

(Ottar Skagen is interviewing Bugge Wesseltoft, in Jazznytt, nr.1, 1993, pictures from C.F. Wesenberg. Translation from Anne Estoppey. If you have comments or suggestions about the translation of this interview, please email: webmaster@molvaer.de)

Top intro:

- If I started to write? I have at least the lay-out which is ready, and a lot of ideas. That will be a long composition of more or less one hour, and some shorter songs. The line-up is also ready. The band will be Terje Rypdal, Jon Christensen, Bjørn Kjellemyr, Nils Petter Molvær, the drummer Rune Arnesen and me.

The "only" tone

Jens Christian "Bugge" Wesseltoft who last year was hired to write the commission for VossaJazz 1993, sounds quite calm two months and a half before he will go on stage at the Voss movie theater and show his abilities as composer and organizer. He is in the meantime completely conscious about what it involves to prepare a whole concert, and that he will get a lot of attention when Palm Saturday (*note: the Saturday during Easter*) is coming. We are nevertheless talking about a traditional arrangement in the Norwegian jazz festival cycle. And he says:

- In fact this will be my debut as a composer.

If Bugge Wesseltoft is relatively unknown as a composer - at least for a broader audience - he is more known as a musician. His synthesizer sounds and piano contributions have been received well after many concerts and with many bands. It looks like he was into everything. But Wesseltoft could not understand this statement when Jazznytt talked to him at the Molde festival last year:

- I don't have so much going on. I play in the band Talisman with Arne Frang, Sveinung Hovensjø, Ole Hamre, Celio de Carvalho and Miki N'Doye, and in another band with Bjørn Kjellemyr, Nils Petter Molvær and Audun Kleive. And there is a project with Tore Brunborg, Jon Christensen and Anders Jormin. We have been in the studio and made a tape, but we didn't get any agreement with a record company yet.

Talisman has come out already with a CD at Odin, and Wesseltoft can say that the band is preparing another one during winter 1993.

- We start to get some gigs out in Europe. Arne is very willing to ring and send faxes and cds around. That's really "allright", that's the way to do it. Clever to try to get outside a bit.

The quartet with Bjørn Kjellemyr as leader was on tour under The Norwegian Jazz Scene during fall last year, and received good critics for its hard and efficient work on the borderline between rock and modern jazz.

- Yes, we got a very good feedback for this band, comments Bugge. But the music is really tough! Bjørn is writing most of it, and he's doing a good job. The music of Rypdal without guitar!

- *The band with Brunborg, Christensen and Jormin sound also exciting?*

- Of course, of course, fantastic. To be able to work with people like Jon Christensen... I don't have that much background as a jazz musician, and learn all the time. You understand how much you don't know yet.

Wesseltoft is also getting into the idea of starting his own band.

- That will be a quartet with a saxophonist, two drummers and me. Vidar Johansen and Rune Arnesen who are now really "hot", with a lot of experience in rock'n roll, are ready. I am just missing the other drummer. I am looking forward to have this starting. I am writing a lot, making songs all the time that I never got the chance to use.

At Molde last year, Bugge thought to start with this band during fall, but the query from the head of VossaJazz implied that his project was delayed.

- You got a very good start in the Norwegian jazz environment as participant to a couple of spectacular projects led by Arild Andersen and Jan Garbarek, but your music carrier is stretching much more back in time, isn't it?

- Yes. I moved from Skien to Oslo in 1985. At that time I had played a lot for myself in many years, and in local rock bands for a while. I grew up during the punk time (*note: Bugge is born in 1964*), and I was young when The Aller Værste were famous; that was also that kind of music we were playing. In Oslo - I moved to my father, Erik Wesseltoft - I was playing during one year in a dancing band, Torry Enghs.

- ?!

- Yes, Torry Enghs, exactly. A lot of known people have been in there. Sveinung. And I think Geir Wentzel. I learned a lot there, one learns always from what one is doing, and I had the feeling I had a great time. We were really good friends - we were more like a band that was headhunted for Torry Enghs, so we were really close together at the beginning. That lasted one year.

- And then?

- Dollie de Luxe! I played with them during four years, from '85 to '89. I was in "Which Witch", until their commitment in London started. Otherwise I was in a pop-rock band, but we had only three-four gigs and never got a record contract, even if it was a really "allright" band, and we tried as well as we could. Then I worked "straight", at Aker brygge while they were building there, and also in a factory and stuff like that. I carried on like that until 1988.

Bugge Wesseltoft has no background at the conservatory or at any music school. He was playing in the school marching band (*note: he played tuba and the big drum!*), but all the rest he learned himself.

- Have you experienced it as a problem in the studio, and afterwards as you started to write and arrange songs?

- In the studio you don't need to be good in reading music, there you are never blanking. You get to hear a song from a K7, and they give you a sheet with the chords. The rest you find out yourself. But on TV-gigs, and if you play at the theater and in reviews, it's different. I also learned how to read notes. It's impossible to manage as a musician if you can't. I am not yet good enough, but I manage. If I get the task to write something for a big band or a symphonic orchestra, I would manage. But of course I would use 5 times longer to write it than people who have been at the music school.

Bugge admits that it was tough to suddenly be in the company of people like Arild Andersen and Jan Garbarek, but he emphasizes that he was only a sideman (*note: helpman?*) in their projects, with definite sounds and notes to follow all the way (*note: not sure if I translated correctly here, but u get the idea*).

Why he got those jobs? He can't see that he worked for creating his own niche in the Norwegian keyboarders environment. There is still nothing special with what he's doing, he states.

- But somebody must have referred to Arild and Jan that I knew something about playing keyboards...

Bugge Wesseltoft is known mostly as a synth-freak (*note: "synth-traktor"?*), but he played grand piano in Jens Wendelsboe's big band last year at Molde.

- When I was little, I played only piano. But then I got an organ, and since I've started to buy synthesizer and electric piano since 10 years, I have been working mostly with such instruments. I am fascinated about sounds and effects, about the borderline between the content and the music (*note: kontentum?*). But it's piano I am playing at home in my living-room. It would be a bit stupid to sit and play sounds just for myself!

- Is it possible to concentrate on electronic instruments, and participate in the hardware race - and still have a personal expression?

- Well, I got a lot of different stuff through the years, but the synth I use most nowadays functions after the same basic principle as the DX7 I bought in '83, and I have been using several of the same sounds the whole way, they kind of became my sounds.

- *There is still not a clear separation between acoustic and electronic instruments.*
- I work a lot with sampling sequences from acoustic music. I can for example play something on a ballaphone (a sort of marimba instrument that I have at home), and sample a bit of it. So the sounds remain acoustic sounds. There is not more programming with sampling sounds from a ballaphone than with recording a human voice. Therefore it can be a quite acoustic feeling out of it, even if you only have electronic instruments with you on stage.

For the ones who had only heard Bugge as a musical colorist, they got a surprise at Molde last year. On the most bop-characterized songs, he was playing "straight" jazz-piano as if he had done only that.

- I had to learn how to comp vocalists on standards when I started to work for reviews and theater. And I like it. I have a good feeling to work with many different things. Recently I have been sitting a lot at home and exercised "stride-piano". Not by thinking that I would become a stride-pianist, but because it's fun to check out things and "allright" to know a little about a lot.
- *Who are your master teachers in the stride-piano style?*
- I don't remember. Older jazz piano players. But it's a lot of that style in people like Ray Charles and Dr. John too.

- *Is the music of Jens Wendelboe that you played at Molde, also your type of music?*
- It is really challenging to play (*note: I don't understand the word "sjov" in the first part of the sentence*). And I like Jens. He was amongst the first to give me some work when I was establishing as a freelance musician in Oslo. But it's not completely my kind of music. You are giving away so much unnecessary "breath" (*note: drag?*). The effect can become the opposite of what you are looking for. Overkill. You have to hold back a little from time to time, to let in a bit of calm and peace. If you love much too much, it's breaking apart, right?

- *What do you listen to when you listen to music?*

- Mostly to older music, jazz from the 60s. Coltrane and Miles. Bill Evans. But Ray Charles and Jimmy Smith too.

- *Is it something happening today in rock'n roll?*

- I have no idea.

- *You are not following?*

- No, I don't. Sometimes one listens to a song on MTV which is a bit "allright", but that is seldom.

- *Mike Mainieri means that rap is the 90s bop?*

- So what? I have no comments to this. I don't know enough about it that I can see such similarities, even if they should be there. But as far as I am concerned, I can't think to sit at home in my living room and listen to a whole record of rap. Then I rather play Coltrane. I just bought the last record that Coltrane made, says Bugge Wesseltoft and becomes enthusiastic. Jon Christensen recommended it to me. Just Coltrane and a drummer, Rashied Ali. It's fucking good. The music is just flowing out and it builds up and becomes stronger and stronger. That's what I dig in jazz, that the musicians give themselves time to develop things. It's the opposite to the pop concept, which is about timing and rules (*note: not sure about this phrase*). Inside a frame of two and a half minute you have to have a hip intro, a super eight bars guitar solo, and a refrain which you remember immediately... You have to listen to Coltrane and Rashied Ali in maybe 15 to 20 minutes before you calm down and start to understand, time don't mean anything for them. Such things are important to acquire for yourself today, I think, when everything is so tight scheduled.

- *What are you doing in ten years from now?*

- Play. I hope that one day I will manage to gather all the threads in this one tone that will knock down all the human beings on Earth. Aarrghh!!!

- *You are amongst the ones who make it go further as musician?*

- Yes, and I am so lucky because I can be myself and play the music I like, and make progresses, too. That's a long way, but I am getting better.