

## Chapter Seven

### **Cold Commodities: Discourses of Decay and Purity in a Globalised Jazz World**

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Since gaining prominence in public consciousness as a distinct genre in early 20<sup>th</sup> Century USA, jazz has become a music of global reach (Atkins, 2003). Coinciding with emerging mass dissemination technologies of the period, jazz spread throughout Europe and beyond via gramophone recordings, radio broadcasts and the Hollywood film industry. America's involvement in the two World Wars, and the subsequent \$13 billion Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe as a unified, and US friendly, trading zone further reinforced the proliferation of the new genre (McGregor, 2016; Paterson et al., 2013). The imposition of US trade and cultural products posed formidable challenges to the European identities, rooted as they were in 18<sup>th</sup>-Century national romanticism. Commercialised cultural representations of the 'American dream' captured the imaginations of Europe's youth and represented a welcome antidote to post-war austerity. This chapter seeks to problematise the historiography and contemporary representations of jazz in the Nordic region, with particular focus on the production and reception of jazz from Norway.

Accepted histories of jazz in Europe point to a period of adulatory imitation of American masters, leading to one of cultural awakening in which jazz was reimagined through a localised lens, and given a 'national voice'. Evidence of this process of acculturation and reimagining is arguably nowhere more evident than in the canon of what has come to be received as the Nordic tone. In the early 1970s, a group of Norwegian musicians, including saxophonist Jan Garbarek (b.1947), guitarist Terje Rypdal (b.1947), bassist Arild Andersen (b.1945), drummer Jon Christensen (b.1943) and others, abstracted more literal jazz inflected reinterpretations of Scandinavian folk songs by Nordic forebears including pianist Jan Johansson (1931-1968), saxophonist Lars Gullin (1928-1976) bassist Georg Riedel (b.1934) (McEachrane 2014, pp. 66-68), Svend Asmussen (1916-2017) (see Washburne, 2010) and others in creating a new jazz aesthetic that drew influence and inspiration from beyond the American model. During this period, a similar move to intertwine the American jazz import with local musical traditions can also be observed in the works of Finnish jazz musicians including Heikki Sarmanto (b.1939), Eero Koivistoinen (b.1946) and Henrik Otto Donner (1939-2013), and perhaps most evidently on Esa Pethman's (b.1938) album,

*The Modern Sound of Finland* (1965). It was the creative output of Norway's jazz musicians, however, that came to greatest prominence through international reception. Their 'Nordic' aesthetic has been framed by British journalist and author Stuart Nicholson and others as a new wave of national romanticism, steeped in the imagery of  *fjell*  and  *fjord* , and projecting 'an awareness of the closeness of man to nature' (Nicholson 2005, pp. 197-198).

Since its coining in the 1970s, the term Nordic Tone has been increasingly employed as a somewhat reductionist catch-all in the discussion of an imagined Scandinavian jazz aesthetic (Mäkelä, 2014, p. 68). Typically employed in press and promotional materials, the term is couched in the tropes of folklore and elemental nature, evoking an unspoiled vision of the Nordic ideal, humankind's connection to the pre-industrialised natural world, interwoven with sagas and mythologies of the past. This paints an attractive and engaging picture, one that has undoubtedly proved an effective tool in the branding of Nordic culture to the outside world. Nevertheless, Nordic Tone with its increasingly hackneyed baggage of stereotyped terminology is problematic on a number of fronts. This chapter seeks both to challenge and discuss such terminologies through examining the route that jazz in the Nordic region, with particular focus on Norway, has taken: from mimicry, to appropriation, to the reimagining and repurposing of a music of African American origin.

### **Defining the Nordic in jazz**

Perhaps an obvious place to begin is in the application of the term 'Nordic', especially when employed, as it often seems to be in jazz press and critical writing, interchangeably with that of 'Scandinavian'. Where there may be clarity in geopolitical delineations of what is meant by 'Nordic', understandings of its cultural connotations are far more opaque. The Nordic region, as represented in the membership of the inter-parliamentary Nordic Council, is taken to comprise the Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden and Denmark) together with Finland, Iceland, Greenland, and Faroe and the Åland Islands. In its application to the imagining of a geo-specifically framed jazz aesthetic or stylistic branch, however, the Nordic moniker becomes largely nonsensical, referring predominantly, as it typically does, to music of Norwegian origin rather than that of Pan-Nordic constitution. Such opacity in its application suggests a somewhat clumsy attempt to homogenise the markedly different historical relationships between the individual Nordic countries to the USA, its cultural exports, and their local consumption. Such differences, alongside equally important distinct histories and folk-traditions have resulted in a

rich variety of interactions with and approaches to jazz amongst individual Nordic countries, differences that confound the very idea of a unified or singular Nordic jazz aesthetic.

Given the variety in approaches to jazz by musicians amongst the Nordic member states, shaping and being shaped by the local scenes within which they practice, the question arises as to whether it is in any way practical to identify a pervasively 'Nordic' characteristic across the breadth of the regions production of jazz? If so, what might be the nature of this characteristic or methodological practice, to what extent is the pursuit of its definition a meaningful undertaking and, more pointedly, to whom? To interrogate the possible origins of imagined common practice, it is useful to cast an eye to the early history of jazz in the region.

### **A brief history**

Jazz music first became intertwined within the cultural tapestry of the Nordic region during the inter-war years, gaining an increasing foothold following World War Two (Medbøe, 2016). Stories of early jazz production in the region typically follow a similar narrative, that of visiting American or British musicians inspiring the locals in the uptake of the genre (Haavisto, 1996, p. 12; Holt, 2002, p. 184). Within the broader context of the uptake of the cultural instruments of modernity in the Nordic region, one might imagine the wonderment that this 'devil-may-care music' must have inspired in local musicians and audiences of the time, emerging from a period of national romanticism, and accustomed to the musical traditions of popular social dances. In contrast to these cultural staples, jazz represented a sonic embodiment of modernity, of a new world order and emergent national identity politics (Fornäs, 2010).

Dance bands soon included jazz in their repertoires, integrating its new sounds and mores to entertain their audiences. Radio broadcasts and the burgeoning dissemination technology of gramophone records featuring luminary American players provided inspiration and informal education to this new generation of Nordic musicians who would become the founding fathers of their local jazz scenes (Stendahl & Berg, 1987). However, the spread of the 'jazz germ' was not without its sceptics and detractors as can be seen, for example, in the early 1930s Swedish press denunciation of the music of visiting American jazz musician Louis Armstrong, alongside disturbing racially framed taunts, as 'more nature than culture' (Fornäs, 2010, p. 5). It is interesting to note that 'nature' is used pejoratively here, as representing the baser elements of the human condition, in contrast to the bucolic ideal that is typically signposted in contemporary discussions of Nordic Tone.

Denmark emerged as the country most receptive to the new music from America within the Nordic region, with Copenhagen by the 1960s lauded on a par with Paris as a European jazz capital. Such status was afforded not least due to short and long-term sojourns in the city by stellar American artists including Ben Webster, Oscar Pettiford, Stan Getz, Dexter Gordon, Kenny Drew and others, and the role they played in creating a Danish national jazz scene (Büchmann-Møller, 2006; Christensen, 2002). Given the solid foundations and robust continuing health of the Danish scene, one might expect that it would be from here that a distinctive Nordic conception of jazz would evolve. It was through the influence of its American visitors, however, that jazz in Denmark might be said to have remained more closely aligned with the aesthetics of the music's originators (Houe, 1998, p. 124), albeit with an internationalist perspective (Washburne 2010). Resident and visiting American musicians typically fronted bands made up of local Danish musicians, from whom a degree of deference was expected, along with a respect for and pursuit of stylistic authenticity. For the emergence of a more overt, locally-reimagined jazz, we must look further north.

Visits to Scandinavia by American free-jazz pioneers including Cecil Taylor, Albert Ayler, Sunny Murray, Archie Shepp and Bill Dixon during the early 1960s led to what Heffley (2005, p. 70) describes as a 'Nordic microcosm of the Continental *Emanzipation*'. At a time in which the American status quo was being challenged by the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, Europe was gearing up for the 1967 Summer of Love and the youth rebellion of 1968. Jazz had been usurped by Rock and Roll as the popular music of the day, and identity politics were high on the political agenda. The revolutionary spirit of the time was reflected in reappraisals of the nature and purpose of jazz as a now well-established art form. In Europe, the founding of the European Jazz Federation in 1968 and the launch of the publication *Jazz Forum* were instrumental in stoking contemporary debate around both European and American jazz (see Knauer, 2009).

It was the arrival in Sweden of American composer and theorist George Russel and trumpeter Don Cherry during the mid-1960s that was to light the touch paper for significant, locally-framed departures from the American jazz aesthetic (Dybo, 2010; Vitali, 2015). Their interactions with Scandinavian musicians, in particular a young Jan Garbarek and his Norwegian compatriots, Terje Rypdal, Arild Andersen and Jon Christensen, were to provide stimulus for rethinking jazz within a non-American, localised framework (Medbøe, 2016). In encouraging this new generation of Norwegian musicians to incorporate elements of their own cultural heritage into jazz practice, a fresh sonic pallet began to materialise that challenged and transcended the American mould.

### **The golden age of ECM**

From these foundations, Norway emerged as the standard-bearer of a Nordic ‘emancipation’ from the normative structures and aesthetics of the American jazz tradition. Through the pioneering practises of Garbarek and others, and through the platform and routes to international markets provided by Manfred Eicher’s ECM (Editions of Contemporary Music) record label, Norwegian jazz came to be received as a distinct and identifiable stylistic entity on the global jazz stage. It is an entity that has latterly been ascribed the moniker of Nordic Tone by numerous commentators, and championed notably by Stuart Nicholson:

What sets Scandinavian jazz apart from the rest of the world is the Nordic Tone, an exemplary example of the ‘glocalization’ effect, whereby the globalized ‘American’ styles of playing jazz have been reinscribed with local significance, be it folkloric influences, classical influences (Nicholson, 2006, p. 19).

During the 1970s and ‘80s, Garbarek recorded a prolific output of seminal albums for ECM including *Sart* (1971), *Triptykon* (1973), *Witchi-Tai-To* (1973), *Dansere* (1976), *Dis* (1977), and *Places* (1978) followed by a seemingly inexhaustible, near-annual output. Album titles such as *I Took Up the Runes* (1990), and *Ragas and Sagas* (1992), and individual Norwegian-language track titles on earlier recordings such as ‘Selje’ (the name given to a Norwegian folk flute), ‘Sang’ (Song), ‘Svevende’ (Floating), ‘Skrik & Hyl’ (Shriek and Yell), ‘Vandrere’ (Wanderers), and ‘Skygger’ (Shadows) helped to construct mythology-imbued, Scandinavian-language, Nordic trope around his music, which in turn encouraged the international press and his fans to buy into the idyll of Nordic Tone.

Nicolson and other others have been demonstrably keen to amplify this idyll through the conjuring of associated imagery. Examples from press reviews of Norwegian musicians include:

Garbarek’s music projects the stark imagery of nature near the Northern Light. (Stuart Nicholson in *Jazz Times*, 2000).

[...] whispers glitter like frosty breath over [Arild] Andersen's rapidly ascending bass and percussion sparkles like unexpected snow (Colin Buttmer, reviewing Arild Andersen – *Elektra*, 2005).

Folk melodies nestle alongside classical structures, the whole thing imbued with a tangible sense of Nordic melancholia. (Ian Mann reviewing Espen Eriksen Trio – *You Had Me at Goodbye*, 2010).

Indeed, the trope of Nordic nature has become so overused as to be employed self-consciously:

Dark and lyrical, characterized by patience and wide-open spaces, this style of jazz has been linked to the lonely grandeur of Scandinavia's fjords and mountains so many times that the cliché barely functions anymore (Peter Margasak preview of Tord Gustavsen Quartet in Chicago, 2014).

In sampling a broad selection of the ECM catalogue of this period, and indeed beyond, one might point to a number of aesthetic, ethnographic and musicological characteristics that are applicable to many of the label's classic releases. One can (with a degree of caution) attribute a sense of space in the recordings, magnified by the use of long reverbs; folk-like melodies are often employed, alongside improvisations in which interplay between individual musicians is based around modal themes; there is heightened focus on texture and dynamics, and performances are recorded with crystalline, intimate clarity. Simultaneously, many of the foundational tenets of American jazz are ignored, discarded, or reimagined. There is an absence of traditional swing-feel, blues inflection, or the complex harmonic changes associated with the development of post-swing American jazz. There is an almost 'classical' nature to composition and performance articulation, with carefully measured attention to detail in ensemble playing, individual musical gesture and sound production (For example in the works of Keith Jarrett, Eberhard Weber and David Darling). The result, it has been argued in some circles, is that much of the ECM output is hyper-jazz, a hybrid of genres – whether of jazz and folk (see Nicholson, 2002) – or not jazz at all. On the reimagining of erstwhile American elements of jazz, Norwegian/Swedish drummer Egil Johansen proffers in an interview with Stuart Nicholson in *Jazz Times* that:

Nordic tonality is in fact a sort of blues, Nordic blues, Scandinavian blues if you will. For us jazz musicians it's but a short leap to experience that melancholy as a companion to joy (Nicholson, 2000).

And, in the same article, Swedish pianist Bobo Stenson asserts:

We play in the language of jazz. But I guess we put other things into the music; we have other traditions here, from classical music to folk music and stuff, and I guess we put that into traditional American jazz (ibid.).

It would, however, be a reductionist fallacy to suggest that all that finds shelter under the umbrella of Nordic Tone is an exclusively Nordic product, and in some manner impervious to external influence. In the case of the ECM label, Eicher's vanguard releases were in fact not works by Nordic musicians. Americans Mal Waldron, Paul Bley, Marion Brown, and The Music Improvisation Company, and Germans Alfred Harth and Wolfgang Dauner were the first to record for the label, paving the way for its subsequent aesthetic footprint. Subsequent releases have included works by American artists Chick Corea, Paul Bley, Keith Jarrett, Jack DeJohnette, Gary Burton, Ralph Towner, Paul Motian, Pat Metheny, David Darling and Bill Frisell, Canadian Kenny Wheeler, Brits John Surman and Dave Holland, and numerous other international musicians. It was the label's seventh release that introduced Jan Garbarek, in the company of fellow Norwegians Terje Rypdal, Arild Andersen and Jon Christensen, to an international audience on the album *Afric Pepperbird* (1970).

The subsequent ECM catalogue features an international roster of artists, the majority of whom might be said (again with some caution) to fit within the then nascent Nordic Tone aesthetic or, perhaps more accurately, within the ECM aesthetic. And therein a critical question, and one loaded with complexities, should be posed: are the roots of Nordic Tone a phenomenon of geographic boundary or, rather, a transnational approach to jazz created by like-minded inter-continental musicians, brought to bear by the individual stewardship of Manfred Eicher on his hegemonic record label? The recorded output of the ECM label, particularly during the 1970s and '80s, under Eicher's autocratic production, can be taken collectively as studies in a curated aesthetic, a construction that has as clear, albeit markedly divergent, a signature as that of classic Blue Note or Verve releases in the USA. The manifestation of this aesthetic does not limit itself to Eicher's selection of artist roster and the recording and production techniques pioneered with

long-time collaborator, sound engineer Jan Erik Kongshaug, but encompasses the full range of presentation assembly from record sleeve and text design, to the label's website and promotional materials.

Early jazz in the Nordic countries has been previously observed to align closely to its American roots. The period of so-called emancipation during the 1960s did not serve, however, to sever these roots. Rather, many of the musicological building blocks of the American jazz tradition were augmented by an ever-broadening pallet, and adapted for new cultural settings. Garbarek himself acknowledges his debt to the legacy of John Coltrane (Shipton, 2002, p. 230) and, naturally, that of his mentor, George Russel in his philosophical and technical approaches to music. Broader global influences are inescapable in his collaborations with, amongst others, Brazilians Egberto Gismonti and Nana Vasconcelos, Pakistanis Ustad Fateh Ali Khan and Shaukat Hussain, Tunisian Anouar Brahem, and Germans Rainer Brüninghaus and Eberhard Weber, and across boundaries of musical history and genre in his collaboration with the Hilliard Ensemble, for example. Therefore, it is perhaps his open ear to musical practice from beyond the Nordic confine and across musical evolution that has given Garbarek's music its definitive place within the global jazz scene, rather than any exclusively homespun, nationalist perspective.

Such arguments aside, the recorded output of ECM, particularly that of its Norwegian roster, has become a benchmark by which Nordic jazz has come to be measured and, to many amongst the region's jazz musicians, its attendant expectations an aesthetic yoke from which it has proved difficult to escape. Within the discussion of Nordic Tone, it should be acknowledged that ECM was not the sole record label releasing jazz from Norway during the country's perceived 'golden period' of jazz during the 1970s and '80s. Academic and author, Michael Tucker, for the Norwegian Music Information Centre, writes that: 'Four of the most beautiful of all Norwegian jazz records were released in the latter half of the 1970s' (2002) on domestic labels that are no longer operational. These labels, including MAI, ZAREPTA, Arctic Records and Octave have nonetheless, over time, been eclipsed by the longevity and continued dominance of ECM.

With similarities to the manner in which the composer Edvard Grieg has been burdened with perceptions '*fjord* and *fjell*', so too Norway's jazz musicians have been zealously presented in international press and programming as a new wave of quasi-National Romantics, through the citing, for example, of Garbarek's incorporation of seljefløyte (traditional Norwegian flute), use of folk-like melodic motifs, and the incorporation of Sami vocal traditions in his work with singer



Marie Boine. Compatriots that have succeeded Garbarek on the ECM roster, and subsequent other Norwegian jazz labels such as Rune Grammofon and Jazzland, have similarly been tarred with the same brush, through the seemingly inexhaustible appetites of critics and marketeers to capitalise on an essentialised 'Brand-Nordic'. This brand has in recent years grown in scope to include literature, film and television productions, giving rise to the use of reductive epithets including 'Nordic Noir' and 'Scan-dram' in English language press reception.

The very success of Brand-Nordic has provided Norway's jazz musicians with both opportunities and, at the same time, limitations. On the one hand the brand affords an internationally recognised marque of authentic provenance, on the other an aesthetic normativity that can be challenging for its musicians to transcend or subvert. At the heart of the brand is Nicholson's trope of 'the closeness of man to nature' (Nicholson, 2005, pp. 197- 98), an unspoilt purity in artistic vision and realisation, a simplicity, honesty and earthiness at polar odds with the urban, industrialised origins of jazz. Such a monocultural imagining of 'Nordicness', set in the isolated landscape of  *fjell* and  *fjord*, could hardly be more distant from that of the hustle and bustle of the multi-cultural urban trope that has come to illustrate American jazz, nor for that matter the city life that most of Scandinavia's jazz musicians inhabit.

### **A new golden age – beyond Nordic Tone**

American journalist and critic, John Kelman in *All About Jazz* (see Kelman, 2012), identifies four seminal recordings during the latter half of the 1990s that expanded and confounded the public's expectations of Nordic jazz and, specifically, jazz from Norway. In 1996, Bugge Wesseltoft released the boldly, and one assumes knowingly, titled *New Conception of Jazz* on his own nascent record label, Jazzland. Following the album's domestic release, the label secured international distribution the subsequent year and *New Conception of Jazz* was introduced to international music markets. The album drew on Wesseltoft's intersection with the Oslo House and Techno club scenes, melding contemporary beats with contributions from a new generation of musicians including Nils Petter Molvaer (trumpet), Vidar Johansen (saxophone), Trude Eick (French Horn) Eivind Aarset (guitar), Ingebrigt Flaten (bass), Audun Kleive and Anders Engen (drums). The album heralded the inclusion of new technologies and the intertwining of elements of popular music culture with jazz – in a sense echoing crossovers between jazz and popular music that had taken place in America during the 1970s by, for example, Herbie Hancock, Weather Report, and through Miles Davis' embrace of fusion.

Trumpeter Nils Petter Molvaer, an alumni of the Trondheim Musikkonservatorium, served his musical apprenticeship with one-time Garbarek collaborators Arild Andersen and Jon Christensen in the now-legendary Masqualero ensemble, recording several albums on the ECM label. His debut solo album, *Khmer* (1997), again on ECM, represented a ground-breaking departure from the label's signature sparse aesthetic, bringing together electronica soundscapes and beats more associated with hip-hop, in a fusion with Middle-Eastern flavours and ethnic percussion. Where Garbarek's cross-cultural collaborations in the 1980s and early '90s had, in many respects, retained individual musicians' boundaries of practice, Molvaer and his fellow musicians on *Khmer*, including Eivind Aarset and Morten Mølster (guitars), Rune Arnesen (drums), Roger Ludvigsen (percussion), with samples by Ulf W. Ø. Holand, blurred musical boundaries by convincingly creating a hybrid of genre and style. The sonically dense, chaotic melange achieved, although nodding to the bold melodies of Garbarek et al, was a marked departure from the aesthetic pioneered and finessed on 1970s and '80s ECM. Molvaer reprised and further developed this new musical direction on his 2000 release, *Solid Ether*.

The band Supersilent, comprising Arve Henriksen (trumpet), Helge Sten (live electronics and guitar), Ståle Storløkken (synthesiser and piano), and Jarle Vespestad (drums) announced themselves in 1998 through the release of *I-3* on the newly formed Rune Grammofon. Established by former Norwegian rock star Rune Kristofferson (who had spent several years in the 1980s working for ECM), the label is described by journalist Richard Williams in the Guardian 'as a vehicle for music that moved away from the wintry textures and meditative moods established by ECM and towards a more aggressive blend of free improvisation with the techniques of electronic and post-rock music' (2002). Supersilent's aggressive blend of noise-based improvisation, albeit interspersed with moments of tranquil beauty, brought a very different perspective to the Nordic jazz oeuvre – one of sonic shock and awe, and energised chaos. Yet, within the three-album recording there remain elements of what one might hear as the signature of the Nordic attention to the creation of wide open sonic space and the crafting of sublime and evocative melodic motif. In the same year, guitarist Eivind Aarset released *Électronique Noire* on Wesseltoft's Jazzland label. A swirling soundscape of effect-laden electric guitar and computer generated materials, the album challenged the Nordic paradigm of more acoustically based instrumentation. Where Terje Rypdal had pioneered the use of effects typically associated with rock music, Aarset took the use of outboard processing to new frontiers, again within the context of what might be taken holistically, albeit essentially, as a Nordic approach to jazz.

Molvaer, Wesseltoft, Henriksen, Aarset, Kleive and their contemporaries paved the way for a successive generation of Norwegian musicians that have contributed to the evolution and reimagining of what the international music press cling steadfastly to as Nordic Tone. Building on the foundations of the Garbarek era, they demonstrate that jazz produced in the region remains an evolving form, borrowing from and reinventing its contemporary cultural surroundings whilst paying heed to its history. Their embrace and mixing of digital and analogue music technologies, and extending of instrumental techniques have given rise to new sound worlds that, whilst drawing on aspects of both American and locally forged jazz histories, re-introduce a global influence in Norwegian jazz, this time framed within the age of digital communications. Where in the 1970s and '80s, musicians were primarily exposed to new influences through listening to recordings on record or radio, or through attending live concerts, the development of the Internet since the mid-1990s has ushered in increasingly limitless access to recordings and other media spanning history and genre.

The means by which to enter into musical discussion, and even collaboration, through dedicated forums and latterly on social media, has recently had a significant effect on the way in which music is discovered, created, consumed, and shared. As well as challenging the place of the recorded album, so much a part of the pre-Internet music listening experience, through placing emphasis on single tracks, new technologies have contributed to a further erosion of the boundaries of genre and style. The genre-fluidity of the Garbarek/ECM pre-internet heyday, in which musical pairings were made between jazz, classical, folk and indigenous 'world' musics, has been expanded to include popular music, its myriad subgenres and their stylistic variants. As Rune Kristoffersen, proprietor of Rune Grammofon, observes in interview with Peter Margasak:

Some of my artists come from jazz and draw on jazz but only few of the releases would be seen as jazz by most people. On the other hand, if you say that improvised music per definition is jazz, then a lot of my releases are jazz. But I don't necessarily see it that way. Lately we've had music academies that encourage students to break free and find their own voice. People who love music with a strong dedication are not happy to only listen to or work with one type of music. That's restrictive for your development (Margasak, 2006).

Norway's contemporary jazz landscape can thereby be said to be populated by musicians practicing across a variety of musical disciplines, blurring boundaries of genre and style, engaging in virtual time-travel through music history, whilst employing vintage and nascent technologies

and performance practices. From the minimalist approach of saxophonist Mette Henriette to the maximalist, techno-infused post-jazz of Jaga Jazzist, the anarchically Hendrix-esque and technologically-aware noise-guitar of Stian Westerhus to the meditative reflections on ecclesiastical psalms by pianist Espen Eriksen and trumpeter Gunnar Halle, there is a diversity in evidence that points to a national conception of jazz in a period of explosion. The linearity and stark simplicity of the ‘golden years’ of the 1970s and ‘80s have ceded to an embracing of all that the information age has to offer, a cultural kleptomania nonetheless governed by the evolution of what we might nonetheless describe as a ‘national sensibility’.

To unpack the idea of a national sensibility across the diversity that characterises jazz from contemporary Norway, the place of pedagogy, education, and cultural infrastructure cannot be underestimated. Music has long been an intrinsic part of the Scandinavian education system (Bergethon, 1961) and over recent decades been predicated on ‘rhythmic music pedagogy’ (Hebert and Heimonen, 2013, p. 141), ‘a distinctive approach to the teaching of collective improvisational performance that is based on highly rhythmic popular music and movement, as well as African-derived traditions’ (Ibid.). In the case of Norway, strong traditions of brass band, choral, and folk music are maintained, supported by a cultural calendar that presents festivals and concerts to audiences in towns and cities across the country.

Drawing on the author’s research delivered at the Rhythm Changes Conference in Amsterdam (Medbøe, 2014), it can be observed that in contrast to established Higher Education jazz pedagogies in America and indeed elsewhere in Europe, the provision of jazz education in Norway is markedly less dogmatic in its curriculum. The often overbearing study of the ‘high priests’ of American jazz Charlie Parker and John Coltrane, and the assimilation of ‘standards’ (canonical repertoire) and the Great American Songbook, cede to the encouragement of innovation and originality through experimentation. The internationally lauded Jazzlinja (Jazz Programme) established in 1979 within the Music Conservatory at NTNU in Norway’s third largest city, Trondheim, boasts that its ‘graduation list reads as a who’s-who of Norwegian jazz musicians’, spanning pianist, Tord Gustavsen to the band, Supersilent. The programme’s student-centred and collaborative pedagogical ethos is outlined by alumnus guitarist Stian Westerhus to journalist Michele Mercer:

I basically made my own curriculum for what I wanted to do. I think the freedom of not being taught aesthetics, in combination with being in a tiny environment with some of

Norway's most talented young musicians, was for me a near-perfect bubble to enter for two years. It taught me to trust my own music — and the value of hard work (Mercer, 2013).

and by previous Director of jazz at NTNU, Erling Aksdal who describes the programme's teaching philosophy as being underpinned by the:

[...] highly egalitarian culture in Norway where authority of any kind is always questioned and people's general sense of self-value is high (Ibid.).

Artistic endeavour is demonstrably prized within Norwegian society when compared to many of its European neighbours, with government aspirations (until the political shift to the right in 2014) to spend 1% of GDP on the arts. Despite recent budget cuts, arts funding in Norway nevertheless remains the envy of many outside its borders. Domestic performance opportunities are, at least in relation to the country's population of just over 5 million, seemingly abundant. Norway stages over 200 music-related festivals annually, of which a number cater specifically to jazz audiences (Holth, 2004), and promotes a cultural engagement policy that reaches beyond the city limits and into the provinces. Norway's jazz musicians are able to apply for domestic and international touring subsidies through Stikk.no, Norwegian Jazz Launch, and Music Norway, and the efficacy of this support is evident in the proliferation of Norwegian artists on the international arena.

### **Return to the crucible**

The narrative that espouses the Nordic appropriation of jazz, from mimicry of foreign exoticism – couched as it was in tropes of the cultural blending of multicultural, 'new-world' America with African 'primitivity' – to its reinvention in the form of the ice-cool, detachedness of Nordic Tone is worryingly problematic on a number of fronts. Firstly, the origin-story of American jazz has long been the topic of inextricably race-orientated debate that has focused variously on jazz's cultural roots and anchoring, ownership, appropriation, exploitation, and authenticity – meaningful discussions of which fall well beyond the scope of this chapter. Secondly, the influence of American musicians on their Nordic counterparts constitutes a complex tapestry of philosophical and stylistic inputs ranging from the classic jazz of Louis Armstrong to the abstracted and free-spirited interpretations of Ornette Coleman, and everything between and beyond. At the heart of such discussions are the spectres of purity and decay, authenticity and perversion. American commentators, notably Ken Burns in his documentary *Jazz* (2000), have often belittled the music's European development, thereby viewing it as inauthentic or, at even irrelevant. However, more

recent publications by E Taylor Atkins, Ted Gioia and academics in the field of New Jazz Studies have pointed to jazz created in Europe as having followed its own trajectory, combining the cold commodities of the American canon, alongside regional and global cultures to arrive at a branch of jazz that is at once linked to the genre's roots whilst pushing at the boundaries of that which has, traditionally speaking at least, been accepted as being stylistically and aesthetically authentic or pure.

Is there, within its structural complexities, an intrinsically irrefutable cultural filament that can be said to have run through Nordic jazz since the 1970s, or perhaps earlier – one that might perhaps even be traced back to the more or less national romanticism of Norwegians Edvard Grieg (1843-1907), Johan Svendsen (1840-1911), Finn Jean Sibelius (1865-1957), Swede Hugo Alfvén (1872-1960), or Dane Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)? And specifically, returning to the case of Norway's jazz, is there a thread within the music that is spun and coloured by a close relationship to the vast, majestic spaces of the country's landscape? It is, after all, the case that many in Norway spend weekends and holidays in their *hytte* (mountain or fjord-side cabin), escaping urban life and reconnecting with nature in locations within which the passage of time has different measure, and distant horizons provide expansive perspectives – a pastime or way of life that perhaps permeates a national identity as expressed through the arts? Norwegians are typically proud of their collective identity and the land to which they belong, and rarely shy about flying the national flag to mark events of shared celebration, be it on the country's annual marking of its national independence day on 17<sup>th</sup> May, or an individual's birthday. Such connection to the national emblem and heritage can be observed throughout the Nordic countries and, rather than representing some of the more unsavoury aspects of flag-waving might be better understood as what British saxophonist Iain Ballamy calls 'a healthy nationalism of the kind we've lost in Britain' (Lewis, 2005). National pride as experienced by Norway's musicians is born out in journalist John Lewis' commentary on Garbarek in the *Guardian* newspaper:

I remember many years ago, Garbarek telling me about a critic who told him he sounded 'too bloody Norwegian', and how he had turned that into a compliment. 'I am bloody Norwegian! How wonderful that I should sound like that!' (Lewis, 2012).

If indeed a national trait can be identified in jazz from Norway, how is such a bordered construct universally transposed to the rest of the Nordic region, a multi-state construct? Although this chapter's primary focus has been placed on jazz from Norway, non-Norwegian artists including

Swedish Esbjörn Svensson Trio (EST), and Danes Jacob Anderskov, Jakob Bro, and Palle Mikkelborg, are frequently presented as embodying, to varying extents, a hallmark 'Nordic' aesthetic. Indeed, its echoes can be found beyond the borders of the Nordic region, with exponents of music of similar sensibilities to be heard amongst jazz scenes around the world. Just as jazz is no longer the sole property of America or its musicians, nor is a Nordic sensibility exclusive to Norway's jazz scene.

Perhaps more central to the development of jazz amongst the Nordic is the significance of instrumental lineage. The individual pioneers of their instruments have served as critical role models for those that followed. Arild Andersen (b.1945) inspired a line of bass players that include Terje Gewelt (b.1960), Ingebrigt Håker Flaten (b.1971), Eivind Opsvig (b.1973), Mats Eilertsen (b. 1975), and Per Zanussi (b.1977). Similarly, Per Jørgensen (b.1952) provided stimulus to Nils Petter Molvær (b.1960), Arve Henriksen (b.1968), Gunnar Halle (b.1973), and Mathias Eick (b.1979). Comparable, and equally strong instrumental lineages can be observed elsewhere in Scandinavia in, for example, the continuing influence of Danish bassist Niels Henning Ørsted Pedersen (1946–2005) or Swedish pianist Jan Johansson (1931–1968) on their musical successors. One might propose, therefore, that the strength of musical succession from key pioneers on their specific musical instrument plays as great a role in the establishment of a 'national sound' as that of collectively experienced national geography and cultural history.

The understanding of jazz from Norway, the Nordic region, or for that matter any global region, is for this and other fundamental reasons multifariously complex. Since its emergence, jazz has been a cosmopolitan music, forged in a multi-cultural crucible, a music of diaspora, a meeting point of musical disciplines and tastes. Jazz is a music of globalisation and hybridity, sped on by the simultaneous fragmentation and homogenisation of popular culture alongside advances in the technologies of practise and dissemination. In short, jazz embodies the potential to be omnivorous in its absorption of other musical influence, regardless of its location of production – a music in constant and overlapping states of decay and rebirth. That said, in our seemingly inescapable desire to construct classifications by which to stratify our cultural diet, we appear to find safety and comfort in the discovery of identifiable, often romantically-framed, characteristics, or through forced delineation of the borders of genre and style.

Norway's jazz has undeniably become an internationally successful brand. However, in order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the nature of its identity we must look beyond simply

northern Scandinavia's natural ecology, histories and mythologies, to the region's redefinition in the post-War world order. As Janne Mäkelä so eloquently puts it:

Nordic jazz can be understood as a union of institutional mechanisms and particular tones. In a sense, Nordic jazz has been more about identification games than about identity itself. [...]. It is a story of regional collaborations and influences that have been motivated by various ideological, political and economic processes (Mäkelä, 2014, p. 69).

The region's social and education systems, state commitment to cultural funding, global interconnectedness, and technological innovation, alongside the tangible and intangible benefits of strong collaborative links between the Nordic countries have contributed to a unique set of conditions that have afforded its jazz musicians a fertile platform from which to challenge, innovate and disseminate – one on which dances with decay and purity transcend the cold commodities of accepted histories.



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