

BOOK REVIEW

HARLEM JAZZ ADVENTURES: A European Baron's Memoir, 1934-1969

By **Timme Rosenkrantz**

Adapted and Edited by **Fradley Hamilton Garner**

Scarecrow Press | Lanham, Toronto, Plymouth, U.K., 2012 | 297 Pages | \$75.00

By **Joe Lang** Past NJJS President

Upon finishing *Harlem Jazz Adventures*, I snapped my fingers and thought to myself, "Damn, that Rosenkrantz cat would have been a terrific person to know and hang with." The only problem for me would have been the ceaseless imbibing of alcohol that he describes over and over. I would have faked it, however, to meet all of those terrific musicians, and, even more importantly, hear them play in so many of the venues that I know only as revered names.

Fradley Garner undertook a labor of love in translating and annotating the writings of Timme Rosenkrantz, the Danish blueblood with an affinity for jazz and the jazz life. He has succeeded in getting the Rosenkrantz story out for all English speaking people like me to enjoy. Most of the content is derived from Rosenkrantz's 1964 memoir that was published in Denmark, with a 1969 newspaper remembrance of Coleman Hawkins, and an Epilogue by Timme's niece, Bente Arendrup, as added bonuses.

The January 2012 issue of *Jersey Jazz* contained a cover story by Dan Morgenstern in which he shared his impressions of the book, and of Rosenkrantz who was a personal friend. I cannot pretend to have the kind of insight that Morgenstern was able to provide, so I will just add my own impressions of the book.

Rosenkrantz first ventured to these shores in 1934 when he was 22 years old. His first stop in New York was at the Commodore Record Shop where he was told by owner Milt Gabler that jazz was dead in America. It was good for Rosenkrantz and for jazz that he did not let Gabler's remarks influence him. Shocked and unbelieving, he ignored Gabler's admonition not to go up to Harlem, a dangerous place for a white visitor. Instead, he ventured right up to the Apollo Theater where one of his first American acquaintances became the legendary record producer and jazz advocate John Hammond whom he met in the dressing room of bandleader Don Redman. Hammond was to open many doors for Rosenkrantz, and he soon began to see and meet many of his musical heroes.

There follows tale upon tale of meeting and befriending jazz legends like Chick Webb, Benny Carter, Willie "The Lion" Smith, Art Tatum and Fats Waller. Most of them involved a lot of booze. With money a problem, at one point he takes a job as a pay-per-dance host at a

nightclub where he is dismissed by Benny Goodman as "just a gigolo." His short chapter, actually all of them are short, about the alcoholic trumpeter Jake Vandermeulen is touching. He also describes how he met Inez Cavanaugh, a sometimes vocalist who became his lifetime companion.

As he proceeds through his jazz adventures, we get glimpses of Stuff Smith, Erroll Garner, Bud Powell, and many others. We learn about Rosenkrantz as a record producer, record store owner, and ubiquitous presence on the jazz scene.

Garner has done a terrific job of translating the writing of Rosenkrantz to the English. The text is highly readable, and makes Rosenkrantz's passion for jazz come alive on every page. Garner's footnotes are concise, and put the stories related by Rosenkrantz into perspective. Placing them at the end of each chapter, rather than the usual placement of notes at the back of the book makes them easily accessible, and useful, rather than being a chore to locate and read.

There is a helpful section on resources that includes a list of books and internet links with a brief description of each referenced resource. Finally, Garner has included a three-part

discography that is described as follows:

- Studio Sessions and Live Concerts in Timme Rosenkrantz's Name
- Timme Rosenkrantz as a Recordist at His Apartments in New York
- Timme Rosenkrantz as Record Producer/Publisher/supervisor

This discography does not purport to be definitive, but does give a good view of the documented evidence of Rosenkrantz's activities related to recording jazz.

Harlem Jazz Adventures is an enjoyable and fascinating volume that presents one man's unique involvement in a world that he loved. Rosenkrantz offers a lot of inside looks at many musicians who are legendary in the history of jazz, and his passion for the music and the players comes through in his words. Thanks to Fradley Garner, we can all enjoy this entertaining reminiscence. 

