

Harlem Jazz Adventures. A European Jazz Baron's Memoir, 1936-1969

By Timme Rosenkrantz (edited by Fradley Hamilton Garner)

In 1934 twenty-three-year-old Baron Timme Rosenkrantz landed in New York, getting off a ship from his native Denmark. The baron, whose ancestor had been mentioned in Shakespeare's Hamlet, settled in a hotel on 70th Street and was full of expectation about the jazz he had come to the USA to hear. He went to Commodore Music Shop on 42nd Street to get some information from its owner Milt Gabler, only to learn that most of the great jazz musicians he loved meanwhile worked in studios playing Vienna waltzes and popular tunes. Rosenkrantz was not discouraged and went about discovering the jazz that could, of course, still be heard in New York. He heard Don Redman at the Apollo, met young John Hammond, saw Chick Webb at the Savoy, and was fascinated by singer Leo Watson.

Timme's father, Palle Rosenkrantz, who was Denmark's first crime novel writer, had given his son a letter of recommendation to open doors for him in New York. But Timme was less interested in his father's boring acquaintances than in Benny Carter and Teddy Wilson's music. He accompanied Billie Holiday to a private party and reported that musicians Eddie Condon and Red McKenzie did not think much of saxophonist and band leader Charlie Barnet. For a chance to hear Benny Goodman at the Casino de Paree, Timme even took on a job as a taxi-dancer. He became friends with Willie "The Lion" Smith, met Art Tatum, visited Fats Waller at his apartment and even smoked his first joint, that no one less than Mezz Mezzrow had given him.

He returned to Copenhagen for a while, but in 1937 he was back in New York. We read here about Slim Gaillard and Slam Stewart, singer Inez Cavanaugh (who was to become his partner for life), and W. C. Handy, Louis Armstrong, and Bill Coleman. In 1940 Rosenkrantz and Cavanaugh opened a record store in Harlem. But four years later they had to close it because business was slow during the war years.

Rosenkrantz tells us about legendary Nick's in Greenwich Village and about his friendship with Duke Ellington and Stuff Smith and gives us a glance at the musical world where bebop was born. Rosenkrantz was always more than just an observer around the musicians: He organized concerts and even some recording sessions, including legendary recording sessions with Errol Garner. The book's appendix contains a list of all the sessions he produced. Although the subtitle suggests a memoir reaching until 1969, Rosenkrantz's own memories end for the most part in the mid-1940s. The book, which was originally published in Danish, has been enhanced by an appraisal of saxophonist Coleman Hawkins written when

Rosenkrantz died in 1969 and by a postscript written by Timme's niece that also tells of the Club "Timme's" that he founded in Copenhagen in the 1960s.

Rosenkrantz wrote his memoirs in 1964 in Danish and it's time that his reports on his times are made available to a wider readership. Fradley Garner, an American who has lived in Copenhagen since 1960, took it upon himself to edit an English translation of the book, slightly annotating and enriching it with explanatory passages from interviews with other people who witnessed the times. It creates a lively impression of the swinging music from the 1930s to the 1950s from the perspective of an outsider, who perhaps for that reason had a more objective, less emotional, critical, and sometimes amazed view of the history of jazz than natives could have accomplished.

Timme Rosenkrantz's *Harlem Jazz Adventures* give us a unique look at the musical world of New York in the 1930s and 1940s, a time of transition between swing and bebop, when musicians with aesthetic self-confidence and drive continued developing jazz. Between the many anecdotes that make the reading so fascinating, one discovers again and again the seriousness with which these musicians pushed their art forward.

Wolfram Knauer (March 2012)

Translated by C. Klohr