



## Frode Kjekstad *a piece of the apple*

I have known Frode Kjekstad since he was a student at the Music Conservatory in Oslo when I was a guest teacher there. That was some 20 years ago in the mid 1990s. He was an impressive jazz musician then and his talent has grown exponentially since that time. I was the producer on Frode's 2002 "New York Time" which was acclaimed jazz release in Norway that year. On this latest release "A Piece of the Apple", he furthers his legacy as perhaps Europe's finest Soul-Jazz guitarist.

Frode's guitar playing is a blend of great ideas, intense technical facility, crisp and clear tone, and swinging time, all delivered with an intense emotionalism reminiscent not of the Scandinavian "cool school", but of the finest American hard groovers.

Appearing on this set of 5 Kjekstad originals, 3 standards, and one jazz original (Eddie Harris' classic "Cold Duck Time") along with the guitarist are 3 of New York City's finest musicians, organist Mike LeDonne, saxophonist Eric Alexander, and drummer Joe Farnsworth. These gentlemen (fellas, you know what you are:) need no introduction to serious jazz fans but for the novices, LeDonne has played with everyone from Milt Jackson to Benny Golson, Alexander with Charles Earland to becoming a star in his own right (and his first recorded appearance was on my album "Jubilation" I believe), and Farnsworth with everyone from Lou Donaldson to Pharoah Sanders. In addition, these guys have their own group which appears regularly at the jazz club "Smoke" in NYC, so they are as tight in their playing together as real fraternal brothers.

These musicians are veteran performers who have toured the world many times and perfected their artistry in front of audiences on most of

the continents of this globe. They are not recent "jazz school" graduates presenting watered down versions of the music of their heroes or "new" conglomerations of various eclectic "influences". These guys are all strong original and seasoned artists with their own powerful voices on their instruments. They play beautifully together on this album which I am sure will touch your soul and get your feet tapping as well!

"A Piece of the the Apple" is the groovy opener. Frode is right in your face with a burning solo, followed by Eric Alexander and LeDonne. Check out Farnsworth's rim shots moving the rhythm along.

"Malala" is a modal uptempo burner. The melody has those great lines in 4ths and the whole track just takes off and flies along from start to finish.

"The Three Musketeers", the third Kjekstad original of the set, is a minor bluesy tune in 3/4 time. Hey, how about that! Guess it has something to do with the title! Great solos all around, and cooking right on through.

"Not While I'm Around" is a soulful ballad with a backbeat kicked off by some dramatic organ from LeDonne. Frode is all alone singing the melody on his guitar and then into his solo, nice work from Eric in the middle, then Mike taking it to just under "monster movie" organ at the end!

"That's All" is a standard tune which is usually played as a slow ballad, is here a medium tempo swinger with a Charles Earlandesque intro of major chords going down in whole steps. Another strong track from all concerned.

"Cold Duck Time", the classic Eddie Harris tune from the great album "Les McCann and Eddie Harris Live at the Montreux Jazz Festival", is here just as funky as you please! Listen to Frode's rhythmic repeated notes that catapult him into his solo!

"This Will Be My Shining Hour", made famous by everyone from Sinatra to Coltrane, is here an uptempo "flag waver" as we used to say in the trade. Frode, Eric and Mike ripping it up as if their lives depended on it!

"Invitation", a song that lends itself to many different treatments and tempos, is here a mysterious slow ballad with an underlying swing feel. Plenty murky and dark sounding. The ghost in the movie which features this song would be proud!

"The Lone Ranger" shuffles the set to a close with the quartet back to full power. Frode states the melody in octaves like a modern Wes Montgomery and the whole band cooks through the solos and to the ending like the champions they all are.

This is a top notch album from a band that could not be any more world class. The recording by my pal Tom Tedesco at Tedesco studios is clear and warm sounding and the performances by Mike, Eric, Joe, and especially my buddy Frode could not be more swinging and inspired.

Happy listening.....

*Randy Johnston*

## Frode "Frodo" Kjekstad

Just outside the Norwegian capital Oslo, in the countryside, there is a beautiful valley, called "The California of Norway"! Here is where the jazz guitarist Frode "Frodo" Kjekstad lives on his farm. From his farm, there is a direct contact line to the jazz of the big cities in the western world; New York, London, Berlin and Paris!

**Frode Kjekstad** was born in Lier, Norway, in 1974. He was already captured by the music of **Charlie Parker** and **Joe Pass** when he picked up the guitar at the age of 14, and the year after he started studying jazz guitar.

Studying music at the University of Oslo, coincidences led to meeting New York based jazz guitarist **Randy Johnston**. This meeting was a great inspiration, leading to lessons as well as a great friendship.

Playing regularly for 4 years with **Sandvika Bigband**, considered Norway's best band in its genre, Frode had the opportunity to play with international jazz stars as **Diane Shuur, Frank Foster, Johnny Griffin, Don Menza, Rob McConnell, Jim Morrison, Mark Nightingale, Claire Martin, Deborah Brown**, and many others.

Frode also played with a number of American players in Norway in other different settings, among these **Gerald Willson, Wendell Brunious, Grant Stewart and Randy Johnston**.

**Frode's style of playing** developed into being a virtuoso, with amazing technique, mastering any tempo, with a focus on time and rhythm, chord

melodies in unusually high tempos, and with a strong talent to communicate a beautiful melody to the audience. His way of understanding and approaching the music, gave a natural attitude of an original jazz artist, without being a clone of others. Frode's personal style was created out from listening to the jazz greats of the past, but he was mostly listening to other instrumentalists, and only rarely guitarists. His solo guitar playing and chord concepts are only equaled by the greatest guitarists in the history of jazz.

In 1999 he was asked to join a trio led by Scandinavian jazz-organ player **Paul Wagnberg**. This suddenly made the 24-year-old one of Norway's most important jazz guitarists, and he started to record under his own name.

In 2001 Frode received great reviews in USA and Italy for his bootleg CD "**Presenting Frode Kjekstad**". The reviewer in "Just Jazz Guitar Magazine" called him "a young genius with perfect sense of time and rhythm".

After this, American jazz guitar legend Randy Johnston took responsibility and invited Frode to New York to record an album with "some of the real guys"!

In 2004 Frode released his CD "**New York Time**", featuring legendary organist **Dr. Lonnie Smith**, saxophonist **Eric Alexander** and drummer **Byron Landham**. This led to increasing international activity and reputation.

A CD featuring Frode's compositions and arrangements for bigband was released autumn 2005, a production done by "Sandvika Bigband", which features 55 minutes of original bigband music. He also recorded with Ski Bigband in 2009.

The years following 2005 was filled up with concerts, festivals, teaching, composing for big bands, and on the private side getting married, having three kids, buying his family farm, and many other things! He also co-released two CD's with Paul Wagnberg's trio; with Frode writing 50% of the tunes.

In 2010 Frode recorded again under his own name; this time the album was called "**The Italian Job**", with Italians **Alberto Marsico** (organ) and **Enzo Zirilli** (drums). After the release of the CD, this trio has played in many European venues, among these Ronnie Scott's in London several times.

In 2013 Frode Kjekstad once again teamed up with New York based saxophonist Eric Alexander, who invited him to join his band with jazz giants organist Mike LeDonne and drummer Joe Farnsworth, at the legendary club Smoke in New York for some gigs. Frode grabbed the opportunity to record a new album with this quartet. Here it is released as "**A Piece Of The Apple**", this being also his first on Losen Records.

Frode Kjekstad's international activity and reputation is increasing, and many great concerts are going to happen around in the world, in the time to come!

Hopefully, soon he will be playing in "**a theatre near you!**"



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