

HOTTER THAN JULY

The IAJRC Convention 2005 in Copenhagen was more than just a success.

A novice reports

“This is my first affair – so please be kind.”

Not being a keen record collector, but merely a collector of jazz music, I was quite naïve about what IAJRC really means. I found out when I was kindly invited to join the convention in my hometown, Copenhagen. An ear-opening experience. Four days - July 6th to 9th - smack dab in the middle of the city, on the Town Hall Square at the charming Palace Hotel, and in the midst of the Copenhagen Jazz Festival with its 800 (yes, 800) concerts and numerous venues. To add to the attraction, the Danish summer decided to unleash its accumulated hot weather that week, revealing a shortage of shorts in the suitcases.

Six musical events were arranged for the convention, ranging from very good to exceptional and all well received by us - jaded Mandarins or not.

Walking into the opening ceremony, I honestly felt some years being lifted off my own senior status when I noticed the average age of the conventions participants – a total of 85 souls, including spouses - from all over the Western World. Though we had a small series of brilliant “senior moments”, the warmth, dedication and humor in the room was soon evident.

After the welcome by Anders Stefansen, the initial host for the event, Alan Bates saluted prolific members - John R. T. Davies, Karl Emil Knudsen and Eddie Barclay - who have left the planet since the last convention. Anders’ backing group was Flemming Albertus, Tom Buhmann, Bjarne Busk, Erik Host, Egon Staniok and the ever-present organizer Leis Lomholt.

My People

The first lecture was a deep look into the now famous Danish collection of the Duke Ellington Stockpile, by the archive master himself, Bjarne Busk. The Stockpile was donated to Danmarks Radio by Mercer Ellington, and new material from the 120 studio sessions, 35 location recordings and 50 interviews is still emerging. Busk based part of his lecture on an interview with latin drummer Emanuel Rahim, who could shed more light on the production of the musical “My People” in Chicago with live recorded samples. And there was more stuff for us Ellington buffs. The latest record, “Duke Ellington - The Piano Player”, is out now.

Dan Morgenstern came from New Jersey to hold a charming and humorous lecture on his early jazz education in Denmark, where he grew up. Some of the Danish jazz that Morgenstern played was new – at least to my ears. Applause.

Creating A Mood

Frank Büchmann-Moeller, whose biography on Ben Webster is eagerly awaited and on its way into print in Connecticut, concentrated his lecture on an (until now) unknown vivacious recording with Webster from 1968 at Jazzhus Montmartre with Kenny Drew, NHOP and Albert “Tootie” Heath. A one-track monotape, now doctored to excellence at Büchmann’s University of Southern Denmark.

“Johnny Come Lately”, “Old Folks” and “Mack The Knife” made the audience smile and nod with open eyes. Interviews with NHOP verified Webster’s special gift: To create a mood.

It was a treat to witness the project “Rediscovering Oscar Alemán” with Theo van de Graaff and Hans Koert from Holland, and Joergen Larsen from Denmark. A joint venture - with Power Point and live guitar demos - about the fabulous Argentinean guitarist. Graaff went on a pilgrimage to Buenos Aires just to shake Alemán’s hand, but stayed a month and had inspiring stories to tell.

Enter Asmussen

Alemán’s best recordings were made in Copenhagen when he played here as part of Josephine Baker’s touring band. (I *have* to find them.) Graff played the music and it was topped off by the presence of Svend Asmussen, who recorded on the Alemán sessions. Asmussen, the cool jazz violinist par excellence, now 89, added anecdotes and dry humor to the lecture. When asked who initiated and paid for the recordings, Asmussen answered, “Oh, I guess I did.”

Asmussen was guest of honor and participated actively in all the sessions – sans violin – and exchanged bittersweet memories with his friend and colleague through two lifetimes, Putte Wickman. The latter raised the ceiling with his fabulous clarinet playing. Some say he’s the world’s foremost today, and we must agree after hearing Wickman solo with Ernie Wilkins’ Almost Big Band on the last afternoon. A special treat, inspiring us to standing ovations.

On the 7th of July – marred by the bombing in London – the committee had arranged an invitation from the City of Copenhagen to a luxurious reception across the street in the Town Hall’s finest room. On behalf of the convention delegates, IAJRC president Ron Pikielek expressed appreciation and thanks to mayor Bente Frost, who delivered an excellent and very friendly speech.

Danish specialties were enjoyed at the long buffet, with cold beer for the hot day. Music was provided by Svend Asmussen’s backup trio with Jacob Fischer (g), who raised ears and eyebrows along with Jesper Lundgaard (b) and Aage Tanggaard (dr).

Every day, the record-, listening- and video/DVD rooms were open for high-quality scrutinizing of specialties. With Reinhard F. Scheer-Henning, a lawyer from Düsseldorf, we ventured into Artie Shaw’s Radio Shows - the melody madness from 1937-38; the innocent times that brought us “Begin the Beguine”. Applause for Shaw - 68 years later.

Be It Bop

Anthony Barnett, this globe’s fiery spirit and dedicated monopolizer regarding jazz violin, brought us into what he called “The Hidden History of Early Recorded Be-Bop Violin in America and Europe.” Rare samples from musicians I’ve never heard of. It definitely may be be - but not so much bop. Again, Asmussen was key witness.

(Barnett was in a dilemma when somebody claimed that it’s not Freddy Guy, but Junior Raglin playing guitar on the private Ray Nance/Ben Webster takes... the discussion goes on.)

The passing of the Bass Great, Niels-Henning Orsted Pedersen, was the subject of Peter H. Larsen’s lecture, which I missed along with the important Discographical Forum - there was a jazz festival outside, all over Copenhagen. But I did catch 40 minutes of Mark Cantor’s jazz films in the small Gloria cinema next door. Full house and fabulous footage - some very rare, some classic.

The final banquet was highlighted by the best of the Danish “amateur” swing bands - Leonardo Pedersen’s Jazz Kapel, going on its 42nd year - playing Basie, Fletcher, Duke ... wild applause and foot stomping!

When I did a small survey about the quality of this convention – spouses included – the answers were “most satisfying”, “excellent” and “probably the best we have ever had – no, strike probably!”

Complaints: "It was so rich with good stuff that we missed the jazz festival. It should have been a whole week." Compliments to the Committee!

How does one qualify to become a member of IAJRC?

Henrik Wolsgaard-Iversen
Chairman of The Ben Webster Foundation
Copenhagen, August 2005

Bands performing at the convention:

"Grand Danois" Fessor-Nulle Quintet

Ole "Fessor" Lindgreen (trb), "Nulle" Nykjær (cl), Kjeld Lauritsen (p+harmonica), Marc Davis (b), Bjørn Otto Hansen (dr)

Christina von Bülow - Ben Besiakov Quartet

CvB (alts) - BB (p) - Daniel Franck (b) - Frands Rifbjerg (dr)

Jacob Fischer - Jesper Lundgaard - Aage Tanggaard Trio

JF (g) - JL (b) - AT (dr)

Thomas Clausen Brazil Trio

feat. special guest Teco Cardoso (as+fl)

TC (p) - Fernando Marcos (b) - Afonso Correa (dr)

Jesper Thilo Quartet

JT (tens) - Oliver Antunes (p) - Mads Vinding (b) - Frands Rifbjerg (dr)

Ernie Wilkins Almost Big Band feat. special guest Putte Wickman (cl)

Bandleader: Per B. Goldschmidt (bars)

Leonardo Pedersen's Jazz Kapel

Mogens Eghjort, Holger Tvestmann, Poul Chr. Nielsen (tpt) - Leonardo Pedersen, Jens Erik Sørensen, Finn Lyng (sax) - Bjarne Thanning, Jørn Nørredal (trb) - Per Tvaergaard (p) - Ib Lund Nielsen (b) - Tobias Leonardo Pedersen (dr) - Ane Kramme Abildtoft (voc)