

John Nilsen Short Bio 2026

John Nilsen was inducted into the **Oregon Music Hall of Fame** in October, 2024.

Born in Seattle, Washington in 1956, the Nilsen family moved to Portland, Oregon, USA in 1960. Nilsen began studying classical piano from his mother at age six. Continuing his musical education, he began playing guitar at age fourteen. John moved to Ashland, Oregon in 1974 to attend Southern Oregon College (Southern Oregon University). Nilsen graduated in 1979 with a Bachelor of Arts in English, and was honored by the institution in 1995 in recognition of his outstanding achievements, dedicated efforts and leadership in the field of the performing arts with the **Distinguished Alumnus Award**, the most prestigious award bestowed upon Southern Oregon University graduates. An accomplished pianist, guitarist, composer, lyricist and vocalist, Nilsen was also selected as a **Yamaha Piano Artist** in November, 2021.

Nilsen founded the Magic Wing record label in 1987. The label has a catalog of twenty-two successful titles, each with international distribution. Before founding Magic Wing, John recorded three successful solo piano records on LA's, Eagle Records from 1983 to 1985. He has had fifteen other CDs licensed in countries including Germany, Great Britain, The Philippines, Canada, Taiwan and Singapore bringing reported total record sales to well over one million copies sold. Few independent recording artists claim such success.

John Nilsen has two hundred and fifty of his compositions and musical arrangements receiving airplay royalties and has performed in all fifty U.S. States and on four continents. Nilsen splits his performances between touring internationally as an in demand pianist combining elements of classical, folk, jazz and rock, performing with the John Nilsen Trio, featuring Jeff Leonard/ bass and Jason Moore/percussion, and with John's guitar/vocal rock band, John Nilsen & SWIMFISH, featuring Dave Captein/ bass, Mike Snyder/drums, percussion, Bob Logue/ guitar, vocals and Don Woodward/guitar, mandolin, harmonica, vocals. SWIMFISH includes John's piano, but features his acoustic and electric guitar work tucked into a bed of a uniquely great supporting cast.

Nilsen was been a member of Ten Grands since its inception in 2001 and through 2025. He has given back to his community by teaching songwriting residencies and speaking to students in schools throughout the country including every school in Oregon's West Linn/Wilsonville School District over the past twenty-five years.