

# BIO – KONNI KASS

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They have a few interesting words of advice in the Faroe Islands, for ambitious teens and twentysomethings: Go travel, study, even work abroad, with our blessing. But then return. A loyal but adventurous spirit comes with the territory up here in the North Atlantic and remains with the locals wherever they roam. That spirit fuels the work of Konni Kass.

Singer, songwriter, saxophonist; Konni fashioned her own sound in the tight creative community of the capital, Tórshavn, alongside a talented band of sometimes sonically opposing but always open-minded compatriots. The results are invariably magical.

It seems extraordinary now to discover that the music on Konni Kass's debut album, *Haphe*, was never really meant to be heard beyond the islands. Since its release in 2016, Kass and her band have been invited to some high-profile stages across Europe, from major support shows to benchmark gigs at the Roskilde and Reeperbahn festivals, and a prestigious Anchor award nomination at the latter. Now, with album number two on the horizon, this once low-key project is becoming a big deal.

Born in Tórshavn, Kass relocated to Sweden after her schooldays to study jazz, then moved onto Denmark for medical college. The medical studies continue, but musical bones and Faroese blood eventually led her home. Kass had been writing pop songs even while studying jazz, so decided to release them as an album, just locally, initially. Finding the bandmates didn't take long, in downtown Tórshavn: she hooked up with old school friend Per Ingvaldur Højgaard Petersen – a drummer – and bassist Torleik Mortensen, “then we talked about Knút [Háberg Eysturstein], the keyboard player. We went out for a drink in another place and there he was. This would never happen somewhere else.”

The result was almost alchemic. They bonded quickly, won local acclaim, and even some vital studio time. So potent was the new combination, in fact, that the singer actually shelved most of the original compositions. “I wrote some new songs, we jammed a lot,” she recalls, “then we recorded them in a week.”

*Haphe* is as boldly unique as only an expectation-free project can be: Fairy-tale ethereal wonders (*Rainbows*; *Dear Friend*; *Silence*) rub shoulders with rollicking Kraftwerkian riffs (*I Lie*), some of which feature unapologetic, unironic saxophone (*Sounds*). There are quietly impressive rock-pop epics in *Run* and *Surrender*, while *Make Me Forget* sounds like a modern torch song recorded on rediscovered analogue equipment; a sort of eco-power ballad.

“There are no rules here,” says Kass, of making music in the Faroes. “And the songs are as long as they want to be. On that album, there's nothing that was thought of as a single, just songs I'd written. The sound is floating, not really defined; it simply goes where it wants to go.”

Not in the traditional daytime-pop sense, perhaps. *Haphe* in ancient Greek means ‘touch’ or ‘connect’, and the record certainly did that with audiences. These are pop songs from the soul, and a rich array of sources, including Konni's lifelong love for bluesy torch singers. “At school everyone else was buying pop,” she says. “I was buying Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles, Billie Holliday.”

It may have been born without expectations, but *Haphe* has transformed Konni Kass into one of the most ambitious artists on the Faroe Islands. The second album is now under way for 2019. The new material treads a playful path between the sound established by *Haphe* and new electronic impulses. On production duties is Faroese legend Jens Ladekarl Thomsen, who enjoyed international success with ORKA and their DIY approach to making music. “In the Faroe Islands, we're influenced a lot by each other, rather than trying to copy what's going on the major market charts” concludes Kass in anticipation of what could ultimately prove to become one of the most internationally relevant Nordic releases in 2019.

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