

Lee Konitz – John Pål Inderberg, Masters Join Hands Across the Water

by Skoot Larson

From his early work with Miles Davis and Lenny Tristano right up to his recent 80th birthday celebration concerts, Lee Konitz has proven to be one of the most brilliant and consistent bop players in jazz. When jazz went through the hard times of the 70s, many others turned to a more commercial sound. Konitz stayed true to the art form, spending more time in Europe rather than selling out to the American music machine.

Back then, he was well known in European music circles, and was collaborating with some of that continent's finest artists. It was during a 1950 tour of Scandinavia, Konitz hooked-up with Sweden's most prominent baritone saxophonists, Lars Gullin, with whom he remained close friends until Gullin's untimely death in May of 1976.



In 2005, Konitz returned to Scandinavia for a concert in Oslo, Norway where he teamed up with another die-hard, straight ahead jazzman, baritone saxophonist John Pål (pronounced like Paul) Inderberg. Inderberg has, for decades, been one of Europe's top improvisers on the big horn, as well as a teacher of improvisation at Norway University's Trondheim Conservatory of Music. He was initiated with his membership in the New Cool Quartet, and several tours with Konitz, as well as Warne Marsh, Chet Baker and Bobby Brookmeyer.

For the 2005 Oslo concert, Konitz and Inderberg joined New Cool Quartet veterans Bjørn Alterhaug, One of Norway's most creative contrabass stylists, and drummer Espen Rud. The portion of that performance captured on CD by Ponca Jazz Records as "Lee Konitz / John Pål Inderberg Live in Oslo," allows us to hear four masters of jazz, recorded in a near-perfect acoustically setting.

The recording begins with Konitz' "Dream Stepper," a lively romp based on the changes of "You Stepped Out of a Dream." The Konitz line is familiar to all, as the New Cool Quartet has had this melody in their book for over 25 years. Inderberg's bari stands

alone for two choruses of intro. Alterhaug's bass offers a few sparse notes behind the baritone before Konitz jumps into a lively duet with Inderberg. Following a bucket full of interesting ideas from all, John Pål joins Konitz in unison for the final chorus.

"How Deep is the Ocean," speaks to the Tristano in both saxophonist's roots. Again, Inderberg kicks-off the tune, but Konitz soon enters with his own statement in counterpoint to Inderberg's line.

Konitz' creation, "Subconscious Lee," based on the chord progression of "What is This Thing Called Love," is one of the finest vehicles ever written for improvising frantic riffs. Composed while he was strongly under the Tristano influence, Konitz has built a tricky rhythm completely apart from the melody originally set to these changes. Alterhaug takes some of the glory here, with a multi-string strumming solo of uniquely beautiful harmonies.

The group's abstract take on "Body and Soul," is probably the most interesting recording of this old standard since Coleman Hawkins played the melody and variations standing alone without a rhythm section. Inderberg and Konitz put some soft harmony behind Alterhaug's solo, adding a depth to this exemplary bassist's work. Konitz adds some humor as well, quoting "Cocktails For Two," to complete his own improvisational piece. The two horns add a credenza as coda, butting heads for a finale of improvised duet.

Before listening to this disc, I was thinking of the fine recordings Konitz made with Lars Gullin over the years. John Pål Inderberg, however, is a much more aggressive player than Gullin, bringing this recording right to the fore with its bold statements and with the synchronicity of these two artistic minds. Between Konitz, John Pål, and Bjørn Alterhaug, there are no lesser moments! Every riff and sound is "cutting edge" thought provoking straight-ahead jazz. Listen for yourself. I think you'll agree!

This CD, "Lee Konitz / John Pål Inderberg Live in Oslo," is available from <http://www.poncajazzrec.no/>, along with many other incredible examples of Norwegian jazz releases from Ponca Jazz Records. More information about Inderberg is available at www.inderberg.com.