

Norway

Erle Marie Sørheim interviewed **Karin Krog**

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Sørheim: I'm sitting here with Karin Krog, Norway's pre-eminent jazz singer. I'm Erle Marie Sørheim, journalist and literary critic.

Hi Karin, thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with me.

Krog: Hi! It's a pleasure.

Sørheim: I thought I should start by asking how you experienced your childhood, since you were a child during the Second World War. What are some of your earliest memories of that time?

Krog: I vaguely remember 9 April 1940, and later on there were air raid sirens and sometimes they were at night. We then had to go to the basement. It was very cold, uncomfortable and you were half awake. So that I remember quite well.

Sørheim: Were you afraid?

Krog: No, not really. But there was a big explosion right next to where I lived, and I was very lucky, because it's easy for me to fall asleep, and I sleep very deeply, so I just slept through that explosion. I was told about it afterwards. But I remember that sinking feeling when I had to quickly put on some clothes to go down to the cold, damp basement. And there were quite a lot of German officers that lived in one of the big houses next to us. We were often given sweets by them, and that was great fun because of course we didn't have those during the war. That I remember well. And later at the end of the war one of these houses was made into a hospital, and then there were a lot of young injured soldiers that were sent there.

Sørheim: German soldiers?

Krog: Yes, and we stood there beneath their windows and they would throw down candy and things to us and we felt sorry for them because they were hurt.

Sørheim: So you didn't think 'they deserve it because they invaded our country'.

Krog: No, we felt bad for them because some of them had lost an arm and things like that. They threw down cigarettes to us as well. I think I was seven at the time. So that was my first cigarette.

Sørheim: You tried one?

Krog: Yes [laughs]. There weren't a lot later on. I think I managed to get weaned off of them. But those are the things you remember. I remember one time my mom gave me a slice of buttered bread. I then went down to the street, because I lived on a farm, and at that time we played a lot in the streets since there weren't so many cars. And then a man came by and he looked at the slice of bread I was eating and said "Now look at that, do you have a slice of buttered bread?" [Laughs] "What?" I said and asked my mom about it, and she told me "Well, you know, adults aren't given buttered bread, only children." Things like that. Everything was rationed back then.

Ok, let's think some more about the war. well, there was this big explosion in Oslo, when the entire stock of ammunition in Filipstad exploded. That was the last day of school before Christmas, and a talent show was taking place at the gym over at the *Vestheim Privatskole* that was situated right next to the *Frogner* movie theatre. And there we were performing in the gym hall with big glass windows – they just about got us out of there. They were afraid all the windows would shatter and we would get hurt. So we had to evacuate. We went to my grandfather, who lived right by the *Kringkastingen* [Norwegian public television that is now called NRK]. On the way there we saw that the sky was completely red. It was no joke.

Sørheim: Wow, did you hear the explosion?

Krog: Yes, and it was violent. And one time in the attic there was a grenade during a bombing that landed on the wooden floor without exploding. So we were allowed to go up and look. Later someone took care of it. But we did get to see a real grenade.

Sørheim: You're lucky that it didn't detonate! And that happened in Oslo? They dropped grenades over Oslo?

Krog: Yes, but it was the English that were doing the bombing. One time we were out in the Oslofjord and we could see them flying, when they were about to bomb Fornebu.

Sørheim: What do you remember about the liberation?

Krog: Yes, I remember it, it was great fun. But mother didn't let us go downtown to see the king arrive, because she was afraid something would happen. That was quite the delicate subject. Because you know, we weren't supposed to know anything. So later, between 1945-50, at school and things like that, we actually became quite ahistorical. There were no textbooks about it, it was too early. That's why I find it useful now to watch movies and read books about what really happened.

Sørheim: But what did your teachers tell you about it?

Krog: Very little really. I don't remember much of it.

Sørheim: Did you have teachers affiliated with the Nazi party during the war?

Krog: I went to this private school [Vestheim] which was right around the corner, and then I switched schools to *Uranienborg skole* where I had new teachers. It was quite the difficult situation in Oslo, as schools were also being requisitioned and we were split up. Some were sent to a branch of a bank and others were sent to different places, and there you were supposed to go to school.

Krog: My father was a train guard, making sure that no one placed explosives on the train lines, and my mother had a brother who was studying who had tried to flee to England. And that boat was bombed right outside of Ålesund. No one ever told them what had happened to him until the war was almost over. That deeply affected them for a long time.

Sørheim: Did you find people were bitter after the war, or what was the atmosphere like?

Krog: Well, yes, there were a lot who were bitter.

Sørheim: Especially against the Germans, or more in general?

Krog: Well, there was bitterness towards the Germans, but I remember mother saying: yes, but you know how it was, there were difficult times in Germany – after all, my father studied there. So it was easier for Hitler, because he promised that everything would be better, so it was supposedly easy for him to win people over because they thought things would get better and they didn't know what was going on. When you now read *Alone in Berlin* by Hans Fallada, about the guy with the postcards, you can understand why the common German folk didn't know more about what happened. And a lot of people probably did know what happened, but they couldn't do anything with that knowledge.

Sørheim: And when you live in a society full of informants it becomes something else. It's very easy for us to say what we would have done when you sit in a free and democratic country.

Krog: Yes, it was dangerous to speak out.

Sørheim: Did your father talk about how he experienced Germany in the early 1930s? Did he witness the rise of Nazism?

Krog: Yes, both he and my uncle said that there was seething unrest. They were aware of the developments. During the whole war, when they received illegal letters, they were very nervous—about how their friends were doing.

Sørheim: Yes, because his friends from university could easily be sent away to war?

Krog: Yes, my father was so short-sighted that he didn't have to, but there wasn't even any real military force in Norway anyway and what did exist was a joke. So it's awful what happened with the young that sacrificed their lives for such an unorganized resistance movement like the one that we had here. There was no military presence here.

It's good that movies were made about it so that the young nowadays can get informed. Because it's so easy to criticize afterwards without knowing how it really was. When I meet my old schoolmates, we start to think: How actually were things for us after 1945 and during the 1950s? Then we realize that we didn't have anything! If you wanted a skirt, you had to sew it yourself. Fortunately, my mother was trained in sewing, so she was very good at it and we had always homemade clothes. Up until the start of the 1950s. That's when we saw the Swedish girls, wearing Swedish off-the-rack outfits, and they were so sophisticated and elegant whilst our outfits were so homemade!

Sørheim: Was there such a big difference between Norway and Sweden?

Krog: Sure, are you crazy? They had off-the-rack manufacturers, and if you wanted to have something, you went there - they even had dollars. They could import vinyl, jazz music. So we young people, when there was something new from the US, when Dizzy Gillespie or Erroll Garner put out a new album, we would then drive to Arvika and buy vinyl there.

Sørheim: So *svenskehandel* [driving across the border to Sweden to go shopping - nowadays because it's cheaper] isn't anything new at all!

Krog: No, that's how it was. The Swedes also had the Swedish Folkparks that were employing jazz musicians. That's how they got work and the Swedes had had employment during the whole war, and at the same time they were following what happened in the US because they could import from there. So they were miles ahead of us – musically, too.

Sørheim: So it was also partly the war's fault.

Krog: Yes, absolutely, it was the war's fault. And during the war - I wasn't part of it - but people like Rowland Greenberg and those that were playing the music of that time, swing music, they were prohibited from playing in Norway because Hitler didn't want any 'negro music', so they had these so-called sewing clubs, these guys, where they played their music during the war. That's how they managed to keep it going in a way, but the Swedes, after the war, they were miles ahead of us.

Sørheim: How did you come into contact with jazz?

Krog: My father had played the drums before he moved to Germany in a Dixieland band in Oslo. And he had some vinyl that he hummed along to and played during the

whole war. That was swing music we were listening to then. My mother liked classical music, so I also listened to some of that.

Sørheim: And when did that music become your own? Or did you feel that this was simply for you?

Krog: Yes, after the liberation there were a lot of allied soldiers in Norway, and there were performances for the young ladies in the town. And my aunt, she was very beautiful and attractive, so she went to the dance with both English and American soldiers, and she took them home to mother and father. We had a summer house, a cabin, on Nesøya Island, and that's where these allied soldiers came home with us. Mother cooked, because they brought corn beef and things like that, you know. And something to drink, and something to smoke! So then I had both an English and an American uncle. And then I had to talk to them, so that's how I learned some English. And then they also brought vinyl along with them.

Sørheim: Do you remember some of the first pieces of jazz you listened to where you thought: 'Wow, this is something big'.

Krog: I thought some of father's vinyl records were very nice, but I remember when there was a new American piano player named Erroll Garner who was neat. And then there were some movies at the Colosseum, in multicolour, MGM, with Doris Day. I thought those were neat too.

Sørheim: Yes, she's the one who sings *Que sera, sera*.

Krog: Yes, she was a singer with a jazz orchestra before she became a movie star; she was a singer. When I listen to her again now, I understand why I liked it, because she was a fine singer. And then there were some music stores in Oslo that started to get some things in. And then it went like this: oh, there's something new at *Musikkhuset* [at the time a music store in Oslo] now we have to go there after school! *Musikkhuset* and *Musikkforlaget*, they imported! So that's where we were. Oslo was smaller at the time, you know. Those were influences that meant something. They were good influences.

Sørheim: When did you notice that you had a talent for singing?

Krog: I don't know. Well, mother's mother was a singer. She studied in Dresden, because her father was a composer and a violinist. So he sent his daughter, at the end of the 1800s – 1895, to Dresden. And there she studied singing.

Sørheim: That was the same time Edvard Munch was in Germany.

Krog: Yes. And mother didn't study singing, but she sang with me. I also had a teacher that was very artistic and she encouraged me. If the needlework class or something similar was getting tedious, she would say: How about it Karen, would you like to sing

a little song now?! So then I had to sing a bit. And then later, at high school, there were a few singing competitions and things like that at school, where then I was pushed to the forefront. There was a Dixieland band I was allowed to sing with. And then there was a jazz club on Pilestredet Street where they played jazz music. Every Sunday between six and eight they had a jam session, where all the jazz musicians in town were allowed to come. And then afterwards they played dance music. So then I got to come up and play with some of the best musicians. I don't know why, but I was allowed to come up and sing with them, and that's how I was discovered. Shortly after I was hired for some gigs.

Sørheim: So singing has always been there?

Krog: Yes, it has always been there, in a way. I didn't think 'Oh, this is what I'm going to do'. It was a natural thing.

Sørheim: Did you think a lot about which direction you should take musically or was it crystal clear?

Krog: No, Billie Holiday came along and then you just had to sit and listen and learn from her. So I think I did a lot of my homework whilst listening to Billie. Mother said "Surely you can't sit and focus on calculus when she's on", but I said "Yes I can!". But there was never any talk about making music to earn a living. No, are you crazy! Father said forget about it.

Sørheim: Was this something you had to fight for?

Krog: There wasn't any talk about fighting for it! I had to find something to study. Because music wasn't something you had as a job, especially not 'easy singing'. My father had been out and played himself, so he knew that it would've been restaurant singing and there was a lot of smoking and cussing. Quite the dangerous life, actually.

Sørheim: Especially for a woman?

Krog: Yes, my father didn't think this was a good idea. It was alright to do it just for fun, but not professionally. But there's also another thing, and it's quite interesting. When I was seven, the Russians occupied the north of Norway, and a lot of people fled, so Oslo became quite overcrowded. A lot of Norwegians from the north came so it became mandatory that if you had some square metres to spare, for example, an extra living room, so that you could house someone. And this is something you don't see today. We must make Oslo bigger, so everyone can have a place to live. But back then you had to have a hometown right, the *hjemstadsrett*, to be allowed to move to Oslo, so you had to have relatives there. The refugees had to have a place to live. And then there was a family that came where I lived, and I think their daughter was a singer. So I was at their place quite often. But she had tuberculosis and I got infected. That's why I had to take it easy, I couldn't play with the others after school or things like that. For me it was ok, I could get rid of it. But that's why father always kept a close eye on

me. His daughter wasn't to have an excessive lifestyle. I had to pay attention to my health – and no smoking!

Sørheim: So the one at seven was your only cigarette?

Krog: Well, almost! But he meant well. When I went to college I quit after the first year, and I started at *Nissen pikeskole* school for girls, that at the time had nutrition classes. And we learned about vitamins, minerals, hormones - that's something very new! And very interesting, so I wanted to go in that direction and study it. But then I met my husband, and we got married.

Sørheim: How old were you then?

Krog: 20.

Sørheim: Only 20?

Krog: Yes, by then I had taken a few classes and had been at the school for housewives for ten months, and also worked a bit, and then I was supposed to go to *Stabæks School* for Housekeeping and Teachers for further training, or you could continue as a teacher, or go into the food industry. Because that was the beginning of instant baking powder, instant soup, etc.

Sørheim: Yes, it was, like, the start of the instant kitchen.

Krog: Yes, and I thought that to be very interesting, I didn't know at the time how dangerous it was.

Sørheim: It must've almost been a bit magical when you experienced it for the first time.

Krog: Yes, after all, that's what they had in America! But then I married, and then I had two children and that was that. I had two children before the age of 23.

Sørheim: Wow!

Krog: Yes, because we could, his parents died so we inherited an apartment and things. It was like a reason to be able to do it. So I sat there with two children.

Sørheim: I imagine that phenomenons like postnatal depression or being pressed for time weren't even known then?

Krog: No, are you crazy! They were 15 months apart, so I just had to change diapers here and there. But I stayed at home back then.

Sørheim: Yes, that's a difference.

Krog: And my husband, his name was Johs Berg. He was very interested in music and he wrote amongst other things about vinyl news and worked for the radio later on. So he was very interested in music and helped me out a lot. I could work quite a bit at night, when the children were sleeping, and he could take care of them. But I was almost never employed for a long amount of time, maybe three months at the most. I was hired for some restaurant gigs.

Sørheim: So at that time, you still saw it more as a hobby?

Krog: Yes, and those were also completely different times.

Sørheim: How many places were there in Oslo for going out?

Krog: Some of these restaurants and hotels had dance floors. So there was the Viking Hotel and Restaurant. And the Humlen restaurant, which is now Dizzies – that was a three-floor restaurant. That's actually where I started. It was my first job, and that was where the best jazz musicians played; Einar Iversen, Mikkel Flagstand and all of those guys. One month, they needed a female lead singer. I got the job, because they recommended me to the boss, and so I came home, because I still lived at home then, and said: I just got hired! And father said: That's not even up for discussion! [Laughter] But then mother said, you know how Karin is, she will become tired of it eventually, let her try!

Sørheim: She was wrong.

Krog: Yes, she was wrong!

Sørheim: How many times a week did you perform then?

Krog: Every night, from eight to eleven.

Sørheim: In a way that's pure luxury compared to today, where you have to travel.

Krog: Yes, are you crazy! Just the fact that you could go down there every day, put on a skirt and go out and sing the first, second and third show and then go home again!

Sørheim: Let's now talk about [...]

Krog: We also got a pay package!

Sørheim: A real package?

Krog: Yes! But that was the last time I was hired, and then that was it. But then the Metropol jazz club came, and they were open every day, so everyone wanted to play. But once in a while you managed to get together a rhythm section and play there some evenings. I realized that I wanted to learn more, so I started to take up lessons with Anne Brown, who was the first Bess in *Porgy and Bess*. She was married to Torleif

Skjeldrup, who was a ski jumper. She was 'coloured', or what are you supposed to say now? She was a lovely lady and she started to take on students. A lot of the actresses went to her, because she was good with diction. And it was great for me, I spent the money I earned at Metropol on my lessons with her.

Sørheim: Ah, so you invested in your own training?

Krog: Yes, I paid for my own training. I wasn't the taxpayer's burden!

Sørheim: What year was that?

Krog: That was the beginning of the 60s. There was an actress that was called Kari Simonsen who said: You should go to Anne because she's so good at this. And that's true, I went to her for five, six years. It was expensive, you know!

Sørheim: Yes, private lessons.

Krog: Yes! But she was fantastic. And she had also been in *Porgy and Bess*, the opera where everyone is a negro, but we aren't allowed to say that anymore.

Sørheim: No, how did that feel, that words that earlier weren't seen as negative and racist now are suddenly prohibited?

Krog: No, that's absurd, because negro means, well, black in the Latin language. But of course, the term has been abused, so of course I understand it.

Sørheim: There were quite a lot of these words after a while.

Krog: Yes, exactly, and when you now start taking out the negro king in Africa in the children's songs of (Thorbjørn) Egner and Pippi Longstocking's father. Well, it becomes a bit special. But anyway, the years at Anne's were priceless. Even today, when I stand there and sing, I often think: Remember, Anne told you such and such! And since I still can, since I still have my voice, I know that I have learned something very valuable from her.

Sørheim: What was the most important thing she taught you?

Krog: Yes, well the most important thing, amongst others, was not to shout. Imagine when you turn on a tap, and the water comes out at full pressure, and then you turn it off again. The same thing happens when you have to sing in a high range, and maybe you press your voice a bit, you hold it for a bit and then you wear it out. These are the things you don't really think about. Somethings have to go in the head, other things should go further down. And if you have to change something physically, it takes a long time and lots of repetition. So it took some time, but I know it brought me a lot of joy. It *brings* me a lot of joy.

Sørheim: Did you keep in contact later on?

Krog: Yes, because she moved to Paris and put on and directed *Porgy and Bess* there and stayed for a while. And then she said “You know what, I have a new singing teacher for you, his name is Igor and he has a new system that I think you should try.” So that’s what I did. And it really was a new system. I did that for ten years, and I also had use for it. She couldn’t work with me anymore, but he was in Norway. He said “Stop singing! Now you only do as I say and then you can learn a new technique.” That’s what they do with piano players as well. I mean, I did continue singing after all, [laughter] but still, I practiced the new technique. So later I went back to Anne when she started teaching again in Oslo ten years later. And then I brushed up on all of it.

Sørheim: So you took lessons long after you had a professional career?

Krog: Yes.

Sørheim: So you never stopped learning?

Krog: No, and then you start falling into bad habits, and then it’s very good that there is someone that says: No, stop it.

Sørheim: When did you realize that you can be a musician, that it doesn’t just have to be a hobby?

Krog: That was probably in the beginning of the 1960s, when I made my first album and it was well received in America, in *Downbeat*.

Sørheim: Wow, *Downbeat*?

Krog: Yes, three and a half stars in *Downbeat* gave you a good reputation. So then we were invited to Sweden with some other musicians that made very modern music. So that was nice, also because you got to see other things. And then Jan Garbarek and I were invited to festivals in Prague and Warsaw in '66, so we went, he and I, and a Swedish bass player I worked with; it was just a tenor sax, a bass and a singer. And that they didn’t understand. “But we have a piano player right here”, they said, but I said, “No, it’s just us!”. That was something new.

Sørheim: How did you travel to Europe? Was that your first trip to the continent?

Krog: Yes, indeed, I was about 30 years old. And after that I was offered work at the *Norddeutscher Rundfunk*, to do a TV workshop for them. And those were fantastic productions. They had some money. And there was this man called Hans Gertberg that already did some workshops and he said that I could hire whomever I please and do my own compositions. So I took Kurt Lindgren from Stockholm with me and a trumpeter from Berlin named Karmel Jones. I guess it was just the three of us. The three of us and the *Norddeutscher Rundfunk*’s big band. There were a couple of productions more, and two TV productions.

Sørheim: How was it for you to come to Germany and work with Germans, with the war so close behind you?

Krog: Yes, actually it was great. They had all the equipment, they were professionals, very good, and the productions are still there in the archives! We reissued my old stuff for my 80th anniversary, and then we were in contact with them and got some of the recordings.

So in 1967 I was invited to America to record an album in Hollywood with Don Ellis. He was a trumpeter and had been here in Norway. He was very modern. He wrote a big band arrangement for me, for NRK. And he had a new big band and needed a female singer. He asked me if I wanted to join them. It really was very modern at that time, especially with three bass players and three drummers. So I didn't really know what he wanted from me, but it went well – we recorded four songs. And then he said: Why aren't you using the reverberator for your voice? Because he used it a lot. So then I thought, yes, why not, ok. So I went home, bought a reverberator and started to experiment with it. That was my first step into electronic music. So then I got in contact with Arne Nordheim and those guys and they thought it was interesting.

Sørheim: What was your experience of being a woman in a male-dominated music world? Being out at night, did you feel like you had to fight to be taken seriously?

Krog: No, not really. That has basically not been a problem for me. I was about to say I'm tired of saying this, but.

Sørheim: But that's actually very positive?

Krog: It's not like there weren't enough offers! [laughter] I don't know if it's the way you behave, you can also be like buddies with the guys and not get so caught up in it. If you do your job and are good at it, then that's that. You as a singer will also be in a position where you're the one who has to hire people. And then they have to do what you say, because you're the one paying!

Sørheim: That's quite nice!

Krog: Yes, but I mean, that's how it is. And of course, there are some that try some things. That happened a couple of times. But I think those are often men that are a bit unsure of themselves, that are a bit – well – and then they feel they have to act the man in front of the others, and then they start getting a big mouth. But it's all just for show. Sometimes it can be a bit stupid, but it didn't happen often.

Sørheim: Did you feel like there was a lot of prejudice about going out and working at night when you had children?

Krog: Yes! And especially because my second child was born with some challenges.

Sørheim: How was it at the clubs at the time, I imagine you could smoke inside at all the concert venues and so on?

Krog: Horrible, yes, it was completely horrible! [Laughter] Especially if they were also grilling burgers and things like that at the same place, so you had that whole smoke as well. There were some clubs that were really horrible in that way.

Sørheim: Did you think about your hearing, whether you could damage it?

Krog: Yes and no, but what could you do? That problem will always be there. Especially if you're working with a big band and things like that. Yes, all of us musicians over 50 have hearing impairments, and I think most of the others, too. But now hearing aids have become very good!

Sørheim: When did you first become a full-time musician? Was it only in the 1970s?

Krog: Yes, that was at the end of the 70s. That's when John [Surman, Krog's husband and British jazz musician] and I and some others each won our category in *Downbeat* and we were put together in a group. That was Albert Meiersdorf from Germany, Jean-Luc Ponty from France and John from England. Daniel Maehr from France and Eddie Louis. We recorded an album in Berlin for MPS. We were put together in a band and went on tour to Japan!

Sørheim: Wow! Did you take an airplane to Japan?

Krog: Yes, you know, to fly to Hollywood in 1967 and to Japan, that was huge. We had concerts in Tokyo, Kyoto.

Sørheim: How was it to go to Japan that time?

Krog: It was overwhelming! It was in August, and it was crazy warm, and everything was different. It was a different world. Now people go on weekend trips to Tokyo, but at that time flying to Japan was like flying to Mars. So it was very different.

Sørheim: Yes, the first time I went to Japan I went on my own, Håvard and the band were on tour, and I thought it was so incredible, but then all the signs were already in English, so it must've been something completely different in the 70s.

Krog: The other important thing that happened in the 70s was that I was invited to study television at NRK. I was invited to take a class and was able to take a year off. That's when I learned TV production. Because at that point I felt I had little work as a singer, so I wanted to try something else. And after that I received a producing license. So that's what I did in the 70s, I did four or five TV productions.

Sørheim: Oh, that's great!

Krog: Yes. But that then that was it, because there was a hiring freeze at NRK.

Sørheim: And it basically remained that way ever since!

Krog: Right? So after that it was more music, and I did some more things with John. So that's how it went.

Sørheim: In a lot of ways it seems like you didn't have a big dream for your career, or an idea you pursued. It was more things just happened bit-by-bit?

Krog: Yes, bit by bit. When I got the state-guaranteed income in 1978, that was a milestone as well. Then I received an income, and it became a possibility. If you just sat on the sofa and didn't do anything, so what you basically shouldn't be doing, you could receive 150.000 NOK. So it was just about enough that you could live off of it. But if you worked and earned some money, they deducted it from your guaranteed income so that it was quite a special way of counting. So you were protected, but you couldn't live off of it. So I basically didn't care about it. I got my payments but didn't say 'I can't take this job because I'm on guaranteed income'. I accepted the gigs I got and had it as a financial safeguard. And it also helped to apply for funds to do recordings and projects.

Sørheim: Did your career unfold in a different way than you thought it would when you were twenty?

Krog: I didn't imagine anything close to what it became. I would've never dared to think it. I don't quite understand people who dare to put all their eggs in one basket and say "Now I'm going to be a musician!" But we did record an album in Berlin, and then I played with Don Ellis at the *Berliner Jazztage*, in the *Berliner Philharmonie*, and that was huge.

Sørheim: So that was in West Berlin then?

Krog: Yes, that was in both the West and the East. And that's important, because we were also in Warsaw and in Czech Republic, and East Berlin, and it wasn't because of the money. There we also got in contact with nice people, people that I actually stayed in contact with even afterwards.

Sørheim: Do you remember how it was behind the Iron Curtain in the Czech Republic, Poland, East Germany? You took the train?

Krog: No, well, we had some Swedish colleagues with a car. And I asked if they could actually drive it. And then they said "Oh, you creature of comfort, you!" Because I just flew, you know. But they were a band, so they had to drive! John Surman played with the Czech bass player Miroslav Vitous. And when they came to a city near the border, they always had an answer for those with a foreign passport, but we were still deadly nervous about driving to East Berlin.

Sørheim: Yes, because?

Krog: We didn't know if someone would say to us "Yes, but that's not the case for your passport!" You know how they are in totalitarian regimes. But people there were also enlightened, and East Berliners were very warm-hearted people. Maybe it changed a bit after reunification, but we made good friends there, even right away with a couple of them!

Sørheim: Were people content in the GDR? Or were they frustrated?

Krog: I mean, they did want to leave! They wanted to leave and see the world. A good friend of mine wanted to come and visit us. But the border was closed, but it was still very nice when we were there.

Sørheim: Do you remember if you felt lucky when you were there, about the freedoms you had?

Krog: Yes, absolutely. I was also in Hungary when the wall fell in 1989. In November I was in Budapest. So we followed the events from there, from the other side. I was on a job with NRK. So then we saw them cross the border in East German cars, the Trabants.

Sørheim: What did you think when that happened?

Krog: That was gripping. What happens now? Will Russia now attack? Those were the questions we asked ourselves. It was very gripping. John and I were also on a music festival bill in Novosibirsk. We first went to Moscow. That was a very special tour. That was when Gorbachev received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990. We continued from Moscow to Novosibirsk and then back again, but without getting our passports stamped in Siberia. When we came back, the Norwegian embassy in Moscow asked for our stamps. When we said we didn't get them, they told us that now we would get in trouble with the KGB! "You should've gotten them stamped; you won't get out of Moscow without them!" But the two employees from the embassy were flying out the same day as us, so right when we checked out, we were with them. So that's how we got out. It was a six-hour flight to Novosibirsk, so to go back there would've been out of the question. And there wasn't any food in Novosibirsk either, you know! There was some food at the train station, some yoghurt and cold chicken. So that was what we got.

Sørheim: And how was Moscow, was it typical for a developing country?

Krog: There we properly taken care of by an older man who also had help from the embassy. He said that we had to be housed at the university, "That's the safest option", he said. Because there was so much crime happening there in 1990. So he took care of us the whole time. We did a concert in Moscow, in the Central House of Artists, and that was just great. And at the embassy they organized a reception for us, so that was exciting as well, those were exciting times!

Sørheim: Did you feel like the 90s were very optimistic, like, politically?

Krog: Yes, I think they were. It was fantastic how the Germans managed reunification. Because that was a real change for Germany. There almost isn't any other country that could've managed it the way they did. So that I applaud!

Sørheim: How was it to travel in Europe in the 60s, 70s, 80s, with all the borders and the different currencies. Was it complicated, did it quickly become difficult?

Krog: It was quite good, I think, I don't remember any big problems, apart from Poland, where you got *złoty* that you couldn't take with you. I just saw a Polish auto mechanic here in Norway, he used to live between Warsaw and Krakow, and do you know what I said? - I once took a taxi from Krakow to Warsaw! Because I had pockets full of *złoty*!

Sørheim: Ah, so you had to use them up?

Krog: Exactly. That was Randi Hultin and I, the jazz critic from *Dagbladet*. We were on our way to Warsaw and we just said "Let's take a cab".

Sørheim: Are there some political events that meant more to you? Maybe something that was close to your heart?

Krog: I have to say that I think cultural – and musical – exchange between all the European countries is very important. And you can criticize the EU as much as you like, but that was the reason why I voted for the EU in Norway, something you weren't supposed to do. You got the most scornful looks! I volunteered for a TV broadcast for 'Yes to the EU', you know, that *Arbeiderpartiet* [the labour party] and Høyre [the conservatives] wanted to join, and in 1990 I actually was at a sort of government dinner, where they hoped we would vote for - or at least negotiate - an agreement with the EU. And I voted to join in 1974, and after that I never got a gig with the Student Societies in Norway again.

Sørheim: No?

Krog: Yes, that was quite extreme! They knew that I had voted for the EU and then they didn't want to hire me. But the reason I voted yes was that I thought that after the Second World War it was important that Europeans talked with each other. I was so naive! I thought it was important that countries could help each other. The other time we voted we luckily got an agreement. Before that, when you travelled to Europe to go on tour, you had to have a *carnet* for all the small electronic things you were bringing along with you. You had to fill out a form for every little thing at the Norwegian Chamber of Commerce, and then you had to bring the form along to all the customs posts, and if the customs officer wasn't well-read and able to understand it, you had to wait until the next one came for his shift. Yes, so for Norway's musicians, it was good we got that sorted out, in '94, then it got easier. Europeans could, for the most part, work in other European countries without a visa or a work permit, but you couldn't do that in

England if you were Norwegian. You had to have a work permit. The Americans couldn't work in England, and the English couldn't work in the US.

As a European, you still can't work in the US without a visa, which costs almost 10,000 Norwegian Kroner. When you play in a club in the US you get 500 Dollars, tops! But what made England and the US a bit more open to each other, at least so Americans could play in England, was that the Beatles got so popular in the US that they simply had to have an exchange. Cultural exchanges increased and they were allowed to play in each other's countries, even if it was still paid quite poorly. So that's what I mean. It's really important that that can happen in Europe. But it's a shame that now Americans can come and work wherever they like in Europe and that they have no responsibilities, and they don't need to apply for a visa. That's unfair.

Sørheim: It's also weird that it's so strict one way but then the EU is completely open.

Krog: Yes, that remains to be worked on.

Sørheim: We have a lot of American friends that are musicians and, I mean, they come to Europe to play all the time.

Krog: Yes, and they get paid by European cultural funds that maybe should've gone to European musicians or artists.

Sørheim: Yes, that's a bit weird.

Krog: I think it's important there's European cooperation.

Sørheim: But the societal disputes about joining the EU in '72 and '94 seem so incredibly heated, with such hard opinions. Nowadays you talk about the climate change debate being polarized, but it seems like people had extremely strong feelings about this.

Krog: Yes, you were almost a Nazi back then [laughs].

Sørheim: Where do you think this enormous negativity from Norway towards the EU comes from?

Krog: I think that fishermen and farmers are very protective when it comes to themselves and their property. And of course, they have to be, those are weathered professions. But it was seen as treason (if you voted yes).

Sørheim: Mum and Dad also voted yes in 1994, because they got so tired of the no side's rhetoric. They painted a devil on the wall in colours that were way too vivid.

Krog: Yes, and I think that for our generation that experienced the war, it could've been alright. I don't know so much about the actual EU government, there are a lot of bureaucrats.

Sørheim: It certainly isn't perfect, but that it's not as evil as a lot of people want to portray it.

Krog: No, I can't really say anything about that.

Sørheim: You worked with a lot of black musicians.

Krog: Yes!

Sørheim: Did you notice racism in Norway and Europe at the time, like with your singing teacher Anne. Did you experience that they sometimes were treated differently or was there not so much racism?

Krog: So, I recorded songs with Dexter Gordon and Archie Shepp.

Sørheim: Great!

Krog: Yes! No, that's such a special topic. There was no racism among us, we loved them, or I mean, we still do. Especially people from that age, the older ones, because I don't have so much contact with younger people. They were so well-behaved and proper. We met Houston Person, who played here a few days ago, who I think is 84 by now. Such a nice guy, and excellent manners. And everyone was a gentleman. There were no problems, great people. Those that I met. What was the question again?

Sørheim: Did you experience seeing them treated in a racist way or in a different way?

Krog: No, I mean these were invited guests! Because of their art, but I know that Anne Brown, for example - that she moved to Norway because she was tired of the racism in America.

Sørheim: It was better in Norway?

Krog: Yes, absolutely. So all the things that they now write in the newspaper about Norway being a racist country and so on, that's very particular, I think. Of course, they were people that looked differently that came to our country, and that was unusual. Anne Brown's daughter, who was very dark-skinned, was the first dark-skinned child that went to the *Slemdal school*. Everyone knew who she was! That was Paula, the daughter of Anne. There wasn't any more to it. But of course, you can see it differently if you're that person.

Sørheim: Yes, maybe it's not so much fun if everyone knows who you are.

Krog: No, and that everyone looks at you because you have dark skin, or because you have a handicap. You're marked as being different. It's the same thing. Or they look at you because you have a weird frame for your glasses, and so on. When I now read the newspapers, I don't recognize myself in them, but now I'm very seldom in downtown Oslo. I don't have anything to do there. So I don't know. But things have

changed. Of course they have. But for those of us who loved the music of those that had dark skin, that was irrelevant. It was just great. I talked to Houston Person some days ago, he's from the older generation – a charming man, so wonderful. He came on stage and said “What am I gonna do now? Oh, it's empty here!” *[Laughs]* If he forgot something, he just laughed it off and said no, it's gone! Just wonderful, you know. And he played just beautifully and was so charming. A perfect gentleman. So no, I very rarely felt any racist sentiment there.

Sørheim: Do you feel that the Norwegian society has become colder or warmer?

Krog: I think it got a bit colder, but I mean I can also see that with the young people. They have no more manners! *[Laughs]* Parents always want to be pals with their children nowadays. They don't set any boundaries. They never say “You can't do that.” Or “Hey, you have to go to one side if there's an older person coming towards you.” They don't dare tell the young what they should do, because then the kids get angry.

Sørheim: And they shouldn't get angry.

Krog: No, they don't set any boundaries. And that's a pity! And when I look at today's youth, no really.

Sørheim: And often with their eyes on their phones.

Krog: Yes, god.

Sørheim: There is one subject we still haven't talked about, that I would really like to ask about, and that's religion. Was it very present in your childhood?

Krog: Yes. I'm baptized and confirmed. We were sent to Sunday school because that way father and mother got free time. And I sent my children there. I'm a member of the Norwegian State Church, so in that way I'm religious. But it doesn't have to be Protestantism, and it doesn't have to be God. I tried out some other things, and there are lots of religions, and lots of gods. And since no one knows if there is a God, and where he is, or anything at all, how he looks like, or if it's a man or a woman, it's very stupid that people go to war because of religion. I agree with the Ten Commandments, and if you adhere to the Ten Commandments, then that's enough for me.

Sørheim: Didn't the church in Norway in the 1950s have a lot of power?

Krog: Probably more than nowadays. I thought I would go and vote this year at the church election, just because I think the Norwegian Church must make an effort. We were Christianized, and I think we should be a Christian country, I think so. So we can let other countries have their things, every person has to be allowed their religion. Yes, you can be religious, but you can be religious within you, you don't have to broadcast it and show it to other people. It doesn't have to be so visual and you don't have to advertise it.

Sørheim: Do you have any thoughts about how Norway and Europe should progress? Maybe within the next 50 years, do you believe in a positive development? Or do you see some developments now where you think that they will continue for longer? Of course, it's always difficult to play the fortune teller.

Krog: Yes, that's difficult. [Laughter] I've had a *Klassekampen* [newspaper of the Norwegian left] subscription for a year now, and I didn't have a newspaper for a long time. I wanted to see what it is. Now, why was I talking about this? No, it's difficult to say.

Sørheim: Maybe it's easier to say what the biggest challenges will be.

Krog: Yes. And then there's Russia. All of our Northern Hemisphere. If they want to have the Finnmark region, why didn't they take it in 1945?

Sørheim: They maybe didn't have enough soldiers.

Krog: Yes, well, they could've taken it whenever, really. But there you have it. and then there's Scandinavia and there we're the ones that are part of the NATO, but not Sweden. We should be a part of NATO, we're so defenceless. I mean, for goodness sake, we don't have any real defence, no real navy. Just some ships.

Sørheim: Are you surprised there's not a bigger military presence after the Second World War?

Krog: Yes, completely. Five years ago, they downsized it. And decommissioned Andøya [military air station]. Are you, like, a bit political?

Sørheim: Yes, but I don't have much envisioned for the Norwegian military.

Krog: No, it's difficult, and then it's difficult to know which political parties do what. For such a long time, you could just vote for *Arbeiderpartiet* [the labour party] and that was it! [Laughs]

Sørheim: Yes, it's become much more fragmented.

Krog: Yes, and that's dangerous, because everything just gets watered down.

Sørheim: You don't even know anymore what you're voting for. Suddenly, *Venstre* [the party of the left] is governing together with the *Fremskrittspartiet* [populist right-wing party], and I mean, they want completely different things.

Krog: That both *Venstre* and the *Kristelig folkeparti* [the Christian party] are now part of the government. That must be horrendous for Erna [Solberg, Norwegian Prime Minister]! [Laughs] And Siv Jensen is of course arguably very competent as Finance Minister. But there are so many [parties], plus the two other parties. If they just let Erna and Siv govern, and let them steer things in one direction, you know? But the weird

thing now is the new road toll parties! *Fremskrittspartiet* (Frp) now say that they will build roads here and there, and they have wanted to do that for a long time. They wanted to take the oil money for it, and that's what they should've done. Because if they had built these roads, they could've transported the fish products a lot more easily, and exported them, and then they wouldn't have needed to say that 'now we will introduce road toll fees', because they have never wanted to have road toll fees! [Laughs] Where's the logic in that? Why couldn't we use some more oil money? If the investments of that fund go to hell, we won't have anything left. If it would've been streets, or schools, or hospitals, then we would have something.

Sørheim: Do you sometimes think, when you look at the younger people, that they are so naive?

Krog: Yes. If we would've built on that, we would've had something to offer to the young, but now they have to build everything themselves, and I don't think they can! They already have enough to do with this! [Points to the smartphone]

Sørheim: Do you have a smartphone?

Krog: Yes, I just got a new one, but I can hardly write messages. I'm quite good at that one [points to the computer] for business, I can do correspondence and things like that. I started in the 80s and I bought some old recordings back that I did with the big companies, Universal and the like. Because the tapes were just lying in the basement there. So then I got it for cheap, and then I started my own label, Meantime Records, so now I have 23 musical productions. I always recorded music when I saw something happening. Then I gathered together some money, savings and the like. So I had some productions, I should upload them. They are digitalized, but if I want to put them on Spotify, what do I have to do? Or if I want to put them on Facebook, what do I have to do? So now I need help.

Sørheim: Do you think technology's a barrier for older people?

Krog: Yes! And I'm also mad at the bank. I think it's absurd how they just cut out any analogue services. I mean there are after all several thousand people that are over 70 that have problems.

Sørheim: And it's almost impossible to get around in Oslo without a smartphone, you need to have an app for everything.

Krog: Yes, an app for everything! I don't actually know what an app is, or I know what it is, but not how to use it.

Sørheim: If you don't buy a ticket via the *Ruter app* [public transport in Oslo], it's a lot more expensive.

Krog: Yes, I bought a *Ruter card*, so now I can travel to Oslo for 18 NOK – there and back if I'm fast! Because now I no longer use my car. Now that the *Miljøpartiet* [the green] party has come along. They are completely crazy!

Sørheim: No, it's not easy to drive around in the centre.

Krog: The Oslo Jazzfestival just finished, and they had some chauffeurs that were supposed to drive us around. And to get to Majorstuen, they first had to drive us via the Bygdøy Peninsula! It's completely empty-headed how they redirected the traffic in the centre of Oslo. But I don't play there that often anymore, so it doesn't make a difference.

Sørheim: Is there anything else you wanted to add or something you thought of? Things I was too dumb to think of.

Krog: Well, I don't understand that hatred of Jews either. I had two Jewish friends that came back from Sweden after the war. They were very lucky, because they could skip religion classes! But they had to go to the synagogue every Saturday. And during the holidays they had this very delicious Easter bread, for example. That we all loved having at their house.

Sørheim: Yes, the unleavened bread?

Krog: Exactly. No, that was never a problem.

Sørheim: So how was it then, they had managed to flee to Sweden during the war with their whole family?

Krog: Yes.

Sørheim: Did you then know during the war that they had fled?

Krog: They just disappeared. But I didn't really know them until they came back after the war. That was how they were, they were a bit different, and that was it.

Sørheim: When did you hear about the Holocaust? Do you remember that?

Krog: No, that wasn't talked about. No. But I knew Robert Levin well, who was Jewish. He wrote a book. And in his book, it is written that they received warnings about what would happen. And that's something no one says that they did, but it's written in his book. The ground started falling beneath their feet and he sent away his wife and everyone in the orchestra said "You have to be very careful now, Robert, because tonight there's a Nazi in attendance." So it's rubbish when they write in the newspaper that they didn't receive any warnings, but you know, like he wrote in this book, they received warnings, but had to finish up business. What should they do with all their money, their belongings? Should they just take their bag and leave? It wasn't so easy! There were many that just dragged on and on, and then it was too late. But they don't

say anything about that, and that I find really unfair with respect to the Norwegian people. Because a lot got help, a lot risked their lives by taking them in or getting them across to Sweden. But there isn't much talk about that.

Sorheim: Thanks very much for this interesting conversation.