

# HÅKON KORNSTAD

Simons Center Recital Hall at College of Charleston June 4, 6, and 7 at 5:00pm; June 6 and 7 at 7:00pm

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## ARTIST



Born in Oslo, Norway in 1977, Håkon Kornstad took up the clarinet in grammar school and eventually turned to the saxophone and studies at the Trondheim Jazz Conservatory. Known for its emphasis on artistic identity, Kornstad emerged from Trondheim with a distinct voice whose strength was soon apparent in the professional success that followed. Even before leaving the conservatory, he began putting it to work in the formation of a group that would evolve into Wibutee, a group embraced by a community of artists centered on the contemporary music club Blå where pianist Bugge Wesseltoft heard and signed him to the Jazzland Recordings label in 1998. In parallel to Wibutee, Kornstad organized an acoustic group that the Kongsberg Jazz Festival selected in 2002 for its annual award for the Norwegian musician or group of the year.

Kornstad released his own solo effort in the album *Single Engine* (2007), a work that showed he had fully come into his own at last. One of Norway's leading newspapers, *Dagbladet*, fully understood the quality and significance of this release, calling it "the definitive transition from 'promising' to 'mature and original.'" His second solo album, *Dwell Time* (2009), is a purely solo saxophone performance, recorded in Sofienberg Church. In real time, Kornstad records short tracks into a looping device that plays back and gradually builds as he adds more, ultimately becoming an orchestra that accompanies him. *Downbeat Magazine's* review was typical of the album's reception in the press, calling Kornstad "one of Norway's most original and daring musicians."

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The year 2009 would mark another major moment in Kornstad's artistic evolution. On a visit to New York, he discovered the world of opera and decided to pursue singing. In 2011, he was admitted in 2011 to the Operahøgskolen (The Academy of Opera) at the Kunsthøgskolen I Oslo (Oslo National Academy of the Arts), where he completed his master studies as operatic tenor in May 2014. His debut at the Oslo Opera House came in February 2012, with the character tenor role *Il Podestà* in Mozart's *La finta giardiniera*.

While still in his first year of opera school, he released his third solo saxophone album, *Symphonies in My Head* (2011). In this recording, there were early signs of how his new knowledge of opera would be integrated into his jazz expression, such as his saxophone rendition of an aria from George Bizet's opera *Les pecheurs des perles*. Critical reviews of the work were again outstanding. Eyal Hareuveni wrote in *All About Jazz* that "he manages to turn his improvisations into small symphonies, arresting in their structure and deep emotional impact."

Kornstad's new direction, a meeting of jazz and opera, manifest itself not only in his solo performances, but also took the form of a new ensemble which he named Tenor Battle, a reference to the classic tenor saxophone "battles" among American jazz musicians in the 1940s and '50s. In Kornstad's version, this refers to him singing tenor and playing tenor saxophone in the same group. Seamlessly blending opera arias and jazz, the group features his longtime companion from Wibutee, double bassist Per Zanussi, as well as Sigbjørn Apeland on harmonium, Øyvind Skarbø on percussion, and Lars Henrik Johansen on cembalo.

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