

Esbjörn Svensson Interview Conducted By Stuart Nicholson: 19th January 2001

Q: You listen to classical pianists more than jazz pianist these days, what are you getting from classical music that you don't get from jazz?

ES: It's because I like the classical music very much and if your going to be a classical player you have to practice a lot, you have to know how to touch the keys and know (break) Hello! [My young son] just took the phone!

ES: (Swedish to son) Sorry — I just have to say something. He is 3 years old. I have a good suggestion — can you phone the other phone...Discuss

ES: The thing is, I have no, I like very much Daniel Barenboim, very famous classical player, Glenn Gould, there's plenty of others, there's a lot of good Swedish players, good players everywhere, I'm so impressed by all those players, they really know the piano, they could play anything, they can play so hard, soft, and they know, they have all the technics they have all the dynamic stuff and everything, this interests me very much, but also the music they play interests me very much, music by Bach, Mozart, Chopin, Bartok all those big composers, I think it's great music. I am not a good classical player, I play a lot of classical but not that good, but the when I improvise I have a sort of classical sound, maybe, sometimes there's blues in there too. I try to play the piano, if you understand what I mean, there are fantastic players who play fantastic music on the piano, but they are not very good *piano* players, and it's a different thing, and I think the music is most important - I like music but I like also to play piano

Q: You made a record called *Swedish Folk Modern* [with Nils Landgren] and it reminded me how Jan Johansson's *Jazz par*

Svenska took Swedish folk tunes as a basis of improvisation. I imagine he came up on your radar screen

ES: Yes, many times (breaks off for child). We try again! Yeah, Jan Johansson, I haven't listened very much to him lately, but of course he is one of the greatest jazz piano players here in Sweden, so of course I have heard him, I like very much very what he was doing, something I really like (breaks off for child). We try again, I'm sorry for this.

Q: I was thinking about the Nordic tone – is there such a thing?

ES: A lot of people talk about it, when I am in Germany they talk a lot about it, here we don't talk about it at all. If there is a Nordic tone, we are the Nordic tone! So we don't think about but I think when I compare in general Nordic music to middle European music, or European music in general there is some kind of difference, I don't really know what it is, maybe it has something to do with the folk music, or the light, or the less of light, the snow but there is something, there is something!

Q: e.s.t. has a very distinct group sound

ES: That's one thing we have worked very hard on, one thing is that it is not very common that a group get to share, a group working for so long and working that much, I think for 7 years we only play with the trio and we don't have a substitute in the band, it's been our gigs all those years, so of course that has made us come close musically, like friends

Q: On *Good Morning Susie Soho* the first track you establish a whole different relationship between the piano, the bass and the drums

ES: Thanks, I don't know what to say, it's the way we're used to playing that's the way we are (breaks off for son) he's very, very tired now...no chance to have discussions, he is the boss!

Q: A lot of European musicians are beginning to say they're hearing more and more European jazz that's more interesting -- to them at least -- to what's currently coming out of the United States

ES: I agree, I agree. I think it's quite boring...I don't really understand why they play all this music in the way we've heard before; but of course some musicians are doing very, very good. I really like what Brad Mehldau is doing....he's very very tired now... Mama ist com – Mama ist com....do you mind one minute...

Q: You're enjoying considerable success across Europe, displacing some of the Americans in festivals

ES: Yeah, right

Q: You're forging a path a where few European musicians have trodden

ES: Well I don't know, everybody in Europe has always been so interested by the Americans but I think we have a very good music in Europe. I think it's time we started to listen to ourselves now, I think we got some fantastic (breaks off) Hello. There are fantastic musicians in Europe, it's not by accident it's happening for us, we have been working for it very hard, first in Sweden, we had not a normal jazz company we went to a small commercial record company – Diesel -- they have been working with us and the record is totally different to what the smaller jazz company is doing. Diesel are doing a lot of good promotion and put the record together with the pop records, I think in Sweden we have a much bigger audience than we had five years ago, each record is selling around 10,000, more sometimes, just in Sweden that is very good to be jazz trio without vocal, that is one thing about success; at the same time we have a very good manager and booking agency in Sweden too, these three parts, the record company, the booking agency and us the trio have been working very, very hard in Europe and then we find ACT music, Siggi Loch, which is also fantastic, and now we have an agency in Germany in Munich, we have been trying to do this all these years and now it's starting happening

Q: Why do you think that is?

ES: Well I hope it's because of the music! The music is good, but at the same time we have very good people working for us, ACT is great, booking agent and manager great, this combination makes it possible. And another thing is that we are a trio, we working together as a trio, we are little bit unusual in that way, most trios it is a piano player with bass and drums and its mostly the piano player you hear about but I think its almost the same thing with us but musically we're working in a different way, I don't know, I hope it's the music!

Q: I was fascinated you got onto the album charts, you're reaching an audience beyond jazz

ES: That's true, now we've been doing it for quite a time we have now an audience that is much bigger than normal jazz groups have. It's because we've been working that way, we made a lot of other records with more commercial artists before and I think that's a way of getting over....you probably don't hear about them but they are very famous in Sweden

Q: It broadened your appeal

ES: Yes, of course people buy a lot of these records and then they say this is a good trio, and then they say they have their own records great, that's the way you have to think

Q: You seem to be everywhere I was in the Club Blå in Oslo recently and you were due to play the next week

ES: Yeah, we were there in December

Q: You seem to have a Europe wide following

ES: I hope so, before we were playing in Europe for three weeks, now we're coming back, we're playing in England and Germany, there are a lot of things going on

Q: What are the audiences you're getting

ES: It's mixed. I think it's still a lot of jazz lovers normal jazz lovers come to our concerts, and there are a lot of young people who like music and maybe heard we are a special band and of course there are a lot of old people, some people are 90 years old that come and that's fantastic

Q: Could you talk a little about the album

ES: *Good Morning Susie Soho*, the trio produced it, and it was quite hard in the beginning working with it, we were recording one week trying to do something and, of course, we did a lot of things then we took a break and we found out we didn't like this, it's not what we wanted to do, so I think we saved like one or two things from that first week then we had another week and everything fell into place and

Q: If you write a tune do you write parts for the bass and drums?

ES: I always write some kind of sketches, I write the tunes but then of course Dan and Magnus they know my music so well now, they have their own way to play it and they just play it, and then if there's something we don't like then we talk about it and try to find another way, if we don't find another way we just don't play it. There was a lot of tunes that was quite good but actually but didn't fit for the trio, it used to be that way sometimes

Q: I was interested in the rhythmic thing on 'Something Else Before'

ES: That was on a tour in Norway. I was writing that tune I had a special idea about the rhythm, but then Magnus started playing something, he was playing that rhythm then I realised this is the rhythm this is the way we should play it, and then we tried to play it,

and everybody liked it, and the rhythm exactly as he was playing it was Magnus' idea and it was always used to be that way, I write down something for them and then they do what they feel and if I like it and if they like then I can continue working on the tune, but then I know what their opinions are and the tune can develop that way

Q: I was interested in the electronic effects, which makes the trio sound very 21st century, very modern

ES: That is also a very part of us, we don't use it so much live in the studio it is very very fun to use the technique, I played a lot since before, not very much now, but when we do the trio thing and Dan he has very,very (break)... Hello. Some problem again! We like it very much we listen a lot to electronic music, I have a lot of synthesiser and Dan has a very nice sound on his bass with wa-wa and distortion, and Magnus he like very much drum n' bass stuff, it just happened we just like to make it sound different, we have a lot of it in us I think

Q: These contemporary rhythms, a lot of people are using it from Scandinavia, Bugge Wesseltoft

ES: Yeah, Bugge they're doing a lot of that. What we try to do as acoustic as possible, even if it sounds like it there are no loops or anything like that, no drum machines, its Magnus playing

Q: Your touring now, any plans for a new album

ES: We haven't talked about it so much so there's nothing yet....In the trio none of us are pure jazz musicians, we're not interested in jazz in general, we like the improvisation part, but for us its music; we take the influences from many different styles and I think when you hear this music from the United States everybody's been playing for forty years, sometimes you get bored with it, but I'd really like to mention Brad Mehldau, he's playing in one sense standards but he's doing it in a fantastic way I think he's really developing, I just wanted to mention him

Q: Well, you have and I'll wind up now and let you get back to family matters! Thanks for your time, and please thank your son for the unexpected entertainment!

ES: [laughs] I will — thanks for your interest in what we're trying to do.