

LIMEHOUSE BLUES
"I'M CONFESSIN'"
HIGH LIFE
JEEP'S BLUES
LADY BE GOOD
TAKE FIVE
EVERYTHING HAPPENS
TO ME
BARBADOS
STUFFY



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Jazz at the Pawnshop

STAMPEN



ARNE DOMWÉRUS
BENGT HALLBERG
GEORG RIEDEL
EGIL JOHANSEN
+
LARS ERSTRAND

When recording engineer Gert Palmcrantz was loading his car with equipment outside Europa Film Studios on December 6th, 1976, it was only to make one of many recordings. No-one knew then that it was to become a cult recording among audiophiles and one of the most appreciated jazz-recordings ever made.

Palmcrantz put the equipment in the car and drove off to Stampen, the jazz club in Gamla Stan in Stockholm. It was far from the first time for him to record jazz at Stampen. The club, named after a pawn-brokers' shop which used to be in that block, opened in 1968. That same year, Gert was there to make a recording of, amongst others, the clarinetist Ove Lind, the vibraphonist Lars Erstrand and the drummer Egil Johansen. He was subsequently to meet the latter two again at Stampen's small stage, together with saxophonist Arne Domnérus, pianist Bengt Hallberg and bass-player Georg Riedel. Palmcrantz knew them well from before.

It wasn't particularly cold and there was no snow, despite it being the beginning of December. Palmcrantz arrived in good time in order to get everything ready before the band started to play at nine-ish that evening.

All those who have visited Stampen know that the ceiling is about four metres high and that the venue houses around 80 people. The



Arne Domnérus, alto sax, clarinet

stage is situated in the right-hand corner seen from the entrance, and is so small that it only just carries a grand piano and a small band. Palmcrantz rigged the main microphones facing the stage, about two metres above the floor. These microphones were Neumann U47 cardioids, standing 15-20 cm from each other and inclined at an angle of 110 to 135 degrees.

Palmcrantz had been perfecting this ar-

angement of microphones for several years: a couple of O.R.T.F.-stereo microphones as a basis and auxiliary microphones where necessary. The O.R.T.F.-stereo – named after the French radio which introduced this simplified *kunstkopf* technique at the beginning of the sixties – was, according to Palmcrantz, the best method for optimal stereo effect and spatiality.

– Real stereo-effect can only be achieved by placing the microphones in a similar way to the disposition of the ears.

Such a couple stood in front of the stage at Stampen and another couple was placed to the right of the stage, facing the audience in order to recreate the right "live" feeling. A support microphone was placed next to the grand piano standing on the right-hand side of the platform with its lid open, and Palmcrantz hung two cardioid Neumann KM56s over the drums on the left side. The bass, standing in the middle, and connected to a little combo amplifier on a chair, was supported by a Neumann M49, also in cardioid mode. The microphone was placed in such a way that it caught sound both from the instrument and from the amplifier. The electric amplification of the acoustic bass is particularly noticeable in the song *In a Mellow Tone*, where there is a slight distortion.

Once the microphones were set out, all that was needed was to connect them all up. In those days there were no multi-cables, so one

had to lead all the eight cables from the stage, past the bar and through the kitchen to a little nook between a refrigerator and a pile of beer-crates where Palmcrantz had built his makeshift studio: a Studer-mixer, two Dolby A 361 noise reduction units and two Nagra IV recorders which he used alternately since the seven-inch reels only last for 15 minutes at 38 cm/second. He adjusted the U47 microphones slightly over 10 000 hz in the treble. The audition was made through two old Ampex monitor loudspeakers with built-in amplifiers.

Gert Palmcrantz has described how it sounded when he later listened through the first test reel:

Following a few test tones there is a trial run of an almost empty room. The clattering of chairs and tables and clinking glass emerge in almost three dimensional stereo. I have just rigged my faithful U47s above the stage and put a test reel on the tape recorder. I mutter something about a broken wire to the piano mike on the right, swearing as my finger is caught in the mike stand by the drums, and I order a tankard of beer in advance.

Then there is a commotion at the other end and I recognize Egil Johansen's contagious laughter as he and Arne Domnérus come bursting in, kidding each other amiably as they approach the stage. Various ceremonies take place and Arne quips at me. "Well, here we go again. So, nothing escapes you – thank God! Ha-ha-ha!"

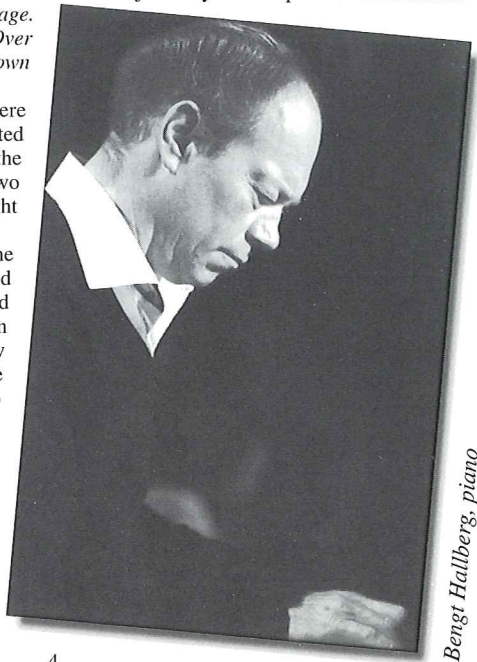
A hubbub ensues. The audience has arrived in high spirits. On stage you can hear Bengt Hallberg running his fingers over the keys, Egil Johansen tightening the skins and Georg Riedel plucking the bass. The smell of smoked sausage and foaming beer, blending with that of the more familiar scent of sour wine corks and detergent, lingers over the sound image. "Dompan" (Arne Domnérus) kicks off Over the Rainbow and the audience simmers down to an approving murmur.

No soundcheck or balance test were actually made. Once the quartet had started playing, Palmcrantz quickly had to set the levels as precisely as possible. After two tunes he had managed to achieve the right balance.

Gert Palmcrantz taped one song after the other, alternating recorders towards the end of each quarter of an hour so that he could join the tunes that were played in-between tapes. It is interesting to note how accomplished the musicians were, since everything could be recorded in one go without any cuts. There is one exception, however: at the end of one of his drum solos, Egil Johansen happened to miss a beat and messed up his entry a little. Gert Palmcrantz cut that measure out and those who want to can amuse themselves by trying to find this almost imperceptible cut.

Otherwise, Gert Palmcrantz let the

music flow freely and hardly touched the dials at all – no gain riding, simply small adjustments were made for solos or when the applause from the audience became too loud. The result was about two and a half hours worth of taped music every night. The second night, the band was joined by the vibraphonist Lars Erstrand.



Bengt Hallberg, piano

– He arrived earlier than the others to have plenty of time to set up his instrument, remembers Palmcrantz.

Lars Erstrand was testing his vibraphone only to find that one of the fans was squeaking. Palmcrantz had to go and find a bottle of maize oil in the kitchen for Erstrand to lubricate the axle.

Then the rest of the band arrived and the recording could begin, practically with the same arrangement of microphones as the previous evening. The difference was that the stage was a little more crowded this time, as can be heard in comparison. Lars Erstrand popped into the control room to hear that the vibraphone sounded O.K.

After the recording, the original tapes were edited to a double LP by Gert Palmcrantz in consultation with the musicians and the producer. The sound quality of this record soon won the reputation of being very high, much to the surprise of Palmcrantz and the musicians who thought their earlier recordings were just as good. Something, however, must have been just right this time, and one mustn't forget that clever musicians with imagination, sensitivity and a feeling for nuance, are the absolute requirement for a recording to take the step from being "good" to being "fantastic".

It is a well-known fact that there are all too many bad records with an impressive sound-quality. Palmcrantz' microphone technique transmits Bengt Hallberg's subtle touch, Arne Domnérus' characteristic tone and Egil Johansen's distinctive drumming – and all

instrumentalists are presented in one sound image which is both intimate and global.

On really good equipment you can hear people eating, the clinking of cutlery against the plates or conversations round the small circular tables. Here and there, among the chink of glasses and the rattling of the till, you can clearly hear the musicians talking, difficult to understand for listeners who don't speak Swedish. "What's the tempo?" someone asks before Limehouse Blues. Arne Domnérus answers "This kind of tempo", tapping his feet. After I'm confessin', a jolly man in the audience exclaims "Hey! That was a good old song!". Sometimes you can hear other music in the background – that of a jazz band playing at Gamlingen, in the basement at Stampen. There are many details to be discovered here.

Gert Palmcrantz records music at Stampen more or less yearly. Here and in other places he has recorded many of the music-world's greatest: Dizzy Gillespie, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles and Bobby McFerrin. He prefers to make live recordings and almost always directly onto two tracks. His ideal is the old 78 rpm record: a method of documentation where the path from the musicians to the recorder is at its most direct, with few intermediaries and no cuts. That is his philosophy as a sound-technician – the meaningful link between musician and listener.

Stefan Nävermyr

Translation: Isabel Thomson



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Recording engineer: *Gert Palmcrantz.*

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Photo of Bengt Hallberg: *Nilla Domnérus.*

Photo of Lars Erstrand: *Orkester-
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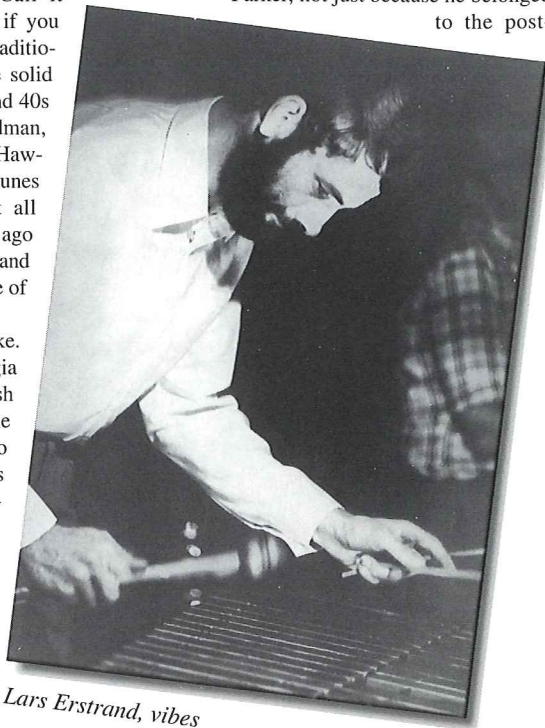
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MADE IN SWEDEN



Essentially, of course, it is all a question of love. Love of roots, origins, a musical habitat. Call it swing or third stream jazz if you want to, or mainstream or traditionalism. Associated with the solid precursors of the 20s, 30s and 40s with Armstrong, Benny Goodman, Bunny Berigan, Coleman Hawkins. Or quite simply with all tunes that were written when it all happened and which long ago planted themselves, legs apart and hands on hips, in the folklore of twentieth century America.

Use whichever words you like. But don't talk about nostalgia — at least not in the mawkish sense we usually employ the term. For nostalgia — to dedicated musicians, just as to to conscious listeners — remains a question of quality, not a matter of annular rings and laments for lost time. We love Frank Sinatra, not because he embodies middle age, suffering and transitory brilliance but



Lars Erstrand, vibraphone

because he happens to be an incomparable vocalist. We were struck dumb by Charlie Parker, not just because he belonged to the post-

war era and our very own decade of the 1940s (as did so many others inferior to him) but because on his way between birth and downfall he contrived to blow a few phrases, the like of which the world had never heard.

Nor, turning to consider this affectionate production, do we love the old songs because they are old; we love them because they are good. They were written at a time when standards were high and when imagination and harmonic inspiration still seemed inexhaustible.

Where in Stockholm should the aficionados foregather if not at Stampen, the former pawnshop in the Old City, the music pub that developed into a Swedish offshoot of St. Germain-des-Près?

Stampen is in fact one of the most be-stomped sanctuaries of Swedish jazz. It is a place of movement in more than one sense; in an atmosphere redolent of beer and improvisation, medieval history and ancient timber.

The accompanists and the soloists come and go, and the signs enjoin to play Happy Jazz. This does not prevent the jazz from



Georg Riedel, bass

being unhappy — for which read: pensive — at times, if pensive is the right word for such classical and american manifestations as the blues, ballads and torch songs.

Scott Fitzgerald once defined seven as the maximum number for pleasant company. If he is right — and members of the immortal big bands have had reason to doubt it — then the players in this album, being five in number, are on the safe side. In december 1976 they assembled at Stampen to demonstrate their affection.

One of them is Arne Domnérus (alto sax and clarinet). It is usually said of most Swedish jazz musicians, in adulatory moments, that they sound like somebody else, meaning of course an american. So there is little need to say, yet again, that Domnérus' inspiration comes from a source halfway between Johnny Hodges and Charlie Parker. Let us instead say that, like Muhammed Ali, he has the flight of a butterfly and the sting of a bee. And tonally speaking he seems at the moment to have the loveliest wings in Sweden.

Another of the five is pianist Bengt Hallberg — mild, eclectic and full of surprises. The odd thing about him is that he has seldom been said to sound like anybody but Bengt Hallberg. Consequently he is international. Sceptics need only flick through any bundle of jazz magazines that happens to come their way.

The third man is Lars Erstrand, vibes. Allegations of his following in the footsteps

of Lionel Hampton are refuted by the suspicion, yet to be disproved, that a year or so ago, whatever the reason may have been, the pupil gained half a length on his teacher. During the swing epoch, the talk used to be of killer-dillers and solid senders. Lars Erstrand belongs to the same school. When he casts off his shirt buttons and moorings, he is apt to become monumental.

Fourth and fifth come Georg Riedel and Egil Johansen, bass and drums respectively. As accompaniment and tandem they resemble the rock of Gibraltar, which — if we may be allowed a gentle understatement — also means a firm ground under the feet of the soloists.

Their repertoire includes a few break-outs. Paul Desmond's *Take Five* underlined in quintuple time is one of them, and the African folk tune *High Life* is another.

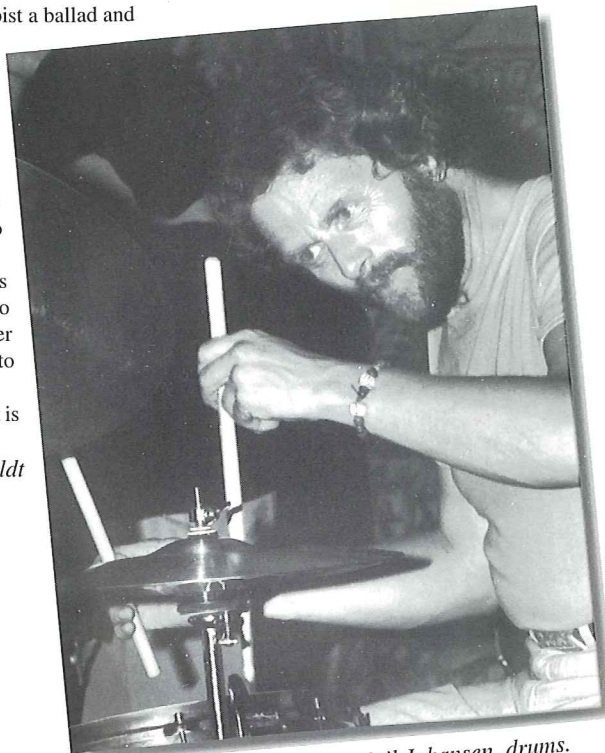
Otherwise we find ourselves at home with the old ones and the big ones. At home with Armstrong in *Struttin' with Some Barbecue*, with Hawkins in *Stuffy*, with Goodman in *Limehouse Blues*, with Parker in *Barbados*, with Hodges in *Jeep's Blues*. And with all of them in a couple of evergreens like *Lady Be Good* and *How High the Moon*. And a piece like *I'm confessin'* has been played by every single jazz musician with a normal degree of self respect ever since the partners Doc Dougherty and Ellis Reynolds agreed on it in the 1930s.

What is worth saying about the remaining ballads? Only this: give a soloist a ballad and he will show his innermost capability. Through his manner of telling a story, perhaps conveying an experience, with his very own pauses and subordinate clauses, reservations and emphases. Ballads are remorseless. They will have no truck with the tawdry.

Arne Domnérus and his friends had some long stories to tell at Stampen in December 1976, stories we could do well to listen to.

For essentially, of course, it is all a question of love.

Jurgen Schildt



Egil Johansen, drums.