

# Swingin' Swedes

The Transnational Exchange of Swedish Jazz in the US

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## Abstract

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The thesis examines and analyzes the dissemination and reception of Swedish jazz in the United States in the period of 1947 to 1963. The main research questions ask how Swedish jazz entered the American record market and how it became noticed as well as what meanings were connected to Swedish jazz.

The analyses are based on an anti-essentialist perspective and focus on the construction of Swedish jazz in the US. Becker's notion of Art worlds, Latour's actor-network theory and Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital are used to analyze the empirical material, consisting of articles in the American jazz press and other periodicals, as well as record covers and liner notes, and interviews with involved actors.

Central to the group formation of Swedish jazz was the notion of it as being Swedish and being modern. Traditional jazz and jazz from other European countries were defined as anti-groups. Initially the similarities between Swedish and American jazz were emphasized but eventually a notion, as well as an ideology, of Swedish jazz as different from American gained currency in the US.

The actor-network through which Swedish jazz entered the US consisted of a variety of actors in the jazz world, among which American critics, the Swedish-American Claes Dahlgren, American jazz musicians and actors in the Swedish and American record industry, but even actors from other countries who were travelling to and from the US. American jazz critics also used Swedish jazz to comment on the situation in the US as in discussions regarding issues of race as well as the status of jazz in the United States.

Swedish jazz was connected to a variety of phenomena associated with Sweden, ranging from smorgasbord and Swedish pastry to Vikings, Volvos and Swedish sin. Swedish jazz was also related to a new masculine lifestyle with the connection to Swedish Modern furniture. Notions of nationality, ethnicity, race and gender proved to play an important role in the processes in which Swedish jazz was given meaning in the United States.

**Keywords:** jazz, Sweden, Swedish jazz, music history, record industry, critics, transnationalism, cultural insiderism, record covers, liner notes, borealism, racial imagination, hipness, nationality, ethnicity, race, gender