positive, a romanticized ideal towards which artists should aspire. Panassié praised African-American musicians but in terms that revealed insulting presuppositions about the nature of African-American culture (Monson 1994, 286). Commentators of the time wrote of black rhythm and white harmony, of black talent and white knowledge, reinforcing a historic essentialization of rhythm in African-American musical discourse. For Panassié (1936) the ability to ‘swing’ resided in the biological predisposition of African descendants towards an overtly percussive musical style. The tendency of an eroticized subculture to stand for the jazz community has been widely resented, and such perspectives distorted the general perception of African-American cultural life, in which jazz was the product of ‘untutored, unbuttoned semi literates for whom jazz history does not exist’ (Marsalis 1988, 21). Ingrid Monson reports that during her ethnographical research one of her interviewees remarked in passing that ‘If a black man knows some shit, that’s talent. If the white guy knows the same shit, he’s smart’ (1994, 311). Of course, this stance was not exclusive to jazz. The work of poet Langston Hughes, for example, received similar reception. Given North America’s historic, symbolic, and de facto centrality for the jazz world, it should come as no surprise that this narrative pattern of ‘northernness’ played a significant role in polarizing jazz discourse.

In Scandinavia, jazz did not long remain a commodity, a world-music fad framed by an exotic gaze destined to be consumed and forgotten. On the contrary, the music grew steadily from humble beginnings and local artists left their mark on jazz’s historical legacy; a mark that is thoroughly imprinted on the music’s contemporary outlook. In this journey, from exotic to modernist, from folk to art music, Scandinavian musicians played an important role in emancipating European jazz from its North American counterpart; their innovations anticipated only by Django Reinhardt’s adventurous musical excursions within the context of the *Quintette du Hot Club de France*. On one occasion, Stuart Nicholson observed that ‘the Nordic tone’ constituted the first major global fusion of jazz and musical cultures from around the world outside the US (2002, 241). George Russell even compared Garbarek’s contribution to that of Django Reinhardt (1970), as did Joe H. Klee, writing for *Downbeat* in 1972. Indeed, in the European case the Nordic framing was of a particular importance and Scandinavian musicians contributed original, robust interpretations of North American jazz. But jazz

generated far greater meaning than the music's audience and was represented in a striking number of ways and by a variety of means; understandably then, jazz in Scandinavia developed along some of the central paradoxes of our age: between modern and primitive, between individualism and collectivism, between authenticity and interpretation, and between grassroots and mainstream.

Taking a broader view, I do not fully agree with Nicholson's observation on the originality of the fusion inherent in 'the Nordic tone'. Historical particularities allowed jazz to flourish in some parts of the world more than in others. During the Second World War, for example, whilst record productions in the U.S. had come to a halt because of the Musicians' Union strike, in Denmark 650 jazz records were released during the occupation; a substantial increase from the 270 released in the 1930s. The Danish Broadcasting Corporation regularly transmitted local jazz production on the radio, a policy silently sanctioned by the Nazis to keep the Danes away from Allied propaganda transmitted by the BBC and on American shortwave signals (Mortensen 2017, 175; Brown et al. 2014, 64), but also because of the relative failure of the regime to stamp out jazz due to the confusion about permissible standards and of a lack of definition for what constituted jazz (Kater 1989). For Holt, Sweden's policy of neutrality during the Second World War benefited Swedish jazz in shaping a recognizable Scandinavian sound (2016), whilst for Jan Bruer this resultant self-sufficiency meant that Swedish musicians were isolated rather than empowered (1977). From its very beginning of its inception, however, and more importantly for my purposes here, because of the menacing colonial networks established by the British Empire, jazz quickly found its ways to distant places, where local musicians fused indigenous musics with jazz. Naresh Fernandes (2012) and Bradley Shope (2008), for example, have shown that Mumbai, a city distinguished for its influence on both archipelago traders and colonial culture, boasted an impressive – in both number and jazz pedigree – volume of music and musicians. In Mumbai, Goan musicians were quick to embrace jazz and Western popular music and, concomitantly, the power and success that their African-American counterparts commanded in there. The resulting diversity of the music scene in the mass-mediated space of urban Mumbai challenged ways of thinking about global modernity in terms of colonization, westernization, modernisation, urbanisation, and Indianisation as Martin Stokes maintains (2004). Jazz in Scandinavia, conversely, did not evolve as 'global fusion'; rather, I argue – succumbing to the traps that one's subjective responses to music results in – that Scandinavian jazz artists proposed an alternative to the dominant jazz expression, but within the parameters that defined North American jazz. This is an issue to which I return later.

'The sound of jingling kroner': cultural policy and transnational exchange

The support that the arts receive in Scandinavia dominate public discussions of jazz in 'the north' (Andriessen 2017, Jarenwattananon 2012, Mercer 2013, Nicholson 2010, O'Dair 2009, Potter 2005, Williams 2005). Christopher Washburne recounts how cross-cultural exchanges at Café Montmartre prompted the Danish Ministry of Culture to recognize the benefits of the club's booking policies for local culture and to provide

governmental subsidies for the club's operations (starting in 1972), a practice that continues to this day (2010, 131). The Danish composers' and musicians' organizations in cooperation with the *Danish Music Information Centre* (MIC) distributes Danish music of all kinds to radio stations, music magazines and newspapers, critics, and promoters all over the world, through a special grant from the Danish ministry of foreign affairs. Similarly, 'in today's strained environment for arts support', Michelle Mercer notes, 'the funding wonderland of Norway can incite jealousy' (2013). Since the mid-1950s jazz awards have been established (the 'Buddy-Prizen' by the Norwegian Jazz Federation, the JazzIntro prize for young musicians), school curricula have been changed to accommodate musical developments, and audiences have embraced the new music. Public support has helped the country's improvised-music scene expand from a handful of artists in the late 1960s to a thriving network of recording, performing, and work opportunities today. Mercer comments: 'It's a cliché to refer to a "Nordic tone" in Norwegian jazz. Many still do, ascribing the geography of fjords and mountains to even the most urban musical productions. But', she concludes humorously 'if a single tone underlies Norwegian improvised music, it's probably the sound of jingling kroner' (2013). Grants from, among others, Norway's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Norwegian Arts Council's Ensemble Support, and the Norwegian Jazz Launch scheme, have generously supported many overseas tours. Equally, jazz is nurtured at influential higher education institutions, a point emphasized by Rune Kristofferson and British saxophonist Ian Ballamy (Williams 2005).

State-sponsored cultural policies, an upsurge in nationalistic fervour, broader political and economic changes in Scandinavia, and the efforts of both public and private institutions in collusion with local and visiting musicians, have over the years propelled jazz musicians from Scandinavia to become some of the most distinctive in Europe. But such policies were the result of continuous efforts by musicians to gain respectability for their craft, as the 1968 Swedish demonstrations evidence (Figure 1). The demands raised became concrete politics through a radicalized labour movement that stretched over several decades from the close of the 1950s until the dawn of the 1980s.



Figure 1. Cover of the album *Music in Sweden 3* (1977)

One may trace such activism in the early days when jazz began to creep into Scandinavian life, and for a moment the jazz craze became a threat to local musicians' employment. The Danish Musicians' Union, for example, strived to ensure employment for its members: in 1927 they created a rule stating that foreign orchestras and musicians could not work without hiring a corresponding number of local Danish musicians (Brown et al. 2014, 60). Like elsewhere in the world, such policies allowed visiting U.S. jazz artists to meet local musicians and engage in mutually beneficial collaborations, which allowed local musicians to play with more experienced players and maverick young musicians to test their craft against the jazz elite. Among the countless examples, bassist Nils-Henning Ørsted Pedersen is perhaps one of the most celebrated. Pedersen's regular work at Café Montmartre in Copenhagen led to a lifetime of collaboration with pianist Oscar Peterson. The booking policy at Café Montmartre drew from the Musicians' Union's 1927 policy, ensuring that the entourage of visiting musicians, 'jazz greats', was made up of local Danish players. Such cross-cultural exchanges also had a profound impact on international jazz musical production. To give

one such example, ‘Ack Värmland, du sköna’, a traditional Swedish folk song that has been appropriated in diverse contexts, has been broadly known in jazz circles as ‘Dear Old Stockholm’ since the well-known renditions by Stan Getz (1951) and Miles Davis (1952). The introduction by Davis on a D pedal is perhaps an example of the modal sonic imprint that this influence left on the music (example 1).

Example 1. ‘Dear Old Stockholm’ with an introduction by Miles Davis (1952).

Sounding ‘the North’: Folk music, contexts, and collaborations

Jan Garbarek has been widely acknowledged as a central figure in the emergence of a distinctively Scandinavian tone in twentieth-century jazz and his music has somehow been exclusively associated with exotic images of the north, melancholy and cold, rainy and deserted. Writing for *Jazzwise Magazine*, Nicholson described Garbarek’s music as combining the intensity of Albert Ayler with the economy of Dexter Gordon, but inscribed with Nordic folkloric allusions (2010), a comparison that has often been repeated (Whitehead 2012). On another occasion Nicholson credits the saxophonist’s music as representing ‘an ordered calm’, noting that Garbarek ‘created an evocative tranquillity strongly rooted in Nordic folk-forms that gave prominence to his saxophone tone as the main expressive force’ (2002, 243). Garbarek’s ‘Nordic tone’ has also been described as sparse and cold, an open sound that evokes the moods of the long nights and short days in the northern landscapes of the Nordic countries (Knauer 2009; Ward 2011). Vitali explains the ‘Nordic tone’ as a distinctive mood evoking ‘snow, mountains and icy fjords’ (2018). Equally, Whitehead (2012) likens Garbarek’s saxophone howl to an icy wind blowing off a fiord, whilst Bourne describes the saxophonist’s sound as ‘sometimes dark and robust, or high and shimmering (not unlike the Northern Lights)’ (1986, 27). Holt explains Garbarek’s sound as ‘clear and majestic, with the long, wide reverb of a mountain valley’. For Holt, the saxophonist’s lyrical folk-based melodies are key in painting an image of him as ‘a sincere storyteller’ (2016, 52). The plethora of references to the integration folk material and geography in discussions of jazz in the

music of Garbarek invite special attention. Garbarek's 1971 album *Afric Pepperbird*, for example, has been instrumental in defining a particular Nordic sensibility, despite the fact that he did not use any Norwegian folk material until his recording *Triptykon* (1972).¹ Still, lopsided historiographical portrayals have become the norm for Garbarek's music, reaching back to the 1970s when, Nicholson argues, 'the Nordic tone' was given its present transhistorical status (2002). Garbarek's sustained interest in folk music from around the world became clear with *Folk Songs* (1981), a stellar collaboration between the saxophonist, bassist Charlie Haden, and guitarist Egberto Gismonti. His particular interest in Sámi culture is particularly evident in his *Legend of the Seven Dreams* (1988), *I Took Up the Runes* (1990), as well as *Twelve Moons* (1993). But he repeatedly noted that it was a U.S. musician, trumpeter Don Cherry, who encouraged him to seek inspiration in folk music, and that he was not motivated by the light of any status accorded to folk music during that period.

Pianist Jan Johansson's 1964 recording *Jazz på svenska*, the best-selling Swedish jazz record of all time, is often accredited as the most influential album in defining the 'Nordic tone' in jazz. Recorded in 1962–63, *Jazz på svenska* draws its material from an anthology of 8000 Swedish melodies and folk songs. Johansson's music is described as 'a Scandinavian kind of blues that places intensity, tone, space and meaning ahead of virtuosic athleticism' (Nicholson 2010). Johansson, an accomplished pianist who had toured and recorded as a member of the Stan Getz quartet in 1960, appropriated old Swedish folk melodies from the collection *Svenska låtar*. He had begun exploring Swedish folk music during his music theatre stint at Chalmers' Technical College in Gothenburg between 1953 and 1955 (Holt 2016, 59). Gothenburg was the second biggest city of jazz in Sweden at the time, which Holt attributes to the fact that the city was the primary port for sea traffic from North America. Kjellberg describes how Johansson researched Swedish folk music (1998, 16–22) and, although the pianist did not record folk songs until later, in 1961 he became active in both the folk and jazz scenes. In 1961, he recorded the album *8 bitar*, released in the U.S. as *Sweden Non-Stop*, which received a rare four-and-a-half stars from *Downbeat* magazine. The record documents a selection of standard songs and original compositions, as well as the Swedish folk melody 'De sålde sina hemman'. Nicholson explains that Johansson's *Jazz på svenska* secured substantial airplay on Scandinavian radio, especially in Sweden, propelling two songs from this bestselling album, 'Visa från Utanmyra' and 'Emigrantvisa', to become adopted as a symbol of Nordic tradition in the midst of an increasingly pluralistic culture (2002, 241). His music is often understood as being influential on Jan Garbarek, Esbjörn Svensson and, among others, Tord Gustavsen. Nicholson notes that:

By the time of Johansson's premature death in 1968, the Vietnam War was causing a crisis of conscience, prompting a lively debate around nationalism

¹ Polish trumpeter Tomasz Stanko also stands out because of his long history of playing with jazz musicians from the Nordic countries. I do not engage with Stanko here, who poses an interesting paradigm. While not from Scandinavia himself, his contributions were highly influential in shaping the concept of northerness in jazz.

and what constituted the national soul. Johansson's music fitted perfectly into a Scandinavian culture that had become intent on reclaiming its Nordic sensibility, and music from *Jazz på svenska* was in perfect synchronicity with the times, assuming the trappings of a 'visionary statement'. Odd Sneeggen (of Svensk musik) claimed it was 'a rural symbol of security in a [Scandinavia] marching towards anonymous big city wildernesses' (2002, 242).

Johansson's carefully nuanced sound, the gradation of his touch and the exquisite detail of his playing communicates a sort of purity in the melodic and folk material. His work resonates in more modern efforts, such as in Jan Lungren's recording *Swedish Standards* (1997), which includes a selection of Swedish hymns, folksongs, and popular songs which for Fabian Holt play into the pianist's imagination of home and are inseparable from 'the concepts of the vernacular, local, and national' (2016, 62).

Johansson's merger of Scandinavian folk music and jazz came with the backdrop of a long tradition. In 1929, Kristian Hauger led an eight-piece band that recorded the song 'Norwegian Jazz Fantasy', a jazz-influenced potpourri of Norwegian folk songs (Stendhal 2018). While it is impossible to compare these efforts, the latter conceived as light entertainment, it is remarkable to notice the material that the musicians chose to interpret, as well as the power of assimilation they saw in those forms of early jazz. In the late 1930s, the Swedish singer Alice Babs combined swing with yodelling which, for Fornäs, offered a more familiar exoticism than jazz, given that European mountains were commonly used as exotic ingredients in domestic entertainment (2003, 241). In 1952, Lars Gullin, an accomplished baritone saxophonist, recorded an arrangement of 'Sov du lilla vida ung', a nineteenth century poem by Zachris Topelius, set to music by the Swedish composer Alice Charlotte Tegnér and published in 1895. For the Norwegian critic Bjørn Kolstad, jazz in Europe had by that time taken on new forms; he noted: 'jazz has hitherto been practised by many gifted European musicians. But European jazz has not previously adapted itself to any national characteristic style, it has been a slavish copy of American ideals, and it has in fact been evaluated according to how closely it could copy American models.' (quoted in Nicholson 2002, 133) Writing for the Norwegian daily newspaper *Bergens Tidende*, Kolstad praised Gullin and concluded 'we felt we were on home ground, we felt that perhaps we, in our small corner of the world, could in such a way make jazz our own' (ibid.). Indeed, such cultural outputs may at first glance seem to be nationalizing jazz by integrating the music into more highbrow Scandinavian culture, yet Gullin's take on 'Sov du lilla vida ung' poses an interesting problem. The melody is performed freely, with piano accompaniment, and is simply presented. Conversely, after the exposition of the melody, Gullin takes a 32-bar solo, which is followed by another chorus by the pianist, and bassist, before the recapitulation of the melody. Here we are presented with two contrasting images. Gullin's 'Sov du lilla vida ung' is, to my knowledge, one of the first melodies performed in such manner in jazz performance; such freely played melodies before structured improvisations became quite regular practice in later years in U.S. jazz. But Gullin's choice to perform a 32-bar solo, his phrasing, and the quality of the

chord changes, are notably closer to its North American counterparts than later attempts to integrate folk material into jazz practice.

Swedish trumpeter Bengt-Arne Wallin's *Old Folklore in Swedish Modern* (1962) was another recording that, although steeped in U.S. cool-jazz aesthetics, is considered a document of Scandinavian jazz identity. In the sleeve notes of the homonymous album, Wallin noted that folksongs are a kind of definite music 'not as notes on paper but as a living phenomenon, created by the right people, inherited and made perfect through the generations – and still full of life today' (quoted in Tucker 1998, 156). Writing for *Downbeat* magazine, Don DeMicheal commented favourably on Svend Asmussen's 'cool Nordic playing' (1963, 22). Given the proximity of the recordings, would it be fair to understand these cultural outputs as the product of strong-willed individuals, shaped by forces of chance and an invisible logic inherent in social change, or as situated within particular constellations of ideas and concerns, developed against a backdrop of Nordic cultural resurgence? The list of collaborations and initiatives that I discuss is partial but shows that, all at different times and contexts, they share something as important as their attempt to nationalize jazz: namely, the imagination and the capacity of folk material to encourage musicians and listeners to reconceive the possibilities of the past, present, and future outside of the parameters of established narratives, as well as jazz's capacity to shape such narratives. The 'Nordic tone' then, although as a term was artificially coined, was a particularly important site of collective cultural meaning; one that became part of the national narrative of jazz in Scandinavia.

Whilst it may be difficult to find sustained expressions of an elaborated generational 'folk consciousness' in Scandinavia, the elision of folk songs and nationalism was crucial in the advancement of 'northernness' in jazz. Musicians sought to develop their own versions of jazz and sonic signatures, 'voices' that express identities rooted in their historical and cultural positions as Nordic (again a point laboured in several of the interviews discussed previously). This was seen positively in jazz discourse communities. Saxophonist Ian Ballamy praised the Norwegian success in nurturing a generation of highly creative musicians with a firm grasp of their own cultural heritage and an instinct for experimentation. He noted: 'They have a strong folklore tradition and a healthy nationalism of the kind we've lost in Britain. They're well educated, fearless in their willingness to pile in with whatever's happening, and they're supported by the state.' (Williams 2005) This type of Scandinavian romanticism seems to legitimize local jazz production, responding to concerns that jazz had no relationship with Scandinavian culture. Also, for Holt the appeal of folk music to jazz musicians was because its status as a more authentic genre than contemporaneous popular music (2016), a point that is confirmed by the ample comparisons between folk music and the blues. Here we are faced with issues concerning the negotiation of identification processes, where the local infiltrates the global and vice versa. The consumption ethos that characterizes the music industry as well as the development of mass-media forms of communication has played an important role in disseminating national imaginations, as well as in shaping dominant norms of 'northernness'. This is an idea that resonates with Benedict Anderson, who argues that it is through such developments of mass-media communication that any national imagination can be disseminated (1991).

The notion of nation as a collective identity or community through a shared ethnic, linguistic, or cultural heritage (see Hobsbawm 1997) may be crucial in the advancement of any discussion of 'the Nordic tone'. But to what extent have historical tensions in Norway been articulated in jazz, and how justified are we in retrospectively hearing, for example, Garbarek's work as the individual expression of a collective Nordic jazz identity? It begs the question as to whether the first sustained attempts at integration of jazz and folk songs and the formation of the Nordic council in 1952 were a mere coincidence, or whether broader forces drew artists into such explorations. This is not to say that jazz encourages nation building; it does quite the opposite, in fact, in George Lewis's succinct take: jazz celebrates difference and the imperative of criticality, 'always inconvenient, even anathema, to the myth making that attends nation building' (2016, xxii). In his exploration of Grieg, Daniel Grimley (2006) cites Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, for whom the collective process of invention is central to the operation of any temporal vision; for Anderson the process of invention through which a nation imagines itself is one of the defining features of nationhood: 'communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (Anderson 1991, 6). For Hobsbawm, the process of invention is allied to the idea of a national tradition, 'a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (1983, 1). That nationalist notions such as these are old suggests that they will outlive their usefulness; yet, whatever the critical reservations, as markers of the cultural commonalities that have resulted from the presence and legacy of 'the Nordic Tone', their days may not be over. The prominence of Scandinavian jazz artists in festivals around the world and, more importantly, the way their outputs are discussed, demonstrates how the notion of nationalism still resonates with political discussions in jazz discourse communities, not only in Europe but also in the wider world.

Several of the aforementioned cultural outputs by Johansson and others seemed to translate jazz into Scandinavian contexts. But are they to be taxonomized in discussions of nationalizing jazz in twentieth-century Scandinavian life or in discussions of musical cosmopolitanism? In this instance, the line between the two seems rather blurry. Comments such as those by Garbarek could be easily understood within an ecumenical space of jazz performance, as internationalist rather than nationalist; yet, there are undeniably elements of both, which opens up a whole new spectrum of meaning constructions and interpretations. 'We have players from any part of the world now doing their own [...] native version. They find their own direction, influenced by their own culture, but still using the very strong basic elements of jazz', Garbarek notes (Bourne 1986, 26). He explains his work as an attempt to bridge the divide between the international community and his traditions, allowing us to listen to his musical outputs as a move towards global sensibility rather than nationalist exclusivity. The focus on community and collaboration, the abundance of references to spirituality, and the internationalist profile that the artists maintain may reinforce this last point. In reviewing *From Gagarin's Point of View* (1999), a collaboration between the pianist

Esbjörn Svensson with the bassist Dan Berglund and drummer Magnus Öström that maintains an important place in the pantheon of most influential jazz recordings, Stuart Nicholson praised ‘the honest humanity’ of the musicians’ playing, noting their attachment to ‘deeply felt melody, unhurried intensity, framed with the Nordic Tone’ (2010). This is in striking contrast to the accepted ethos of improvisation in more traditional, straight-ahead, forms of North American jazz,² where market-centred ideologies have celebrated a masculinist, heroic, individualism, and the dexterous risks that soloists take in turbulent environments, celebrated at least since Ralph Ellison’s famous assertion quoted below:

There is in this a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment (as distinct from the uninspired commercial performance) springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest; each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the successive canvases of a painter) a definition of his identity; as individual, as member of the collectivity and as a link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its very life in improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazz man must lose his identity even as he finds it (1995, 234).

Jazz discourse has customarily valorized the tropes of storytelling as a metaphor for improvisation, but we have seen that the stories that Scandinavian musicians have to tell are rather different from those in the U.S. As much as North American jazz, during the 1940s in particular, became known for its after-hours and masculinist demonstrations of virtuosic bravado, jazz musicians in Scandinavia became known for their contributions to shifting the focus onto other aspects of performance, namely attention to sound and minimalism. Minimalism as virtuosic performance implies a certain critical skill in the deployment of one’s abilities: the ‘control’ demonstrated by performers attracts particular prestige as it shifts the focus from *execution* to *judgment*. A heightened sensitivity to ordinariness of tone could almost be seen as the rejection of virtuosity, in particular by a performer no less capable of dazzling audiences. The value of this minimalistic sensibility, as demonstrated by the clarity and economy of many Scandinavian jazz musicians, is that it can be interpreted as being more communal; whereas virtuosity sets the performer apart from their colleagues, minimalism and collaboration celebrates the ordinary and the shared skills whilst allowing the appreciation of singular differences (see Ramsay 2017 for a similar discussion on dance). Such dichotomies rendered Scandinavian jazz musicians as the antithesis to the aesthetic conservatism that neo-classicist jazz cliques have in more recent years represented, allowing, once more, fluid and contestable ideas of jazz, and for jazz scenes to be understood as culturally charged sites of identities.

² For a discussion of straight-ahead jazz see Travis Jackson (2012, 6).

Technological prosthesis and mediated geography: ‘Seeing northerness’ in Scandinavian jazz

Afric Pepperbird signalled the collaboration between Garbarek and Manfred Eicher’s Edition of Contemporary Music records (ECM), a long lasting and mutually beneficial relationship that shaped the future of both the Norwegian saxophonist and the iconic label. Mervyn Cooke has already noted the significance of the ECM label ‘in establishing a variety of internationally appreciated musical idioms’ (2017, 5), as well as its importance in ‘drawing European jazz thinking to the attention of American players and audiences in the 1970s’ (9). ECM was paramount to the idea of ‘the Nordic tone’; pianist Bobo Stenson notes and affirms the role that Eicher played in shaping a broader European jazz aesthetic. Pat Metheny was critical of Eicher: for him the iconic producer’s resistance to employing musicians who could swing was crucial in producing a non-American sound (Metheny interviewed by John Alan Smith 1978, 53). From its beginning, the company sought to transmit a subtle ‘aesthetic of atmospheres’ that suggested a ‘sound scenario of nature and history’ (ECM: Sleeve notes of *Desire* 1996, 14; quoted in Nicholson 2002, 243), which brings to mind the work of later electroacoustic composers’ sound painting and acousmatic environments rather than established outputs in the jazz idiom. Although today, musicians and sound engineers exchange information about how to get the ECM sound, going as far as to suggest microphone set-ups and other technological specificities, Eicher has given a plethora of interviews in which he explains that there is little technological prosthesis to ECM production. The fact that ECM albums have been recorded in several places and not in one location may emphasize Eicher’s point, who insists that ECM’s success is due to engaged listening and a selected roster of musicians. But the iconic producer did in fact record Garbarek playing against a Norwegian fjord to capture a more natural reverb sound in *Dis* (1976) which had a profound effect on the reception of the saxophonist’s music.

The understated typography, abstract paintings, and photography that accompany ECM album covers create a mood similar in effect, although not in style, to the iconic work of Reid Miles in the heyday of the Blue Note label, or that of Sadamitsu ‘S. Neil’ Fujita for Columbia. As much as the soulful Blue Note recordings where distinguishable for the images of black artists sweating and yielding to their instruments, over the years, visual cues of Scandinavian localities fed an idea of ‘northerness’ to the public. A recent audio-visual feature of the music of Tord Gustavsen on the ECM’s official YouTube channel cross-fades images of the trio with scenes of lakes, snowy mountains and landscapes suggestive of the Nordic countries, all juxtaposed with a yacht humorously named ‘Fjord’. Garbarek’s 1984 album *It’s OK to Listen to the Gray Voice* in particular drew from the Swedish poet Tomas Gösta Tranströmer, whose work, for Tucker (1998), reveals a close relationship to the Nordic landscape, whilst the iconography of his *All Those Born with Wings* features two photographs of the Aurora Borealis. Ole Kock Hansen’s *På en grøn bakketop* (1978), for example, included a Danish flag on the cover. Pedersen’s 1990 recording *Hommage: Once Upon a Time*, which includes the track ‘Det haver så nyeligen regnet’ – a song that has survived in Denmark as a national

song, sung every year to commemorate Denmark's liberation at the end of World War II – displays on its cover an ideal Danish village (figure 2).³



Figure 2. Pedersen's 'Danish village', Hansen's piano playing posture on a backdrop of a typical Danish landscape that also includes a Danish flag, Johansson's *Jazz på Svenska*, and the Runestones's *Exodus*.

Birgitte Sandve explains that traditional notions of national identity were re-actualized in the 1960s when Norway experienced significant immigration from non-Western countries. She notes that the 'invention of Norway' was centred upon images of nature and traditional peasant life and notes the Romantic movement's increased attention to nationalism in poetry and folk tales, visual arts, and traditional folk music (Sandve

³ Still, in the plethora of records produced in Scandinavia, such visual cues were not the norm as the informative *Jazz Birka Archive* tells us: http://birkajazz.se/archive/sweden_3.htm.

2015, 47). This is of course not to diminish the imagination of any of the aforementioned artists, who have the right and need to imagine and visualize their music within whatever context they deem necessary. But it is important to investigate the discourse communities in the arts or the wider public and the extent to which these efforts were situated within a broader fabric of concerns. Although any claims about music as actively shaping contemporary conceptions of place and geography are only formulated as tentative suggestions, perhaps the presence of these visual cues have the power to instil in listeners a novel sense of geography and, in their own fragile way, to allow them to envision a distant and impenetrable celestial ‘other’.

Visual cues to landscape and geography have been important in making jazz a saleable commodity to audiences worldwide as well as in how jazz artists negotiated their representation, but were not exclusive to jazz production from Scandinavia. Mervyn Cooke notes that Pat Metheny’s work *New Chautauqua* (1978) ‘embodied a prominent “Americana” dimension, partly as a result of a fresh perspective on his homeland’ (2017, 117). Like his Scandinavian counterparts, Metheny’s inventions departed from mainstream jazz styles and reworked musical material that fell under the broad category of ‘country’ music. Cooke explains that country music had also a profound influence on vibraphonist Gary Burton, with whom Metheny previously had played for several years:

In 1967, Burton was playing with [Larry] Coryell, who had in the 1950s been influenced by country guitarist Chet Atkins, whose example inspired him to play ‘finger style’ in a mix of country, classical, and jazz techniques. Burton had spent some time in Nashville as a teenager during the summer of 1960 and he was later to draw broad parallels between jazz and country music on account of their shared rhythmic drive, improvised solos, and ‘an enormous respect for instrumental skill and creativity’ on the part of the players. (Cooke 2017, 117)

In later years, bassist Charlie Haden who, although North American, was influential in establishing a distinctive European aesthetic to jazz described the duo album with him and Metheny *Beyond the Missouri Sky* (1997) as ‘contemporary impressionistic Americana’ (sleeve notes, 5). Metheny highlighted the importance of Midwestern landscapes in his creation of a rural-sounding jazz-rooted Americana, paying particular attention to the simplicity and clarity of the countryside (for a detailed reading see Cooke 2017, 117–150). In similar terms, it is perhaps surprising to hear Havana-born flautist, composer, and vocalist Magela Herrera talk about inspiration drawn from Norway’s white landscapes, forests, and fog. Herrera explains that living in this Nordic country for six years afforded her a different way of ‘seeing’ music. She refers to the song ‘Ahora’, from her new album *Explicaciones* (2019), for which she took inspiration from Norway’s natural landscape and beauty: the mountains, the smell of the air, the vibe of the cities and people, and even Norwegian folk music (C. M. Johnson 2019).

Conclusion

As much as studying jazz outside the U.S. has much to teach us about the increased cultural complexity involved in modern jazz production, studying jazz in Scandinavia invites us to reconsider notions of ‘northernness’. If there are certain inherited aesthetic predilections in accounts of jazz music from ‘the north’, the music’s inherent ambiguities have made it a particularly tempting place to seek validation for descriptions that may otherwise limit the music to a particular imagery. My observations here are not ultimately geared toward the conclusion that commentators should avoid talking about ‘the Nordic tone’, but that such descriptions are all too easy to attribute to certain cultural outputs, and that they confine music that may resist categorization into predetermined classifications. Jazz production from Scandinavia is worthy of some serious ethnographic and historical study; rather than distort it to fit in a particular description of ‘northernness’ we should seek to delve deeper into the bewildering richness of its particular spatial realities. If anything, studying how jazz has been assimilated in the world outside the U.S. teaches us how jazz – a music invoked by so many diverse cultures in so many places – has been used as a tool in overcoming the national fragmentation and monotonous appreciation it may receive. Most importantly, it sets smaller music cultures against grander narratives (the place of jazz in the world as well as the place of the world in jazz), telling us, in this instance, how under special conditions jazz and folk music have been reimagined. In this respect, I am reminded of Scott DeVeaux’s formulation where, in his celebrated essay on jazz historiography, he noted that ‘the struggle is over the act of definition that is presumed to lie at the history’s core; for it is an article of faith that some central essence named jazz remains constant throughout all the dramatic transformations that have resulted in modern day jazz’ (1994, 528). The paradox lies in that the locally situated expressions and discursive productions of national imaginaries, ‘the Nordic tone’, ‘Mugham jazz’, ‘Balkan jazz’, and so forth, although they are brought on for a variety of reasons by young generations of musicians invested in establishing locally inflected musical explorations, and the transformative political, economic, and cultural European landscape which emerged in the aftermath of World War II and the Cold War, they are always part of a bigger picture that includes, well, the world.

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