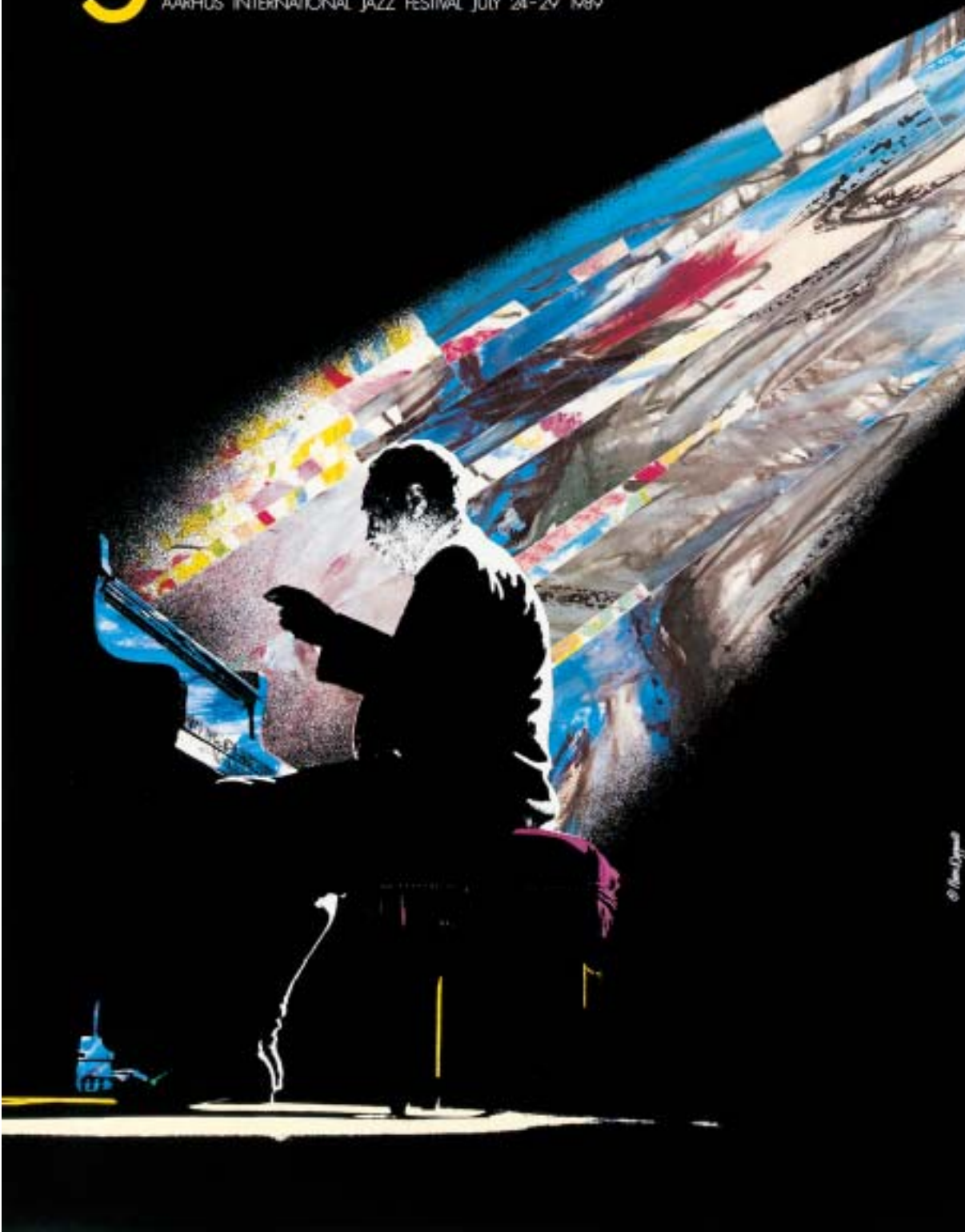


JAZZ

AARHUS INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL JULY 24-29 1989



Master of the Poster

A meeting with Finn Nygaard is never going to go the way it was expected. This very afternoon, set at Fredensborg – roughly fifty kilometers away from the Danish capital – was originally intended as an outline for an interview about posters. Posters – and nothing but posters. Because they are the undisputed passion in the life of this Danish artist – a life which just happens to be approaching its fifties milestone. An occasion which he marks by launching a yet another grand project of the kind that would be breathtaking for mostly everybody else.

For this reason the interview comes to deal with posters alongside the above-mentioned project which concerns, among others, this very book entitled "Finn Nygaard with Friends" "Fifty-Fifty". Fifty posters created by the world's most outstan-

ding poster artists alongside fifty posters of Finn Nygaard's own design. Yet posters are not going to be the only subject. Not this time either. It is as a fact going to be dealing with life, for a great part; and - to a lesser extend – with death, ambitions, circus, adventure, design, international friends of the poster, eastern mysticism, as well as number magic. And posters for sure.

- As a matter of fact, my interest in posters began at an early age. As a child I lived in Århus, where my family was acquainted with Ib Antoni, whose posters I've always been crazy about, says Finn Nygaard. I must have been ten or twelve years when for the very first time I stuck a poster upon a wall of my own room. It was a poster featuring Jimi Hendrix, made by the Polish designer Waldemar Swierzy, and it stayed up there for a number of years.



DJANGO DÓR
2001
LEGEND OF JAZZ
SVEND ASMUSSEN
MASTER OF JAZZ
ALEX RIEL
JAZZ PERFORMER
OF THE YEAR
JACOB FISCHER

- The first real poster, I printed myself, dates back to the 1970's. It was a theatre poster made for the play "The Fallen Angel", by Noel Coward. Scenography, and a lot more, was my responsibility in that case – a poster amongst other.

More than 300 posters bear the signature of Finn Nygaard, who in addition to that has a high-flying, prolific career in graphic design. He has designed logos for the likes of Egmont – the entertainment business' giant, the "Fætter BR" toyshop-chain, Venstre – the ruling political party of Denmark, besides working out comprehensive corporate identity programmes for a number of large companies. Still, it is first-and-foremost posters which has given him an international recognition. And it is thanks to them that he has friends and acquaintances all over the world.

- In reality my ambition was to create posters which would apply to a particular time and place, as well as, emotion. Some of them coming managing to exceed beyond the limits of time and place, is what's so fascinating about posters.

- My posters are like a diary. They reflect time and place, and a definite feeling. Today, when looking at them, I'm straightaway able to recall the mood I was in, when making every each of them, relates Finn Nygaard.

- **Should I point** some important ones out, I'm bound to pick Bertolt Brecht's "Mutter Courage", commissioned by Århus Theatre. I was on to something, there.

- Out of the latest ones, I'm mostly glad for the way the poster about the Hospital Clowns in Denmark turned out to be.

- And then I cannot deny, that the jazz posters occupy a special place in my heart. Miles Davis and Ben Webster, I reckon, are the ones I'm particularly fond of.

- Acting as a pander is out of the question, as far as the free art of poster making is concerned. Seen as a part of a greater whole, they're one big experiment. Somehow they can be looked upon as my book of evolution.

- Posters are giving me an opportunity to try out different things, an opportunity which would othe-

wise be harder to find an outlet for in other areas of my graphic activities. The poster I made for the Tunø Festival – for instance - has been a trial of achieving something simple yet at the same time, haughty and cheeky, he maintains.

The Fredensborg Post Office has been kept busy for quite some time. Posters sent from all over the world for Finn Nygaard's grand project are streaming in their dozens. Each new sending is being received as enthusiastically. And with an equal share of humility.

- Posters are the main thread in all of my activities. Thanks to them I have got a lot of friends. Finn Nygaard points out to these many parcels being a confirmation of that.

He is well known for thinking big – literally speaking, as well. Many of his posters are made in sizes 1.50 x 1.00 m, while Kolding Trapholt Museum's exhibition poster for its Paris-imported special "Hommage Toulouse-Lautrec" show – consisting of one hundred international contributions on the subject – has a printed-size of 2.00 x 1.40 m.

2001 was the jubilee year, marking one hundred years since the death of poster art's all-time greatest master, the French Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

There were worldwide celebrations. The above-mentioned Paris exhibition, amongst other. Danish Finn Nygaard got included within the ranks of the one hundred contributing poster designers.

- **Posters are a passion** of mine. In a way, they have always been – it's just that it becomes clearer and clearer for me. Posters are the pivotal point for plenty of the work that I do and

the friends I have. It's exciting that, as a matter of fact, there exists an international poster language. In the same way jazz or circus is international, so is poster. Isn't it quite exceptional?

- As a full-fledged artist one has to keep up setting challenges and traps for oneself. Otherwise one's invention is bound to get poorer and risks reaching a standstill, he ponders on.

- The character of my style is the stringent fas-





hion, I'm building things up – combined with, what could be described as my "easy touch" ...

- "Mutter Courage" serves as a good example for it. It's full of storytelling and details, while in reality it's simple. As a result, it's quickly recognized and legible, and at the same time, it's got depth and a potential for a longterm engagement of the viewer's attention. There are many layers, stories and messages in this poster.

The Danish Post Office has recently issued 2 stamps, designed by Finn Nygaard.

- Postage stamps are really exactly like posters. Just smaller. And then, there's this fascinating matter of their distribution by the million.

- Where it comes to it, a poster has simply to be posted on a hoarding and function there. Its functioning is the decisive thing. A poster just has to function. When you're waiting on a bus, you should endure looking at it, at the bus stop.

- I feel extremely honoured by the fact that some of my posters are exhibited at museums. Or hanging up in private homes. Obviously, the fact that some people dig having them in their homes,

makes me proud. This is what's utmost for an artist.

How do you go about creating your posters?

- At the beginning by way of gathering information, I focus my interest on a subject. It's the same way, whether the topic is jazz, opera, children or cancer. I'm getting affected by it – which hopefully shows in my posters, eventually.

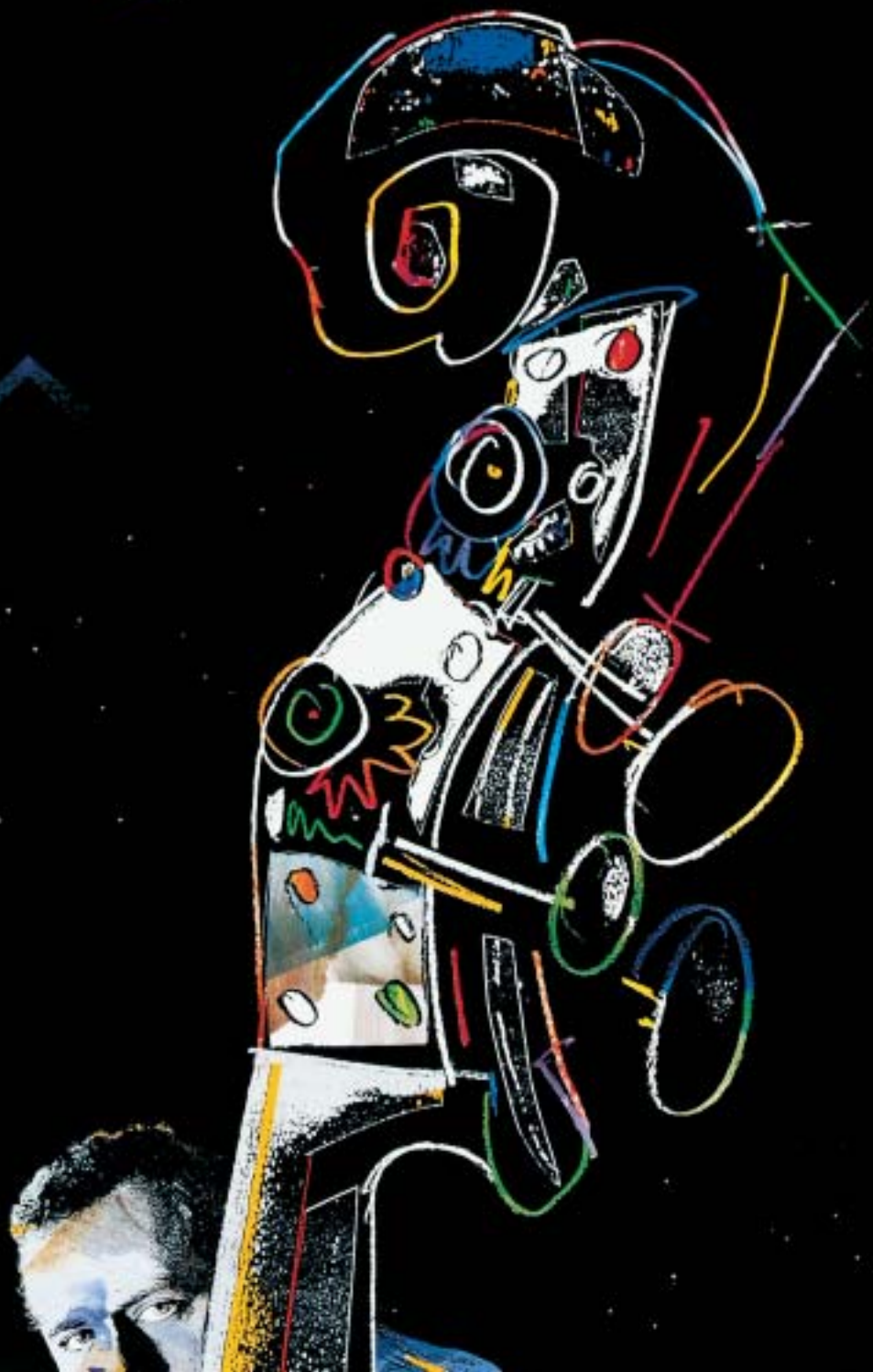
- When viewing one of my jazz posters one should be able to hear music. Tears and laughter should accompany a look at one of my circus posters. The poster which was devoted to children and youngsters struck by cancer has affected me greatly – and the poster does reflect it. In this way, all of my poster designing process can be regarded as a kind of a diary of emotions.

- At times, the simplest things take the longest to create. Often it takes ages to crack an egg. The ripening of just the right idea may take anything from ten minutes to three months.

A number of Finn Nygaard's posters include an element of an inquisitive stir. When gazing at it,

JAZZ

AARHUS INTERNATIONAL JAZZ FESTIVAL JULY 15-20 1991



one would like to find out what's on the reverse of a poster, For the same reason, many of them contain a symbolic hole – which one could imagine jumping through and materializing on the other side.

- Lately, there has been a tendency for lots of posters being photographic representations instead of artistic visualisations. I feel sorry for that. The best posters are pieces of art in their own right, and reflections as well as communicators of emotions, comments Finn Nygaard.

- I love paintbrushes. I consider myself a brush operator. All the time, I'm striving after the sublime in the delicate stroke or the accidental in an otherwise controlled drop of paint.

- I would wish to be able to work a year or two just for myself, without any clients. It could give me a possibility to leave for Japan, and perfect calligraphy for a year of undisturbed tranquillity, over there. I'm crazy about ink. Somehow, it's another passion of mine. I love sitting with my lettering pen in peace and quiet.

What does the 50 mark mean to you?

- Nothing, when it comes to it. And then still. It's only natural to stop awhile and look within. What have I achieved, and what desires do I have? It's a number to keep count of.

- An idea strikes me, that I'm reaching 50 in the year when H.C. Andersen would be 200, and so would Bournonville, while Piet Hein would be rounding 100.

- Number 11 pursues me. For a considerable spell of time I had been a part of the Eleven Danes design company which ment a lot as far as my professional development. My birthday is on the 11th of August – which, as I happen to know – was the day of H.C. Andersen's funeral.

- I'm not a poster collector in the true sense of the word. As an example, I seldom stick any of my own posters on the wall. Yet I fancy looking at the works of others, he admits – and underlines these words right away, by picking up some of the gems from his collection.

- I have much to do with other poster artists. And lots of respect for them. I'm fond of talking to them and working with them. One could remark that this book ought to be including plenty of others – but at some point there had to be a limit. And then I got the idea of building the book around this fifty-fifty concept – one half of the hundred posters coming from some of the world's best artists and the other half from my own hand.

What are your dreams?

- Some are dreaming of turning the world upside down. I used to have that dream, too. But it's not possible. I'm not able to change everything. My work can get so good, though, that the world may turn around just slightly on its impact, he says.

- All in all, I consider myself to be a fortunate person. I smile a lot. And there's a grain of humour in much of what I do. I like giving things a twist.

- A couple of years ago, I was asked by the Chinese to create a poster for the China International Art Design Expo 1999, in Shanghai. The poster somehow became a kind of a political manifest. As far as I'm concerned, it's got a lot to do with human rights. I drew the planet earth, half of it being surrounded by



darkness – and I affixed the text "Good morning China – Good night Europe" to it.

- I have fallen deeply in love with the East. I love eastern calligraphy – Japanese, first-and-foremost – and I've always done that. I'm fascinated by the peace and absorption, often encountered out there.

The interview is drawing to a close. Finn Nygaard has to attend a parents' meeting, at his children's school. That has to be taken care of, too. Notwithstanding the fact of Finn Nygaard having taken the H.C. Andersen's maxime "To travel is to live", by far closer to his heart than mostly anybody else.

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