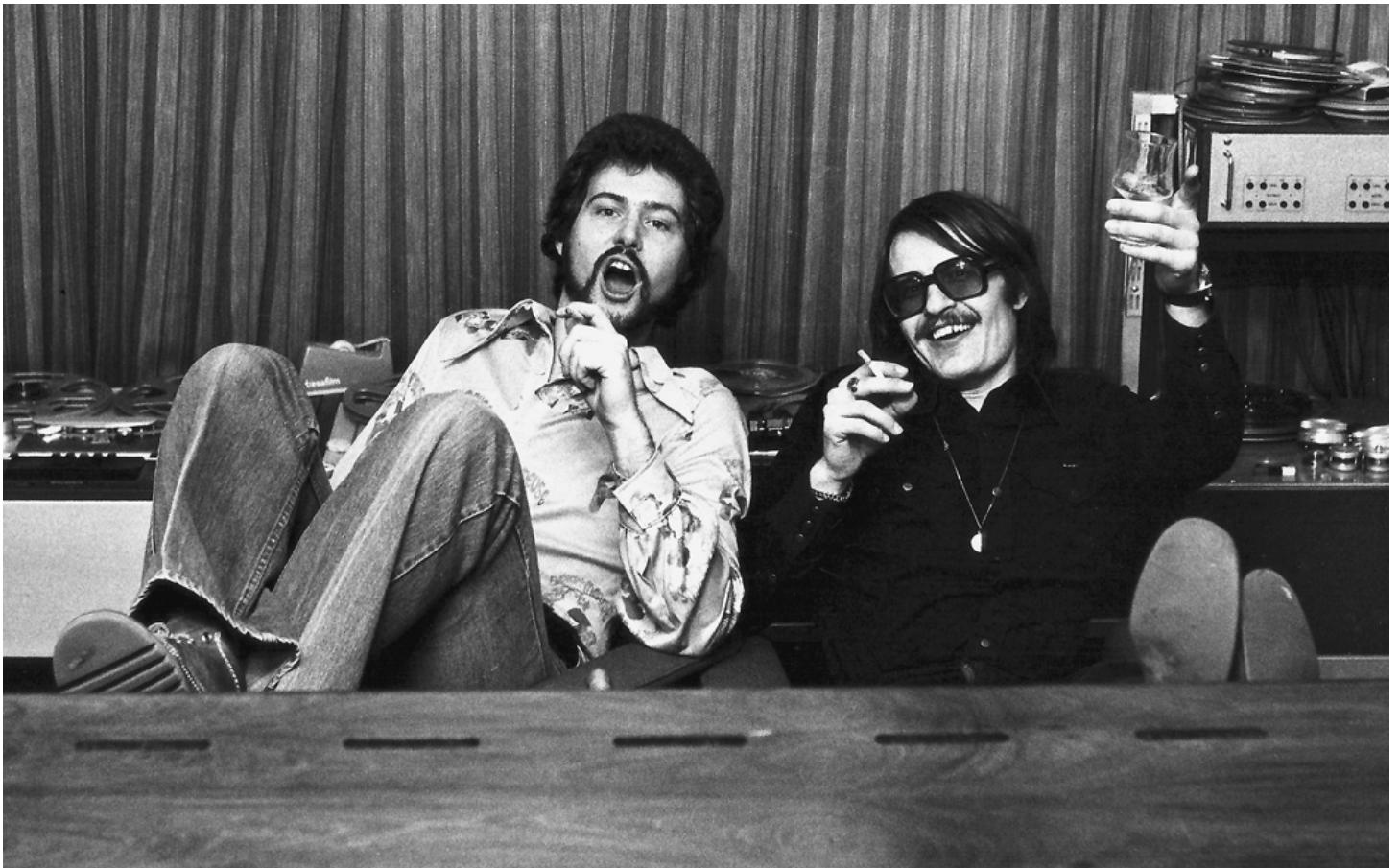


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INTERVIEW: PRODUCER PER MEISTRUP

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Per Meistrup was exposed to music early on through his parents. As the tidal wave of beat music flooded the world, Meistrup exchanged his piano with a guitar. That led to gigs backing fabled Danish singer Peter Belli early on. Soon after Meistrup decided to make a career change and went into aviation while leaving music behind, at least for a while.

Eventually, Meistrup was dragged back into the music business and went onto become a producer and owner of a studio and record pressing plant with several labels under his belt. Over the span of 15 years, Meistrup released everything from Danish folk music, Turkish Jazz to local Rock on his labels.

How did you get into music?

I grew up in a home with a musical interest. My father loved to play piano, classical music, and continued playing daily until he passed away at 104 years old. My mother was professional figure skating instructor, and “spliced” pieces of different music together for her pupils free skating programs. As a kid my parents took me to both classical concerts, and opera at the Royal Theater in Copenhagen, as well as to a concert with at that time the biggest name in “modern music”, Tommy Steele, in the famous Copenhagen sports- and concert hall, “KB Hallen” – I was almost crushed by others in the audience as my parents wanted to get up front and later back stage to get autographs – perhaps that was the real beginning of my musical interest.

I was of course sent to piano lessons, as most children from middle class families would be at that time, but that never caught my interest – I was more interested in guitar, so I began with some jazz-guitar lessons in a music school. At that time my school friends listened to pop music and talked about someone called The Beatles, not really of my interest. However, my father insisted I should go with him to a concert at “KB Hallen”. KB Hallen was an indoor tennis arena which was used as a music venue. My father was a tennis player and had been member of the club for more than 50 years, and also was member of the “Players Committee”, he had free access to the VIP lounge – I was about 15 years old when I was dragged to a noisy concert with four British lads; noisy, not because of loud music, but because of the teenage girls screaming continuously during the boy’s performance...

That event changed my musical interest and soon I played in a noisy amateur beat-band with some school friends – in Denmark that style of noisy music was classified as “barbed wire music” (pigtrådsmusik, ed.). We did not play Beatles songs, but rather fancied the more raw sound of Rolling Stones and similar groups. Our band was called “McPhersson’s” after the lead guitar player, however we were 3 guitar players, organ, bass and drums.

That was in secondary school and when I began high school I formed a new band there. We had quite a number of paid for weekend-jobs in the various beat clubs that blossomed up all over at that time. A very good organ player, who also was an excellent singer, joined so we became a four-piece band together with guitar, bass and drums. In the beginning we used the old band name, but soon changed to “Rave”, a word I liked and had found as brand name on a fancy British hippie-shirt I had bought. Later the organ player left and was replaced by a lead guitar, and I had to take over the vocals. Musically we were probably not good at all – as long as you could play three chords on a guitar, you more-or-less could play in a band – but we of course believed we was.

After high school I spent some time traveling to North Africa the winter '67/68 to sell Swedish city busses, and in the summer I worked in a circus in Sweden – but that's a totally different story – and when I made it back in the autumn my former band-pals suggested we got together again, which resulted in some years as professional rock musician. Let me add that we may not have delivered good music by today's standard, but we were pretty good entertainment, and therefore had lots of jobs – and of course lots of fun ourselves...



(http://othersounds.com/interview-producer-per-meistrup/1969_ravebelli-on-stagee2/)

Peter Belli & Rave (Per Meistrup on guitar), 1969 (Foto: Kurt Wagner)

Tell me more about the band please.

In summer of '69 we got involved in a summer festival in North Zealand (Nordsjælland, ed.) and met a famous Danish rock singer, Peter Belli, who had recently split from his previous band "Four Roses", that was his band after the famous "Les Rivals". Belli suggested that we should be a backing group for him, as he had some club work, but no band. We never recorded anything – we were probably far from good enough – but Belli did release two singles during that period, vocal on tapes pre-recorded by studio musicians, among others "Bliv væk fra vort kvarter"; he had changed from English to Danish lyric that became popular, all written by Thøger Olesen, who actually were my parents summer house neighbor and a friend. Our backing job lasted for the

following winter season; then Peter Belli's manager began to give us some small concert tour jobs alone, and combined with other club work that made our calendar absolutely fully booked. After the summer 1970 we decided to quit while we were ahead and continue with ordinary work careers – playing rock music at that time was not considered a real job.

You helped found a studio named ROC. What did ROC stand for?

The name for the studio, ROC, is short for Recording Operation Company. Our logo was a bird, the mythological roc-bird from the Arabian Night tales, but also known from other old legends and Sanskrit epics. ROC Studio opened officially mid August 1976.



(http://othersounds.com/interview-producer-per-meistrup/1976_studioroc2a/)

Recording room, ROC Studio.

Can you talk about that?

The drummer from my “old” band Rave and I began to play again for fun while we both had our daytime jobs. I bought a Hammond organ and we began to work on a rock opera based on “The Tale of the Enchanted Lamp” from Arabian Nights; we were inspired from “Jesus Christ Superstar” and The Who, who had created “Tommy”.

As our compositions began to come together our former bass player joined in, that was better than my foot bass on the organ, and a very good lead guitarist, Mike Andreassen, showed up as well. I had bought three Ferrograph Series 7 tape recorders, a kind of top-level audiophile hi-fi machine, and a pair of Yamaha 8-channel mixers, so we recorded the whole thing as a demo. We then began thinking professional and talked about recording in England. Still working at the airline it was easy for me to jump

over there and investigate the studio possibilities. We began to calculate costs – we expected to pay everything ourselves, and if successfully finished, then we would try to get it released as a double album – but we would be limited in how long time we could afford to spend in a studio.

During my several trips to England I bought some music magazines that were hardly available in Denmark at that time, some of them had advertisements for recording equipment like smaller and affordable 8-track tape recorders and mixing consoles designed for 8-track recording.

I began to consider that if we bought our own tape recorder and mixer, and placed the equipment in our rehearsal room, instead of spending our savings on studio time, we could have unlimited recording time. I suggested the idea to my friends and they liked it. Without any knowledge – nor experience, apart from a few times in an 8-track studio with Peter Belli and a one session with my band – we began to investigate, and suddenly we realized, we needed 16-track or more, and to cover that extra investment perhaps we could rent out studio time to others, and suddenly we were into planning a real recording studio. We ended up financing it with almost a third from the guitar player Mike, a similar share to me, and then the sales executive from the airline I worked in, had become interested from all my talking, and also partnered in with almost a third as so-called “sleeping partner”, the remaining minor shares were the drummer and bass player.

Please continue.

At that time there were only 16-track studios in Denmark, but 24-tracks recorders had appeared on the market, so to justify a new studio, it had to be 24-track: the first Danish 24-track studio. We talked to the renowned Danish tape recorder manufacturer, Lyrec, which were about to build a new designed series of four or five multi-track machines, if they could find buyers. The company has just been through bankruptcy, and their bank and future investor wished them to have some confirmed orders for at least three machines to finance a reconstruction of the company; however Lyrec would not ask for any advanced payments due to their present situation.

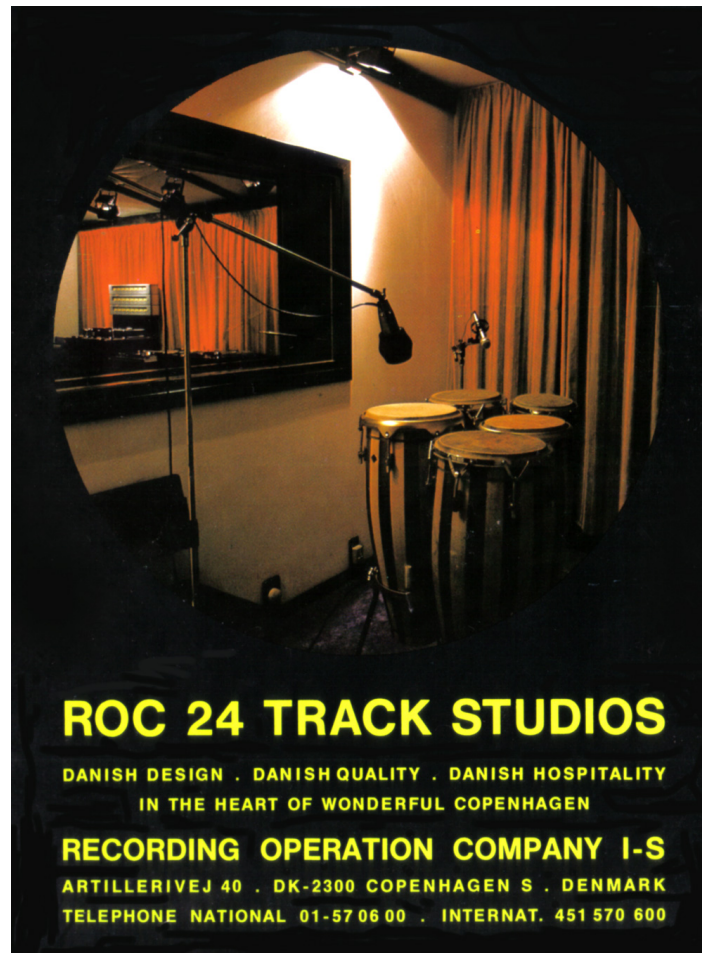
We also needed to find a mixing console. We talked with the Danish manufacturer who had made the console for Metronome Studios, and also build lots of consoles for the Danish Broadcast Corporation (DR, ed.), but they did not have the kind of design we were looking for; it was mainly Mike, the guitar player, who knew about recording and equipment, as he worked in a music store and had great interest in hi-fi. A problem we found with the Danish console was that there were no panning button, only left, or right, or both channels, meaning middle, could be selected. I shall add that many stereo recordings from the sixties were music in one side, and vocals and reverb in the other side, until EMI London invented a 3-track tape recorder to place the vocals in the middle, the beginning of multi-track recording. Mike and I went to England to look at possible solutions; I fancied Helios that I've seen at Richard Branson's Manor House Studios, but they were custom build only and extremely expensive; we looked at Trident A-series, but the price were higher than we had space for in our budget, and their B-series too limited in functions; and then I had seen ads for a smaller, but extremely efficient looking console, from a little unknown company called Soundcraft.

I had already talked with the Soundcraft owners, Phil Dudderidge and Graham Blyth, on an earlier trip to England. They had rented some rooms at the top floor in a building on Great Sutton Street in the center of London, where they mainly produced small 12 and 16 channel PA-mixers in a flight case; but Graham, who was the technical guru, had just designed a bigger 16 into 4, or into 8, mixer. I talked about a 24-track console and Graham was quite interested, but Phil had his reservations; they had tried to build a bigger console before to a Canadian customer, and that had not been a success, so Phil said that Soundcraft should never again make a big console.

Graham and I had kept contact by mail. When Mike and I visited Soundcraft together, Mike began to talk about 24-track in-line. That was not possible and way too big for them to make, but Mike said that it would be very easy to adjust their design to the way a tape recorder worked. Graham and Mike argued a bit about it, Phil gave up and left the meeting, and I hardly understood

what Mike had in mind. Mike asked if I had brought the manual and schematics from Lyrec in my case – yes, and then he started to show Graham and draw something. Suddenly Graham understood Mike’s idea, laughed and shouted »that’s brilliant«!

A couple of weeks later I was back in London. Graham had made lots of drawings and plans, and calculated a price that suited our budget perfect. A 28/24 inline mixer, with 8 sub-groups, full LED meter-bridge – which was very hi-tech stuff in mid 70’s – and a parametric 4-band EQ. A build-in path-bay that corresponded directly to the Lyrec’s multi track machine and it’s remote, made the mixing console change from recording to “sync” or playback by the touch of one button at the tape recorder’s remote control box, which was Mike’s idea that it could control all channels on the mixer. The delivery was agreed to 1st of June 1976.



(http://othersounds.com/interview-producer-per-meistrup/1976_roc4-folder-back/)

Which studios in Denmark would you say were your competitors?

The major studios were Rosenberg and Metronome, both with 16-track; a couple of long established, but smaller ones like “Wifoss Studio”, owned by Philip Foss who was an electronic engineer with many inventions of his own like a console and a plate-echo, but he also had one of the first series of 16-track Lyrec recorders, and Helge Albrechtsen’s 2-track in the lounge of a rowing club, “Roklubben Kvik”, used for many recordings of more classic entertainment stuff, for example such as selected musicians from the Royal Theater’s Orchestra forming a “recording orchestra” named after the present conductor or leader, accompanying opera or musical singers, or well known actors.

A number of new-comers, like us, popped up with everything from 4-track demo studios, to 8-track, 16-track and Freddy Hansson’s new “Sweet Silence Studio” that was also 24-track, very well equipped with Trident A-consol. Another successful pop-band, Shubidua, also opened their own studio, based on the private recording equipment from one of the members father, the

famous jazz-violinist Svend Asmussen; they also upgraded the 8-track equipment and got 24-track.

What were some of the difficult issues of running a studio?

At that time Denmark had only one broadcaster, the government controlled Danish Radio, so any release was dependent of, if it got aired at DR. They had a very popular Danish Pop program, which resulted in a number of local recordings and releases. Unfortunately that program stopped just as we opened ROC Studios and suddenly the demand for local recordings decreased. Furthermore, as a new “player on the market” we did not have any portfolio, so we faced a hard time to get a recording business up and running. We did like many of the newly opened studios, recorded new talents for free based on a split or flat fee, if the recordings could be released by one of the major or established record companies; we got a few projects sold on small flat fees for the studio. That, together with our regular day jobs, kept us in business for a while.

How did you divide the responsibility between Mike and yourself?

My partner, Mike was the main engineer and he had good ears and flair for music, whilst I merely worked as administrator, but also engineered some secondary recordings. I soon learned – and I am music publisher Jørgen Kleinert thankful for his many talks and “lessons” about music business, when he sat in the front office while some of his artists were recording – that it could be a better future for us to become a record label and music publisher, rather than an “underpaid” recording studio in tough competition for too few recording projects compared to the number of studios.

The original intention with the studio project to record our own material, never finalized – suddenly we had a business to take care of, and that was more difficult than anticipated. However, my partner Mike had an idea of recording his own sole-album and began that, using lots of studio time. I thought it was bad timing, as we needed to care for business that could make an income, rather than blocking the studio for months doing his sole project. We argued about it – and our third part, the “sleeping partner”, would not like to interfere and take side – so we didn’t find a solution; but financially the studio began to suffer from that. Finally Mike got his project finished and the master sold for a small flat fee, but then he started another project of his own music. Each of us three had borrowed a lot of money to begin with, plus an additional credit for the company, and without enough income we were running dry of money. Furthermore some of our clients also had a hard time to pay us – the music business, at least some of the Danish companies, began to have a bad financial reputation – and at that time credits were often based on so-called “Letter of Credit”, a draft running for 30 days or more, we could use as security for our credit in the bank, meaning borrowing money on it. When due, we might get a small partial payment only and another draft for the balance; if that went on too many times with the same client, the bank refused to take the replacement drafts, so our bank credit got overdrawn.

Since we could not agree on Mike’s studio time, I wanted to pull me out of the partnership, as we each was personally liable for the entire company debt, that just grew. I had a small personal business registered from before we started the studio partnership, so I would rather try to build something up there with cassette tape business; so I managed to lease a duplication equipment and got started. The short of a long history was that we eventually dissolved the ROC partnership while I personally took over the entire company’s debt, but also got the assets. As my own company was already running, the former ROC studio became an integrated part under my name.



(<http://othersounds.com/interview-producer-per-meistrup/wduplication-4/>)

Engineer Tony Waldron loading pancakes. We had a Lyrec 16 speed bin-loop cassette duplicator and 10 slaves with a capacity of 400-500 normal music cassettes per hour or around 3,000 per 8-hour shift.

Did you ever have the capabilities to press records?

I got an offer to take over the last operating Danish vinyl record pressing plant, United Records, as the owner had died from illness; that seemed like a good opportunity, and I managed to find finance partners for that project by changing my company to a limited partnership. It was hardly a plant, rather a workshop with 4 pressing machines, two for 12-inch and two for 7-inch.

We used 140 centigrade hot steam under pressure for pressing, and as the heat to produce the steam came from burning oil, which had become expensive during the oil crisis in the 70's, the steam cost was relative high, compared to the limited number of pressing machines. Furthermore we also needed to cool the molds quickly down to release the vinyl – just like molding chocolate – so we ended up with a mix of semi-hot water, which both was going to be reheated for pressure steam, and cooled down to less than 30 centigrade for cooling-water; in fact pure waste of energy. We bought a new steam generator heated with nature gas, but before we installed it for production, we got the opportunity to outsource the pressing to a big foreign plant using steam from a neighboring power station – excess steam or part of cooling process – that saved energy and money; today you would probably call it for an environmentally friendly or green solution.

Another important thing in record pressing is the vinyl quality. We used classical grade vinyl granulate, and we could continue with that, as the Hungarian pressing plant we outsourced to, mainly manufactured classical records and used the same German vinyl brand and quality, as we did.

In the “benefit of hindsight” I should have kept my pressing machines, instead of disposing of them as scrap metal – today it seems like vinyl has a renaissance, even used equipment can be gold worth.

A small anecdote to my short career with record pressing is, that after I bought United Records, I got an offer from EMI Denmark to take over their closed plant in Copenhagen; including their matrix department, where the moulding forms were made. I could have it all for free, just I would rent the buildings for a small fee – the fact was that it would cost EMI a minor fortune to get the factory buildings cleared and renovated. We seriously considered the option, but figured out that it would be too costly to start up again – the equipment was old and worn out – furthermore no one from the former staff dared to go down the basement to start up the steam boiler, due to danger of explosion...



(<http://othersounds.com/interview-producer-per-meistrup/fabel-presser/>)

Advertisement for Fabel record presses.

Where did you press up records when it was no longer economical solution?

Apart from EMI's plant there were only two small independent records pressing manufacturers, so I presume that there were never a big record production in Denmark. One of the small manufacturers was already closed when I got into the music business. EMI closed their plant a few years later, probably in 1978, and I took over the last independent in '79, but only kept it running a shorter period before we outsourced the pressing.

There were some major plants in Holland and England that most of the established international companies used – in fact, it was their own plants – whilst the independent labels probably shopped around, some few used United Records and followed over to my company.

How did you get in touch with Turkish musician Atilla Engin who you've recorded several LP's with?

Atilla Engin showed up with a failed project from another company, a few tracks more-or-less finished, and lots of ideas. That became the album Matao, and it received very good reviews. We continued our co-operation, even if the sales were far from as good as the reviews; but jazz were “cheap” to record, meaning jazz musicians knew their stuff and only used extremely short studio time compared to rock music, so costs were mainly album sleeve and record pressing.

I shall add that my company probably was “last choice”, meaning when the majors or more important labels rejected a project or an artist, they would contact me. I had some co-operation with a very professional British producer, who talked much about quantity; meaning recording and releasing as much as possible, then the odds of something hitting – at least in sales – were bigger, than just concentrate on a few artists or projects. I was very open minded, so a lot came out – I think we more-or-less said yes to almost everything – however a few recordings never made it to the end. If it was today, I presume I would have done it the other way, more selective and concentrated on a few only. On the other hand, I may have given a lot of artists an opportunity.

And if you ask specifically about jazz and fusion music, I shall say that, that repertoire was merely considered a niche and not the major goal; our aim was to try, one day to get a major pop/rock hit.

Was RA Records also your label?

Yes, we had a small number of various labels. The first we called “Rocods”, but that was only for 2 releases during the ROC Studios period, Ra Records became the outgoing label for the rock-oriented material after my company took over.

Another label was “Gold Label” that we used for a few vinyl releases and numerous tape releases – it was our budget label, mixed of both cover versions and original artists, both new unknown and quite old established foreign names, we could buy masters with, names like Chuck Berry and Johnny and the Hurricanes; and Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and Glen Miller Band, among others. We were probably one of the first, if not the very first Danish company, that released known artists as budget tapes – which was new at that time and generated quite some interest, so we could also export music-cassettes to the other Nordic countries.

Then we had a small label “PMP Music” we used for Danish pop material, and productions of children songs and stories. And finally we had “Danish Music Production”, primary for jazz, but we also made an album with traditional Danish folk music.



(<http://othersounds.com/interview-producer-per-meistrup/wgold-label-musicassettes/>)

Sales display for the budget Gold Label.

How many records have you released?

Probably around 15 pop/rock albums, 10 jazz/swing albums, some in other music styles, maybe 5, and then some 40 or 50, 7-inch singles, and numerous cassette tape only releases. The latter mainly budget price – I need to mention that it was a time when buying music were relative expensive, and budget audiocassettes became cheap alternative for music in the car. Some few, later well known Danish artists, especially from the part of Denmark called Jutland, started their career on budget tapes – unfortunately none of mine; my biggest mistake in my music career was, that I several times said »no thanks« to an artist from over there in Jutland, “Suzi & Leo” that both looked and sounded very odd, but later became an extremely hot and well selling name.

What’s your favourite release that you’ve made?

My absolute favorites are two rock albums with Danish groups. The one is the band “Avantgarde de Luxe”, with Danish lyrics, titled “Jorden under mig”. The composer and group leader, Ivan Nio, had made some quite surrealistic lyrics with weird titles, so when the basic recordings were finished and we should decide for album track order – often big discussions between band-members about what keys can follow the previous, etc. – I suggested, that we instead wrote each title on a small piece of paper. Now having all the small paper slips with titles placed on the floor, we began to see if we could make a kind of story out of them – that should be the track order – and as it was a story, or rather two, with one for each side of the vinyl-album, there should be

no track separation, but each song should continue straight into the next; not only like The Beatles did it with their Sgt. Pepper album, but the songs should kind of mix together. Therefore we took the raw 2-inch 24-track tape and cut the tracks in the right order, one tape for side A, and another for side B. I shall say that I always used an ongoing track layout; so all songs had drums, bass, guitars, keyboards, vocals, and so on at corresponding track-numbers. Then listen, and listen again, coming up with ideas, so we could use or record some effects continuing from one song into the next – could be anything, a telephone engaged-beep sound, a steamboat siren, speeches from WWII politicians – to keep the surrealistic story together. We ended up getting a big band in the studio to play a short fanfare as intro to the opening track. That was fun – especially as the album became a broadcast hit, and the engineers could not always figure out where exactly a track should begin, and end...

What's the other of your favourite albums that you made?

The other favorite album, titled “Sunglass Revolution”, is with English lyrics and from group called “Shanks”. The composer and bandleader, Thomas Groenlykke, had been living a while in Louisiana in USA and spoke American as a native. That was kind of “underground” at that time in 1985, some tracks almost theatrical, and other very minimalistic; especially “Long Black Song” about black people and racism, which we also released as a single and dedicated the song to the Danish photographer Jacob Holst's foundation.

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OTHERLINKS

- ego trip (<http://www.egotripland.com/>)
- Ethiopian / Eritrean Discography (<http://funkfidelity.de/>)
- Honest Jons (<http://www.honestjons.com/>)

- Latin Funk Blog (<http://latinfunk.org/blog/>)
- Numero Group (<http://numerogroup.wordpress.com>)
- Sofrito UK (<http://sofrito.co.uk/>)
- Soulstrut (<http://www.soulstrut.com>)
- Very Good Plus (<http://verygoodplus.co.uk>)

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