

---

## Northern Lights and Sounds

### Fringe Beat

By Josef Woodard

Thursday, November 6, 2008

**SWEDISH EAR MASSAGE:** **Glenn Miller** might have been squirming in his oceanic crypt hearing the uncharted, free improvisational wares unfolding in Stockholm's famed **Glenn Miller Café** last Monday night. Then again, maybe he wouldn't be: We can never really project aesthetic values on bygone creative minds. Maybe Miller would have been an avant-gardist in his old age. Before a packed and appreciative crowd in a tiny—i.e., cozy—room not much larger than the beloved old **Jazz Hall** in Santa Barbara—the art of collective improvisation, sans tonality or rhythm, was being expertly practiced by a band called **The Electrics**, featuring the luminous and amazingly free-minded yet grounded German trumpeter **Axel Dörner** (check him out).



*Axel Dörner*

Meanwhile, 10 blocks away in downtown Stockholm, another well-known jazz club here, **Jazz Club Fasching**, was hosting a fascinating inside-outside Swedish band called **Swedish AZZ**, mixing shards of vintage jazz, free blowing and surprisingly tasteful turntable sonics. At the helm is saxophonist **Mats Gustafson**, steadily gaining more acclaim, in Europe and beyond. All this, on a Monday, in dear old Stockholm—to paraphrase the tune and nod to a city adored by many a jazz musician over the decades.

One connection between Dörner and Gustafson was the previous weekend's event far to the north of Stockholm, in the Norrlands university town of Umeå, which just celebrated the 40th anniversary of its jazz festival. While the summer Stockholm Jazz Festival is a summery affair on the festival circuit, Umeå's festival leans towards artier fare,

while also satisfying various demographics with hip hop (Guru's *Jazzmatazz*), big band swing, and orchestral-meets-jazz sounds (at its best, Joakim Milder's *Mysterious Ways*, a tribute to the internationally-known Swedish pianist Esberg Svenson, who died young last year).

Gustafson, a wondrous player specializing on baritone sax, hails from the Umeå area and was an artist-in-residence at the festival, appearing in the world premiere of Swedish AZZ but also in a cathartically brain-massaging free improv set with volcanic German sax legend **Peter Brötzmann** and the quite amazing drummer **Paal Nilssen-Love**. For his part, Dörner traversed deconstructed **Thelonious Monk** material in the witty **Monk's Casino**, whose set was followed by a cool young band outta' Finland, **Mikko Innanen & Inkvisitio**, another, younger variation on the inside-outside jazz idea, which accounts for some of the most seductive new ideas in the music. Just ask the **Bad Plus**.

Umeå's 2008 festival also included worthy American artists (**Dave Holland's** great quintet, **Joshua Redman's** trio with drummer **Brian Blade** and bassist **Reuben Rogers**, **Christian Scott** and quirky Oklahomans **Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey**). But the American deserving greater recognition award went to **Henry Threadgill and Zooid**—guitar, tuba, bass and drums, navigating Threadgill's unique and continually compelling chamber jazz language, appealing to the cerebrum and the gut. (Local memory trip: Some might remember Threadgill's fantastic show with his group **Very Very Circus** at the Fleischmann Auditorium back in the warm dark ages of the 1980s, one of the greatest jazz shows these ears have caught in Santa Barbara).

By the time this column is in print, we'll have a new president, and I'm assuming it will be the one who virtually the whole of Sweden, Europe ("old" and new), the civilized world, and you and I hoped for, won. If that's not the case, I've already packed my bags for Stockholm.

**TO-DOINGS:** Sometimes, we take for granted the things which make Santa Barbara the special place it is, and we're not talking about the usual allurements you'll find listed in Chamber of Commerce brochures. Take, for instance, the **Santa Barbara Blues Society**, which boasts a reputation as the oldest continuously-running Blues Society in the U.S. (and beyond?), and which regularly brings tasty, true blues to the agreeable venue of Warren Hall, at Earl Warren Showgrounds. This Saturday, the SBBS' soiree features the much lauded Cajun-blues artist **Tab Benoit**. Should be a hot, dance-able time, full of steamy guitar licks and Louisianan grooves, in the shadow of Earl Warren.

(Got e? [fringebeat@independent.com](mailto:fringebeat@independent.com).)