

Making now out of then or any time – even the now - is what jazz is all about

Staffan Öberg Nonet is a rather typical jazz orchestra from Umeå, Sweden. Amateur only in the sense that no one makes a living as a jazz musician. It is also a "no generation jazz ensemble" with a long history. The core members, Lars-Göran Ulander, Eilert Thulin, my brother Sten Öberg and I learned jazz by doing in the late 50's when jazz ruled. Younger members have more formal musical training. The Staffan Öberg Nonet started as a seven-piece Arne Domnerus type of dance band led by pianist Stig Söderberg. It was a great school. You can read all about it at the band website <http://oberg9.se>.

When we resurfaced as the Staffan Öberg Septet in early 1980 it was for no other specific reason than to dig into our own musical heritage. The focus was on musical freedom of expression with a Mingus-esque attitude. Now, almost 40 years into this, I am glad we did. We have been able to surprise ourselves, audiences and critics alike. Now as a nonet with a small brass section, we still find challenges in our "classical" repertoire of Monk, Mingus, Coltrane and Shorter; but even more so in new scores arranged or composed for the nonet by band members. You can find music by our current pianist, Thomas Olsson, myself, and arrangements by Eilert and Lars-Göran on our CDs from 2007 and 2017. In many ways, this new record takes us a bit further.

I hope you will have as much fun listening to our album as we had recording it.

Staffan Öberg

In 2018 Staffan asked me to orchestrate Ornette Coleman's "Peace". Given the hand, I took the whole arm and made a triptych of "Focus on Sanity" and "Peace" from the album "The Shape of Jazz to Come" (1959) and "Free" from the recording "Change of the Century" (1960). And while I was at it, I threw in the first Ornette song I ever heard, "Lonely Woman". It turned my world around. Thank you, Swedish Radio and Claes Dahlgren.

I have stayed very close to the original structure of the music, avoiding "bebop harmony"; however, if that means I have been "harmolodic" enough is hard to say. After all these years I haven't really figured out what that means. The bass lines are close to those played by Charlie Haden. The piano parts are Thomas Olsson's free interpretations of

my suggestions. For "Focus on Sanity", soloists depart from Ornette's bluesy recommendations. The solo part of "Peace" starts with a simple follow the leader orchestration over the first part of Ornette's remarkable solo and then leads into an improvised duo commentary by me and Sten Öberg.

"Free" is best described as a remix. We made three takes. Listening to them I had a problem deciding on which one to use or crosscut and landed in a question. What happens if you play them all together like a triple nonet panning the takes left-right? With a few adjustments it worked. Listen for yourself. I was excited! The idea didn't come out of the blue, it is a variation of something similar that Ornette did in 1961 on the groundbreaking album "Free Jazz" with two quartets improvising over the same music - simultaneously.

For "Lonely Woman" I added a prolog, and variation of it as an epilog, to Ornette's structure. The solo is a truly free harmolodic commentary to the music, starting as a beautiful baritone sax/piano duo growing into a trio with the tenor sax.

My own "Ex Nihilo - With Eyes Wide Shut" centers round a 6-note motif built on G# and A that stuck to my mind thanks to Stanley Kubrick's movie "Eyes Wide Shut". It turned out that the motif was the building block of "Música Ricercata no 2" composed by one of my favorite composers, György Ligety. It is also the motif in "The Song is You" made famous by two other favorites, Frank Sinatra and Charlie Parker. No wonder it stuck. Since I couldn't get rid of it, I decided to make something out of it.

Ex nihilo, meaning out of nothing, is a grateful nod to Ligety and refers to his method of composing which, incidentally, was born around the same time as Ornette's idea of harmolodics. The common denominator being musical freedom. The first solo part with piano and baritone sax, growing out of the initial piano/bass side-theme, is followed by a Spanish-tinged trombone solo leading into a climaxical orchestral quartet/trio section ending with a piano solo followed by a tenor sax solo freely over diminished scales. A floating orchestral section - a chord revolving around itself - leads back to the motif then ending as if nothing happened.

Enjoy the music.

Lars-Göran Ulander

