

50 YEARS OF JAZZ AND BLUES

December 2nd 2002

The beard has turned grey the glasses are somewhat thicker and over the years the shape has filled out, fitting a more mature man.

But the more than five decades that have passed since the inception of STORYVILLE have not really changed the original impression of the man behind this record company - KARL EMIL KNUDSEN:

The excitement of his voice and the intensity of his eyes when a new idea is born are exactly the same as they were in the early fifties, when the adventure began!



THE BEGINNING

To be exact, the year was 1950, when a group of jazz enthusiasts/record collectors often met at the home of Karl Emil Knudsen. Among those present were Heinrich Breiling and the young clarinet phenomenon Henrik Johansen. It wasn't the strong tea or the constant flow of beer, typical of the jazz scene at the time that drew together this enthusiastic group. It was something quite different. Knudsen always seemed to present a new stack of 78's, freshly delivered from either England or the U.S.

The import laws were rather strict at the time, to put it mildly. But Knudsen had discovered that collector friends were quite wild about early Danish jazz recordings, especially local renditions of Tiger Rag and St. Louis Blues. So he had established a sort of swap/trade arrangement which was accepted by the authorities.

Some of the early trades brought forth numerous Paramount and Gennett recordings, reissued on an ambitious scale on new labels. The young Knudsen had his own business ambitions and realised very early that there were possibilities in his native Denmark.

Heinrich, Henrik and Karl decided to start a new label. They chose the name Storyville, inspired by the famous district in New Orleans which was the birthplace of jazz. This venture could not contain all of Knudsen's ambitions. That's why Basin Street Club, started with some other good friends, came into being. The club was named for the best known street in New Orleans.

To attract the public, he went to England to persuade some name bands to play at his Basin Street Club in Copenhagen in addition to the Danish house bands Adrian Bentzon's Jazz Band & The Ramblers. That was how Knudsen met Chris Barber in 1950, who was then working part-time for the small record company Tempo. This company was releasing exactly the same kind of music that Knudsen and his friends wanted to issue. So Tempo licensed some of their masters and they were then pressed on the Storyville label.

The first issue was a 78 of the 1924 Red Onion Jazz Babies playing Terrible Blues/ Santa Claus Blues. Featuring great

personnel, including both Louis and Lil Armstrong, the record became a small sensation, particularly among record collectors. It bore the catalogue number KB 100. The output that first year starting just before Christmas of 1952 included material from other companies, totalling 10 to 12 releases. But it became clear to Knudsen that all the work at Storyville was his responsibility. He and his partners agreed that their original investment of 500 Danish crowns would be paid back and Karl would then be on his own. After a severe illness, Knudsen had taken a leave of absence from engineer studies at The Technical High School of Denmark. He worked part time for an engineering office under the Copenhagen Telephone Company - KTAS. Storyville business was tended to after hours. After 2 to 3 years of this arrangement, his superiors at KTAS suggested that Knudsen would be happier running Storyville full time. That suited Knudsen, who had developed a taste for starting things. He realised, that he could transform his hobby into an ongoing financial concern. He forever put aside plans to resume his studies. At this same time, Knudsen started the concert agency Jazz Jamboree, along with Anders Dyrup. Anders was very close to Adrian Bentzon's Jazz Band, and soon they were arranging concerts with them all across the country. Later, they did the same for Chris Barber, Ken Colyer, Humphrey Lyttelton, the Dutch Swing College, Cy Laurie, Graham Stewart, Sandy Brown, and other great names of the period. Even grander concerts were promoted in Copenhagen with the Modern Jazz Quartet & Chet Baker in the Odd Fellow Palais and Lionel Hampton at the K.B. Hall.

Anders Dyrup started with the Adrian Bentzon Jazz Band the Club Montmartre during this period and wanted to get into the recording business as well. He made a batch of recordings, but very much against his will, was drafted. He made a new deal with Knudsen "because now he had all these records laying around, and they wouldn't sell themselves."

Anders' label was called Sonet, and, together with Knudsen's Storyville, these recordings became the main output of their joint activity: The Danish Gramophone Publishing Co. (Dansk Grammofonplade Forlag). In 1955 a closer cooperation started with Scandinavian Record Company of Sweden. Travelling salesman and part-owner Gunnar Bergström of SRC came to visit Knudsen in Copenhagen and the foundation for the Sonet family of companies in Scandinavia was laid. The partnership between Dyrup & Knudsen lasted until 1963, when Anders wanted to withdraw. After this, Knudsen became the sole owner of the company.

In the meantime, the relatively few recordings made by Chris Barber and Ken Colyer had turned out to be very nice hits. "Ice Cream", "Down By The Riverside" sold more than 250,000 copies, in Germany, Holland and Denmark mainly. The catalogue



number was A45000 and was also the very first 45 rpm record on Storyville. Also, Papa Bue's first recordings from 1956 slowly began to be quite good sellers. But it was the recording of "Schlafe mein Prinzchen" by Bue's Band in 1959, which became the first real big chart topping success. With sales of close to one million from Germany, Austria,



Switzerland, Holland and Scandinavia, the company was firmly established.

Around this time, Gustav Winckler (the Danish Bing Crosby) was hired as a producer of Danish pop artists. The company signed names like Raquel Rastenni, Grethe Sønck and Dario Campeotto. Later on, Jørgen Winckler and Gustav himself followed. Of

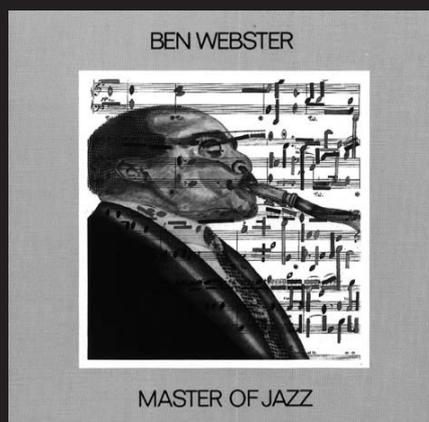
course, all these artists were released on Sonet. All through the 1960'ies and 1970'ies, Sonet had countless hit records and started signing US labels such as Roulette, Chancellor, Canadian American as well as independent singles from several smaller producers. This was the way Knudsen first met Chris Blackwell who turned up in the Copenhagen office with a Laurel Aitkin single, which was issued on Sonet soon after. A foundation was laid for the later sign up of Blackwell's new label Island, while Storyville moved along slowly with limited activity.

THE BLUES PERIOD

But quite a few things happened anyway. Looking back on the period of 1956 to 1964, Storyville's activity centered on traditional jazz and mainly blues. The first great blues singer to arrive in Copenhagen was Big Bill Broonzy in 1956. Many recording sessions followed with Champion Jack Dupree, Robert Pete Williams, Big Joe Williams, Lonnie Johnson, Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee, Memphis Slim, Sonny

Boy Williamson and many others. These Storyville recordings made it economically possible, among other things, to record some modern jazz. They were originally released on Sonet, but later reissued on Storyville.

Among the artists were Bud Powell



and Archie Shepp/New York Contemporary Five, but also several well known Scandinavian artists were recorded such as Rolf Billberg, Max Brüel & Jørgen Ryg.

STORYVILLE AND SONET DIVIDED

From 1964 to 1978, when Sonet and Storyville were divided, not much was recorded or issued on Storyville, except for records by Papa Bue & Liller. These records, however, became great hits and were awarded with silver and gold records. Fessor's Big City Band was also extremely active at this time, recording either alone or with guest stars from the US like Sammy Price, Al Casey, Doc Cheatham and

many others.

Most of the foreign musicians who visited Denmark during this period passed through unrecorded by Storyville. But there were exceptions like Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis and Harry "Sweets" Edison, and the Lee Konitz/Warne Marsh Quartet recorded in Montmartre as well as in the studio. There were also recordings with Jesper Thilo and featured instrumentalists Clark Terry, "Sweets" and Al Grey. Papa Bue recorded with such greats as Albert Nicholas, Edmond Hall, Wingy Manone and Wild Bill Davison.

Knudsen obviously had grander ambitions than this like recording resident US artists Ben Webster and Dexter Gordon - but as the daily work at Sonet came first, these project were always postponed.

THE SEPARATION

In 1978, Storyville and Sonet were divided into two separate firms. At the same time, Knudsen sold 50% of both



companies to Sonet in Sweden. Storyville now began a more intensive business policy by making more recordings and licensing from Japan. Some of these licensed recordings featured Art Pepper, Anita O'Day, Barney Kessel, Warne Marsh, Bill Perkins, Pepper Adams and June Christy. In Denmark, Niels Lan Doky became the first of a new wave of younger musicians who became a part of the repertoire of Storyville in 1986. The Palle Mikkelborg/ NHØP/Kenneth Knudsen trio recording was a hit.

Recordings by Quest, the Mingus Dynasty Band, Klaus Suonsaari Quintet, Jens Winther, Kenny Barron, Khan Jamal and John Tchicai brought Storyville into the modern era.

THE NINETIES

In the late 1980'ies and early 1990'ies, Storyville issued a batch of ambitious series. The Masters of Jazz series included 12 different issues on CD and LP with great artists like Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, Jack Teagarden, Duke Ellington, Ben Webster and Art Tatum. The Blues Masters series also included 12 titles, only on CD, coming from the great Storyville recordings made in the 1950'ies and 1960'ies. The Sounds of New Orleans contains 10 CDs. With all of this renewed activity, it became impractical for Storyville to have production in Denmark and administration in Sweden. At the start of the new fiscal year on July 1, 1990, a new Danish Storyville company was opened which consolidated both functions.

A NEW BASE

When the Sonet owned Studio 39 was closed, it was natural to adapt the building on Dortheavej as Storyville's home base, with offices and a storage facility. On October 15th 1991, Sonet's activities were transferred to PolyGram, and Knudsen once again became the sole owner of Storyville. Now all of Storyville's activities were under one roof.

JAZZ VIDEOS

Along with the record business Storyville now also bought rights to numerous jazz films from such companies as Official Films (the Soundies) and Pathé Pictures (the Snader Telescriptions). The company also started licensing film clips to other film makers and television stations, and a series of jazz home videos as part of the Storyville catalogue were created for the growing video market. By 1998 more than 60 home video issues had been issued throughout Europe, with 20 more to be issued in 1999/2000 as well as NTSC copies for the US & Japanese markets during 1999.



Documentary film production was started in the mid 80'ies when Knudsen met US filmmaker Don McGlynn in Los Angeles. Don moved to Denmark and was hired to produce various documentaries such as an internationally successful programme: The Mills Brothers

Story produced in co-operation with the Danish Radio. Another success called The Spike Jones Story, was produced in co-operation with the estate of Spike Jones. Along with these projects, Don and Storyville have been involved in some other exciting programs. They produced a documentary: Chris Barber On The Road as well as an all music home video with Chris Barber of a studio concert in Stockholm, and did the same on Niels Lan Doky's 'Close Encounter' recording session. A documentary about Snader Telescriptions called 'TV's First Music Videos' was also produced.

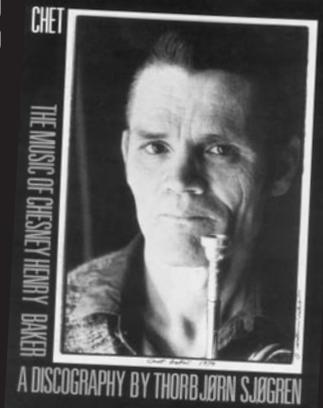
The issued home videos feature artists like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Count Basie, Peggy Lee, Nat "King" Cole, Jack Teagarden, George Shearing, The Mills Brothers, Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, Stan Kenton, Gene Krupa, Jimmy Dorsey, Eddie Condon, Bobby Hackett, Svend Asmussen, Eddie "Lockjaw" Davis, Clark Terry, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Jordan and a host of others. Recent issues included such artists as Slim Gaillard, Benny Goodman, Artie Shaw, Big Bill Broonzy, Sonny Boy Williamson and Robert Lockwood, and a host of other new projects are in preparation such as "The Stars Of Jazz". (a well known US TV program produced by Jimmie Baker in the late 50'ies) Lately 2 concert performances of the 40th anniversary of Chris Barber & Papa Bue respectively e resulted in 2 new videos.



BOOKS

Because of Knudsen's great interest in jazz history, his other company JAZZMEDIA has published several books since 1962, such as the discography JAZZ RECORDS

which documents all the jazz records produced from 1942 to 1969. This 11-volume work many years been the leading discographical work concerning this period. When the author Jørgen Grunnet Jepsen died, it became clear to Knudsen that a revised version bringing the project considerably more up to date could only be done if a discographer just as dedicated could be found. The choice fell upon Erik Raben, under whose expert editing the work has now been in progress for several years. The first seven volumes are now published.



A Miles Davis discography by Jan Lohmann, a new Chet Baker Discography, The Music of Chesney Henry Baker by Thorbjørn Sjøgren and a mammoth work by Dr. Klaus Stratemann Duke Ellington - Day by day and Film by Film have been published in the last few years as well as Klaus Stratemann's latest book "Louis Armstrong On Film". The 1998/99 season saw 2 new books published: Ray Avery's "Stars of Jazz" and Bill Russell's "Oh Mr. Jelly" - another mammoth book of the size of the Ellington book.

THE JAZZPAR PROJECTS

Karl Emil Knudsen's business card reads Dr. in Jazz Archeology. A self-claimed title and not to be taken seriously (of course no such academic degree exists), but somehow it is not entirely incorrect. He has always had a particular fondness for the older styles of jazz, as he frankly admitted



when Thorbjørn Sjøgren was recently talking to him about Storyville's present and future activities: "Jazz is something that grabs you by your guts. It's not supposed to be an intellectual thing-at least not for me." And while this clearly reflects the majority of Storyville's releases it certainly does not mean that

Knudsen does not also recognize some sort of "obligation" to support other aspects of jazz. A good case in point being the Jazzpar project, which was initiated in the late 80's by Arnvid Meyer, one of the main activists and "fund-raisers" on the Danish jazz scene for some 40 years. Having Skandinavisk Tobakskompagni (Scandinavian Tobacco Co.) as its sole sponsor, the Jazzpar project has become known as 'The Nobel Prize of Jazz'. A jazz musician - fully active, but deserving further recognition - is selected once a year by an international committee of jazz experts, to receive the substantial cash award of 200.000 Danish Crowns (equal to approx. 27.000 USD in 2002's exchange rate) and a bronze statuette by sculptor Jørgen Haugen Sørensen. The prize recipient then headlines a series of concerts, radio- or TV-recordings and a CD-recording in the company of a handpicked group, containing a number of Danish musicians. Besides, a Danish musician/bandleader is selected and requested to pick a favorite colleague from abroad, with whom to be part (concert- and recording-wise) of the Jazzpar project. Thus, sponsoring has an important and long-time effect in (also) making Danish

jazz visible on the 'world map' of jazz. Storyville Records is proud to have been associated with the Jazzpar awards since 1991 to present such winners as Tommy Flanagan, Lee Konitz, Hank Jones, Roy Haynes, Tony Coe, Geri Allen, Django Bates, Jim Hall, Martial Solal and recently Chris Potter along with supporting musicians such as Hank Jones, John Scofield, Mischa Mengelberg as well as the Danes: Jesper Thilo, John Tchicai, Allan Botschinsky, Kim Kristensen, Jørgen Emborg, Steen Vig, Marilyn Mazur, Karsten Hovmark & Erling Kroner.



THE END OF THE NINETIES AND ON.

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It is fair to assume, however, that one thing more than anything else has been Knudsen's 'labour of love' during the nineties: after years of meticulous preparation the year 2000 finally saw the release of the 16-

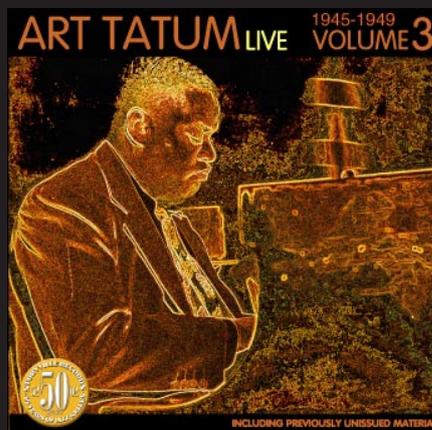
cd series "The Golden Years of Revival Jazz", containing more than 300 recordings by Chris Barber, Papa Bue, Acker Bilk, Henrik Johansen, The Ramblers, Theis Jensen, Adrian Bentzon, Bohana, Sandy Brown, and many more. This was the kind of music that was Storyville's main field of operation during the company's formative years; this was the kind of music that swept Europe like a tidal wave during the fifties and early sixties, and ~ aside from the nostalgic aspect - this is music that is still listenable today, some 40 or 45 years after it was originally released on singles and EP's (remember those ? If you don't, you've really missed something). Available separately, each of the CD's includes material by five or six bands, several of the recordings being previously unreleased. A 48 page booklet is supplied free of charge if you buy at least 8 of these.

Very close to Knudsen's heart, though, the above project may be, he's done much more than that during the nineties: An agreement with the Duke Ellington Estate was negotiated, giving Storyville the rights to previously unreleased Duke Ellington material. Several of 'The Duke Ellington Treasury Shows' (D.E.T.S.) have been released and 12 cd's containing material from the "Stockpile" (The enormous amount of recordings that Ellington made over the years at his own expense - just for the record, if you'll pardon the pun) are at present being edited by a.o. Ellington specialist Bjarne Busk. Not necessarily to be released on the Storyville label, but in some cases by other labels through licensing agreements. And concerning Ellington, 4 DVD releases are also at the planning stage for Storyville (they are already released in England on the Quantum Leap label). Similar arrangements have been made with several other important artists like Louis Armstrong, Dexter Gordon, Ben Webster, Clark Terry & Stuff Smith to mention a few.

The transferring from video to DVD of much of Storyville's catalogue of videos are in the process of being made.

Another thing could very well prove to open up a veritable gold mine: A licensing agreement with the Danish Broadcasting Corp. concerning their TV-tapings of concerts as well as studio productions, making available a lot of more or less forgotten material by artists performing in Copenhagen over the years. As Knudsen recently reported to the Interviewer: "Actually we have in recent years released more recordings of radio broadcasts, taken from various archives, than brand-new studio recordings, but we have also released several new recordings by young Danish musicians, as I do consider it some kind of obligation, somehow, to support your own country's young and up-coming talents, but believe me - in this part of the field, economically, the ends do not meet, so I realize we'll have to rethink our involvement in these kinds of projects in the future."

But then, there is still a lot of archive material waiting to see the light of day ? "Oh, certainly. I've been lucky to get in touch with knowledgeable persons at the SR (Swedish Broadcasting Corp.) and the NDR (Nord Deutscher Rundfunk, meaning the North German Broadcasting Corp.) who search their archives for material that fit into our line of releases. And I'm happy that we've also gotten access to the Library of Congress archives, though of course not permitted to release anything until a deal has been agreed upon by all artists involved in a particular project. There is such a vast amount of material there, with, luckily, the Library having the attitude that the music should much rather be heard than stay on the shelves. And, needless to say, I agree to that",



Knudsen adds with a slight smile.

And as if all this wasn't enough to keep the 73-year old, white-bearded man quite busy..... Well, there are things that are so exciting that you just can't leave them alone. In a few months we are going to release the first of eight cd's containing

Art Tatum's Live performances and transcriptions, spanning the years 1934 through 1954, which is virtually his entire career.

For this project we have enlisted several specialists as liner note writers, including Arnold Laubich, the author of the Art Tatum bio/discography. No matter how many great Art Tatum recordings are available, this is really something special and a valuable addition to his discography."

50 YEARS ANNIVERSARY

And of course the actual 50th anniversary of Storyville Records (the oldest independent European jazz label, actually) should be celebrated, though it is no secret that Knudsen is less given to celebrations than to his daily work: an anniversary CD, containing a variety of examples of what the company has released over the years (though nothing 'traditional', just swing and modern jazz) will be

produced, tracks selected by Italian critic and jazz writer Filippo Bianchi, and included with the October issue of the Italian magazine Musica Jazz.

STORYVILLE

The aim of the label and its founder has always been to show the diversity of jazz & blues in Denmark, Europe and the World.

Although, basically, the entire world is Storyville's market, Knudsen confesses to a certain loyalty to the local Danish market and its many excellent musicians. The attraction Copenhagen and its jazzclubs such as Montmartre & Slukefter have had on US jazzmen was responsible for the colony of jazzmen such as Stan Getz, Oscar Pettiford, Kenny Drew, Dexter Gordon, Ben Webster, Horace Parlan, Duke Jordan, Ed Thigpen, Doug Raney, Bob Rockwell, Chuck Israels, Thad Jones, Ernie Wilkins etc. etc.

Many of the recordings we have done through the last 40 years show this coexistence of and interaction between these US residents or visitors and the Danish elite.

It's no secret that Denmark has produced an amazing number of bass players of international renown, and artists like Niels-Henning Ørsted Pedersen, Mads Vinding, Jesper Lundgaard, Hugo Rasmussen, Bo Stief etc. are among the ones that most anybody would like to share the stage with.

THE FUTURE

One thing, however, has been troubling Karl Emil Knudsen in recent years (well, apart from the economic hardships that anybody working with jazz will be familiar with): a severe distortion of his hearing makes listening painful and difficult. Not the easiest thing to cope with (or to face) for a man, to whom jazz has, for his entire life, been a vital necessity, literally a sine qua non. And he sees no reason not to be frank about it: "Of course it raises the question of when to retire or when to sell the company. I've had great help in recent years from people like Anders Stefansen, Per Møller Hansen, and Arild Widerøe, to name a few. But I admit that I've started looking around to see whether there might be any potential buyer - one who should also be interested in carrying on the Storyville spirit. So we'll see. But fifty years is a milestone and should of course be celebrated, giving us a chance to emphasize that we are, after all, the oldest independent jazz label in Europe and that we're still able

to come up with some exciting releases".

Basically led by his life-long passion for jazz, there would be (I guess) a few things that had stood out over the year in Knudsen's mind: " Well, of course it's not everything that's equally close to my heart" Knudsen says, his tone suggesting that he wouldn't like to put anything down at the expense of anything else. "But I guess it'll come as no surprise to you when I mention the series of American Music recordings (Bunk Johnson, George Lewis, et al) as a favourite of mine not the least because of the efforts to persuade Bill Russell which took several years and many visits to New Orleans. Also when I met Mezz Mezzrow and made a deal with him so I could release the King Jazz label from 1945-47 with Sidney Bechet and himself. Actually, his little spoken reminiscences on the records were made in Copenhagen, just prior to the LP-release..... and Big Bill Broonzy, when he was here, back in '56, he was stayin' at my apartment for a month.... Oh yeah, Sonny Boy Williamson, too. A unique harmonica player and singer.....

Of course I must not forget Duke Ellington. His music is in my opinion, to use Duke's own words, 'beyond category'. You never get fed up with Ellington. No matter how often you've heard a particular tune, there are always little surprises to come up.....Unfortunately I never had a chance to record Johnny Hodges on his own. He's always been a particular favourite of mine, but I did record Benny Carter (whom I also have been very fond of from my youth) on one of his visits to Copenhagen. And I could easily label him 'The ultimate gentleman of jazz'. Personally as well as professionally, he was a pleasure to work with".

Talking about the 'home boys', did anything happen during this half-century that Knudsen feels has left a mark not easily erased? "Well, yes, then I'd single out Papa Bue's Viking Jazzband. Not only for their music, but also because of the fact that the success that they had during Storyville's 'adolescence' in the late 50'ies really was a great boost to us, economy-wise".

"And digging into archives, finding old tapes, transcriptions and the like, and making agreements with estates of musicians long gone so that the stuff can be made available, I gladly admit that it still gives me a thrill....."

Mike Hennessey &
Thorbjørn Sjøgren

