

For Koen Van De Wardt, making music is a far greater pursuit than simply creating something to catch someone else's ear. "The more people that respond to my music the less lonely I feel," admits the singer and musical architect who records ethereal, oft-hushed but forever gripping synth-anchored music under the moniker Klangstof. "For me it's just about getting in the studio and erasing all the bad feelings I have in my mind."

The Dutch-born, Norway-raised Van De Wardt is on the surface a happy-go-lucky 24-year-old ("People expect a very depressed young man and instead they get this smiling asshole"), and yet when he retreats to his solitary place to write music, much in the way he's done since first picking up the guitar at age 14, the anxiety, the negativity, the feeling that he's misunderstood, it all comes pouring out. The result is a collage of the supremely genteel yet haunting vocals, sleek melodies and experimental beats and rhythms. "It's a very weird thing that goes on in my head whenever I'm making music that I don't even understand myself," Van De Wardt says. "For so long I locked all my feelings out as a human being. And now the way I express those feelings is through music."

There's a patience at play in Klangstof's aural creations: the musician is a craftsman when constructing the chilling sound that comprises his stunning debut album, *Close Eyes to Exit*. It's there in the crisp, slow-building single "Hostage," electric guitars gently strummed, electronic beats like a rising heartbeat, all giving way to full-throated release: "I ran for shelter/But I got there," he intones. Or in the way "Sleaze" shifts from whispered confession ("Nintendo is the only thing that makes me smile") to propulsive, rainbow-hued synths at a moment's notice.

Koen knows there's a power in reaching deep into oneself in order to ultimately connect with others. It's why he first began making music. After moving with his family from his native Netherlands to rural Norway at age 14, the once-social teenager found himself totally isolated. "My life was torn apart and I had to start all over again." He became enamored with Radiohead's seminal 1996 album, *OK Computer*, and specifically the undercurrent of unchecked pain in lead singer Thom Yorke's voice.

In short time, creating music became an almost manic pursuit for the fledgling musician. Even after attending Hedmark University College and playing bass in a popular Norwegian band, Moss, Van De Wardt felt compelled to return to his own well. "That's when I started to do Klangstof" – a name with no particular meaning ("klang" means echo in Norwegian and "stof", dust in Dutch) – "and then I couldn't stop."

More than anything, making music and sharing it with others has Koen no longer feeling quite so alone. "I'm coming out of my old world where no one cared and getting into this new world where all of a sudden everyone cares about me. I don't know if I should like it or not. But it's very special."