

# How World Order

Datarock

At home and around the globe,  
Norwegian artists are on stage,  
on the runway and on the cutting edge.

BY AMANDA SCHUPAK

**O**n a warm summer night in Manhattan's hip East Village, Eivind Opsvik's fingers were a blur of motion. A projector flashed video on a graffitied wall while Opsvik, a member of Norway's avant jazz movement, picked and bowed his upright bass before a crowd of arty young urbanites.

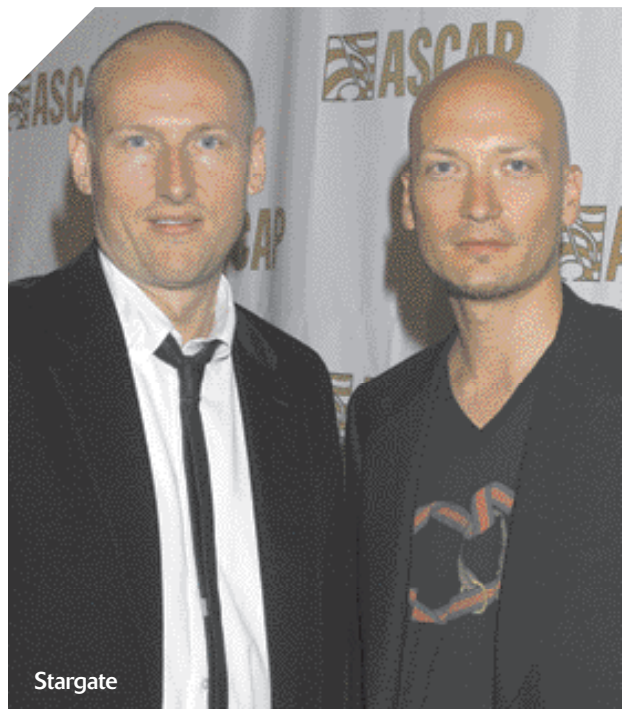
Daylight reveals that Opsvik is not alone. The presence of creative Norwegians is growing in New York and around the world, as a burgeoning new class of musicians, artists, filmmakers and designers expands out of Norway to make its mark abroad.

## MUSIC

Originally from Oslo, Opsvik has been performing in New York City for 10 years and is one of a number of Norwegian jazz artists who draw audiences into small bars and clubs around the city, or fill the seats at the landmark Lincoln Center. The popularity of Norwegian jazz in America reflects the maturing music scene in Norway, where half a dozen jazz festivals take place each year. A crop of independent record labels, such as Rune Grammofon, Jazzaway Records and Smalltown Supersound, have grown to bring new acts into stores.

The same thing is happening for rock and other genres as well. "It's not easy to get picked up by a U.S. or U.K. label from a city on the southwest coast of Norway," says Fredrik Saroea, one half of Bergen-bred alternative dance-pop group Datarock. "It's important that local producers with a passion for music help out their artists." Over the last five years, he says, the city of Bergen has increased its funding to support emerging musicians.

While Norway's biggest pop acts sing in Norwegian and enjoy little if any international attention, Datarock's English lyrics heavily reference American pop culture familiar around the world. The band has played 500 shows in

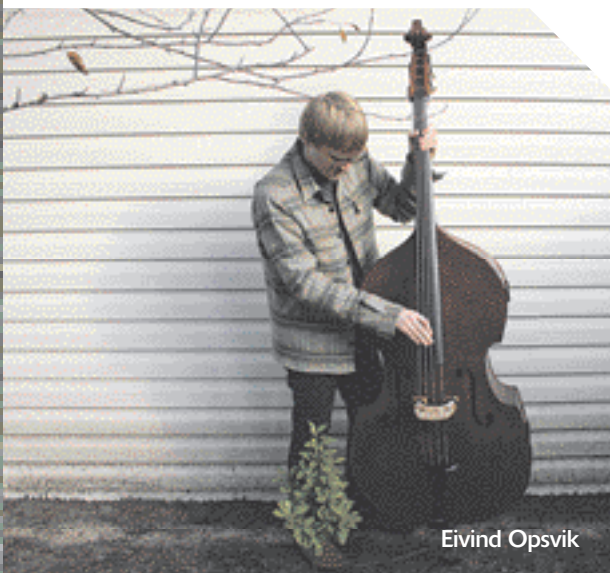


Stargate

31 countries, including 40 consecutive dates on a recent tour in the U.S. (Saroea credits "magical Norwegian powers" and Viking blood for Datarock's endurance and strength.)

Working mostly from their studio in New York City, Tor Erik Hermansen and Mikkel S. Eriksen, together the rap and R&B production duo Stargate, have written music for superstar artists like Mariah Carey, Beyoncé Knowles and young rapper Ne-Yo. Their collaborations have earned them top spots on the pop charts. "We grew up in the 80s when a-ha were the first Norwegians to go No. 1 in the U.S. [with the 1985 song "Take on Me"]," Hermansen reflects. "It took a long time for us to get there, but we did it."

While most hitmakers revel in the lime-light, Stargate stays behind the mixing board—and behind the scenes. "We've been called humble, hard-working and quiet," says Hermansen. "[We] have no ambition to become famous. I don't know if that's a Norwegian trait, but it's definitely different from most in the music industry."



Eivind Opsvik

# Art & Design

Design by Bleed



**K**im Hiorthøy is a veritable Renaissance man. But he wouldn't say that. "I try to avoid considering myself anything," he stresses, betraying Stargate-like reserve. "It's not good to have to think about oneself so much."

Play it down as he might, Hiorthøy is among the most notable of Norway's new guard of visual artists. His drawings and collages hang in Oslo gallery Standard (Oslo), and his illustrations grace the covers of a number of albums from Rune Grammofon and Smalltown Supersound, on which he has released several records of his own.

A Trondheim native who splits his time between Oslo and Berlin, Hiorthøy, 35, has also made music videos and documentaries, illustrated children's books, and mentored cutting-edge young artists such as Espen Friberg and Aslak Gurholt Rønsen of

graphic design studio Yokoland, whose work was published in the 2006 book "Yokoland – As we go up we go down."

Though the work of individuals such as Friberg and Rønsen has garnered some international acclaim, most of Norway's commercial design has failed to reach audiences abroad. The exception: design strategy firm Bleed, whose international client roster includes Deutsche Bank, Hermès, Pepsi and clothing brand Diesel, in addition to high-profile Norwegian brands such as the Philharmonic, National Theater, even the Royal Family. With only 15 employees, Bleed is one of Norway's largest design companies.

"Back in 2000 there was a big hole in the market in Norway," recalls Bleed managing director Kenneth Pedersen. "The Internet bubble had just burst, and there was not a single company that was really good at thinking cross-platform." Bleed's founders set out to provide inventive marketing solutions that include large interactive screens or art installations in addition to more traditional print and web designs.

At Bleed, innovation is king. If a potential client asks them to "copy a nice web page they saw on holiday," Pedersen says, "then we politely ask them to go elsewhere with their business."



Kim Hiorthøy

Moods of Norway



## Film

**S**ubtle hints from Fredrikstad, Norway have made their way to Hollywood. Director Harald Zwart sneaks a visual shout-out to his hometown in every film he does. In his 2003 hit movie, "Agent Cody Banks," which grossed over \$50 million at the box office worldwide, the red and white colors of the Fredrikstad Fotballklubb (FFK) can be spotted on banners and scarves in Cody's bedroom.

In 2000, Zwart was the first Norwegian to become a member of the Directors Guild of America. He directed such stars as Matt Dillon, Michael Douglas and John Goodman in 2001's "One Night at McCool's." And last year he was tapped for the sequel to the recent remake of the "Pink Panther," starring Steve Martin.

A few months after Zwart wrapped

Nicolai Herlofson, co-founder of Oslo's high-fashion brand FIN, senses a social shift pushing Norway into creative frontiers where it has long lagged behind its Nordic neighbors and the rest of Europe. "Aesthetics is more recognized as an important part of our lives," he says, crediting urbanization, travel and "most importantly, that it is OK to break the law of Jante," which discourages brash individualism.

Harald Hansen, of tourism and development outfit Innovation Norway, concurs: "Norwegian society has become more open and tolerant in regards to somebody having success. Norway has slowly gone away from being egalitarian to become more competitive and egocentric."

FIN is sold in 15 countries including the U.S., yet it maintains a modest Scandinavian style, favoring simple lines. "Not much bling from us," Herlofson avows. Though understated by design, FIN ensembles, made from eco-



Eco-fashions by FIN

friendly organic materials, have movie star appeal. Actresses Keira Knightley and Kate Bosworth have been spotted sporting the FIN label.

Herlofson hopes to see more homegrown clothing brands succeed internationally, but first the moneymen must recognize fashion as an investment opportunity. "I think—I know!—that people are missing out on a lot of great fashion design because there has not been capital to take it to the market," he says. Moreover, foreign consumers are unfamiliar with Norwegian couture—and culture. "There are those who believe Norway is a Swedish island."

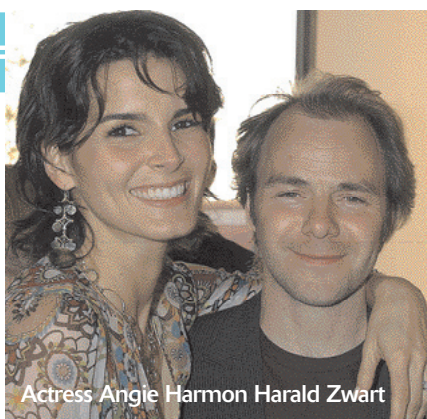
Another label, the five-year-old Moods

of Norway, wears its Norwegian pride on its sleeve—literally. "All our clothes have a twist of Norwegian history and tradition," says co-founder Peder Børresen.

The Moods crew adorns T-shirts, sweaters and accessories with anchors, tall ships and mermaids, in homage to Norway's preeminence as a sailing nation at the end of the 19th century. The Winter 2007 collection gave a nod to a history of hunting. They call it "a tribute to a world where hunter and animal can live in harmony and share a few cocktails around the bonfire." The cheekiness is in the details: A hunter and a bear grace the back of a pair of men's undershorts—they're drinking martinis.

up shooting the "Pink Panther 2," another Norwegian made a quiet, critically-heralded foray into the American movie scene. Last May, 34-year-old writer-director Joachim Trier debuted his highly acclaimed film, "Reprise," in the U.S. The movie had already earned Trier three Amanda Awards (Norway's Oscars) in 2007, for writing, directing and best picture, and garnered recognition at the Toronto and Sundance Film Festivals.

Set in Oslo, "Reprise" follows the struggles and triumphs of two best friends and budding novelists. In its treatment of artistic aspirations and the stumbles of youth, the film could have taken place anywhere. But it flirts with a persistent sense of cultural isolation in Norway, a feeling that art comes in, but little goes out. In one scene, a character says of a young author's book that if it



Actress Angie Harmon Harald Zwart

had been written in English it would be an international best-seller.

Like the music of Datarock, or the puckish iconography of Moods of Norway, Trier employs a global cultural vocabulary. "Growing up I was reading Japanese comic books, watching American and French movies and reading Russian novels," Trier says. He co-wrote the "Reprise" script in Norwegian, but "its frame of reference extends from [American] punk rock to French poetry."

The film itself, with its borderless success, is a sign of a new era in which Norway's collective creative voice can be heard around the world—even if we still need subtitles.

*Amanda Schubak is a freelance writer in New York City.*

