

JAZZ DANMARK

BY ANDREY HENKIN



Alexander von Schlippenbach

The Boston Marathon is the oldest. The Baikal Ice Marathon is probably the coldest. The most historical has to be China's Great Wall Marathon. But all those are child's play compared to the Copenhagen marathon. Not the road race that happens in the Danish capital in May but the jazz festival held each July, the 2016 edition of which had roughly 1,300 concerts in 10 days taking place in 121 venues, starting in the morning and going well past midnight. There's no way to train for this kind of grueling undertaking. You could even make it a triathlon by utilizing some of the plentiful city bikes and cruising on the barges that float down its canals.

Your correspondent was in Copenhagen for three of the last four days of the festival (Jul. 7th-9th), with unusually unpredictable weather. This manifested itself immediately with the first concert: Mostly Danish group FUSK (drummer Kasper Tom, saxophonist Philipp Gropper, German bass clarinetist Rudi Mahall and bassist Andreas Lang) with guest alto saxophonist Mia Dyberg at the back courtyard of KoncertKirken in the northern part of town. Tom's compositions, breezy postbop vehicles in the realm of quiet Eric Dolphy, were actually blown away regularly on a stiff wind. The sun beat down on the small stage erected outside of Jazzhouse for Estonian alto saxophonist Maria Faust joining with Americans Tim Dahl (electric bass) and Weasel Walter (drums) for an old-fashioned freakout, modernized by Faust's use of effects. Known more for her lovely and delicate composing, Faust showed that she could blow fire with two of the most incendiary players of the American out scene, Dahl especially throttling his instrument into submission.

One of the most interesting scions of the Danish jazz scene is drummer Stefan Pasborg and his most recent project may be his most compelling: a reimagining of the works of Stravinsky for saxophone-keyboard-drums trio. The group's 2015 release on Copenhagen's ILK Music was named a Tribute of the Year by this humble gazette and it was in the ILK-run 5e, a rough industrial space in a rough, industrial area behind the Copenhagen train station, that the group played. Anders Filipsen's greasy keys matched sublimely with Anders Banke's almost classical saxophone and clarinet on excerpts from *The Firebird Suite* and *The Rite of Spring*.

Christianshavns Beboerhus was the homebase for programming put together by another local imprint, Barefoot Records. One of the concerts there was Pelican, an evolution of the Flamingo trio of bassist Adam Pultz Melbye, drummer Christian Windfeld and contrabass clarinetist Chris Heenan, augmented by saxophonist Torben Snekkestad, each of the four daring the others to play above a whisper or shift tonality at

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 43)

GARANA JAZZ FEST CARAMOOR

BY THOMAS CONRAD

BY TOM GREENLAND



Arild Andersen

Every year, all year, but especially in summer, the map of Europe is dotted with jazz festivals. None is further off the grid than Garana, which celebrated its 20th edition in 2016. Garana (pop. 126) is a village on a mountaintop in the middle of nowhere in western Romania. The festival started as a jam session in a farmhouse in nearby Brebu Nou (pop. 86), in 1997. Two years later it moved to the only restaurant in Garana. (Daytime concerts are still held there.) The main festival grounds are now a meadow rented from a local farmer ("Poiana Lupului" or "Wolf Meadow"). Garana is often described as a "jazz Woodstock". It is an intensely communal, even tribal, happening.

Because there are almost no hotels in the area, tents and campers populated the open spaces near the festival. On the first day, during the afternoon sound check, a herd of cows wandered through the parking lot. The mountaintop is bitterly cold at night, even in high summer (the festival ran Jul. 7th-11th). The crowd, sitting on logs, bundled up and sipped *tuica*, Romanian white lightning, from clear plastic bottles. At the back, behind the rows of logs, there were food tents. Enormous vats of goulash bubbled.

Garana is not for the faint of heart, yet Festival Director Marius Giura attracts first-class acts. Kurt Rosenwinkel's trio (electric bassist Dario Deidda and drummer Joost Patocka) played a concert in Wolf Meadow worthy of Carnegie Hall. Rosenwinkel stood stock-still, his engineer's cap pulled over his eyes, and unleashed guitar brilliance in torrents. Ideas flew by in waves, but each note was etched on the cold night air. Rosenwinkel avoids a common trap. Many jazz musicians limit themselves by playing only their own unexceptional compositions. Rosenwinkel is not too proud to cover Charles Mingus and Miles Davis and Carl Fischer. To "Self-Portrait in Three Colors" and "Milestones", he applied his specialty: knife-edged lushness. "You've Changed", inundated in variations, became a vast new design that always returned to touch Fischer's timeless song.

Three other well-regarded bands that gave strong concerts were Food, Nils Petter Molvær and Louis Sclavis. Food is Iain Ballamy on tenor and soprano saxophones and Thomas Strønen on drums, but their use of digital technology creates sonorities far beyond these instruments. They played material from their latest ECM album *This Is Not a Miracle*. Within Strønen's electronically enhanced rhythmic environments and oceanic tides of sound, Ballamy threaded a fine line, a patient path. The music was like wind through the tall trees that surrounded the meadow, stark against a twilight sky.

Molvær has been a pioneer in the use of

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 43)



Chick Corea

Only an hour's jaunt from Grand Central on the commuter rail, then a short winding shuttle ride through sylvan glades, the sweltering July sun thankfully filtered by a canopy of leaves, the journey to the Caramoor Jazz Festival may nevertheless feel like crossing into another country or taking a few steps back in time. The irenic setting, on the elegant former estate of arts patrons Walter and Lucie Rosen, combines jazz, architecture, formal gardens and a summer picnic atmosphere, creating a gentle but prevailing cumulative effect on both performers and fans.

Musically, the festival favors 'classical' repertoire—not surprising, considering the parent organization's initial commitment to classical and operatic programming. Now in its 23rd season (the second in collaboration with Jazz at Lincoln Center), this year's event (Jul. 23rd) offered traditional New Orleans-rooted styles, stride piano, a triumvirate of classic urban blues belters, plus various tributaries of the jazz mainstream, capped by pianist Chick Corea's trio with bassist Christian McBride and drummer Brian Blade.

Other activities were designed to incorporate up-and-coming jazz artists and/or ingratiate new generations of arts audiences. Young children (aka future jazz fans) could try to get a sound on various band instruments at a local stall, help write a blues song at the "Riffin' with Riley" workshop or handle Brazilian percussionist Fernando Saci's unusual arsenal of instruments, including upside-down baking pots and pans, housekeys-on-a-string, turkey call and a collection of plastic pigs. The Jazz House Kids (all high school-aged) and other young performers, a few still in their teens, many only in their 20s, could be heard around the grounds, grouped in various configurations at Friends Field, Sunken Garden, Venetian Theater, Spanish Courtyard or even on the various picnicking lawns. Tap dancer Michela Marino Lerman, for example, tromped the Friends Field stage with the Gotham Kings, a King Oliver-inspired outfit fronted by the trumpet team of Alphonso Horne and Riley Mulherkar, then later laid out a board in the idyllic Sunken Garden to hoof along with guitarist Gabe Schnider and bassist Russell Hall (who also played with the Kings). Drummer/arranger Evan Sherman performed original charts with his progressive swing band comprised of young-blood improvisers plus veteran trombonist/vocalist Ku-umba Frank Lacy in the enormous Venetian Theater, but later regrouped with Saci and a couple of horns in the Garden Courtyard. One got the impression that these youthful artists, many of whom could be spotted taking the night train back to Manhattan together after the last show, are all part of one big, constantly changing band.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 43)

(DANMARK CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

faster than a snail's pace. This kind of fabulous discipline was counteracted by Boneshaker, the American-Norwegian trio of saxophonist Mars Williams, bassist Kent Kessler and drummer Paal Nilssen-Love at ski-lodge-like Jazz Club Loco in the Christiania section of the city. The band's name was not hyperbole as audience skeletons and the club's wooden floors were severely and satisfactorily rattled.

The next day was one of running around the city – often trying to stay dry amid sudden downpours – and stopping in at concerts like the cheekily named Pepper Spray at the Absalon Hotel, a quintet fêting music by and associated with late American baritone saxophonist Pepper Adams, or a sliver of the Ibrahim Electric marathon (another Pasborg trio project, this time recalling '70s funk and surf styles), which would play for seven hours at Vega to a standing-room-only crowd. These snippets were bookended by a pair of shows at 5e: the duo of Anders Banke and pianist Emanuele Maniscalco, who met in the band of Maria Faust and proved that free improvising can be beautiful, pastoral and deliberate, and Laura Toxværd's *18 Compositions* release concert, which demonstrated that the alto saxophonist may not release records that often but that each is the product of great thought refracted through a fabulous, rough-hewn sound and multi-spatial approach (and, in this case, comes with a book of the graphic scores used by her trio of pianist Christian Balvig and drummer Ole Mofjell).

The final day for your correspondent in Copenhagen was a mélange of genres, formats and generations, whether the solo electronics of Mads Emil Nielsen radiating out in slow waves at Gallery Bohème; standard (as in Great American Songbook) vocal stylings of Bobo Moreno in partnership with Danish legends Ole Kock Hansen (piano) and Bo Stief (bass) in the courtyard of Det Lille Musikhus; or saxophonist Jacob Dinesen's boppy quartet heard through the open windows of a packed Palæ Bar. Exemplifying this breadth was the fusioning Orquesta Libre (visiting from Japan) at Skuespilhuset, sort of like a humorless Zappa band populated by Latin jazzers, all soft curves; the percussion-, vocal- and spirit-heavy Shamanism led by percussionist Marilyn Mazur at Kulturhuset Islands Brygge, featuring a strong horn section including Lotte Anker in tribal catharsis; and the May-November, Danish-German collaboration of Tom, Melbye, alto saxophonist Henrik Walsdorff and free-jazz forefather Alexander von Schlippenbach at Christianshavns Beboerhus, a wonderful peaks-and-valleys, full-group-to-subsets slab of the finest free jazz, replete with the Monk-isms the elder player has incorporated into his inimitable serial approach over the past decade.

Aarhus...in the middle of Denmark has had its own festival for 38 years and counting. Originally called Aros (a name adopted by the city's wonderful art museum, cheerfully festooned with artist Olafur Eliasson's *Your Rainbow Panorama* installation), as in mouth of the river, the city is a charming contrast to the bustle of Copenhagen and all its summer tourism. At about half the size and population of its sister to the southeast, the logistics for its festival are much more forgiving, with 35 venues all in easy walking (or biking) distance and only a few shows an hour. Aarhus draws less visiting American acts so delving into the Danish jazz scene is effortless.

Two of the acts were duplicates from Copenhagen but were well worth reseeing during your correspondent's two days in Aarhus (Jul. 10th-11th): The Firebirds, in the large black box theater Atlas, and Tom/Melbye/Walsdorff/Schlippenbach in the converted industrial space Udstillingsstedet Spanien 19C, which included a prismatic take of Eric Dolphy's "Serene" to close their set. Tom also performed in a fabulous free-improvising trio with Andreas Lang and

cerebral Danish pianist Jakob Anderskov in the cute pub Ambassaden in what was originally billed as a bassless duo. Much of the select itinerary featured saxophonists of all stripes. Emil Hess' Evolution at the Kunsthall Aarhus was a nonet playing jazz in a hip late '50s vein via moody originals. The Saxopaths on the outdoor stage Kloostertorvet was a classically-minded saxophone quartet with Anders Banke at its precise core, never wavering in tone or function. The KCB Collective of Danish saxophonist Benjamin Koppel alongside the American rhythm section of Scott Colley and Brian Blade at the fetching Helsingør Theater in the old town of Den Gamle By played music by band members in an appealing non-hierarchical fashion, Blades' rat-a-tats bouncing off the painted wooden walls. And Mette Rasmussen at Udstillingsstedet Spanien 19C played solo, ranging from deconstructing her horn for textural explorations to deconstructing the audience's ears and brain with tortured bleats, wails and screeches, a one-woman musical abattoir. ❖

For more information, visit jazzdanmark.dk

(GARANA CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

electronics but his trumpet lines are haunting without them. Molvær and Food often share a similar rapt atmosphere of mists and clouds, but Molvær covers a wider dynamic range, often ascending to shattering crescendos. There is something apocalyptic about his soaring pronouncements. His pedal steel guitarist, Geir Sundstøl, brings him back to earth. Sundstøl has introduced a new dimension into Molvær's world: the sweet twang of country music.

Sclavis, with a trio, performed unique arcane jazz/classical chamber music. But his formalism always arrived at manic improvised counterpoint. The searing, whining outbreaks of Dominique Pifarély, the most exciting violinist in jazz since Billy Bang, stole the show.

High quality music also came from the Yuri Honig Quartet (featuring the austere lyricism of pianist Wolfert Brederode), Carlos Bica's Azul (with wonderfully theatrical drummer Jim Black and unsung guitar hero Frank Möbus) and Kari Ikonen.

Of the Romanian musicians at the festival, two were very good (pianist Sebastian Spanache and trumpeter Emil Bizga) and one laid waste to Wolf Meadow. Liviu Butoi, master of at least five reed instruments, has been active on the European free jazz scene for 40 years, but under the radar. He played with his band French Connection: three hot Frenchmen (vibraphonist David Patrois, bassist Arnault Cuisinier, drummer Edward Perraud) and excellent Romanian pianist Mircea Tiberian. Butoi is a rare outcast whose wildest forays are melodic. "Brebu" was a hypnotic ceremony.

The most famous band on the program was Jack DeJohnette/Ravi Coltrane/Matthew Garrison. Their direct claim on the legacy of John Coltrane's classic quartet will never be exceeded. They played songs from their recent ECM album *In Movement*. The music was highly proficient and sometimes passionate, but less than the sum of its parts. As an ensemble, they do not come together into something larger than their individual solos to make an overarching statement. And DeJohnette wasted valuable time toying with electronic percussion devices.

The greatest set of the festival came at the right time: last. In bassist Arild Andersen's quartet (Tommy Smith, tenor saxophone; Helge Lien, piano; Paolo Vinaccia, drums), everyone fills a role, profoundly. They played triumphant anthems that rang out over Wolf Meadow, Smith in clarion cries, Vinaccia in crashing climaxes. But they also played poignant lullabies like "Mira", the title track from their latest ECM album. Andersen uses electronics to serve art. He

soloed, pizzicato, over his own looped arco bass choir. The band played two encores and ended the festival on a high note. Or rather, a deep Andersen bass note that sounded like it might hang forever in the Romanian night. He is one of the few living bassists who, all by himself, can break your heart. ❖

For more information, visit garana-jazz.ro

(CARAMOOR CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13)

At a festival like this, you have to make a choice: go for the most appealing acts, get a good seat and hunker down? Or sample small doses of everything, flitting frantically from set to set? For comprehensive coverage, choose the latter, probably missing some choice parts, but hearing a wide variety of fine artists. Trad-jazzers like the Gotham Kings and trumpeter/vocalist Bria Skonberg, though steeped in a repertory style, happily never came off like museum curators, delivering the music with exuberance and originality, the former unable to resist taking it 'out' a bit, the latter covering fellow Canadian Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi". Vocalist Jazzmeia Horn's set showcased the limber range, sterling scat technique and Betty Carter-esque esprit that won her last year's Thelonious Monk Institute Vocals Competition award while Trinidadian trumpeter Etienne Charles' group played what had to be the event's bubbliest beats, mixing reggae, calypso and soca. Brandee Younger looked like the goddess Athena in her flowing gown and golden sandals, thrumming her unamplified harp under the trees, accompanied by bassist Rashaan Carter and a few cicadas. Alto saxophonist Eddie Barbash followed drummer Jonathan Barber's tribute to the three Joneses (Papa Jo, Philly Joe and Elvin) with an acoustic set of bluegrass harmonies, fiddle tunes, even a Lefty Frizzell cover, all rendered with a Johnny Hodges-inspired tone. Probably the most captivating (and downright hilarious) performance was Eric Lewis' (aka ELEW) solo stride piano set (tailing similar sets by Mathis Picard and Marc Cary): staring at everything but the keys, he ripped through three masterful pieces replete with unstoppable swing, stabbing chords, dramatic tempo changes and unexpected dissonances, his face unconsciously mugging the spontaneous flow of musical emotions.

In the big tent, backed by a crack team, Catherine Russell, Brianna Thomas and Charenee Wade sang (alone, in pairs or as a trio for the finale) double-entendre-laden selections from their "Ladies Sing the Blues" show: "Who'll Chop Your Suey (When I'm Gone)", "Taint What You Do (But the Way That You Do It)" and "Woman Be Wise (Don't Advertise Your Man)", among others. Corea, looking lean and sprightly for his 75 years, commenced the final set by 'calling' the first phrases of "500 Miles High" to the audience, who proved its hipness by singing them back accurately. He then launched into a flashy but finessed exposé on standard playing, including a lilting "Alice in Wonderland", brisk samba-fied "Tempus Fugit" (preceded by a Chopin-esque impromptu), Thelonious Monk's "Work", Duke Ellington's "Sophisticated Lady" (a bass feature, though all of the tunes could be considered that in light of McBride's remarkable fretboard feats), Joe Henderson's "Recorda-Me" (a fast bossa), to end with a fast 6/8 minor blues, "Fingerprints", and the de rigueur encore "Spain", with even more challenging 'calls' for the audience to try. For the first two-thirds of the set the trio seemed to be moving through their usual paces – dazzling though those might be – but eventually the music took on an enhanced character, something more. A sea of happy murmurings was audible as the crowd headed for the parking lot, sated by a long, jazz-filled experience. ❖

For more information, visit caramoor.org