

KNUT ERIK JENSEN, pianist

Acclaimed for both the probity of his performances and musical versatility, Norwegian pianist Knut Erik Jensen has delighted audiences throughout Europe and America. A prolific recitalist, he has given more than 150 performances throughout the United States and Canada alone since 2007, where he has been a guest artist on the prestigious concert series of Rice University, the University of Texas, Emory University, the Kerr Cultural Center, Steinway Galleries of Phoenix, and the University of Calgary, to name only a few.

An authority on the music of Edvard Grieg, Mr. Jensen was the featured soloist in the Grieg piano concerto with the National Philharmonic Orchestra of the Republic of Moldova, the Minot Symphony, the Saratoga Chamber Orchestra and other ensembles. A chamber music enthusiast, he has toured Scandinavia, the US and Germany with clarinetist Nils Marius Kjosnes and dramatic soprano Myriam Danielsson, culminating in his critically acclaimed performance of Francaix's rarely played *L'heure du Berger* with the Berlin Philharmonic Wind Ensemble, at Norway's renowned Winter Chamber Music Festival.

Although Knut Erik Jensen's musical gifts were already apparent as a child, it was the accordion that first drew him to music. His early mastery of that instrument, which he studied in earnest under the tutelage of Per Olaf Green, earned him the recognition of his peers and the public alike, as well as victories at a number of competitions, including the Norwegian Championship in 1999. While that event marked the end of his years as a performer on that instrument, he continued to conduct, compose and arrange music for accordion ensembles.

But in 1997 Mr. Jensen, already a seasoned performer at sixteen, turned his attention to the piano. At eighteen, with only two years of piano study under his belt, he made his debut with the Trondheim Symphony Orchestra at the Great Concert Hall of Olavshallen, playing the Grieg piano concerto. That achievement did not go unnoticed; less than a year later the Conservatory of Trondheim invited him to continue his professional studies under its auspices. It was there that the pianists Mona Spigseth Sagstad and Jorgen Larsen took him under wing, inspiring his interest in chamber music as well as the solo piano works of Liszt. He later went on to study or coach with a number of esteemed concert artists, including Francesco Libetta, Kevin Fitz-Gerald, Kathryn Stott, Tor Espen-Aspaas, Havard Gimse and Piers Lane.

Knut Erik Jensen's versatility has served him well. In addition to the piano and accordion, he is also a skilled saxophone player, singer and conductor. His willingness to explore music in all its diversity has taken him as far afield as klezmer, rock, and jazz, musical genres that inspired him to tour Norway with the Kilombo Ensemble. But it was his interest in vocal music that led to his frequent affiliation with Trondheim's Opera Company and Music Theater, for which he was a pianist for Rossini's *Petite Messe Solenne*, Mozart's *Magic Flute*, Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, Verdi's *La Traviata* and others. His televised performance of Brahms's *Wiegenlied* with the celebrated mezzo soprano Randi Steen was broadcast throughout Europe and the US in 2005, as part of a Christmas Special with the St Olaf Choir. In 2010 the International Opera Institute of California, then new, appointed Mr. Jensen as its first music director. In an effort to reach out and bring opera to greater public attention, Mr. Jensen established the Opera Café, which brings impromptu performances of operatic arias and ensembles to public spaces.

In recent years, the celebrated Banff Centre in Canada invited Mr Jensen's participation, awarding him a residency scholarship as artist-in-residence on no fewer than three occasions from 2008 to 2010. An established presence at Banff, he was heard frequently in solo and chamber music, collaborating with a select group of artists from all over the world. His immersion in the music of Alexander Scriabin, in which he has distinguished himself, along with that of Geirr Tveitt, Edvard Grieg, Christian Sinding and other distinguished Russian and Scandinavian composers has led to his recording of a number of their works for the Piacevole label. In 2015 Mr. Jensen will add the music of Alexis Stavchinsky and Nicolai Medtner to his growing discography.

An innovative programmer, Knut Erik Jensen has developed several thematic programs, including a survey of the music of Scandinavian composers, past and present, entitled *Nordic Elegance*, as well as another called *From Grieg to Gershwin*. Mr. Jensen's engagements for the 2014-2015 season include recitals for the Tarleton Piano Festival in Texas, the La Porte Performing Arts Series in Indiana, the concert series at Arkansas State University, a solo tour of mainland China, and concerts in his native Scandinavia.

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***"A sensitive, musical presence and vibrancy not often heard"* – Adresseavisen, Norway 2008**

***"He plays with a contagious enthusiasm... a remarkably sensitive ensemble player."* - Tor Espen Aspaas, Founder, the Winter Chamber Music Festival, Norway**

***"Knut Erik Jensen is an extremely gifted young musician, who manages a broad repertoire with great artistry."* -Havard Gimse, pianist, recording artist**

"An exceptionally savvy interpreter of Scriabin, Knut Erik Jensen's thoughtful, probing and refined performances yield everything that Scriabin is about: opulence, spirit, mystery and not least, passion."* – John Bell Young, pianist, recording artist, former critic for the *American Record Guide*, *Clavier Opera News* and the *St Petersburg Times

***"A stunningly gifted musician"* Barry Shiffman, Director, The Banff Centre , Canada**