
SIGNIFYIN(G) CARL: NIELSEN'S MUSIC IN THE JAZZ REPERTOIRE

By Mikkel Vad

There is something highly ironic in exploring the use of Carl Nielsen's music in the jazz repertoire. He was, to say the least, not a fan:

My opinion is that it [jazz] spoils the young musician's ear and individuality, it is a nasty and deathlike music, always the same, because they steal from one another. I also think that jazz is a direct sin against the people, who by instinct love good music and much prefer it to this impudent, depraving skeleton-rattling noise.¹

To be fair he did speak of jazz in moderately positive words elsewhere,² but in general it seems that he despised it. In the light of Nielsen's remarks it seems just the more ironic that his songs have gained a considerable afterlife in the jazz repertoire.

This article will trace the prevalence of Nielsen's music in the jazz repertoire and suggest that it should be understood within the broader framework of jazz aesthetics. Thus, the interpretive starting point will be from African-American studies, in particular using the concept of Signifyin(g) as can be read in Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey. A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*.³

The only Danish scholar to write at length about the use of native songs in the jazz repertoire is Fabian Holt, who classifies it under the term 'hjemligt' repertoire, i.e.

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- 1 Axel Gerfalk, 'Jazz Age Bitterly Assailed by Great Danish Composer', interview in *Times*, Los Angeles, 22.1.1928 and *Post Dispatch*, Houston, 29.1.1928, John Fellow (ed.), *Carl Nielsen til sin samtid*, Copenhagen, 1999, 439. For further of Nielsen's comments on jazz see Fellow (ed.), *op. cit.*, (1999), 356-357, 393, 437-438 and 441-442.
 - 2 See Fellow (ed.), *op. cit.*, (1999), 393. And even from within the jazz community there has been attempts to revise Nielsen's view on jazz: Torben Enghoff, 'Carl Nielsen og jazzen', in *JazzSpecial* 116 (2010), 30-33.
 - 3 Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Signifying Monkey. A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Oxford & New York 1988.

'homely'.⁴ Although his reasons for using the metaphor of place are good (mainly as a question of identity) I have chosen the metaphor of language as the frame for my interpretation. Thus, Carl Nielsen's music can be characterised as a 'vernacular', along with related music by other Danish (and Scandinavian) composers as well as folk tunes.

The reasons for doing so are, firstly, that vernacularism, in Gary Tomlinson's words, 'is a mode of thought that attempts, in contrast to transcendentalism, universalism, and essentialism, to theorize the space between itself and others – to keep sight, so to speak, of the other modes of thought around it by keeping them above the horizon.'⁵ This way to frame the music as vernacular will help to keep it free of both the national romantic ideologies ascribed to Nielsen's music as well as the mythological canon of the jazz tradition, or at least to signify upon such concepts. Furthermore, Signifyin(g) is a vernacular that mediates between different linguistic domains, originally African-American vernaculars and white American discourses. However, here it shall be suggested that this tropological figuration is still at play in jazz even if it is not set within an explicitly African-American context, e.g. that of Danish jazz. Therefore, by using the same term to characterise both the African-American jazz tradition and the songs by Carl Nielsen I also hope to level the field, so to speak. To paraphrase Gates, the goal is not to embed, as it were, Carl Nielsen within jazz or jazz within Carl Nielsen.⁶ Rather the aim is to analyse upon a self-reflective hermeneutical mode of thinking that is already present.

Secondly, the metaphor of language seemed more appropriate because of the fact that a number of albums used this metaphor themselves, i.e. variations over the title 'Jazz in Danish'.⁷ Although one might say that there is little difference between jazz *from* Denmark and jazz *in* Danish, the latter more aptly describes the notion cen-

4 Fabian Holt, 'Om brug af hjemligt repertoire i skandinavisk jazz', in Anne Ørbæk Jensen et.al. (red.): *Musikvidenskabelige kompositioner. Festskrift til Niels Krabbe*, Copenhagen 2006, 364-379. A recent thesis also deals with the subject, like Holt analysing it as a case of 'Danishness'. Bo Steengaard Christensen: *Danish Standards. Konstruktionen af en national identitet omkring jassen i Danmark*, M.A. Thesis, University of Copenhagen 2011.

5 Gary Tomlinson, 'Cultural Dialogics in Jazz: A White Historian Signifies', in Bergeron & Bohlman (ed.): *Disciplining Music. Musicology and Its Canons*, Chicago, 1992, 66. Tomlinson's italics.

6 Gates on the relation between African/African-American literature and European theory: 'Our goal must not be to embed, as it were, Europe within Africa or Africa within Europe [...]'. Gates, *op. cit.*, xx.

7 E.g. Jacob Anderskov, *På dansk*, (ILK, 2006); Schack Martin: *Jazz på dansk: gamle sko på nye fødder*, (Gateway, 2011); but also titles that do not have Nielsen-songs on the repertoire, but contains other vernacular material: Jan Johansson: *Jazz på svenska*, (Megafon, 1964); Jan Johansson: *Jazz på ryska*, (Megafon, 1967); Sv. Asmussen & Jan Johansson: *Jazz på ungerska*, (Megafon, 1968); Louis Hjulmand: *Jazz på dansk*, (Olufsen, 1988).

tral to jazz, that each musician must find his/her own voice as a means of expression. Again, similar to the process of Signifyin(g) the important thing is not *what* or *where* something is said or played, but *how* it is said or played:

Signifyin(g) for [Mezz] Mezzrow is not what is played or said; it is rather a form of rhetorical training, an on-the-streets exercise in the use of troping, in which the play is the thing – not specifically what is said, but how. All definitions of Signifyin(g) that do not distinguish between manner and matter succumb [...] to serious misreading.⁸

It [Signifyin(g)] does not refer primarily to the signified; rather, it refers to the style of language, to that which transforms ordinary discourse into literature. Again, one does not Signify some thing; one Signifies in *some way*.⁹

I do not make claims to an essential blackness of Danish jazz and as Gates observes Signification is by no means essentially African-American. The following quote might be seen as an invitation to carry out research and interpretation as the one attempted in the present study:

Lest this theory of criticism, however, be thought of as only black, let me admit that the implicit premise of this study is that all texts Signify upon other texts, in motivated and unmotivated ways. Perhaps critics of other literatures will find this theory useful as they attempt to account for the configuration of texts in their traditions.¹⁰

That being said, it is apparent that the African-American elements of the music necessitate an interpretive view that takes into account that while the performing musicians may not (or at least usually not) be black the music is a part of an African-American tradition. Because the concept of Signifyin(g) not only presents us with a theory of African-American rhetoric and discourse, but also more broadly speaking is a kind of hermeneutics that stresses doubleness and intertextuality, I have found it particularly useful in the interpretation of the use of Carl Nielsen's music in the jazz repertoire. Thus, it is my hope, that the theoretical and interpretive dialogue will reflect the musical dialogue and double-voicedness found in the music in question.

8 Gates, *op. cit.*, 70.

9 *Ibid.*, 78. Here one could readily substitute the words 'language' and 'literature' for 'music'.

10 *Ibid.*, xxiv-xxv.

Signifyin(g) and Jazz Music

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. develops his concept of Signifyin(g) by looking at African-American culture from within: 'to step outside the white hermeneutical circle and into the black.'¹¹ Tracing the black vernacular roots (both written and oral) back to West Africa and within the African-American tradition he aims to bypass the dangers of letting Western theory and terms define African-American texts and culture. Thus, he differentiates between standard English 'signifying' and the African-American concept of 'Signifyin(g)'. The use of a bracketed 'g' not only helps to avoid confusion between the two terms, but also marks the difference between the literate written usages of standard English and the African-American vernacular where 'this word is, more often than not, spoken by black people without the final g as 'signifyin'.'[...] The absent g is a figure for the Signifyin(g) black differences.'¹² Where white signifying gains clear and fixed meanings on the semantic level through logic and rationality, black Signifyin(g) is a rhetorical play that works through indirection, figuration, repetition and revision to suggest multiple meanings through association. This black discourse is characterised by parody, irony, gesture, implication, humour, trickery and dialogue. Signifyin(g) is highly performative; it is 'troping'. The Signifying Monkey from vernacular stories is the archetypical Signifier in the African-American culture who is ascribed the aforementioned qualities:

[...] the Signifying Monkey, he who dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language, is our trope for repetition and revision, indeed our trope of chiasmus, repeating and reversing simultaneously as he does in one deft discursive act.¹³

In other words, Signifyin(g) is a mediating strategy for a discourse that is highly intertextual. In emphasising repetition and revision Gates shows how Signification is engaged with preceding texts. When Signifyin(g) the interaction, negotiation and dialogue between past and present is central. In jazz this intertextuality is evident in the tradition of playing jazz standards and using them as the basis for improvisation, which not only Signifies upon the original song, e.g. Gershwin's 'I Got Rhythm', but also on the numerous recordings of the tune and Signifyin(g) again in the reworkings of it to form other tunes (e.g. Sonny Rollins' 'Oleo'). This is a case of repetition, reversal and difference. Gates gives the example of Jelly Roll Morton's 'Maple Leaf Rag (A Transformation)' Signifyin(g) upon Scott Joplin's 'Maple Leaf Rag', where Gates writes

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹² *Ibid.*, 46.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

that 'Morton's composition does not 'surpass' or 'destroy' Joplin's; it completely *extends* and tropes the figures present in the original. Morton's is a gesture of admiration and respect.'¹⁴ The same is the case of jazz musicians' use of Carl Nielsen's song.

Gates writes that there 'are so many examples of Signifyin(g) in jazz that one could write a formal history of its development on this basis alone'¹⁵ and indeed, a number of studies have used Gates concept of Signifyin(g) to analyse the cultural codes, differences and meanings that jazz musicians produce by imitation and repetition.¹⁶ The theory has offered a set of analytical tools to interpret musical Signifyin(g) in phrasing, time, pulse, feeling, form, sound etc., as well as musical interaction and improvisation and last, but not least, the contexts of history, politics, race, identity and culture. The Signifyin(g), troping practices include calls, riffs, licks, call-and-response, blue notes, instrumental imitations of vocal qualities and vice versa, timbre, multi-metre and rhythmic displacement among others. These musical figures Signify on other performances and genres Signify on other genres. However, as Samuel A. Floyd, Jr. has stated:

Musical Signifyin(g) is not the same, simply, as the borrowing and restating of pre-existing material, or the performing of variations on pre-existing material, or even the simple reworking of pre-existing material. While it is all of these, what makes it different from simple borrowing, varying, or reworking is its transformation of such material by using it rhetorically or figuratively – through troping, in other words – by trifling with, teasing, or censoring it in some way.¹⁷

Once again, 'one does not Signify some thing; one Signifies in *some way*.'¹⁸ The following will focus on the double-voiced nature of the use of Nielsen's songs in jazz. More precisely, there is a parallel between the Signifyin(g) intertextuality of the jazz tradition and Nielsen's music and that of the relationship between the discourses of the mainstream (white) American culture and the African-American vernacular.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ See e.g. Samuel A. Floyd, Jr., 'Ring Shout! Literary Studies, Historical Studies, and Black Music Inquiry', *Black Music Research Journal* 11/2 (1991), 265-287; Tomlinson, *op. cit.*, R. Walser, "'Out of Notes": Signification, Interpretation, and the Problem of Miles Davis', in Krin Gabbard (ed.), *Jazz Among the Discourses*, Durham & London 1995, 165-188; David Horn, 'The Sound World of Art Tatum', *Black Music Research Journal* 20/2 (2000), 237-257; G. Burrows, 'Black, Brown and Beige and the politics of Signifyin(g): Towards a critical understanding of Duke Ellington', *Jazz Research Journal* 1/1 (2007), 45-71.

¹⁷ Floyd, *op. cit.*, 271.

¹⁸ Gates, *op. cit.*, 78.

Tracing the Traditions

The ‘folkelige’¹⁹ songs of Carl Nielsen have been well described elsewhere, so for the context of this particular study only a few observations will be made. Anne-Marie Reynolds and others have traced the aesthetic ideas that inform the songs back to the eighteenth century and places Nielsen in the tradition of Herder and Schulz. Furthermore, Nielsen is in debt to the tradition of communal singing, national romantic ideology and Grundtvig’s principles for a ‘folkehøjskole’. While not based on actual folk tunes the songs aim to have a ‘Schein des Bekannten’ as Schulz had described it.²⁰ In a sense Nielsen was Signifyin(g) upon a tradition and repertoire going back to Schulz and an even older imaginary past.

The use of Nielsen’s songs in jazz is part of a Scandinavian tradition of playing vernacular material that started in the mid-twentieth century. It is important to notice that the tradition emerged as a part of modern jazz, i.e. within bebop and later styles. In other words in a time where jazz increasingly has defined itself as art music rather than popular music.

Although Bruno Henriksen had recorded the Danish folksong ‘Marken er metjet’ in 1943, the first recording of a vernacular song from Scandinavia to make an impact was in fact made by an American musician. Stan Getz recorded the Swedish ‘Värmlandsvisa’ in 1951, which to this day is a part of the standard jazz repertoire known as ‘Dear Old Stockholm’.²¹ Thus, Luca Cerchiari includes it in the repertoire of ‘transatlantic music’, attesting to the fact that while the tune may be said to hold an ambiguous position in the jazz repertoire it is nevertheless first and foremost regarded as a jazz standard and not as a ‘folkelig’ Swedish song.²²

Following these recordings it was however Jan Johansson’s album *Jazz på svenska* (1964) that achieved the position as the paradigmatic and canonical example in the tradition of playing vernacular melodies in jazz. The Danish album to gain a similar canonical position is Niels-Henning Ørsted Petersen and Kenny Drew’s *Duo* (1973), which contains two Danish folksongs. Tellingly, like Getz’ encounter with Swedish

19 I follow Reynolds in her use of the untranslated ‘folkelige’ rather than the English ‘folk-like’, ‘folkish’ or ‘popular’. Anne-Marie Reynolds, *Carl Nielsen’s Voice. His Songs in Context*, Copenhagen 2010, 122. In this case there is also an analogy between the use of the Danish term ‘folkelig’ and Gates’ reasons for insisting upon the African-American vernacular ‘Signifyin(g)’ rather than the standard English ‘signifying’.

20 Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 121-162; Karen Vestergård and Ida-Marie Vorre, ‘Danishness in Nielsen’s Folkelige Songs’, *Carl Nielsen Studies* 3 (2008), 80-101.

21 The recording has been released on various EPs and album. ‘Stan Getz Discography’, *Jazz Discography Project*: <http://www.jazzdisco.org/stan-getz/discography/> (accessed 11.14.11).

22 Luca Cerchiari, ‘Greensleeves and the Challenge of Transatlantic Music(ology)’, *Jazzforschung/Jazz Research* 39 (2007), 111.

musicians led to the use of 'Värmlandsvisa', it is the transnational collaboration between a Danish and an American jazz musician that stands as the prime example of the use of Danish vernacular music. Both albums set the music within the small jazz ensemble and play in a lyrical and contemplative mode. The last forty years have seen numerous new recordings in this tradition.²³

The musical sources sought after to expand the jazz repertoire is as indicated broader than just Carl Nielsen. In other words, even if the subject of this article might suggest otherwise, Nielsen holds no particular position before other composers or music in the jazz repertoire. He might be one of the most frequently recorded, but this is a result of his prominence within the already existing Danish tradition of vernacular song. The fact that jazz albums with music solely by Nielsen are made gives the picture of a slightly elevated position. However, the number of albums is so small (three) that it should not be given any weight in the context of jazz in general. On the other hand, in the context of Carl Nielsen studies it should not be dismissed.

In the Scandinavian tradition of playing native material we find, as already indicated, a large number of folk tunes alongside recordings of Nielsen's songs. In Denmark the material used for communal singing (as found e.g. in *Folkehøjskolens Melodibog*) is especially prevalent in jazz. Furthermore, songs from popular music are used, but although more recently composed tunes can sometimes be heard, the use of material from film, musicals and cabarets from before ca. 1960 is more frequent. In this regard Danish jazz is parallel to American. Especially so-called traditional jazz bands (i.e. playing in the style of early New Orleans jazz) such as Papa Bue's Viking Jazz Band have recorded an eclectic repertoire consisting among other things of songs from the Danish cabaret and schlager tradition. While there is a parallel between the use of 'folkelige' tunes and other popular non-American songs in jazz one should make a distinction between songs used for communal singing in the tradition of the 'folkehøjskole' and songs from cabarets, films and other popular settings. Taking the example of Papa Bue, these Danish tunes were released alongside a wide variety of jazz standards, but also other European tunes, e.g. 'O sole mio' and Brahms' 'Wiegenlied', and should as such not be seen as a part of the tradition of playing and Signifyin(g) upon 'folkelige' songs in Danish jazz.²⁴ In this context it should also be noted that, to my knowledge, no traditional jazz band has recorded Nielsen's melodies.

A small number of recordings feature tunes from classical music, i.e. European art music. These should not be regarded as vernacular and characteristically,

23 On the importance and impact of NHØP/Drew's recording see Christensen, *op. cit.*

24 See also *Papa Bue Diskografi*, http://www.gustavwinckler.dk/papa_bue_diskografi.htm (accessed 04.12.12).

whether within Third Stream or other genres these adaptations of the music often rely equally, if not more, on arranging and re-composition as on improvisation.

Finally, it should be stressed that the music mentioned here only occupies a marginal part of the jazz repertoire used by Danish jazz musicians. The largest body of repertoire is still original compositions and the jazz standards. The songs cannot be characterised as Danish standards equivalent of the regular jazz standards (tunes from 'the great American song book' as well as compositions by prominent jazz musicians), but they have none the less found a permanent place in the jazz repertoire. Jazz musicians at jam sessions may not use them, but they are regularly recorded.

In a broader perspective the use of Nielsen's songs is not only part of a Scandinavian tradition of playing vernacular repertoire in jazz. Vernacular material plays a big part in the jazz tradition in general. The various manifestations of the blues are the prime example of this. As already noted the modes of Signifyin(g) are especially prevalent in jazz and are therefore also in play when Carl Nielsen's songs are played by jazz musicians. Thus, the use of Nielsen's tunes is a case of one genre or tradition Signifyin(g) upon another.

Nielsen's Music In the Jazz Repertoire

Although there has been use of a wide range of Nielsen's music in jazz it is chiefly the so-called 'folkelige' songs, including the psalms that have found their way to the jazz repertoire.²⁵ The primary reason for this can be attested to the fact that the songs are well-known in Denmark where they are a part of a larger repertoire of songs sung as communal singing, in schools and kindergartens and ordinary homes, whereas the art music, i.e. the symphonies, operas etc., are not a part of the everyday life of the Danes. As previously noted, the fact that jazz, even when it defines itself as art music, has found its melodic material within popular and vernacular genres probably has caused Danish jazz musicians to search mainly among Danish vernacular music when expanding their repertoire. There might also be a parallel or, as it were, a Signifyin(g) relation to the jazz repertoire in general in the choice of the 'folkelige' tunes because it leaves more room to Signify in, so to speak. As Gates writes: 'The more mundane the fixed text ('April in Paris' by Charlie Parker, 'My Favorite Things' by John Coltrane ['Jeg ved en Lærkerede' by...]), the more dramatic is the Signifyin(g) revision.' Choosing the more mundane (and I take the meaning of the word in the positive sense) material leaves room for the musician to rework the music, whereas the use of the large-scale art music might be felt like a restraint, not being as intertextually dynamic. Of course Nielsen's songs place themselves between the individually

25 See the discography added to the present article.

composed and the communal vernacular (not that the two are mutually exclusive). As such the 'Schein des Bekannten' of Nielsen's songs might be characterised as a Danish vernacular tinge, in a term more often used in jazz (e.g. the famed Spanish tinge).

Furthermore, because of their melodic and formal structure the songs lend themselves more easily to the regular form of jazz playing where a theme is presented, followed by improvisation over 'changes' (i.e. the chord sequence and form of the tune) and concluded by a final statement of the theme. Although one can find alternative ways of using the music this is by far the predominant way of playing the music (this is the case of both Nielsen's as well as other Danish vernacular music). Admittedly, a more precise description of the uses of Nielsen's music in jazz would have been the use of his *melodies*. Because the melodies are more or less preserved in their original shape and form it is mainly within harmony and rhythm that we find the Signifyin(g) difference. This might also fit well with the characteristics of melodic material itself. According to Anne-Marie Reynolds Nielsen's 'type of ['folkelige'] melodies are a self-sufficient entity; it is enhanced but not dependent on the harmonic support for its appeal.'²⁶ Thus, room for interpretation and Signifyin(g) is found within the realm of harmony and the harmony originally found in Nielsen's songs is not used or is reworked or presented in the various jazz recordings of the tunes. Like in much other jazz the musicians rework the harmony to fit within the jazz idiom (using II-V-I chord progressions and tritone substitution as the most common) or change the harmony to different idiosyncratic styles. Likewise a rhythmic difference from Nielsen's original is often found. Obviously swing and sometimes latin rhythm is utilised and even when the feeling is straight (i.e. even quavers) the rhythmic articulation will often be freely phrased, implying the beats rather than defining them. That being said, some musicians will also find affinities between Nielsen's music and jazz. These affinities might be found on a purely musical level as when Torben Enghoff states that he can hear jazz elements within Nielsen's music: 'In relation to Carl Nielsen and jazz the interesting is not what he said. On the contrary, there are many similarities with jazz in Nielsen's music.'²⁷ Subsequently Enghoff mentions Nielsen's choice of chords, voicings, scales, melodic structure and rhythm.²⁸ Already Jan Johansson noted the major-minor ambiguity in the Swedish tunes on *Jazz på svenska* implying an affinity with jazz music.²⁹ This kind of affinity might be seen as a

26 Reynolds, *op. cit.*, 85.

27 Enghoff, *op. cit.*, 32. My translation.

28 While I do find these affinities interesting as an interpretive starting point I do not share Enghoff's view that this by consequence essentially labels Nielsen as a jazz composer.

29 Jan Johansson, [cover notes in] *Folkvisor*, (Heptagon Records, 1995) [reissue of *Jazz på Svenska* and *Jazz på Ryska*], 8-9.

Signifyin(g) revision, as when the Carl Nielsen Jazz Trio takes Nielsen's flattening of the third in bar five of *Sang bag Ploven* and uses it as a blue note in the reworking of the tune as a blues. By reinterpreting this note as a part of a blues tonality a troping of the figures in Nielsen's original melody is brought to the foreground in an act of Signifyin(g) upon the major-minor ambiguity and the supposed affinity and double relation between Nielsen's melody and blues tonality. Thus, the Signifyin(g) tropes are not only differences in the strict sense, as something in opposition or reverse, but an ironic repetition and revision of musical features found in jazz and in Nielsen's music. The version of *Sang bag Ploven* has another element of Signifyin(g) because the original title is not used for the album. Instead the track is labelled 'Carl Special', of course punning the Carlsberg beer ('Carls Special'). Danish jazz musicians may refer to Carl Nielsen only as 'Carl'.³⁰ This might indeed be a Signifyin(g) trope as so far as it is a calling out and naming, and thus placing 'Carl' as a trope that mocks the canonical position of the composer 'Nielsen', but also calls upon the African-American tradition of referring to jazz greats only by first name or nickname, e.g. Miles (Davis), Duke (Ellington) or Trane (J. Coltrane). The comparison with the jazz masters is also present in Enghoff's article where he asserts more general aesthetic similarities between Nielsen and jazz ('Like Miles Davis and John Coltrane, Carl Nielsen was constantly drawn by new challenges [...]').³¹ This is of course constructed view of Nielsen, but none the less serves as an example of Nielsen's placement as an integral part of the jazz canon rather than as an European outsider.

The earliest example of a Nielsen-tune being recorded by jazz musicians is Finn Savery's arrangement of *Jens Vejmand* on an EP with the Erik Moseholm Trio in 1961. While released around the same time as Johansson made his recordings it did not create a trend and it is only since the mid-nineties that we have seen a large amount of jazz recordings featuring Nielsen's songs.

The use of Nielsen's songs can roughly be grouped as follows: a) on albums with music only by Nielsen; b) on concept albums with Danish vernacular material; and c) on albums where only one Nielsen tune appears along side the ordinary jazz repertoire or other eclectic material. As for the latter (c), it places Nielsen in the role of the Trickster similar to the Signifying Monkey. Often quite literally at the margins, as the last track on the record, Nielsen assumes the role of a mythological figure as if to poke fun at the canonical songs of the jazz tradition. Nielsen's mythological position is in a double-voiced discourse at the same time confirmed by his presence and

30 This is also the case in two musical portraits or tributes to Nielsen (neither explicitly uses music by Nielsen). Respectively 'Carl' and 'Til Carl' on NYNDK: *The Hunting of the Shark*, (Jazzheads, 2009); and Jonas Müller, *East African Prayer Meeting Suite/Nordic Suite*, (ILK, 2007)

31 Enghoff, *op. cit.*, 32.

downplayed by the ease with which his music slips into the jazz idiom. Hence, we find a tension between Nielsen's music and jazz that is strengthened and not necessarily clarified by interpretation. In Gates' words: 'Indeterminacy [...] is accounted for by the vernacular tradition, as an unavoidable aspect of acts of interpretation.'³²

As for the first group (a), Nielsen's role as Denmark's national composer may of course be confirmed by the fact that Danish jazz musicians have chosen to dedicate entire albums to his music. As mentioned earlier, one of the bands even defines it self as the Carl Nielsen Jazz Trio. The three albums in question all feature a solo vocalist. Thus, the weight is put on the living oral vernacular tradition of singing Nielsen's songs. In all three cases, tellingly, the vocal style is that of folk song (Da.: 'visesang') and pop singing (respectively Lars Oluf of the Carl Nielsen Jazz Trio and Erik Grip, and Maria Carmen Koppel). Again we find literally a double-voiced relationship between the singers' more Danish, and white if you will, rendition of the song, not least because it is sung in Danish, and the African-American jazz style.

As for the relationship between the lyrics and the music this becomes especially interesting in the larger number of recordings without a vocalist. In these cases the Danish jazz musicians hold double positions as insiders in what Ingrid Monson has called a 'community of interpreters'.³³ On the one hand as Danes familiar with the text and the tradition of the 'folkelige' songs and on the other hand as jazz musicians applying tropes of Signifyin(g) when using Nielsen's songs. As Monson has suggested there might be an ironic juxtaposition between the original tune and the jazz version. In this sense a jazz musician may demonstrate his musical intelligence when transforming Nielsen's song to jazz. An example of this type of ironic attitude is found in Pierre Dørge & The New Jungle Orchestra's version of 'Det koster ej for megen Strid' where after several choruses of elaborate jazz improvisation the tune is ended with a tutti choral rendition of the song very close to Nielsen's original arrangement. While it may be a homage to the original it does in the context of the previous choruses seem very simple and foolish, not less so because of e.g. the guitar's use of mandolin-like tremolos and the trombone's growls and use of plunger. In terms of an African-American aesthetic the preceding choruses now seem like an 'improvement' of Nielsen's music.

The group of recordings where Nielsen's songs are placed together with material by other Danish composers and folksongs (b) present a variety of different approaches to the material though usually within the mainstream styles of swing and bebop. Even when presented as a kind of world music, e.g. when Morten Carlsen of

32 Gates, *op. cit.*, 22.

33 I. Monson, 'Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, and Ethnomusicology', *Critical Inquiry* 20/2, 305.

The New Jungle Orchestra plays the Hungarian tarogato rather than his usual saxophone, the focus is on melodic and tuneful improvisation. It seems that just like Nielsen wished to write more simple and tuneful music which is to be found in the romantic style, the use of his melodies has invited jazz musicians to play in a less expressively virtuosic manner than found elsewhere in jazz. Even a musician with a strong identity as a free jazz saxophonist as John Tchicai in his rendition of 'Solener saa rød, Mor' keeps his playing mostly diatonically and with stepwise motion and imitation of the melody.

This however should not be understood as if the use of the songs is an unmediated representation of Nielsen's music. There is a Signifyin(g) difference in the way the songs are played by jazz musicians. Be it the timbral qualities of jazz saxophone playing, a swing or latin groove, the improvisatory play with the melody, the reharmonisation, or the blues phrasing interpolated in the music, these musical tropes are Signifyin(g) tropes. Obvious examples might include Martin Schacks use of implied double time feel in 'Den danske Sang' which could be interpreted as what Samuel A. Floyd Jr has referred to as 'Signifying on the time-line'; Hans Ulrik and Thomas Clausen's blues phrasing and hard bop groove on *Jens Vejmand* perhaps meant to suggest an ironic affinity between blues aesthetics and the hardship of the song's protagonist.

Furthermore, even though the main part of jazz recordings of Nielsen's songs are not for example free jazz, there is a much wider stylistic span than suggest by the canonical albums by e.g. Johansson. Fabian Holt writes that the openness towards more diverse interpretations can be seen as a 'change that can be linked to a more free and eclectic, but also nostalgic historical consciousness, sometimes referred to as post modern.'³⁴ This is a case of post modern thought the intertextuality at play is also as previously noted a case of Signifyin(g).

The Search For a Transnational Vernacular

The use of Carl Nielsen's songs in jazz may be seen as a reaction against African-American dominance in jazz and as Danish nationalism. However, viewing the music as Signifyin(g) both Danish and African-American values reveals an intertextuality much richer than to state simply that using vernacular material constitutes an emancipation from America and a nationalist tendency in Danish jazz. When setting the use of Nielsen's songs in an exclusively nationalist framework one only sees one side of the picture. While it certainly is true that the use of native songs in jazz connote national identity viewing the music as a form of Signifyin(g) vernacular reveals affinities as well as differences between the traditions. Likewise, Christen Kold Thomsen

³⁴ Holt, *op. cit.*, 370. My translation.

has found an aesthetic and even political connection between Danish jazz musicians and their American counterparts. By association with modal jazz and its connection to black civil rights he finds the use of vernacular material a case of black-white double consciousness:

In Denmark 'Nordic' jazz is a part of the musical reaction, which – with American and English inspiration – includes 'political' folk singing and ditto folk-rock. Behind the jazzified great Nordic song canon's [Da.: *sangskat*] connections to the latter a link is made to black Americans' political struggle for civil rights and recognition.³⁵

Thus, the 'cool', 'melancholic' or 'pensive' nature of the so-called 'Nordic' tone may be just as much a part of the 'blue' feeling of African-American jazz as of Scandinavian life.³⁶ This doubleness indicates that an interpretation that only sees the use of Nielsen's music in the jazz repertoire as a question of national identity will miss the mark both historically and aesthetically. Although jazz is inevitably tied to America it was from the very beginning global in scope and as E. Taylor Atkins has observed:

Jazz exists in our collective imagination as both a *national* and *postnational* music, but is studied almost exclusively in the former incarnation. Our purpose here [as jazz scholars] is to recuperate its career as a transgressor of the idea of the nation, as an agent of globalization.³⁷

As a vernacular discourse that Signifies across the Atlantic on the double tradition of Carl Nielsen and African-American jazz the music in question here is not exclusively one or the other. Just as the Signifying Monkey stands at the interpretive crossroads in the African-American vernacular the use of Nielsen's songs in jazz attests to the fact that it is a glocalised art form.³⁸ In the context of jazz Nielsen Signifies both

35 Christen Kold Thomsen, 'Om jazz og race i dansk jazzkritik: nogle eksempler'; S. Hein Rasmussen & Rasmus Rosenørn, *Amerika i dansk kulturliv 1945-75*, Odense 2010, 55. My translation.

36 Similar thoughts can be found in Stuart Nicholson, *Is Jazz Dead? (Or has it moved to a new address)*, New York & London 2005, 195-222.

37 E. Taylor Atkins, 'Toward a Global History of Jazz', E. Taylor Atkins, *Jazz Planet*, Jackson 2003, xiii.

38 On the glocal and global in jazz see Nicholson, *op. cit.*; Atkins, *op. cit.*; J. Harris, 'Jazz on the Global Stage', in I. Monson (ed.), *The African Diaspora. A Musical Perspective*, New York 2003, 103-134; on problems writing music history facing the problems of nationalism, globalisation and glocalisation see Hans Weisethaunet, 'Historiography and complexities: why is music national?', *Popular Music History* 2/2 (2007), 169-199.

upon the local/national and the global, and the past and present. Thus, the connection between these concepts should be seen in relationship rather than opposition to each other. In jazz the use of Nielsen's songs and other vernacular material attests to a transnational intertextuality and dialogue created through a process of repetition and revision of musical tropes. Shared elements are repeated with differences that extends and tropes figures present in both Nielsen's music and jazz. The vernacular traditions of jazz and Nielsen reflect and affect each other.

The use of Gates theory of Signifyin(g) in relation to the music in question is enlightening because it aims to create an interpretive field that deals with the music in its own terms. The theory does not try to show that the use of Nielsen's songs in jazz is worthy of study and listening because it is fundamentally still the same music with the same values of national identity more or less inherent in it. On the contrary, it brings the cultural differences and negotiation of meanings to centre stage. However, the use of Nielsen's song within a jazz context and as part of a process of Signifyin(g) also attests to the fact that within this cultural diversity there is also musical and cultural dialogue.

A B S T R A C T

The article traces the prevalence of Nielsen's music in the jazz repertoire and suggests that it should be understood within the broader framework of jazz aesthetics. Drawing on Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s theory of Signifyin(g) the doubleness in the way Danish jazz musicians have used Nielsen's music is interpreted as a transnational vernacular. Seeing as it is mainly Nielsen's "folkelige" songs that have their way to the jazz repertoire the recordings are placed within a broader Scandinavian tradition of playing vernacular tunes in jazz. The vast number of jazz recordings of Nielsen's music are broadly categorised and various musical, Signifyin(g) tropes are identified. Thus, the article is also a call for an interpretive strategy that takes the dialogic intertextuality of the music in to account.

Discography

In an effort to escape essentialist value judgements I have included any recording that might in the widest sense be categorised as jazz. Thus, in the discography one will find recordings ranging from the styles of pop- and smooth jazz over blues and gospel influenced jazz, swing, bossa, bebop, cool jazz to world jazz and free jazz.

The discography also lists the songs by Nielsen that appear on each album. The titles of the songs are given here in the order, form and spelling in which they appear on the record.

The discography reveals that 'Tidt er jeg glad' is the most frequently recorded tune (11), followed by 'Solen er så rød, mor' (9), 'Jeg ved en lærkerede' and 'Jens Vejmand' (both 8), and 'Jeg bærer med smil min byrde' and 'Tunge, mørke natteskyer' (both 5).

Anderskov, Jacob: *På dansk*, (ILK, 2006)

Sænk kun dit hoved

Bartok and Friends: *European Standards*, (Right Tone, 1995)

Symphony no. 5, 1.movement. op.50

Bebiane: *Forunderligt at sige*, (Refleks, 2005)

Forunderligt at sige

Bitran, Mariane/Makiko Hirabayashi Quintet: *Grey to Blue*, (Sundance, 2008)

Tit er jeg glad

Cameron, Etta: *Fra den danske salmebog*, (Artpeople, 2005)

Tunge, mørke natteskyer

Påskeblomst, hvad vil du her

Carl Nielsen Jazz Trio: *Tak for sangen, Carl*, (Carl Nielsen Jazz Trio, 2008)

Jens Vejmand

Jeg bærer med smil min byrde

Solen er så rød, mor

Se dig ud en sommerdag

Underlige aftenlufte

Jeg lægger mig så trygt til ro

Underlige aftenlufte

Tit er jeg glad

En lille langsom vals

Jeg ved en lærkerede

De snekker mødtes i kvæld

Vi sletternes sønner

Påskeblomst

Tågen letter

Carl Special [I solen går jeg bag min plov/Sang bag ploven]

Tunge, mørke natteskyer

Derfor kan vort øje glædes

Den Danske Salmeduo: *Nu stiger solen*, (Aero music, 2003)

Min Jesus lad mit hjerte få

Den Danske Salmeduo: *Danske Salmer i Nye Arrangementer*, (Aero Music, 2005)

Mit hjerte altid vanker

DR Big Band: *Dansk Stereo* (Cope, 2005)

Tunge, mørke natteskyer

Dueholm, Anne & Henrik Kunz: *Duo*, (Cope, 2001)

Tit er jeg glad

Dørge Becker Carlsen: *The Skagen Concert*, (tutl, 2008)

Det koster ej for megen strid

Dørge, Pierre & The New Jungle Orchestra: *Live at Birdland*, (Stunt, 2003)

Det koster ej for megen strid

Dørge, Pierre & The New Jungle Orchestra: *Music from the Danish Jungle*, (dacapo, 1995)

Det koster ej for megen strid

Egmose, Willy Trio: *Bare det swinger*, (Music Mecca, 1993)

Der sad en fisker så tankefuldt

Frej's Jazz: *Nordlyd*, (Music Mecca, 1993)

Jens Vejmand

Fryland, Thomas Sekstet: *Metamorfoser vol. 1. Salmer og sange*, (Sweet Silence, 2004)

Påskeblomst, hvad vil du her

Tunge, mørke natteskyer

Fryland, Thomas Sekstet: *Metamorfoser vol. 2. Arbejdersange*, (Sweet Silence, 2004)

Hvem sidder der bag skærmen

Jeg bærer med smil min byrde

Solen er så rød mor

Gullin, Peter Trio: *Transformed Evergreens*, (Dragon, 1994)

Snurretoppen

Hess Skou Quartet: *Hess Skou Quartet*, (Storyville, 1996)

Tit er jeg glad

Himmelblå: *Sorrig og glæde*, (Himmelblå, 2006)

Min Jesus, lad mit hjerte få [medley w. 'O du Guds lam']

Jazzfriends et al.: *Holbæk Jazzgrupper spiller danske evergreens 2002*, (Holbæk Jazz Dage, 2002)

Solen er så rød mor

Jazzkapelmestrenes Jazzkapel: *JAZZevent*, (Music Mecca, 1993)

Jeg ved en lærkerede

Jazz Salme: *Tro er for mig*, (Royal Music, 2002)

Tit er jeg glad

Min Jesus lad mit hjerte få

Jormin, Anders: *Nordic Light*, (Dragon, 2000)

Opus 41 ('The fog is lifting') from 'Moderen' [recorded 1984]

Jørgensen, Kr. & Jacob Fischer: *Duets*, (Music Mecca, 2000)

Tit er jeg glad

Grip, Erik: *Carl Nielsen – og en enkelt anden*, (Gyps Fulvus, 1997)

Jeg bærer med smil min byrde

Jeg lægger mig så trygt til ro

Tidt er jeg glad

De snekker mødtes i kvæld

Jeg ved en lærkerede

Nu er dagen fuld af sang

Underlige aftenlufte

Sænk kun dit hoved, du blomst

Tunge, mørke natteskyer

Solen er så rød, mor

Jens Vejmand

Jeg gik i marken og vogted får

Min Pige er så lys som rav

Den milde dag er lys og lang

Du kom med alt og det var dig

Kaspersen, Jan: *Slow Life*, (Karma, 1980)

Jeg bærer med smil min byrde

Koppel, Marie Carmen & Mads Bærentzen, Peter Vuust: *Carl Nielsen – Sange*, (Music Mecca, 2005)

Solen er så rød, mor

Jeg ved en lærkerede

De snekker mødtes i kvæld på hav

Jeg gik i marken

Min Pige er så lys som rav

Sænk kun dit hoved, du blomst

- Tit er jeg glad
Hvor sødt i sommeraftenstunden
Ak, min rose visner bort
Kramer, Maj-Britt: *Engang Once: Songs from Denmark*, (Sundance, 1996)
Tit er jeg glad
- Lundgaard, Jesper: *X-mas bass*, (Music Mecca, 1998)
Mit hjerte altid vanker
- Moseholm, Erik Trio: [Untitled], (Hit ep, 1961)
Jens Vejmand [also released under F. Savery's name]
- De nattergale: *Hva' har vi da gjort siden vi ska' ha'et så godt* (Harlekin, 1987)
Jens Vejmand
- Nielsen, Christina + Carsten Dahl Duo: *Lys på himlen*, (dacapo, 2000)
Tit er jeg glad
- Nielsen, Jens: *Forårsfornemmelser*, (Niensens Musikfabrik, 2009)
Den milde dag er lys og lang
Jeg bærer med smil min byrde
- NYNDK: *The hunting of the shark*, (Jazzheads, 2009)
Symphony No. 2 (2nd Movement)
- PBS Acoustic Trio et al.: *Nordjysk Jazz 2008*, (Jazz Nord, 2008)
Jeg ved en lærkerede
- Pedersen, Niels-Henning Ørsted: *The Eternal Traveller*, (OJC, 1985)
Jeg ved en lærkerede
- Petersen, Maria Hiort: *Danske sange*, (Cope, 2003)
Nu lyser løv i lunde
Den danske sang
Tit er jeg glad
- Rasmussen, Valdemar: *Op, al den ting*, (Exlibris, 2000)
Mit hjerte altid vanker
- Rêve Bohème: *Django Jalousie*, (Cope, 2002)
Solen er så rød, mor
- Schack, Martin: *Jazz på dansk: gamle sko på nye fødder*, (Gateway, 2011)
Jeg ved en lærkerede
Den danske sang er en ung blond pige
- Selmer, Lone: *When first we met*, (Music Mecca, 2003)
Tit er jeg glad

Steen, Uffe/Jens Jepsen: *String time*, (Intermusic, 1997)

Jens Vejmand

Storm, Sidsel: *Sidsel Storm*, (Calibrated, 2008)

Solen er så rød, mor

Tchicai, John: *Grandpa's Spells*, (Storyville, 1993)

Solen er så rød, mor

Tyst: *I underværkers land*, (Kim Boeskov Music, 2010)

Tunge, mørke natteskyer

Min Jesus lad mit hjerte få

Ulrik, Hans & Th. Clausen med Anders Jormin: *Danske Sange*, (Stunt, 1998)

Jeg ved en lærkerede

Jens Vejmand...

Øberg, Morten & Bent Lundgaard: *Fjerne ruder*, (Intermusic, 2002)

Tunge, mørke natteskyer

Underlige aftenlufte

Tit er jeg glad

Vi sletternes sønner