

Tord Gustavsen

The oldest of five children, I was born in Oslo, October 5th 1970. We moved to the village Hurdal in Akershus, Norway in 1973, where my brothers and sisters were all born. I grew up in this rural area, while always having the city of Oslo as a cultural point of reference. Playing the piano since the age of 4, I started composing and improvising before learning to read music and perform classical pieces. (I am deeply grateful to my father for bringing music into my life the way he did.) I played in churches and local settings of different kinds, combining classical training with writing my own songs and performing gospel music and jazz-fusion. I played the piano with choirs ("Sarepta", Jessheim Ten Sing "Yessing"), and vocal-piano quintet "Ichtys", while attending school at Kjerkekretsen barneskole (primary school), Hurdal ungdomsskole (secondary school), and Jessheim videregående skole (high school). Guiding me in my classical training, teachers Kristin Sandholt at Nannestad community music school, and Hanna Marie Weydahl (assistant professor at Norges Musikkhøgskole - the Academy of Music, Oslo) were important during this time.

At the age of 19, I moved back to Oslo to study at the University of Oslo. Here, my interest in jazz really started to flourish. However, I studied sociology, psychology and the history of religions up to the level of a cand.mag. or Bachelor degree. I did my "siviltjeneste" (social work instead of joining the armed forces) at Kirkens Bymisjon (Church City Mission) in Oslo for a year and a half, where I also kept working as a pianist later on. I played with the jazz bands "GEST" and "BALSAM", which were both important in bringing me the experiences of creative jazz work. At this time I also met vocalist Kristin Asbjørnsen, whose artistic thoroughness and expressive powers have had a lasting and formative effect on my journey.

I applied for the jazz department at the Conservatory of Music in Trondheim, Norway and was accepted in 1993. The jazz education in Trondheim was fruitful, with special thanks to Erling Aksdal for his harmony and ear training classes, and to Jon Pål Inderberg for his methods of oral transmission in developing improvisational and stylistic skills. While in Trondheim, I also formed several bands and played with a number of great musicians. The late Geir Digernes stands out among them, and I will never forget his beautiful bass playing and his supportive being, both musically and personally. I played with bass player Odd Magne Gridset, tuba player David Gald, saxophonist Eirik Hegdal, drummer Magnus Forsberg and several others, while also continuing my work with singer Kristin Asbjørnsen, both in a duo setting and with the quartets SirkelSaga (exploring original compositions) and Aggravatin' Papa (developing a fresh approach to the songs of Bessie Smith). Several of the Trondheim musicians are still important friends and colleagues of mine. We played at festivals, clubs and churches all over Southern Norway with a number of these constellations, and we also toured Sweden and Finland with "Jazzprosjekt '95".

Having finished three years of training in jazz piano, jazz history, improvisational techniques, composition and analysis in Trondheim, I moved back to Oslo. Here, I pursued my career as a freelance musician, while also commencing my second wave of academic studies at the University of Oslo. Over a two-and-a-half years' time I made the cand.philol. (hovedfag) degree in musicology (this degree resembles something in between a master and a Ph.D.), specializing in the psychology and phenomenology of improvisation, while also attending courses in general analysis, composition and philosophy of music.

In Oslo, I now live at Enerhaugen (between Tøyen and Grønland) in the eastern part of the central city. I

practice, rehearse bands, play gigs, go on tours, and continue my research. I also teach jazz piano at the University of Oslo, Department of Musicology as a guest teacher. In January 1999 I released my first official CD (aire & angels) with singer Siri Gjære. During 2000 another two CD's involving me were released ("Port of Call" with Silje Nergaard and "First Meeting" with the Nymark Collective). Three more releases came in 2001 (with Carl Petter Opsahl, with Funky Butt, and a second one with Silje Nergaard, "At First Light"). In 2002 came the release of Nymark Collective's second album "Contemporary Tradition" and also a second aire & angels album simply called "aire & angels II". These projects and recordings are all very important in making up my musical path so far.

In 2003, I released my first solo album with my trio, "Changing Places" on ECM Records. Exciting things are happening with this; there seems to be a great deal of enthusiasm all around the world among listeners and in the ECM network of dedicated people in distribution and promotion. I really look forward to promoting the album and presenting my own music live. I will also keep playing with Silje Nergaard, Siri Gjære and the Nymark Collective; interactive work is still just as important as solo featuring. Among my most important co-workers at this stage are Kåre Nymark jr., Mats Eilertsen, Kenneth Ekornes, Jarle Vespestad, Harald Johnsen, Silje Nergaard, Carl Petter Opsahl, Simon Flem Devold and Siri Gjære. I am grateful to them all for making music with me and inspiring me in many ways.