

REMEMBERING MY FRIEND KARL EMIL KNUDSEN

AND THE ENVIRONMENT THAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER



Karl Emil Knudsen and N.O. fever hit Copenhagen

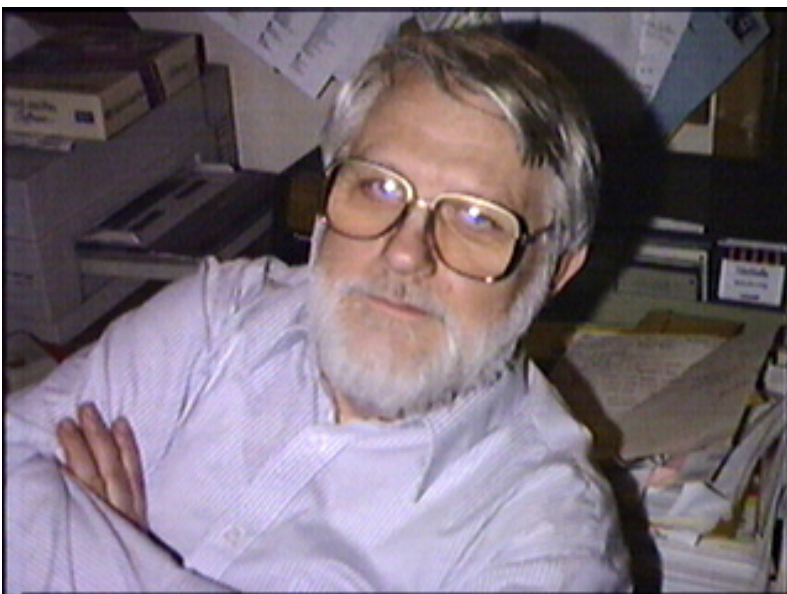
We were romantics, young Danes who saw early 20th Century New Orleans and its amazing musicians and singers almost in the same light as we had just a few years before seen Ali Baba, Tarzan, that flute-playing guy from Hamelin, and H.C. Andersen's steadfast tin soldier. We didn't grow up with Batman, Superman, or Mary Marvel—our childhood heroes were much older. But then we grew a little and for some odd reason, quenched our thirst for heroes by turning to legendary jazz players and their music. It was real, but still sufficiently distant from our world to trigger the imagination: An old, toothless man of color, rescued from a rice field and led into the spotlight to play a donated horn through donated teeth. It allowed our imagination to wonder how his music had sounded before dire circumstances silenced it. There was the key. Past personal calamities were important factors that fueled our need to romanticize and made any comeback all the more stirring. Promotion people took full advantage of that human trait and, although we were smart enough to know what they were doing, we fell in line and did as hyped.

It was amazing, when you think about it. Young people in a Nordic land embracing and fantasizing over a culture that couldn't be more different from their own, and it came complete with a musical score. We loved these sensuous, rhythmic sounds that made our bodies move like no Danish music ever had, and our new pied pipers conjured up all kinds of fantasies. We found magic in such names as Kid Ory, King Oliver, Johnny Dodds, Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey. Some of us became as familiar with the street names of New Orleans as we were with our own. We wanted to be there, to stroll through Congo Square, breathe in the air of what had once been the Storyville district, or just walk down Toulouse Street and make a right on Dauphine.

Some wanted to take the new obsession beyond fantasy. No, there weren't any attempts to start rice fields, nor did ornate iron balconies alter the look of our neighborhoods, but there were upstart local bands that tried to capture the right sounds, fluffs and all. The relatively sedate Trumbauer-inspired Swing Sweet and Hot Club Band had satisfied a certain need, but it lacked the nitty gritty of newer groups, like the Ramblers and the

Bohana Jazz Band, two foot-stomping groups that gave us reasonable simulations of New Orleans music, sans the surface noise.

And then there was Karl Emil Knudsen, a young employee of the Copenhagen telephone company (KTAS), who perhaps was more smitten than the rest of us, but somehow managed to maintain his composure as he made tangible his own fantasies. His first step was to start a record label. Storyville Records made its inauspicious start with three or four re-re-reissues. We are talking 78s here, and, physically, these were about as thick they come, and the sound as bad as it gets, but if you listened carefully, there was Ma Rainey, her voice barely penetrating the surface noise, and James P. Johnson on a roll, a piano roll



Karl in my cluttered computerium on one of his visits to NYC.

that someone had pumped at the wrong speed, and there, too, were Louis and Sidney Bechet with Clarence Williams, drowning out the voice of Alberta Hunter as they all played their derrieres off in glorious sub-fi.

When I said that these were re-re-reissues, I meant it. Karl had simply lifted them from Riverside Records, a new American label that had achieved the seemingly impossible: making the sound quality of Paramount and Gennett 78s twice as muddy as anything we had heard before. It didn't matter to us, not back in those early postwar years. We loved what was coming out of those grooves, even though we only heard the half of it.

Karl's next step was to find a place where we all could let our hair down and defy our genes with slightly artificial body motion. Take a look at any early, all-white American Bandstand kinescope and you will see what I mean—some of us just ain't got rhythm. Karl found the perfect spot on Hambroesgade, a dinky Copenhagen street in a dock area. The one-story structure looked like it might have been a place where dockworkers assembled. With its well-worn wood floors, drab cement walls and general lack of color, the place was about as uplifting as a Bozie Sturdivant lament, but, like Bozie's singing, it also had an unmistakable inner beauty. I mean, we wouldn't have wanted it to look like the Copa, or even the Cotton Club—the place was almost tailor-made and Karl made it come alive on Saturday nights.



Diplom's 1953 Winter catalog. The cover was designed by yours truly, GA, the "G" standing for my middle name, Gunnar.

There were no roving searchlights, furs or shiny limos on the November night in 1952, when it all started. Word had quickly spread about this new club, a place where one could actually dance to live New Orleans music, dress casually, and spend no more than a tram fare. Tax laws required 24-hour advance membership enrollment, which took place at record shops, like Diplom Radio, a favorite hangout where Bent Haandstad guzzled beer, burped, and passionately recommended records. It cost but a pittance to become a member, and the price of admission to the club was equally affordable.

To give you an idea of the interest in Karl's Storyville Club, I signed up immediately and became member number 299. On opening night, I

pointed my bicycle in the direction of Hambroegade, where I added it to a fast-growing tangle of wheels and handlebars. We never talked about it, but I think Karl and his fellow entrepreneurs must have been overwhelmed by the initial turnout—I know that I was. Although I had been consumed by a love for jazz for almost five years, I did not know anyone who shared my interest, and I was too shy to strike up a conversation when I attended lectures on the subject. In fact, I always found a seat way in the back. It's hell to harbor a burning interest in something and not be able to share it with anyone, so I found this new club to be more than just a place to spend Saturday nights, it was a wonderful remedy for my loneliness. Oh, I had friends from art school and work, but they saw my passion for jazz as a passing fancy that surely would dissipate with maturity. My mother thought so, too—when she felt a need to explain why I seemed glued to my HMV gramophone, she assured visitors that it was something I would soon get over. Of course, the real reason for my physical attachment to the old machine was that the spring had broken and I could not afford to have a new one made (the world had moved on to electrically powered turntables). There is an old Danish saying that "the naked woman soon learns how to weave" (i.e. *necessity is the mother of invention*) and it didn't take me long to realize that I could play my records at the correct speed, 78 rpm, by placing my index finger on the label and pushing as hard as I could, making a circular motion. Of course, this meant that I could not walk away from the machine without the music stopping, but there was also an advantage to my unpatented, manual method: I was forced to give every note of the music my undivided attention. Soon, all my record labels were worn, some to a point where the information could no longer be seen, but I recognized matrix

numbers and the visual character that audio frequency lends to a disc. For example, the surge of brass that follows Francis Wayne's vocal on Woody Herman's "Happiness is Just a Thing Called Joe" tried the limits of the groove's ridges and made that particular side readily identifiable. Yes, it's silly, and so is the fact that I had a callus in the middle of my index finger from passing over the spindle 78 times per minute.



A re-enactment sixty years later.

Getting back to Hambroesgade and the jazz hub that Karl spearheaded into existence. It wasn't the Mocambo, Stork or Cotton Club, but the glitter was there. No, a photo would not have captured it, for it was in our eyes and minds: a glow of anticipation and excitement that lit up this dreary dockside place on opening night. If there were stars, they were the members of Copenhagen's inner circle of jazz, men (pictured below) whose love for the music drove them to plan great things for the rest of us. Others—not pictured here, but certainly at the forefront of things—were Torben Ulrich, a tennis star who handled a clarinet with as much ease as he did a racket, Arnvid Meyer, his trumpeter and a future jazz archivist of great importance to jazz in Denmark, and Børge Roger-Henrichsen, a fine pianist who headed the Danish Radio's jazz department. There were others, like Anders Dyrup, and the circle was ever growing—the spark that seven

years later would ignite the almost legendary Jazzhus Montmartre had been lit.

Of course, the Montmartre became known throughout the world, it was a place that began with New Orleans clarinetist George Lewis on the bandstand but soon became a venue that booked top contemporary players, like Dexter Gordon and Stan Getz. As we stood in line and slowly moved toward the entrance to Karl's club, we couldn't have imagined players of such stature paying Copenhagen more than a quick concert visit. But we weren't even thinking of such things, our minds were on this new adventure. The entrance, as I recall it, was a nondescript wood door, probably one step up from the street. It led to an outer room with a table on which sat a membership roster and a small cash box. A couple of people checked names and sold admission while Karl paced nervously and supervised the mounting of a crude sign over the door. It identified the room beyond as the "Storyville Club." If I remember correctly, there was also a hastily drawn sign with a magic two-letter word: "ØL" That means beer, which was about all any of us could afford, but it was also a drink of choice. Here it was sold by the bottle, straight out of the wooden box.

The room itself was fairly large, with tables and chairs scattered about and a raised platform with an upright piano. So far, it was all anticipation, but that was thick enough to cut with a knife. Then something began to happen, guys were turning the raised platform into a bandstand. A month earlier, Karl had quietly entered the record business by recording trombonist Chris Barber with a young Danish group, The Ramblers. The four selections were released on a new label, Memory Jazz, around the time of the club opening. The band's leader was trumpeter Jeppe Esper Larsen, who quickly became the hottest local musician round, and now he was mounting that raised platform, instrument case in hand. Chris Barber was there, too, so you can imagine the excitement. I think I saw Karl smile, but I can't be sure.

Soon we all felt that we were, indeed, down by the riverside. At the time, I was working as an apprentice in the art department of Fona, a chain of music stores that covered the country and had several branches in Copenhagen. There were thus many display windows to be made attractive, and we did the artwork, which rotated among the branches, excluding the two huge windows of the main store, which were given special consideration.

One of our assistant branch managers was a guy named Eyvind Lindbo, nicknamed “Fesser”. I had seen him a few times, when he came through the art department, but we never spoke, Imagine my surprise when I saw him at the Storyville Club opening, not just as a member, but as one of the “in” people. It took me a while, but I finally got up enough courage to approach him at the club and suggest that a more professional sign would look better over the entrance. He suggested that I make one.

The following Saturday, having spent a good part of the week working on it, I brought the club a new sign. Now the smile on Karl’s face was unmistakable and he liked it so much that he asked if I might be able to come up with something to liven up the drab walls. This proved to be my ticket to the inner sanctum.

Next week I will conclude this recollection of Karl and reminisce about the time when he brought to Denmark the Ken Colyer Jazz Men band, which I recorded for Storyville’s first original release. I will also recall the “Riverboat Shuffle” that Karl created on Øresund, the sound that separates Denmark and Sweden at their closest point (there is now a bridge).

The first recording I made of the Colyer’s Jazzmen was “Tiger Rag,” recorded on April 11, 1953, when the band made a one-time appearance at Lorry’s 7-9-13 Club, part of a Copenhagen entertainment complex that featured Alberta Hunter and other notables in the 1930s. This tape was not meant for release, I was really just testing the equipment (a B&O home recorder and a single ribbon microphone), but Karl and I found it worthy of distribution.

Chris Albertson



The inner circle. On the far left is Boris Rabinowitsch. He was our first post war “modern” pianist. Today he writes about the music. Behind stands Jeppe, whose band performed with Chris at Storyville’s opening. That’s Karl Emil Knudsen in the center and Bent Haandstad standing behind him, holding his magazine, Jazz Parade. The man seated on the left is J.A. Lakjer. He owned a jazz record shop and published a magazine called Jazz Revy. This was a December, 1952 summit meeting and I was still very much an unknown outsider.



L to R: Monty Sunshine, Lonnie Donegan, Ken Colyer, Ron Bowden, Chris Barber, Jim Bray.

Karl Emil Knudsen: Part II (conclusion)



I don't know if anyone made any money on it, but I also don't think that was ever the Storyville Club's *raison d'être*. I do know that it was a success with the public. You may recall from part I of this reminiscence that my co-worker at Dona, Eyvind Lindboe (aka Fesser) suggested that I paint a sign to go above the door at the Hambrosgade facility that now housed the club every Saturday night. I worked hard to come up with an impressive sign and it did, indeed impress Karl Emil so much that I never again had to pay the admission fee. Did that make me feel like an insider? You bet it did, especially when Karl also asked me if I could make the walls less dreary. At that point, he could have asked me to mop the floors and I would have jumped at the opportunity. As it was, I wasted no time getting started on the murals. I decided to paint them on large sheets of paper that could be put up like wallpaper, and, of course, make the motif New Orleans, the city we all loved and knew only from photographs. That was not a problem for me, although I'm sure it would have raised concern among people with first-hand knowledge of the city. In retrospect, it also contained elements that today would be deemed politically incorrect and upsetting to some people. You see, in my naïveté, I created a stereotypical view of black people in a romanticized setting that had little to do with the New Orleans I would visit seven years later. Perhaps it is a good thing that there don't exist any photos of my work. I think some people would have taken offense at the occasional "black fruit hanging from the poplar tree," as Billie used to sing. Morbid scenarios aside, the murals livened up the look of the place—I used every color I could dip my brush into and everybody seemed to like the result. That included Karl, who was already busy getting Storyville Records off the ground.

In March of 1953, the Storyville Club was still going strong and I was ready to take a further step onto the jazz scene. Working at Fona, a chain of music stores, I was able to purchase a tape recorder at a discount and with a time payment plan. Magnetic recorders were new in Denmark but when I saw that B&O had a wire recorder on the market, I immediately lusted for one and, shortly thereafter, when they introduced their first reel-to-reel tape machine, I was able to make the switch. When I think back—as is my wont—I have to marvel at this early machine's quality, the B&O engineers weren't fooling around. Of course it was mono and, of course, it weighed a ton, but the sound was amazing. Still looking back, I have to wonder how even extreme shyness did not prevent me from doing some rather bold things, such as write a letter to Humphrey Lyttleton, stating that I was coming to London and wished to record his band and an interview for a program on the Danish Radio. I had no connection with DR (Danmarks Radio), nor, in fact, money that

could take me to London. I did, however, have determination and a burning need to be accepted in the inner circle of Copenhagen's foot-stomping jazz scene. So, I naïvely wrote the letter. To my surprise, I received a response from Humph's manager, Lyn Dutton, within a week. I touched on this in an earlier post ([Melly, Mick...London 1953](#)), but here is the actual letter:

HUMPHREY LYTTTELTON
OFFICE LTD.
Directors: H.R.A. Lyttelton
P.T. Dutton

84 Newman Street,
Oxford Street,
London, W.1.

Mr. Christiern Albertson
14 B Toldbodgade,
Copenhagen K,
Denmark.

22nd January, 1953

Dear Mr. Albertson,

Thank you for your letter, it was good to hear that you are coming to London in March and of course we shall look forward to seeing you.

There should be no difficulty whatsoever in recording the interview with Humphrey on tape but I am afraid there are Musicians' Union problems which make it difficult for us to allow tape recordings to be made of actual music. It is strictly against the Union rules and we may not be able to overcome these. It can be discussed more fully when you are in London but I think it unlikely that we shall be able to assist in this way. There is, of course, no such difficulty with the interview.

With kind regards and looking forward to seeing you,

Yours sincerely,
LYN DUTTON

It had never occurred to me that unions might stand in the way, but, as I interpreted his letter, Mr. Dutton was leaving the door ajar. That naked woman I mentioned in the previous part of this recollection was about to learn how to weave. After a month of scrimping to save up my Kroner, I still needed to dip into my slowly growing collection of records. I now had an electric phonograph, so not all my labels were worn down to the shellac—I took a bunch of them to Concorno (I think that was the name), a place that specialized in used jazz records. Then, on March 12, I boarded a third class car on the London boat train with a round-trip ticket and just enough money to get by—or so I thought.



It's New Year's Eve, 1953 and I am dancing with Rita. This is the only photo of my B&O tape recorder that I have.

Before I left, I ran up my employee account at Fona by purchasing a B&O ribbon microphone and a stand. You can imagine how much I now had to carry, the recorder weighed about 65 pounds and the stand was nearly that. They gave me a hard time in customs at Harwich, never before having seen a tape recorder and not quite knowing what it was; it didn't help—or perhaps it did—that this was where customs inspectors were trained and carefully monitored by their superiors. Well, I made it past that hurdle and to Mr. Kerpner's Guest House in Earl's Court— £2 a week, with breakfast.

I phoned Lyn Dutton, who suggested that I join him and Humph for lunch at 100 Oxford Street on the following day. It was here that the band played at night. I don't have to tell you that I was a nervous wreck, but I made it through lunch and was delighted when Humph suggested that we do the interview that afternoon and that I also record the band, informing any inquiring minds that it was for my own enjoyment.

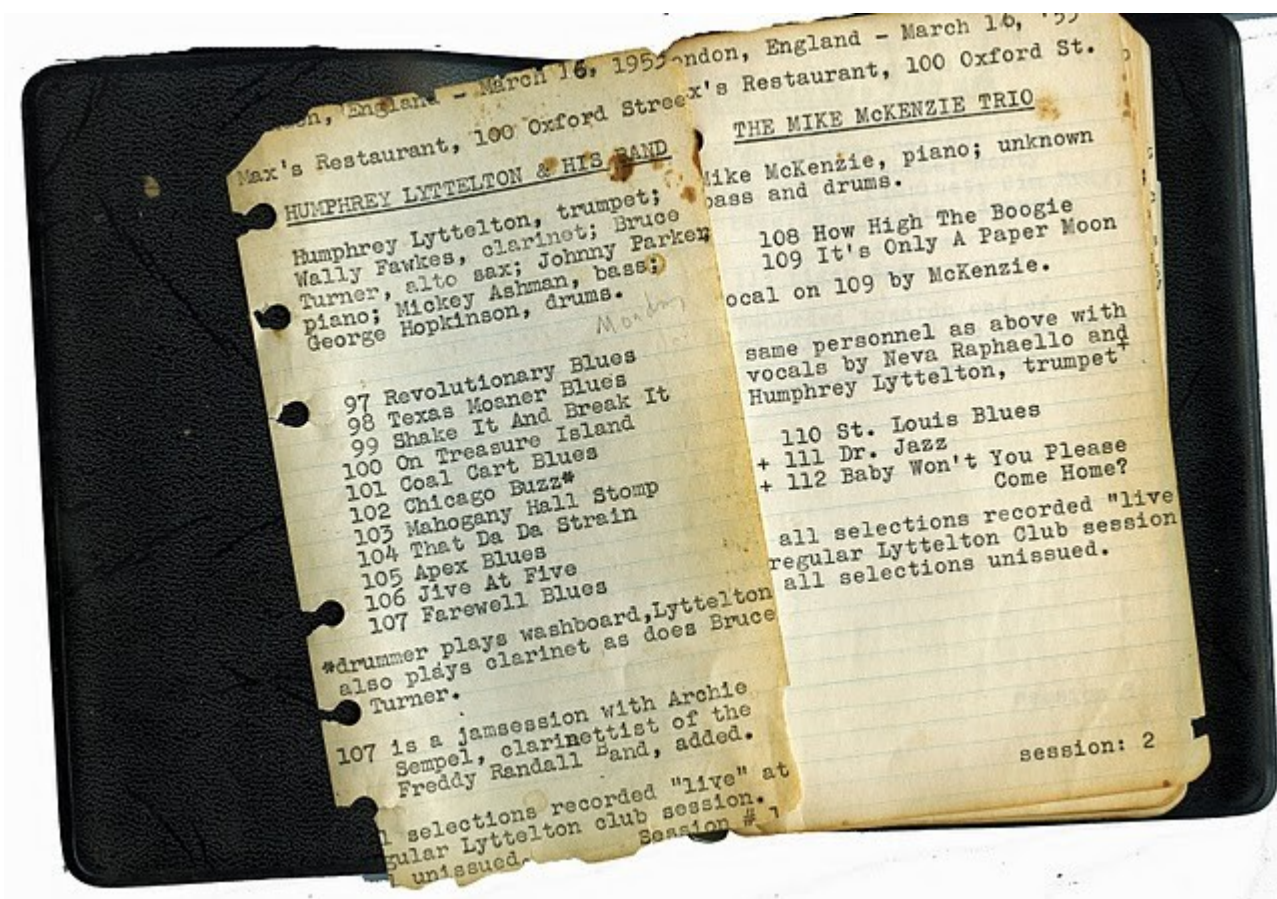
That afternoon, I came back and managed to engage two flights of steep stairs with my heavy load. Then Humph and I sat down and I conducted my first interview, ever. I think it was also my worst ever, and that is really saying something. The tape is probably somewhere in the recesses of my catch-all closet, and it should stay there. Here, recalled verbatim, is a sample of the embarrassing exchange:

Humph: "I don't believe Bechet ever heard the sides we recorded with him.

"*Don't* you?"

"No, he didn't even ask for a playback in the studio."

"*Didn't* he?"



I have for several decades kept a discography-style list of my recorded sessions. Here are the two pages documenting the 1953 Humphrey Lyttelton session. [Click on image to enlarge.](#)

I think you get the picture. Things went better that evening and I still marvel at the job B&O's engineers did on their first tape recorder, It was mono, of course, but the sound was remarkably good and I was very fortunate to have placed the single microphone so that the balance was almost perfect—only Johnny Parker's piano was slightly lacking in presence. The band was in good form and when clarinetist Archie Sempel joined in and challenged Wally Fawkes on "Farewell Blues", the place erupted. Humph also played on a couple of numbers by Neva Raphaello and pianist Mike McKenzie's trio (see *tape information pictured above*). Those tapes are also mislaid, but very likely in my apartment. If I ever get another functioning reel-to-reel player (I'm working on it), you will hear some of these recordings, which I have never made public. Well, that isn't entirely true, because my little lie about coming to London to record material for a Danish radio show became a truth when a call to the jazz department resulted in a program featuring my London tapes. It was my very first radio experience, so the letter to Humph actually started two career paths that now have led to me doing this blog. One never knows, do one?

I was leaving to return to Denmark the following morning, so Humph suggested that I leave my tape recorder in the cloakroom at Mack's overnight and pick it up on my way to Liverpool Street Station. Great idea, but not one without consequences.

When I came to pick up the recorder, I was asked for my cloak room check, but none had been issued me, so they called in one of those uniformed retirees that always seem to work at these places. He looked at the machine and decided that it was probably expensive, whatever it was. I explained what it was and why I had left it in the cloakroom, but the old man wasn't really buying my story. I told him that I could describe in detail what

we would see when the cover was removed, but he held his ground. Then a young waitress popped up and solved the problem. She had been there the night before, as a guest, and she had seen me with Mr. Lyttleton and that machine. The old man was convinced by her testimony, so I had my machine back, but valuable time had been lost, so I arrived at Liverpool Street Station just as my train was pulling out!



Liverpool Street Station

I checked my recorder, stand and bag at the station, this time making sure that I had a receipt, and went to the Cook travel bureau to have my ticket changed for the next train. Here's where the consequences of Humph's suggestion began to manifest themselves—it was the winter season and so the next boat train was three days hence. Furthermore, while I could still go third class on the trains at either end, only first class passage was available on the ship. By the time I had paid for my upgrade, I was down to my last shilling. That naked lady needed to take out the old spinning wheel and get busy, so I spent half of my money on a tube ticket to Charing Cross Road and the other half on a cup of tea at Rex's restaurant, a Greek musicians' hangout which I knew Chris Barber frequented. My idea was to borrow some money from Chris, knowing that Karl was bringing him and the Ken Colyer band to Copenhagen the following month.

I nursed my tea at the restaurant for two hours and the Greek waiters didn't seem to mind. There was an old wind-up gramophone on a table in the corner and a small pile of jazz records, in case anyone felt like feeding it. They also had a storage room where musicians parked their instruments, sort of like Jim and Andy's in New York, but without the booze. Chris finally arrived, along with the entire band. This had actually been his group, but Ken Colyer, a merchant seaman, had recently returned from New Orleans, where he was jailed for abandoning ship and overstaying his welcome in the U.S. This made him an overnight hero in the eyes of British jazz fans and placed him way ahead of other European trad musicians. New Orleans? Jail? How perfect was *that* in the eyes of jazz romantics? The Barber band became Ken's and on this day they were off to a pub called The Fishmonger's Arms, where they would hold their third rehearsal in an upstairs room. Would I like to come along?, Chris asked. What a silly question!

Chris gladly lent me five pounds (good money in those days) and generously offered me shelter at his house while waiting for the next boat train. I won't go into it now, but my trip back to Copenhagen was, indeed, a "trip"—in a more current sense. I will save it for

another time, so let me fast-forward to my triumphantly return to Copenhagen with two reels of Lyttleton tapes.

I don't recall the exact circumstances, things happened so fast and everything was done in such an informal manner, but—perhaps somewhat inspired by my surprising success in London and the fact that my tapes and I were going to be featured on a radio show—the Storyville Club people decided to put me in charge. Karl was becoming too busy with his record label and they needed someone at the helm. Me? I couldn't believe it then, and I still can't, but there I was, deeper into the inner circle than I had imagined possible. My extreme shyness was also becoming less so, but if I was aggressive, it was in a quiet way. In April, the Colyer band arrived and Karl asked me to record it for his new label. I was the only one in our group who owned a tape recorder, so it wasn't for any other reason that I he asked, but it helped to validate my purchase of such an expensive machine, at least in my mother's eyes. Imagine how many shirts and pairs of socks that money could have bought, she once said. Besides, my interest in jazz was but a passing fancy—why not let it pass in a more practical way. As it turned out, my mother's view changed as she developed a fondness for the likes of Errol Garner, Nellie Lutcher, and Louis Armstrong.

Someone, I think it was Karl, had come up with a brilliant idea for promoting the visit by Ken Colyer's Jazz Men: stage a "riverboat shuffle." They rented one of the ferries that sailed between Copenhagen and the Swedish port of Landskrona, a rather large multiple-deck boat that easily accommodated the Colyer band on one deck and two Danish groups elsewhere. Even on a chilly April night, dancing on the deck had its charm, and a further lure was the fact that sailing into a foreign port rendered liquor and tobacco tax free. Ticket sales were as brisk as the Spring air and I don't know why "riverboat shuffles" did not become regular events. It wasn't a paddle boat on the Mississippi, except in our minds, and, sure enough, the press loved the idea and hopped aboard with their cameras and note pads.



The guitarist is Fesser, my friend from Fona. That's me with the crooked tie. Hanne in her "New Look" coat, and Rita and Hanne (lower right).

Extracts from the press clipping.

I had called in sick, so you can imagine how I felt the next morning when I came to work and spotted on my boss' drawing board a newspaper opened to the above photos. Mr. Bang was a nice guy, however, so I got off with just the embarrassment.

I included the Colyer band's "Tiger Rag" in the first part of this recollection. A recording that I made almost accidentally, it was a prelude—as it were—to a more purposeful session planned for April 19. In the meantime, however, Karl and I spent the next day, a Sunday afternoon, with Chris Barber, Monty Sunshine and Lonnie Donegan at the home of

clarinetist Henrik Johansen. His father was I had recorded that almost accidentally, but a more formal trio session took place the following day, at the home of Henrik Johansen. His father manufactured toilets and other bathroom fixtures, so there was in the house a rather large bathroom with desirable acoustics. That's where my tape recorder captured this rendition of St. Phillips Street Breakdown as played by clarinetist Monty Sunshine with Donegan on banjo and Chris Barber on bass. Of course it is very much in the George Lewis vein, but I think they did a good job. What do you think?

The following Sunday, we went to Gentofte, a Copenhagen suburb where Karl had done some scouting to find a large room that might give us a San Jacinto Hall-like sound. Bill Russell's recordings of Bunk, One-eyed Louis Nelson, *et al* had that hollow acoustic and, well, European trad musicians were emulating every clinker made by their aged idols, so why not also try to capture what had become known as the American Music (in the label name) sound? The ballroom of the Gentofte Hotel was perfect, so Colyer's Jazz Men mounted the bandstand and I placed my microphone on the dance floor, about 30 feet away.

As I listen to these recordings now, almost sixty years later, I have to agree with *The Gramophone's* reviewer, Oliver King (a made-up name, if ever there was one), who in the January 1956 issue gave not a single star to an EP containing some of these recordings. He explained why:

"Again I have refused to award stars for these performances, as they are so badly recorded as to sound woolly and almost pre-electric. If I Ever Cease is a little better in this respect, but although some fine jazz undoubtedly went into the recording microphone, precious little idea of it comes Out; the band might be playing in a room draped with felt two blocks away..."

Having myself spent about three decades writing monthly record reviews, I have to admit that I have been equally harsh in my views. Mr. OK (if you know his identity, please tell me) had a good point, but he didn't know that the "bad" sound was deliberate—he should have been able to figure that out, however. Here is a sample of that "almost pre-electric" sound:

The Colyer recordings were issued in 78 rpm format on the British Tempo label, as well as on Storyville—later, of course, they found their way to vinyl and are currently available on a CD issued in England by Lake Records. "I never received a thank you or a penny," Ken said a few years later, "I hear that Knudsen is now a rich man. Bad cess to all parasites." Well, I don't think Karl made much money from these tapes, and I have never complained over the fact that I, too, never received any payment. Karl did become rather well off, but that was because he was a good businessman, loved the business he chose to enter, and worked tirelessly.

In March of 1954, I left it all behind and sailed for Iceland, the country of my birth. More eager than ever to return to the land of jazz, where I had spent close to three wartime years never hearing a note of it. Having dual citizenship, I discovered that I could apply for an immigration visa on either the Danish or the Icelandic quote, and my chances were better if I opted for the latter.

I sold my beloved B&O machine to finance my move and boarded the steamer Dronning Alexandrine to head for a very uncertain but enticing future in the Promised Land. As we all know, jazz continued to thrive in Denmark, the Montmartre became a world-class venue

for jazz, Karl expanded his business and took it far beyond traditional jazz, although that remained his favorite, and such icons of the music as Stuff Smith, Dexter Gordon, Thad Jones and Ben Webster were among the many Americans who took up residence in Denmark. Had that happened before I left, I might have stayed.

Karl sometimes parked at my apartment while in New York, and it was always a pleasure to have him around, although he was constantly on the phone, talking to widows, sons and daughters of jazz musicians, making deals. He entered the film business as well, issuing some wonderful jazz videos, and he became a book publisher. It was all a labor of love, even when it brought him money, which it often did *not* do.

The last time I saw Karl was when he stayed with me in September of 2001 and we watched together in utter disbelief as the World Trade Center drama unfolded. The following day, we walked over to Broadway to have lunch with Maxine Gordon and that's when the impact of the attack really hit us. The actual attack was horrible beyond description, but it looked like something we were used to seeing as staged for a blockbuster movie. The immediate after effect hit harder, emotionally. You could see it in the faces of New Yorkers as they tried to go about their business—eyes met and an eerie recognition came over faces of passing strangers. For someone who was used to New York, a city where one might never really get to know one's next-door neighbor, this sudden, unrehearsed kinship became particularly surrealistic. And then the pictures appeared everywhere, snapshots and posters of missing loved ones, taped and pinned to bus stops and lamp posts by people who desperately sought any news. Karl and I had planned to attend a jazz collectors' meeting in New Jersey on the following day, but I was in no mood, so I bowed out. I told Karl that roads were blocked and the meeting had probably been called off, but he was determined to go, so he did, and found the meeting, although it too showed the effects of September 11. I spent the morning of the 12th visiting a sick friend at Columbia Presbyterian and I shall never forget the sight of literally hundreds of photographs with names and phone numbers that framed the hospital entrance. It was an extraordinary time, a moment when the melting pot that is New York finally seemed to have come together. How sad that it didn't last and sadder still that it ended up polarizing us as never before.

Two Septembers later, Karl Emil Knudsen passed away at age 74. Gone, but far from forgotten by his many friends, some of whom meet regularly as the *KEK Society*, to honor his memory. They even have a [dedicated web site](#). I recommend that you pay it a visit, some of the text is in Danish, some in English, but you don't have to read any of it to see how much our friend, KEK, is missed.

The post WWII revival jazz scene that brought Karl and me together some sixty years ago is long gone, so are many of our mutual friends, but the work that Karl so exhaustively pursued will forever bring the music he loved to new ears. Storyville Records now belongs to an international music company and the number of releases has dwindled considerably, but the record business itself is fast becoming a memory. If you have ever dealt directly with Storyville Records, you probable came into contact with Mona Granager—she was Karl's right hand for more years than she might admit to, and she continues, along with another long-time Storyville asset, Anders Stefansen, to issue CDs that Karl would have been proud of.

There is so much more to tell about Karl and jazz in Denmark, but it will have to wait. You have probably surmised that I can go on and on and on, and that I often do just that. Hope it's okay.

Chris Albertson



Karl on his last visit, September 11, 2001. It is as if he is looking at the text above and wondering what all the fuss is about.