

**The**  
**VIOLIN**  
**and**  
**TENOR SAX**  
**of**  
**FRANK OTTERSEN**

Born: Oslo, Norway, March 14, 1921  
 Died: Kolding, Denmark, May 22, 1971

*Introduction:*

Frank Ottersen was the most prominent of vintage jazz violin players in Norway. I had the pleasure of meeting him once at nightly jam session in my family house while my parents were on holiday. A great event!

*History:*

Professional musician from 1938. Dancing jobs at seaside- and mountain-hotels at the end of the 30s, own Swing Ensemble at Sinsen cinema June 1940, Frankie Swingers at Larkollen same summer, with Lidoen's orchestra autumn 1940 out 1941. Also concerts with Frankie Swingers (1940), Romert Normann's string quartet (1941), own orchestra at Bygdønes July 1941, with Book'n's revue orchestra spring 1942, own rhythm orchestra in Bergen in (May) and Sinsen cinema (May-August). Member of Alf Sjøgaard's orchestra at Edderkoppen 1942-45, also appearances with own rhythm trio at Rosekjelleren 1942-43, concerts as Frank Ottersen's "Streng Trio" winter 1943, recordings with own group autumn 1943, trio with Sjøgaard's summer tour 1944, classical house concerts 1944-45, jazz concerts with own quintet winter 1945. Various quartet- and solo-concerts in 1945, concert reviewer in Friheten newspaper 1945-46, own orchestra at Kongen summer 1946 (several broadcasts), then leader of Chat Noir orchestra 1946-47, soloist with Robert Normann's trio and record session with Rolf Syversen autumn 1947, then with Stella Polaris, own orchestra at Lidoen august 1948, Kongen summer 1949, then again at Chat Noir from September 1949. Active until he passed away in Kolding, Denmark (ref. Bjørn Stendahl & Johs Bergh: Sigarettstomp – Jazz i Norge 1940-1950 (Norsk Jazzarkiv)).

*Availability:*

July 14, 1942: Herman Records NOCD 3005 (Robert Normann Vol. 2)  
 Oct. 27, 1943: Herman Records HJCD 9002 (Jazz in Norway Vol. 2)  
 Nov. 22, 1943: Herman Records HJCD 9002 (Jazz in Norway Vol. 2)  
 Oct. 17, 1945: NJA D122-26/27  
 Jan. 29, 1946: NJA K641  
 Oct. 15, 1947: Herman Records NOCD 3005 (Robert Normann Vol. 2)  
 Feb. 1949: NJA K670, D128-33  
 Feb. 1951: NJA K044 and others  
 Feb. 21, 1951: Herman Records NOCD 3005 (Robert Normann Vol. 2) 694 only  
                   Both in NJA  
 Ca. 1951: NJA K25  
 Late 1952: NJA and private collection  
 Feb. 22, 1953: NJA K0012 and private collection  
 Late 1953: NJA and private collection  
 1953: Herman Records NOCD 3008 (Robert Normann Vol. 3)  
 1954: NJA and private collection  
 Nov. 5, 1955: NJA and private collection  
 Dec. 18, 1955: Herman Records HJCD 9003 (Jazz in Norway Vol. 3) 1209 only,  
                   Both on NJA D130-9/10  
 1967: Private collections

## FRANK OTTERSEN SOLOGRAPHY

**FRANK OTTERSEN OG HANS SEKSTETT** **Oslo, July 14, 1942**

Frank Ottersen (vln, comp-3033), Per Nilsen (cl, as), Lulle Kristoffersen (p), Robert Normann, Frank Aasen (g), Mikal Kolstad (b), John Veiglum (dm).

Four titles were recorded for Odeon:

3032-1	Ding Dong Dang	Straight 32 bars. Solo 24 bars. (F)
3033-1	Skumring	Intro 4 bars to straight 32 bars. Solo 26 bars. (M)
3034-1	Promenade	Break to straight 32 bars. Solo 24 bars. (FM)
3035-1	Opus 1	Straight 32 bars. Solo 24 bars. (FM)

Frank Ottersen's first session is also his most famous one, for several reasons. It is in fact one of the very few where he is permitted to play true jazz. He is demonstrating that he surely must be considered among the very best violinists in the European vintage tradition. He plays four excellent violin soli, from the breakneck fast "Ding ..." to the moderate "Skumring". Finally but not least, as an extra benefit, it features Norway's great guitar player Robert Normann in one of his greatest sessions. As leader he could have taken more solo space, but he was a modest man. He was an excellent improviser, and yet some extra attention should be given to his straight introduction of "Opus 1", such elegance is rare! This session is one of Norway's greatest vintage jazz treasures!!

**SYV MUNTRE** **Oslo, Oct. 27, 1943**

Frank Ottersen (vln, arr), Arvid Gram Paulsen (tp, as), Rolv Nordstrand (cl), Per Nyhaug (vib), Frank Aasen (g), Per Sleipnæs (b), Lorang Karlsen (dm), Inger Beck, band (vo-592).

Two titles were recorded for Telefunken:

592-B	Mester Jacob	Solo 32 bars. (FM)
593-E	Frankie's Signatur	Solo 32 bars. (FM)

Only two titles were made at this session, strange because it contains some of the best of Norwegian swing musicians, and they are all in good shape. The violin soli here are also perhaps also the most exciting ones he made on record, full chorus on both, well conceived and swinging par excellence.

**SØGAARDs DANSEORKESTER** **Oslo, Nov. 22, 1943**

Arvid Gram Paulsen, Gunnar Tuft, Einar Johansen (tp), Lyder Vengbo, Gunnar Gulbrandsen (Rugstad) (tb), Frank Ottersen (ts, comp, arr), Harald Barwin, William Syversen, Bjarne Hansen (reeds), Ulf Arnesen (p), Frank Aasen (g), Per Sleipnæs (b), Alf Søgaaard (dm, ldr).

Two titles were recorded for Norwegian HMV in Golia Kino, no (ts) on 601-1 "Pike Fortell Meg Et Eventyr" but:

602-1	Melodi	Solo 16+8 bars, orch on bridge. (SM)
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It is necessary to include this excerpt from an earlier work on "Jazz Tenor Saxophone in Norway" (Johs Bergh & Jan Evensmo, Norwegian Jazz Archives 1996): The best of Norwegian big band dance music with a jazz touch. FO takes a beautiful and well conceived tenorsax solo, possibly the best Norwegian solo on this instrument in the early forties. Although primarily a violinist, he was reported to be very competent on tenorsax, and "Melodi" is proof enough. It is a calamity that this is the only example of what he could do.

**HAROLD SMART / FRANK OTTERSEN** **Oslo, Oct. 17, 1945**

Harold Smart (hammond-org), Frank Ottersen (vln).

Four titles were recorded for HMV, two issued:

621-1	I'm Beginning To See The Light	Duet with (org). (M)
622-1	Strutting Like A Peacock	Duet with (org). (M)

Such was Norwegian record companies that when FO got the chance to record again, he was teamed up with somebody whose jazz competence was very slight. Nice to hear the very competent violinist, the music being more of a continuous prepared duet than real improvised soloing, but he seems somewhat uninspired under the circumstances

**FRANK OTTERSEN / ARILD ANDRESEN** **Oslo, Jan. 29, 1946**

Frank Ottersen (vln), Arild Andresen (p).  
Broadcast, five titles:

5:30	Evergreen Potpourri	Duet with (p). (S/SM/M/FM)
2:55	Fantasi	Duet with (p). (S)
2:50	Boston Bounce	Duet with (p). (FM)
2:15	Baby, Won't You Please Come Home	Duet with (p). (M)
3:05	Star Eyes	Duet with (p). (S)

Another 'duet-session' but of much higher quality. The two artists seem to enjoy each other's company, and the music is quite inspired and delicate. There are several sections where FO's masterly violin comes clearly through. Note also his pizzicato solo on "... Home"!

**ROLF SYVERSEN – ROBERT NORMANN** **Oslo, Oct. 15, 1947**

Rolf Syversen (accordeon), Frank Ottersen (vln, arr), Robert Normann (el-g), Kåre Sandegren (b).

Two titles were recorded for Musica (but never issued on 78 rpm.):

758-B	7 x 8 Stomp	In ens. Soli 8 and 20 bars. (FM)
759-B	Bagatell	In ens. Soli 8 and 8 bars. (F)

Examples of contemporary modern, or modernized, swing with sophisticated arrangements, interspersed with brief solo parts. Nothing wrong with that, but longer soli had perhaps been more interesting. FO has some nice contributions.

**FRANK OTTERSENs SWINGGRUPPE** **Oslo, Feb. 1949**

Frank Ottersen (vln), unknown (ts), probably Leif Egil Kristensen (p), Ivar Børsum (b), Finn Eriksen (dm).

Private recording:

0:56	Tea For Two (NC)	Solo/straight 32 bars. (FM)
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A brief fragment in the middle of a jam session, mostly of academic value.

**FRANK OTTERSENs KVINTETT** **Oslo, Feb. 1951**

Frank Ottersen (vln), Scott Lunde (p), Frank Aasen (g), Frank Cook (b), John Veiglum (dm), Solveig Barland (vo).

Four titles were recorded for Columbia:

1834-1	Den Farlige Alder	Obbligato parts. Solo/straight 16 bars. (M)
1835-1	Min Lille Pekingeser	Obbligato parts. Solo/straight 16 bars. (M)
1836	I Et Ubevoktet Øieblikk	Obbligato parts. Solo/straight 8 bars. (M)
1837	Fidelidelei	Obbligato parts. Solo/straight 6 and 6 bars. (M)

Not really a jazz session, but nice and swinging items with wonderful lyrics if you understand Norwegian! FO never ventures far into improvisations but his artistry is clearly felt all through.

**FRANK OTTERSENs ORKESTER** **Oslo, Feb. 21, 1951**

Frank Ottersen (vln), Tom Clausen (oboe), Per Nyhaug (vib), Willy Andresen (p), Robert Normann (elg), Frank Cook (b), E. Jarlseth (vo-693), Carsten Byhring (vo-694).

Two titles were recorded for Harmoni:

693	Vårsang	Obbligato parts. Solo 8 bars. (S)
694-G	Rytmenes Makt	Straight intro 8 bars. Obbligato parts. Soli/straight. (M)

"The Power Of Rhythms" is great but again because of the magnificent lyrics, not much jazz really. "Springsong", whose jazz contents has long been overlooked because of the oboe, is really a surprise, a very nice slow solo!

**JAM SESSION****Oslo, ca. 1951**

Frank Ottersen (vln), Frank Aasen (g), probably Øistein Ringstad (p), unknown (b), (dm). One title:

7:05 Pennies From Heaven (NC) Soli 64 and 4 (NC) bars. (M)

Found this recently (March 2017) in Norwegian Jazz Archives. Great discovery, seven exciting minutes of great guitar and piano playing and two magnificent violin choruses. The recording closes when FO starts on a second solo.

**FRANK OTTERSENS SEKSTETT****Oslo, late 1952**

Ragnar Robertsen (cl), Frank Ottersen (vln), Willy Andresen (p), Alf Blyverket (b), John Veiglum (dm), Per Nyhaug (vib).

Broadcast from Restaurant Speilen, Grand Hotel. Six titles:

1:20 Theme Straight. (S/FM)

3:00 Little White Lies Solo 16 bars. (FM)

2:55 Sweet And Lovely Straight. (SM)

2:40 Synopsis Soli 16 and 4 bars. (FM)

2:30 Hallelujah Straight 32 bars. Soli 16 and 4 bars. (F)

0:30 Theme Straight. Coda. (S)

**Oslo, late 1952**

Same with Kjell Haugen (vo) added. Two titles:

2:35 Tell Me Why Intro. Solo 16 bars. (SM)

1:50 How Do You Like Your Eggs? (NC) Straight. Solo 36 bars. (FM)

**Oslo, early 1953**

Same. Eight titles:

1:55 On The Alamo (NC) Solo 16 bars. (FM)

2:25 There's A Small Hotel Solo 12 bars. (M)

3:15 Indian Love Call Straight. Solo 8 bars. (M)

2:45 Be Anything Straight. (SM)

2:25 Ain't She Sweet Soli 8 and 4 bars. (M)

2:50 Takin' A Chance On Love Soli 8 and 8 bars. (M)

2:15 Bei Mir Bist Du Schön (NC) Solo 8 bars. (FM)

1:40 Theme Straight. Coda. (S/M)

These programs were meant for dancing, and in general the titles are rather brief. Although FO is the leader, soli are distributed evenly among the various participants, and the violin soli have rarely a full chorus. One cannot be but disappointed at the meagre jazz contents, even more so because among the many brief soli, there are interesting details showing how good FO really was. Note also the fine clarinet playing on these broadcasts.

**JAM SESSION****Oslo, Feb. 21 or 22, 1953**

Frank Ottersen (vln), Eilif Holm (vib), Einar Iversen (p), Barney Kessel (g), Arne Styhr (b), J. C. Heard (dm).

Jam session from Penguin Club:

11:30 All The Things You Are Soli 2 and 2 choruses of 36 bars. (M)

Jazz At The Philharmonic visited Oslo in Winter 1953, and there was a great jam session night at the Penguin Club (unfortunately I was too young to participate), including among others Charlie Shavers and Willie Smith. "All The Things ..." is the only item without strong blowing by trumpets and reeds, and definitely the best of all. The main focus is of course on a Kessel in his prime, but the jam lasts quite long, and FO gets two opportunities to solo. The result is some of the very best he has left us, showing that he was one of Europe's best swing violinists.

**ROBERT NORMANN / FRANK OTTERSEN****Oslo, 1953**

Frank Ottersen (vln), Robert Normann (g)

One title was recorded at Hotel Exelsior:

Smoke Gets In Your Eyes 3:14. (S)

Sorry to have omitted this nice duet, long time available on CD.

**FRANK OTTERSENS SEKSTETT** **Oslo, late 1953**  
 Ragnar Robertsen (cl), Frank Ottersen (vln), Willy Andresen (p), Finn Westbye (g, vo-“Honey“), Håkon Nilsen (b), Per Nyhaug (dm, vib), Inger Jacobsen (vo-“You Go ...“, “... Moon“).  
 Broadcast(s) from Restaurant Speilen, Grand Hotel, six titles:

1:45	Honey (NC)	Solo 16 bars. (SM)
2:00	Blue Lou	Solo 16 bars. (FM)
3:00	Lady In Red	Soli 32 and 48 bars. (FM)
3:30	You Go To My Head	Solo 8 bars. (S)
2:25	How High The Moon	Obbligato parts. Solo 16 bars. (F)
0:30	Theme	Straight. Coda. (S)

**Oslo, late 1953**

Same. Four titles:

2:45	Dinah	Straight 32 bars. Solo 16 bars. (FM)
3:00	These Foolish Things	Straight. Solo 8 bars. (SM)
3:35	T’Ain’t What You Do	Solo 8 bars. Straight. (M)
2:35	Two Sleepy People	Straight. Solo 8 bars. (SM)

There is a more prominent jazz colour on these late 1953 programs. There are delicate violin soli on “Honey”, “Blue Lou” and “Dinah”, on “... Red” he gives himself more space than usual, and on “... Moon” his half-chorus is another evidence of his capabilities. Nevertheless the listener rightly get frustrated by this modest programming of the sextet’s leader.

**FRANK OTTERSENS SEKSTETT** **Oslo, Jan. 23, 1954**  
 Personnel as above.  
 Broadcast from Restaurant Speilen, Grand Hotel, five titles, not present on “Cherokee” and “Blues For Bass” but:

2:45	Believe It Beloved (NC)	Straight. Solo 32 bars. (M)
3:45	Shine	Straight 32 bars. Solo with ens 64 bars. (FM)
4:15	I Ain’t Got Nobody	Straight 32 bars to solo 32 bars. Solo 64 bars to coda. (FM)

**Oslo, Jan. 24, 1954**

Same. Two titles:

3:00	Scatterbrain	Solo 16 bars. (M)
2:45	Stompin’ At The Savoy	Solo 16 bars. (M)

**Oslo, 1954**

Same. Two titles:

2:35	Takin’ A Chance On Love (NC)	Straight. Soli 8 and 8 bars. (M)
1:30	My Melancholy Baby (NC)	Straight. Solo 6 bars (NC). (M)

**Oslo, 1954**

Same. Five titles:

2:30	Stompin’ At The Savoy	Straight. Solo 16 bars. (M)
4:45	I Ain’t Got Nobody (NC)	Straight 32 bars. Soli 32 and 64 bars. (FM)
3:00	Collaboration	Soli 8 and 8 bars. (M)
2:40	I May Be Wrong	Straight. Solo 12 bars. (M)
2:05	It’s Only A Paper Moon (NC)	Solo 16 bars. (M)

**Oslo, 1954**

Same. Seven titles:

3:40	Jeepers Creepers	Solo with ens 34 bars. (FM)
3:15	Once In A While	Soli 8 and 8 bars. (S)
3:00	I Can't Believe That YILWM	Soli 8 and 16 bars. (M)
2:15	Lover Come Back To Me (NC)	Duet with (vib) 32 bars. Solo 32 bars to ens/coda. (FM)
1:35	Margie (NC)	Intro. Solo 6 bars. Straight. (FM)
2:50	For All We Know	Straight. (S)
2:25	I Got Rhythm	Solo 20 bars. (F)

The sextet continues with its dance programs, but occasionally there are goodies. "Shine" is one of them, and particularly the two versions of "... Nobody", presented as "jam session", are highly thrilling.

**FRANK OTTERSENS KVINTETT** **Oslo, Nov. 5, 1955**

Eilif Holm (cl, g, vib), Frank Ottersen (vln), Jørg Petter Røed (p), Ole Kristian Salater (b), Erling Monsen (dm).

Broadcast from Restaurant Speilen, Grand Hotel, three titles:

2:00	Please Don't Talk About Me WIG	Straight. Solo 16 bars. (M)
3:30	Always	Straight. Solo 16 bars. (M)
0:30	Theme	Straight. Break. (S)

Nothing to add to the above, except that this seems to be the last program from Restaurant Speilen, although one never knows, maybe more turns up!

**FRANK OTTERSENS ORKESTER** **Oslo, Dec. 18, 1955**

Personnel as above with Kari Corneliussen (vo-1207).

Two titles were recorded for HMV:

1207-2	Søt, Snill Og Kjærlig	Solo 12 bars. (M)
1209-2	Soft Sound	Soli 16 and 8 bars. (M)

Again there are surprises when you least expect them! A quite awful popular session, jazz not intended, and then one finds true, nice and sweet soloing on "... Sound", and a really groovy blues chorus on "Sweet ...", wow! A better termination of a Frank Ottersen solography could not be found. Only so sad that this great jazzviolinist got so few opportunities to really show his great jazz capabilities.

No further recording sessions.

Postscript of Dec. 1, 2016: Well, there is one more!:

**STUFF SMITH / FRANK OTTERSEN** **Denmark, possibly 1967**

Stuff Smith, Frank Ottersen (vln).

A brief fragment from an encounter between these two jazz violinists, possibly in Copenhagen, has been graciously made available by Anthony Barnett:

2:19 'foolin' around'

This is not a jam session but just two minutes of some friendly co-fiddling. Mostly of academic interest although FO is playing the old Norwegian folk song Per Spellman".

...ooo...