

Håkon Kornstad

Biography *Single Engine*

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It can often seem that within jazz music, saxophonists come a dime a dozen, with few ever gaining any permanence as a fresh, original voice. The Norwegian saxophonist **Håkon Kornstad** isn't one to blow his own horn, so to speak, just to hype his talent and rave about his abilities. He's wisely left that up to others to do, and the results are that an increasing number of music critics, reviewers and listeners are stepping up to exclaim the "new" saxophonist as their own discovery. The accolades certainly abound. And after a decade of experimentation and a respect to his craft as a musician, as well as a considerable amount of recordings to show for, Kornstad has finally emerged with his first fully-fledged solo endeavor, entitled *Single Engine* (Jazzland, 2007).

Håkon Kornstad has received extensive praise for his wide range of different expressive moods and soundscapes for tenor sax, for his boldness in combining percussive beats and layers of sound – at times abruptly percussive, and at other sweetly melodic. His adventurous explorations on the sax are tempered with a well-honed musicality, communicating and never excluding those listeners seeking to discover new territories of sonic expressiveness.

Born in Oslo, Norway on April 5th, 1977, he began playing the clarinet in grammar school at a young age, eventually leading to studying saxophone formally at the Trondheim Jazz Conservatory. — *Stan Getz was an early influence and I used to listen to my father's albums. I also heard Coltrane but thought he was too weird – I just didn't get him at the time. It wasn't until after I got into Jan Garbarek and Keith Jarrett's "Personal Mountains" album that I think this opened up Coltrane for me,* Kornstad says about his impressionable years. Its often noted about him, though, that while others stop at emulating Coltrane, Kornstad has continued on to develop his own particular style and tone, using his influences as a springboard rather than as platform to rest on.

While studying at the Conservatory, he met fellow students **Wetle Holte** (drums) and **Per Zanussi** (bass) and created the jazz trio **Triangle**, later joined by **Erlend Skomsvoll** (piano) and **Live Maria Roggen** (vocals).

Eventually this would evolve into the band **Wibutee**, performing their first notable concert at the Bergen Nattjazz festival in May of 1998.

Later that same year, after his studies ended in Trondheim, Kornstad returned to Oslo and was warmly embraced by the emerging new Norwegian jazz scene, centered around the contemporary music club Blå. This provided him with an opportunity to perform with various concepts – even with a DJ – and he quickly gained the attention of keyboard guru **Bugge Wesseltoft**, who signed him to Wesseltoft's Jazzland Recordings label in 1998. This first recording with Kornstad's band **Wibutee** (also produced by Wesseltoft) resulted in the album *Newborn Thing*, released in 1999 on Jazzland. Wibutee means "Holy Ashes" in Sanskrit, originally spelled VIBHUTI.

From 2000 to 2001 Wibutee were also joined by ex-**The September When** bass player **Gulleiv Wee** on electronics. Roggen and Skomsvoll left the band in 2000, followed by Norwegian electronica specialist **Rune Brøndbo (aka Sternklang)**, who joined the group in 2001 previous to the release of their second album *Eight Domestic Challenges* – the first album produced by the band themselves. They eventually also released *Playmachine* in 2004. Per Zanussi left the band in October of 2004, being replaced on bass by **Marius Reksjø**, and then finally by **Tor Egil Kreken**. As one of Kornstad's most important side projects, the band today consists of Rune Brøndbo (electronics, keyboards, programming); Wetle Holte (drums, electronics, programming) and Kornstad on saxophone, flutes, flutonet, melodica, electronics, vocals, and programming. For most live concerts Wibutee also feature Tor Egil Kreken (electric bass, guitars) and **Eyvind Andreas Skeie** (guitars, keyboards, electronics). Wibutee are now working towards a more melodic concept than before, still with Kornstad's easily recognizable tenor saxophone in the lead. One reviewer wrote: *"Wibutee's music continually surprises, with different turns and directions, and even though the band loans freely from rock, jazz and electronica, it doesn't ever lose its own special style."*

After Wesseltoft approached him in 1999 to join him for a concert in Glasgow, Kornstad has performed regularly with both Wesseltoft and in other concepts led by him. It wasn't long before the media began to take notice and write stunning reviews of his live performances, as well as his performances with such other artists as **Sidsel Endresen**, **Eivind Aarset**, and even **Anja Garbarek**. Kornstad quickly became a vital contributor the energy of the emerging Norwegian jazz scene, with even the European music journalists starting to take notice.

In 2001, he performed as **Kornstad Trio** with **Mats Eilertsen** (bass) and **Paal Nilssen-Love** (drums) at the **Molde International Jazz Festival** with **Pat Metheny**. Metheny had heard the trio at the previous year's festival, and as Artist in Residence the following year expressly requested to play a concert with Kornstad Trio.

The following year he was awarded the prestigious **Kongsberg Jazz Festival's Musician's Prize**, which resulted in a commissioned work and performance the following year at that festival. This performance resulted in the CD **Live From Kongsberg** (Jazzland, 2004), which also featured the German trumpet player **Axel Dörner**. Also in 2002, he released **Space Available** (Jazzland) as Kornstad Trio. The group represented the best of the emerging Norwegian jazz talent at the time, and toured extensively on the international touring circuit.

Kornstad also has worked in duo format with drummer Paal Nilssen-Love, recording an album in New York and Ålesund, Norway in 2000, released as **Schlinger** in 2003 (Smalltown Supersound) which the BBC described as *"A bracing experience which may bring a sense of exhilaration and colour to your cheeks."* His drive towards collaborations also resulted in 2005's project with pianist **Håvard Wiik** to record **Eight Tunes We Like** (Moserobie), which Budd Kopman in *All About Jazz* wrote, *"...an absolute gem of an album that is on my short list for Best of 2005. (...) 'Eight Tunes We Like' is a stunningly beautiful achievement and a major statement of musical purpose and method. In this respect it is an important album that will not allow you to hear these tunes the same way ever again. Bravo!"* The duo followed up this successful pairing with **The Bad and the Beautiful** (Moserobie, 2006), which was nominated for a **Norwegian Grammy** (Spellemann) award. The album made the *best of*-lists in various Norwegian newspapers and magazines.

2006 saw Håkon being busier than ever, with him performing three solo concerts in China along with an exhibition of his design artwork featuring the many album covers he has designed for Jazzland. He toured Canada and Europe, as well as the USA, and engaged in an exten-

sive tour of Norway. In August, Wibutee toured for their release of **Sweet Mental** (Sonne/VME), as well as performing as a sideman with other members of Wibutee for **Anja Garbarek's** band. Into 2006 and into 2007, he joined the **Jazzland Community**, a touring club concept consisting of jazz musicians from the Jazzland label performing on each other's music and their own, showcasing the brilliant talent that label features. Together with Bugge Wesseltoft, Sidsel Endresen, Eivind Aarset, Marius Reksjø and Wetle Holte they have toured across the major European capitals. A CD release entitled **Jazzland Community** was issued by Jazzland in 2007 also. The grouping continues to tour, with a planned tour of Canada this summer.

After ten years of strengthening technique, discovering nuances, and playfully exploring the sonic possibilities of the sax, **Håkon Kornstad** finally has released his own solo effort in **Single Engine** (Jazzland, 2007). — *I think in the past I really wanted to try every imaginable style, every form of music*, Kornstad says about the recording. *And I did. With this album, I feel for the first time that everything has come together and allowed me a greater range of expression than what I had previously, in that I'm not bound to any one style, but have gone beyond that and now am forging into another – one that's entirely my own.* In the 10 tracks on the album we are taken from a myriad of sounds – from the sax, to the home made *flutonette*, to electronics – which shows the driving force of **Single Engine** gaining momentum, clearly tied together with an impeccable artistry and Kornstad's willingness to explore. After a decade of collaborations and as sideman, he comes fully into his own and invites you to hear what he's discovered. With the culmination of his past, Kornstad is now firmly placed in the future, and **Single Engine** is certainly the driving, propelling force that will at last gain him the recognition for his own individual vision.

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WWW.KORNSTAD.COM
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As leader/co-leader:

Kornstad — “Single Engine” (Jazzland, 2007)

Various artists — “Jazzland Community” (Jazzland, 2007)

Kornstad & Wiik — “The Bad And The Beautiful” (Moserobie, 2006)

Wibutee — “Sweet Mental” (Sonne/VME, 2006)

Kornstad & Wiik — “Eight Tunes We Like” (Moserobie, 2005)

Kornstad Trio — “Live From Kongsberg” (Jazzland, 2004, Vinyl Limited Edition)

Håkon Kornstad & Paal Nilssen-Love — “Schlinger” (Smalltown Supersound, 2003)

Kornstad Trio — “Space Available” (Jazzland, 2002)

Tri-Dim with Barry Guy — “2 of 2” (Sofa, 2001)

Wibutee — “Eight Domestic Challenges” (Jazzland, 2001)

Wibutee — “Newborn Thing” (Jazzland, 1999)

Tri-Dim - “Tri-Dimprovisations 1 of 2” (bp, 1999)

As sideman (selection):

Laurent Garnier — “Retrospective” (F Communications, 2006)

Sternklang — “Transistor Beach” (dBut, 2006)

Ornand Altenburg — “Backseat Driver” 2005

ARM — “Open Reminder” (Melektronikk, 2004)

Various artists — “Tribute to Bjørn Johansen” (Gemini Records, 2004)

Sternklang — “My Time is Yours” (dBut, 2003)

Bugge Wesseltoft — “Moving” (Jazzland, 2001)

Jacob Young — “Glow” (Curling Legs, 2000)