

**The**

**ALTOSAXES**

**of**

**SWING**

**in**

**NORWAY**

*Vintage Norwegian alto saxophone:*

Jazz in Norway developed slowly with the middle thirties as the time when things started to get going, still slowly. Much focus was on the string swing tradition, but of course we had our share of blowing too. However, it seems that trumpet and tenor saxophone performers were rather more prominent than instruments like clarinet, trombone, altosax and baritonesax.

There may have been unrecorded talents, the studios were not places with open arms for jazz then, and the German occupation's anti-jazz philosophy and persecution was most harmful to our knowledge of how Norwegian vintage jazz really sounded like; apart from a few 78s we have to rely on history telling, and even that comes to an end with time.

However, it seems that we had only two important altosax players:  
**Arvid Gram Paulsen** and **Per Nilsen**.

In the following sections, there are details about their careers and (few) recordings. Therefore, we should state here only that Arvid Gram Paulsen was one of our very best jazz performers who similarly to Benny Carter could play trumpet, altosax and tenorsax, as well as composing and arranging, with sovereign competence; a talent out of the ordinary who might under other circumstances and with a more straight personal life have had international recognition. Per Nilsen was "only" a reedman, sticking to clarinet and altosax, a good musician without belonging to the very upper talents.

The

**ALTOSAX**

of

**PER NILSEN**  
**“NILSE-PER”**

Born: Arendal, Norway, Feb. 23, 1914  
 Died: Canada?

*Introduction:*

Per Nilsen was one of the most active and important of the few Norwegian altosax players. He emigrated to Canada in the 1950s and disappeared from view.

*History:*

Played for dancing in the 1930s, member of Oslo Swingklubbs band, at Oterstig (Tjøme) summer 1940, played bass in Svein Øvergaards orchestra at Sinsen Restaurant, Oslo in autumn 1940, member of Lidoens orchestra and at same time Fred Thunes concert orchestra autumn 1941. Stayed in Bergen winter 1942, played with Sjøgaards Rytmekvartett January – March. Frank Ottersens Rytmeorkester in May, joined Frank Ottersen at Sinsen cinema for engagement summer 1942 (record session). In Book's revueorchestra in autumn, guest leader for Jitterbugs in Porsgrunn, concerts with Alf Sjøgaards large orchestra winter 1943, own rhythm quartet in March, popular temporary replacement in several large and small bands, in Book's revueorchestra autumns 1943 and 1944, Stein Lorentzens bigband and Maxims cabaretorchestra 1944-45. Continued with Will Arilds orchestra at Valencia 1945-46, participated in Pete Browns bigband spring 1946 (record session). Later with Willy Andresens orchestra at Humlen (record sessions 1949-50. Emigrated to Canada in the 1950s (ref. Bjørn Stendahl & Johs Bergh: Sigarett Stomp – Jazz i Norge 1940-1950 (Norwegian Jazz Archives 1991)).

*Availability on CD for sessions in the Per Nilsen solography:*

July 14, 1942:	Normann Records / Herman Records NOCD 3005
May 6, 1946:	“
Dec. 16, 1949:	AB Fable2-011/12
Jan. 13, 1950	“ 431 also on Herman Records NOCD 9002

## PER NILSEN ALTOSAX SOLOGRAPHY

**OSLO SWINGKLUBB's BAND****Oslo, Feb. 14, 1940**

Jack Butler, Rowland Greenberg (tp), Ivan Jacobsen (tb), Per Nilsen (as), Arvid Gram Paulsen (ts), Jan Fredrik Dahl (p), Robert Normann (g), Fred Lange-Nielsen (b, arr), Stein Lorentzen (dm).

One title, "I'm Coming Virginia", was recorded for Norwegian HMV, but no altosax solo.

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

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

Four titles were recorded for Norwegian Odeon, (cl) only on 3035-1 "Opus 1" (Solo 16 bars. (M)) but:

3032-1	Ding Dong Dang	Solo 32 bars. (F)
3033-1	Skumring	Solo 16 bars. (M)
3034-1	Promenade	Solo 16+8 bars, (g) on bridge. (FM)

This session is perhaps as a whole the very best in the Norwegian swing tradition, featuring our great national treasure, guitarist Robert Normann, as well as the alas to little documented but excellent violinist Frank Ottersen. PN's contributions here are his very best of the few recorded, playing in style showing he was familiar with Benny Carter's altosax playing, and also that he deserved his popularity and activity in the Norwegian underground war jazz. No particular favourite item, but maybe "Ding ..." is some kind of highlight, impressive playing in a highly driven tempo.

**PETE BROWN & HANS ORKESTER****Oslo, May 6, 1946**

Frank Andersen, Sigurd Sjøberg, Bjarne Haraldsen (tp), Lyder Vengbo, Arild Jensen, Erik Fredriksen (tb), Per Nilsen, Sigurd Kolsrud (as), Bjarne Nerem, Per Skogsrud (ts), Hans Eriksen (bar), Lulle Kristoffersen (p, arr), Robert Normann (g), Håkon Nilsen (b), Pete Brown (dm), Nora Berg (Brockstedt) (vo-679), Frank wylert (vo-678), (vo-group-from the above).

Two titles were recorded for Musica, no altosax soli on 678-B "Love In Bloom" but:

679-C	Gotta Be This Or That	16 bars 4/4 with (ts-BN). (FM)
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Two competent altosax 4 bars pieces, in a duet with a surprisingly rough Bjarne Nerem on tenorsax.

**WILLY ANDRESENs KVINTETT****Oslo, Dec. 16, 1949**

Per Nilsen (as), Odd "Sunda" Wentzel-Larsen (vln), Willy Andresen (p), Håkon Nilsen (b), Per Nyhaug (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Harmony:

425	I Like Be	Solo 16 bars. (M)
426-B	I Like Bop	Solo 16 bars. (FM)

**Oslo, Jan. 13, 1950**

Same, except Alf Blyverket (b) replaces Nilsen. Two titles:

430	Synchoporius	Soli 16 and 4 bars. (FM)
431	Riffin' In F	Solo 32 bars. (F)

These are the first Norwegian recording sessions where one consciously is trying to play bebop. As Bergh/Stendahl states it in their book "Sigarett Stomp – Jazz i Norge 1940-1950": "Any great threat to Parker and Gillespie isn't this – but the music is nevertheless very interesting, and Per Nilsen seems to have moved from swing to bop with a certain success". I would like to add: This is a most serious session with elaborate bebop arrangements and fine violin, and it is obvious that PN has listened closely to Bird's music. Unfortunate that we have no information about his musical development after he left Norway. If any of the readers know something, please contact Norwegian Jazz Archives!

No further recording sessions.

**The**

**ALTOSAX**

**of**

**ARVID GRAM PAULSEN**  
**“SYRE-PÅL”**

Born: Oslo, Norway, Jan. 4, 1922  
 Died: Oslo, Norway, April 11, 1963

*Introduction:*

Arvid Gram Paulsen was Norway's response to Benny Carter, playing trumpet, altosax and tenorsax with equal ease. He passed away early, but his music is so valuable, that I think it should be better known outside our borders.

*History:*

Professional musician from his first summer job at Åsgårdstrand 1939. A particularly gifted multi-instrumentalist who quickly became active in Oslo Swingklubb's orchestra. His first recording session features him on tenorsax, Feb. 14, 1940. With Svein Øvergaard's band 1939-40, altosax in trumpeter Rowland Greenberg's different groups 1940-42, at the same time with Svein Øvergaard at Sinsen restaurant autumn 1940, concerts with own groups 1941. With Willie Vieth's orchestra at Kongen summer 1941. Book'n's autumn tour 1941, recording session on (as) with Rowland Greenberg Jan. 15, 1942. Trumpet and altosax in Book'n's Revyorchestra spring 1942, in Alf Søgaaard's orchestra at Edderkoppen 1942-45. Recording sessions with Syv Muntre (tp, as) Oct. 27, 1942 and Nov. 24, 1943, with Frank Ottersen (tp, as) Oct. 27, 1943, with Søgaaard's Danseorkester (tp, as) Nov. 22/23, 1943, with Rolf Syversen (tp) Oct. 13, 1944. Member of Pete Iwers' bigband and Book'n's revueorchestra 1945, had sporadic own bands but made his living from theatre- and dancejobs. Trumpet soloist with Alf Søgaaard's orchestra 1947, with Finn Westbye 1948-50, with Lulle Kristoffersen in Sweden 1950. Book'n's touring 1950-51, then several years at Rosekjelleren, circus bands and various dancing activities. With "Norsk Jazzelite" 1950, Pete Brown's groups 1955-57, own bands in the late 50s. Received the Buddy-prize 1957, played mostly tenorsax although he often won polls as best altosax. (ref. Bjørn Stendahl & Johs Bergh: Sigarett Stomp – Jazz i Norge 1940-1950 (Norwegian Jazz Archives 1991)).

*Availability on CD for sessions in the Arvid Gram Paulsen altosax solography:*

Jan. 15, 1942:	Herman Records HJCD 9002 (Jazz in Norway 1940-1950)
Oct. 27, 1942:	“
Oct. 27, 1943:	“
Nov. 24, 1943:	“

## ARVID GRAM PAULSEN ALTOSAX SOLOGRAPHY

**ROWLANDS ORKESTER****Oslo, Jan. 15, 1942**

Rowland Greenberg (tp, vo), Arvid Gram Paulsen (as), Gordon Franklin (ts), Frank Hansen (p), Rolf Haslum (b), Kjell Bjørnstad (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Norwegian Telefunken:

N513-B Big Apple Solo 24 bars. (FM)  
 N514-A St. Louis Blues Solo 24 bars. (FM)

Quoting Stendahl/Bergh: This should have been Norwegian jazz of the forties at its very best, with some of the very best contemporary musicians in studio, obviously to play jazz without commercial considerations. However, there is very bad sound balance, of the rhythm section almost only the piano can be heard, and therefore the performances becomes rhythmically faulty. However, it must have sounded better in the recording studio, because the three soloists are playing interesting soli, particularly Greenberg and Paulsen". Yes, there is fine and very promising altosax playing here, particularly on "... Blues", and also Paulsen must have been quite familiar with Benny Carter's altosax style.

**SYV MUNTRE****Oslo, Oct. 27, 1942**

Arild Iversen (vln), Arvid Gram Paulsen (tp, as), Carsten Klouman (p), Robert Normann, Finn Westbye (g), Fred Lange-Nielsen (b, vo-1490), Stein Lorentzen (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Norwegian Columbia, (tp) only on 1489-2 "Monolitt" but:

cn1490-2 Sigarett-Stomp Solo 8 bars. Obligato parts.  
 Solo 16 bars. (M)

This one of Norwegian vintage jazz' most important and well known items, with interesting vocal describing the fate of the smoker in a war setting where tobacco was a rarity and scarcity. AGP swings his altosax with great competence here, and it is obvious that he is one of the best European contemporary performers on this instrument.

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

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

Two titles were recorded for Telefunken, no altosax on 593 "Frankie's Signatur" but:

592-B Mester Jacob Solo 16 bars. (FM)

An elegant altosax solo, again demonstrating AGP's improvisational powers.

**SYV MUNTRE****Oslo, Nov. 24, 1943**

Arild Iversen (vln), Arvid Gram Paulsen (tp, as), Bjarne Nerem (ts), Carsten Klouman (p), Robert Normann (ts, g), Fred Lange-Nielsen (b, arr), Harald Ottho (dm).

Two titles were recorded for Norwegian Columbia:

1549-1 Bob's Vuggesang Straight with orch. (S)  
 1550-1 Opus 7 Solo 8 bars. (FM)

Another candidate to being the best Norwegian vintage jazz record! So much happens here, that AGP brief but excellent altosax solo almost disappears in the general treasury chest. Note also the beautiful sound of the concluding ensemble of "... Vuggesang" (Lullaby), particularly due to the altosax. So incredibly sad that this is the last captured altosax session by our great Arvid Gram Paulsen.

No further recording sessions on altosax.

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