

Niels Henning Ørsted-Pedersen

1946 - 2005



genannt NHØP, ein Virtuose am Kontrabass, hat mit den ganz "Grossen" der Jazzmusik gespielt; wie z. B. mit Oscar Peterson. Eugen hat mit ihm drei Schallplatten aufgenommen: "Eugen Cicero plays Schubert", "In Concert" und "For my friends". Am Schlagzeug spielte jeweils Tony Inzalaco. Wir haben NHØP am 11.01.2003 in Zürich bei einem Konzert mit Toots Thielemans getroffen und uns für später am Telefon verabredet. Am 11.02.2003 habe ich mit ihm mehrere Gespräche am Telefon geführt, die ich aufgezeichnet habe. Hier einige Ausschnitte:

Well, my mother was playing the organ at church and my father was running a boarding school. Education was something my parents took very seriously. There was a "house rule" that all of the children were to play piano. It was not so important to practice, but to see the piano teacher once a week. I am the youngest of five children and I started playing piano since I was six. My older brothers were already playing Jazz.

The boarding school of my father was based on the Danish philosopher and teacher **Severin Grundtvig** and it was his principle to start and finish each day with singing a song all together. Thus there was all kinds of music all day around me. One day, when I was about 13 years old, my brothers and some friends of ours formed a band and they suggested to my father that I should play the double-bass, because that was the only instrument that no one played and my brothers did not want me to be left out. As I was the youngest, all the interesting instruments had already been taken.

Soon it appeared that I had more talent than the others. I was about 13 or 14 years old, when we went to **Copenhagen** to buy a new bass at a Jazz Club. At that occasion, I was asked to sit in and I ended up getting the gig. That's how it all started with me playing in Jazz Clubs.

When I was 15 years old I already played with Bud Powell, Dexter Gordon, Johnny Griffin, Ben Webster, Jimmy Smith, Kenny Drew, Sonny Rollins, **Bill Evans**, later also with **Quincy Jones, Roland Kirk, John Lewis**, Albert Ayler and even with the great **Ella Fitzgerald** well I really can't remember all of their names, so it is easier to say with whom I did not play with. That is, as far as I know, John Coltrane.

This was in the early sixties, when the Clubs could not afford to have the whole band or trio coming from the US. The Jazz Clubs of Copenhagen, the "Montmartre", "Ronny Scotts" in London and other clubs in Paris, Sweden and Norway had this co-operation agreement, that when the soloist would come over from the States doing a tour of may be six weeks in the different Clubs, they would be playing with their house trios.

For about 12 years I was in the "house trio" of the "**Montmartre**" in Copenhagen. It was then, that I met most of the top musicians of the Jazz world, either playing with them or meeting them after they did their concerts at other places. You may say, I even had a very rough youth. Of course, besides all these music engagements, I did go to school. In fact, since I was 17 years old, I went to school in the morning and went to the Radio Big Band Copenhagen in the afternoon. It was only possible, because my parents had big confidence in me. We were living in the country and I did not always get the train from Copenhagen to get home at night.

So since I was 14 years of age, I often stayed over nights in Hotels after my gigs. But I did manage to graduate and went to University to study. Yes, it was a great challenge to meet up with all these different top characters in Jazz and lead the life that comes with it. That I "survived", is all thanks to the devoted upbringing of my parents. Even though my father was not interested in Jazz as such, he and my mother were deeply interested in our well-being.

The school system I was brought up with, was a system where you learn according to your ability and it goes as far as you can cope with what you do. The basic principle is that it doesn't really matter what you do as long as you show responsibility for your life. That is what I learned and what I am thankful for to my parents. I mean, of course my mother cared with whom I would be around. Even though she could not speak a word of English she wanted to see Bud Powell, when he came in town. But when she said, he has "very good eyes, you have nothing to fear". I was allowed to play with him. I know, it sounds strange, but that is the truth.

Yes, I did also meet up with **Erroll Garner**. He used to play for about a month at the "Tivoli Garden" in a variety show, one of our bigger places in town, and afterwards he used to hang out at the "Montmartre". He was a very humorous and warm personality.

How did you meet Eugen Cicero?

Well, first of all, I was always free to play with different musicians. Even when I started to play with Oscar Peterson, our first concert was in 1970, I never became duty bound to be a member of his trio. I was newly married in April 1971 and why should I marry if I devote myself at the same time to traveling with a trio around the world?

So when I met Eugen I did a lot of free lance work in Germany. I played in the band of Peter Herbolzheimer, where I probably first met up with **Tony Inzalaco**, who later became a drummer in the Kurt Edelhagen Band in Cologne. Then I ended playing with the Big Band of the **Norddeutscher Rundfunk** ...

I think, one day, I was called up by Intercord and they asked me to do some recordings with Eugen. I especially remember the recording with Schubert and the big orchestra. The tracks were all written out and chosen by Eugen, so I had nothing to do with the transcription as such. Of course there were rehearsals where I got to know the musical ideas of Eugen.

He was a very humorous person in many respects, we surely enjoyed playing together. But we did not develop, what you may call, a lasting or deep relationship, even though we did some tours in Germany. I especially remember a concert in Aachen.

You should know, in that job to become intimate friends is nearly impossible, otherwise you would end up not playing anymore. You may become buddies, if your social and personal life is okay, but if you've got problems, that's another question. In Eugen's career I was chosen for what I was good at and that's what you hear later on the records and on stage. That is the result that counts and not the personal association in each others life. Then, after a while, it is totally normal that we go each others separate ways again.

You should realize, it is quite difficult to get any closer between musicians, even when you are on tour together. On the one hand you have to protect yourself, that you give your best musically and on the other hand, you have to respect each others privacy. There is not much you can do for someone, who gets into trouble, for instance with his wife at home, far away, or even in the audience. In someways, you are a better side-man, if you do not know too much about the personal life of the person you are playing with. I know, this sounds hard to understand, but playing music together is a very personal affair anyway!

Was there anything "special" about Eugen?

Eugen could play both Jazz and Classical music. That in itself is a great talent, but it can also mean, he did not know where he belongs. So if this turns out to be a problem for him, what can you do about it? So it is better not to get too much personally involved, because you must concentrate why you are on stage and you have to give your best every night. That is all Eugen and the audience deserves.

So in order "to function" under the given circumstances on stage and in the studio you have to protect yourself by sticking to your own affairs. This is the reality everywhere on the bandstand: There is no time to get to know each other as such, except if you are on a tour for a very long time or you work in the same city.

You know, you come in the afternoon, have a sound-check, then at night you have to perform. Then you have to come in with your talent, contribute in the best way you can, afterwards have a dinner and the next morning you say bye-bye. This pace of life affords for everyone to protect his private life, -and it has to be worth to be protected!

You must always remember, it is not important how you feel on stage, even before or afterwards, but if you can't perform there is no reason for you to be there. You "must" function, that's why you can't be a psychiatrist and bass-player at the same time. In other words, if you don't get that straight, you wildie. It's as simple as that.

Everyone must be aware of his responsibility, well, that is how I was brought up. Yes, there is something of a "**Faust-Syndrome**", that you must keep your personal affairs in the unknown, in order to bring out the best of you and be as good as you are. This does not come over night and that is why the business is full of phony people (yes, the business attracts phony people!) and you must know, there are a lot of "prices" to pay.

I always liked to discuss that issue with Joe Pass. I consider him as a good friend of mine, unfortunately he passed away already. We both compared the situation of belonging to a "trio" or "band" is a lot like being in the army: First of all there is a hierarchy and there are your rights and duties. If, for instance, you play with Oscar, he is the General, according to how well you play you can become either Colonel or Lieutenant or if you are not doing any good at all you end up as Private.

Of course, that has also an impact on how you live with the group members on a day to day basis. The only mistake you can do, is not realizing that this is the way it is. We are all under the pressure of being watched, not only by the critics and the audience, but also by your own band-leader and fellow musicians. The sooner you realize that and take account of it the better you are off. Then you know what it is all about.

You shall never forget, the choice to be there, was yours, so wherever you are, in any position in life, you can't get away with saying "I regret doing this or that, I really don't belong here" - that is the end! If you work your way up to a career like I have, you cannot say, "tonight I am not playing my best, because I am tired". People must "hear" why you are there and they only accept you, when you are as good as you are, I mean the best you can.

Now, someone like Eugen, who is obviously torn between two different kinds of music, like Jazz and Classic, which should not make any difference at all, but unfortunately does to many people, he can run into a sort of conflict, when a Jazz or Classic reviewer comes in and says, well he does not really play Jazz or Classical music.

Well, in the end, it is not that important what they mean, but what effect it has on Eugen. If he feels, he is not really 100% good at what he is doing, he comes to the basic question: "what am I doing at all?" and if he cannot answer that question for himself, it becomes suicidal.

There is another point, where the "Faust-Syndrome" shows up: If your contribution to the music is limited in time, then you must not forget, that after you have said everything, you still have to live every day of your life. When your only identification in life is your career, you may end up as a poor man. You are flattered anywhere you go and you may live in the best Hotels, but the only time this means anything at all, is when you are on the bandstand.

Now, Eugen coming from a communist country, separated from his home and family, living in a different culture in many respects, cut off of his roots, just could not have the easy way of living. I want to say this in a very sympathetic way about him, that I felt very early, he had this strike of desperation, sort of depressions and was mentally not in balance. That is the worst thing for you, because you are constantly being questioned by people wherever you go.

The people and places around you are always changing so the continuity and security which you need can only come from your inside, everything around you will sooner or later change. Everyone has to **find his own way of survival**. I for instance play Badminton, that is how I survive. What did Eugen do?

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