



The Jazz Baron

by

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Here is Mr. Garner's Bio:

Fradley Garner is an American freelance writer and translator based in Denmark. The former Denmark contributor to Down Beat, he is international editor of Jersey Jazz, journal of the New Jersey Jazz Society. Garner is translating and annotating the Danish memoirs of Baron Timme Rosenkrantz, while searching for an American publisher. He wrote the author profile for the book. (E-mail Fradgar@get2net.dk.)

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The Jazz Baron

When it comes to jazz royalty, you've probably heard of the Duke and the Count. But very few have heard of the Baron. A journalist, record producer, and so much more, Baron Timme Rosenkrantz—or Timme, as he was known to friends—was above all a devotee of jazz.

Born in Copenhagen on July 6, 1911, Timme was a real baron whose ancestors were Danish aristocrats. An unlikely jazz fan, he got hooked on jazz as a young boy when someone brought an American jazz record to his school. Soon he was spending all his money on records by Louis Armstrong, Bix Beiderbecke, and Duke Ellington. He studied journalism and in 1933 founded one of the first European jazz journals, *Jazzrevy*. A year later, at the age of 22, he sailed to America to hear American jazz firsthand.

“Denmark is quite a nice country,” Timme wrote in the Danish magazine *Jazz*. “Our food is fat and good, our beer is first class, our girls are good looking.... But our jazz is not really up to par.”

He arrived in New York in 1934 and immediately fell in love with the swinging Harlem jazz scene. He met John Hammond, who took him to see the amazing talent at the Savoy Ballroom. He became close friends with the Duke. He met all the great musicians and saw all the great bands. Timme wasn't just a visitor in Harlem; he *lived* it—its sights, its sounds, and its people.

“Timme made close friends on the jazz scene,” wrote journalist Ole Bech-Petersen. “He knew it from the inside, and was a regular in nightclubs, bars, studios, dance halls, record shops, or anywhere else he might hear jazz.” He knew all of the famous jazz musicians and “listened to music with them, partied with them, smoked pot with them and drank huge quantities of alcohol with them.” His list of friends reads like a “Who's Who” of jazz and includes Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Coleman Hawkins, Billie Holiday, Art Tatum, and Fats Waller, among many, many others.

Timme was the first white European journalist to write about the Harlem jazz scene. In his lifetime, he wrote for many Scandinavian newspapers and magazines and for such famous American publications as *Down Beat*, *Metronome*, and *Esquire*, as well as the British magazine *Melody Maker*. Starting in 1934, he lived alternately in New York and Denmark, often staying in New York for long periods of time.

Timme had a persuasive charm. In 1938, he talked the president of RCA Victor into letting him hand-pick a dream band and produce the recording. The result was two 78-rpm records by “Timme Rosenkrantz and his Barrelhouse Barons” that *Down Beat* and *Metronome* called the best records of 1938. On record for the first time were tenor saxophonist Don Byas, trombonist Tyree Glenn, and vocalist Inez Cavanaugh.

Inez was Timme's love, and they were together until he died. He saw her at the Traveler's Club in Harlem and told her, “Where have you been all my life?” She was a journalist as well as a singer and had written articles for several magazines including *Down Beat* and *Metronome*. Together, Timme and Inez wrote the liner notes for *Billie Holiday Greatest Hits*, a

record produced by good friend John Hammond; they co-managed a Paris club, *Chez Inez*; and they co-wrote the lyrics to *Is This to be My Souvenir*, which Inez sang on the 1938 RCA Victor record.



Inez and Timme.

When World War II started in 1939, Timme found himself stranded in New York for the duration of the war.

“I had to find some way to make money; I had no more in the bank,” Timme writes. Always the humorist, he continues, “I had a collection of a hundred records, and I figured that if I sold those, I would be able to buy another couple of hundred, sell those, buy 400, and so on until I had a million records and was a very rich man indeed.”

He opened the Mel-O-Dee Music Shop in Harlem in 1940. He sold records in the front and had a rehearsal hall in the back that was used by such notables as violinist Stuff Smith, trumpeter Bill Coleman, and bassist John Kirby, among others. His very first customer was Louis Armstrong, who offered to buy \$50 worth of records—a large sum in those days.

During the war he was also a “dance partner for hire” at a dance club, an employee at the Commodore music shop, and for a short time the host of his own radio show, “Rhythm is Our Business,” on local station WNEW. But his most important job was producer. From 1944–45 he recorded jam sessions at his apartment, where he “held open house, day and night” for willing musicians. His recordings, released on his own labels “New York,” “Baronet” and “Embassy” include such notables as violinist Stuff Smith and pianists Robert Crum and Erroll Garner.

Garner, a unique virtuoso pianist and composer of the famous tune “Misty,” was Timme’s discovery. Timme heard him playing intermission at a small club on 52nd street and knew he was special. They became friends, and soon Timme made the very first recording of Garner on November 16, 1944, in Timme’s apartment. He recorded Garner on at least six more occasions from 1944–45 and also featured him in concert at Times Hall. Garner became an incredible success, largely because of Timme’s early encouragement and support.

In June 1945 Timme produced, recorded and hosted a concert at New York’s Town Hall that featured numerous jazz legends including drummer Gene Krupa, vibraphonist Red Norvo, pianists Teddy Wilson and Billy Taylor, violinist Stuff Smith, trumpeter Bill Coleman, saxophonists Flip Phillips and Don Byas, and bassist Slam Stewart. In 1946, he produced recordings for Continental records of Red Norvo, pianist-composer Jimmy Jones, saxophonists Harry Carney and Charlie Ventura, and his lifelong companion, vocalist Inez Cavanaugh.

Timme was also the first to bring an American jazz band to postwar Europe in September 1946. The band, directed by Don Redman, featured Don Byas, Billy Taylor, Inez Cavanaugh, vibe master Tyree Glenn, trumpet and vocalist Peanuts Holland, and trombonist Quentin Jackson. In 1947 he brought the first bebop band to Europe—Chubby Jackson and His All

Stars—and in New York produced and recorded a series of Friday jam sessions at Café Bohemia that featured pianist Lennie Tristano and trumpeter Rex Stewart, among others.

In the late 40's Timme and Inez moved to Paris where they set up and co-managed a jazz club, Chez Inez. Timme continued writing and collecting jazz photos (something he had done since he first set foot in Harlem in 1934) into the 50's and 60's, always returning now and then to New York where his close friends and favorite music were. In Denmark in the mid 60's he hosted a popular jazz program on Danish and Swedish national radio. He recalled old times with the jazz elite and played recordings from his vast collection.

In 1968 he proudly opened Timme's Club, a jazz nightclub in Copenhagen that featured pianist, composer, and good friend Mary Lou Williams on its opening night. Later Teddy Wilson, Ben Webster, and Inez also played there. Timme, who had been battling an ulcer for many years, was photographed at the club nursing a glass of milk. He was in New York, the city whose music and people he loved, when he died on August 11, 1969, from complications related to his stomach and liver.

Today, Timme's legacy extends far beyond his recordings. He was an author who published not only jazz articles but also three novels and a collection of short stories, in Danish. He published two books about the American jazz scene, "Too Bad America Has to be So Far Away" in 1938 and "Jump Out the Window and Turn Right" in 1954, also in Danish (titles translated).

Timme had a great sense of humor, and as Duke Ellington noted, he was a "wit extraordinaire." For example, he once referred to Art Tatum's dexterous rendition of "Tea for Two" as "Tea for Two Thousand." Here are some other representative examples:

Una Mae Carlisle is the most beautiful jazz musician I have ever met—Monk wasn't even a runner-up. I had such a bad crush on her that I had to fill my pockets with ice cubes, otherwise I'd go up in smoke.... Oh well, enough of that—that was 20 years ago, and the ice has melted. (1967)

I am very restrained in many ways. I didn't eat my first rum cake till I was 15, and never smoked till I was 20. I am still shy in the company of women... the only thing I'm really crazy about is elderberry soup. (1964)

And then there is Benny Carter, also one of the genuine greats of jazz. He can do anything. He plays all saxes, trumpet, trombone, piano and drums—I've even seen him play ball. (1966)

Timme was also an avid photographer and photo collector whose photos you see in this paper. In 1939 he published the first jazz-photo book, "Swing Photo Album 1939," featuring photos of the movers and shakers of jazz. It was republished in 1964 and today it is a collector's item. Over his lifetime, he amassed a collection of more than 2,000 photographs which have become part of the Timme Rosenkrantz Collection at the University of Southern Denmark. Librarian and historian Frank Büchmann-Møller has put together a selection of these photographs in *Is This To Be My Souvenir*, available from Odense University Press.

Timme collected biographical data on jazz legends with the intention of publishing a jazz encyclopedia, but he gave it up when Leonard Feather (a good friend of Timme's) beat him to the punch in 1955 with his *Encyclopedia of Jazz*. Timme's last book, a collection of memoirs titled *Dus Med Jazzen* ("getting familiar with jazz"), was published in Danish in 1964. Büchmann-Møller writes that the memoirs "offer a unique view of jazz and some of its famous musicians." Journalists Fradley Garner and Bente "Topsy" Arendrup, Timme's favorite niece, are currently translating the work into English and are actively seeking a publisher.



Count Basie and Timme.

Another contribution of Timme's was as unofficial "jazz ambassador" between the United States and Europe. As mentioned, he brought many jazz greats to Europe to play at his clubs in Paris and Copenhagen or to tour Europe, as the Don Redman orchestra did. He also released recordings of many American artists under his own labels in Denmark, bringing the legendary music of Lionel Hampton, Dizzy Gillespie, Stuff Smith, Oscar Peterson, Gerry Mulligan, and Dave Brubeck to an eager Danish public.

But he also brought European jazz to America. On his radio show at WNEW he played Danish and Swedish (as well as American) jazz. At the 1947 jam sessions at Café Bohemia he introduced Swedish clarinetist Stan Hasselgard and Danish drummer Uffe Baadh to the American public. And his articles in Danish and Swedish publications instilled a love of jazz in his fellow Scandinavians and encouraged them to come to New York, where they would seek Timme out and oblige him to be their unpaid tour guide, a role he accepted graciously.

Timme loved blacks at a time when prejudice and segregation were all too common. He worked with, drank with, and spent his life writing about the people of Harlem. His longtime companion Inez was black, and he was lovingly called "a colored white man" and "the world's whitest Negro" by fellow journalists in Denmark. He hated intolerance and once spoke up to a gangster who was hurling racial insults at Art Tatum. His reward was a bash in the head with the butt of a gun. A black friend who saw it all said Timme had a "black soul."

Timme wrote, "I came to Harlem to hear jazz, but I found much more than that. I found a charming people, whom I befriended. I found clever artists, great musicians, fine authors and painters, phenomenal dancers and artistes. I also found excellent journalists, doctors, scientists and much, much more. But above all, I met a people with a sense of humor that, considering their own lives and history, is as wondrous as it is admirable."

And the people of Harlem loved him back. There were two memorial services for Timme after he died—one in New York and one in Copenhagen—and in them Duke Ellington, Tyree

Glenn, Teddy Wilson, Ben Webster, Inez, Don Byas, Charlie Shavers, and many others paid tribute. Duke wrote in his autobiography *Music is My Mistress*, “We are thankful to Timme Rosenkrantz, and may God bless him and minimize the grief of his relatives, who may be assured of the great love felt for him by all of us, his friends.”



The Baron and the Duke.

Timme never made a lot of money; in fact, he often lost large sums of money on his undertakings. He started a magazine called *Swing Music* that folded after a single issue and another called *Riff* that never saw the light of day. His record shop, where he let musicians rehearse for free, closed after a year. His 1945 concert at Town Hall was a success musically but a failure financially. And his two clubs, *Chez Inez* and *Timme's Club*, had very short lives.

“He was perhaps the world’s worst businessman,” said journalist and longtime friend Doug Dobell. “He preferred to dig the music and musicians rather than make a business out of them.”

And although Timme was a talented writer, “you will not find volumes of his works that are truly representative of his literary stature,” Duke noted. “The reason for that is that he was a very unselfish man who always dedicated himself to the great musicians he loved and to the music they played.... His patronage of music consumed most of his time.”

For Timme, it was all about the music. More than anything else, he loved that swingin’ jazz, no matter whether it was swing or boogie-woogie, whether the musicians playing it were black or white, Danish or American.

In an interview about what constituted “real” jazz, Stuff Smith said, “Ask Timme Rosenkrantz. He knows. He knows jazz. That’s one sure thing about old Tim.”

’Nuff said.

Photograph Credits

The picture on the cover shows Timme standing aboard a ship on his way to New York in 1934. It's from the *Jazz Special* article, courtesy of Ole Brask.

The picture of Louis Armstrong and Timme is from the article "Reflections, Reflections, Reflections on Louis Armstrong" in *Down Beat*.

The picture of Inez and Timme is courtesy of Bente Arendrup.

The picture of Count Basie and Timme is from the *Jazz Special* article.

The picture of Timme and Duke Ellington is from the *Jazz Special* article, courtesy of Ole Brask.