

We Swedes have an ambivalent relationship to *dansband* ('dance band'). From passionate love to the opposite, through ironic comedy. That is a reason why we can combine the words 'we' and 'Swedes' to express identity. Every community has its myths, symbols and soundtracks that define it. Anthropologists speak about imagined communities. Dansband, a virtually unique Swedish phenomenon that has emerged in the space between traditional Swedish dance, rock and swing is an example of such symbols. It is hard to move about in Sweden and not in any way encounter dansband. In turn, the dansband community has its own symbols, rules, heroes and heroines. It does not have a high status, and despite being the music genre that sells the most records year after year, it is rarely mentioned in the same sentence as 'the Swedish music miracle'. That is a comfortable position for the genre to exist in. Dansband is the major reason why Sweden shares the first place with Slovakia among the most dancing nations in Europe. Dansband exists like an undertow in the collective consciousness, even for those who are not enthusiastic dancers of jitterbug and foxtrot at the close to a thousand dance venues, or enjoy the music. The stars of dansband take turns with royalties on the covers of tabloids at the supermarket.

A story about the culture of dansband is also a story about Sweden. Not in a national romantic way that divides nations or people into separate and fixed units, ascribing them unchangeable attributes. Rather, it is about identity in transformation and in constant negotiation, and relationships between traditions. Folk dances like polka and schottis have crossed paths with American music like rock, jazz and country. The fusion has created its own essence and entered the venues. Dansband has established its distinct ground formula since the term entered the language, and the music style is in turn open to exchange with other expressions. As folk music changed its status and now shares radio channels and universities with jazz and classical music, dansband has taken over parts of its role. Within dansband music you hear the sounds of Karlstad as well as Nashville, and that way it is a reflection of a time and a place. It is not an arena for radical musical or poetic innovation, and you rarely hear political lyrics, odd paces or dissonant chords. But there are no such ambitions or expectations. What is there, is craftsmanship and hard work.

Dansband musicians are heroes who play for four hours with just a break for coffee and a cheese sandwich, keeping a struggling scene alive. A scene that lets people from many different places feel at home and meet like-minded people. The bands' touring buses are rolling homes in constant motion between gigs along the Swedish roads. The national radio ties together the community in time and space. *P4 Dans* lets the whole country listen to what is playing on remote stages. In time for Sunday morning coffee, *Svensktoppen* lets you listen to songs that remain the same on the top of the list for years.

Each person comes to the dance venues with their own experience, frame of mind and their own style of dance. On the floor it all merges into one unit where

body language speaks and everyone moves in the same way, with room for individual variation. As a subculture the dansband community can be studied from different perspectives. The music can be described, as can the ritual of going out and dance, and the relations between the people. But in the moment, for the dancer, it is all about some of the most basic human needs. Romance. Touching. Being together and sharing an experience. That is also how Johannes Frandsen depicts the Swedish dansband culture. Rather than telling about the dance, he takes the viewer out dancing. The photographs speak directly and wordlessly about what neither needs nor can be explained.

Touch me has taken a decade to realize. It is the kind of work that needs to evolve slowly. As a friend and colleague I have followed Johannes' work closely. By profession he is a freelance photographer and when the project started it was in a photojournalistic style with a descriptive approach. He visited dance venues around the country, and travelled together with bands on buses and cruise ships. As the work matured he took a step back, and avoided getting too involved. The camera was turned away from the musicians, letting the people on and off the dance floor play the lead role. He continued to travel to classic grounds, such as the festival *Dansbandsveckan* in Malung and other scenes. From sober exercise dance to nights smelling of alcohol on the waves of the Baltic Sea. But the context has been pushed back and dissolved. The dansband community has become its own state, beyond space and time. It is the interpersonal tension that is the core of the portrayal. There is a contrast between being on the dance floor and outside of it. Outside you can see reservation, seclusion and self awareness. On the floor, these conditions dissolve into tenderness and intimacy. It is that tension and change of state that has driven Johannes to return year after year to wake up numb in the backseat of a car and struggle with tangled film in the darkest parts of a touring bus.

I have never met anybody who is more curious and gets more energy from being where people meet than Johannes Frandsen. He pays attention to everything around him and can create a fellowship with anyone. If you go to a party with Johannes it is commonly known that the day after, he will be able to tell you precisely what everyone has said and done. He brings that quality with him as a photographer when he embraces a subject. He leaves his comfort zone and works very intimately, forced by the wide angle lens of the small point and shoot cameras he often uses. He photographs openly and honestly, and thus becomes invisible. He has a distance that keeps his eyes keen for details, events and relations. He is a collector and intermediary of expressions, with a wide open eye for emotions and the quiet drama between people. With a flash aimed straight forward he illuminates details and freezes moments. Space and time dissolve on the grainy colour negatives. What is left, is what it is all about: to touch and be touched.

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Touch me
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