



Himmerland and the shared soul

- playing new music across styles, cultures and frontiers

On a mild autumn evening in March at one of Australia's major folk festivals, the huge crowd in the big marquee clap and shout their admiration for the band on stage.

This is a Himmerland concert, and this Danish band is one of the most travelled outfits on Denmark's roots and folk music scene.

Right now it is the drummer that has all the audience's attention. Bathed in coloured light from the spots, he sings and dances around behind his drum-kit, while his hands flash over the skins so fast that the eye can hardly keep up with them.

Then the rest of the band join in on saxophone, violin, guitar and electric bass, and the marquee throbs with new roots and world music and happy listeners. It is as though everybody in the place has drunk of the same magic, intoxicating potion.

The First Meeting

On the other side of the world, in an area known as Himmerland in northern Jutland, lies the tiny Danish village of Halkær. It is about 20 miles from Ålborg, where the Vikings founded a market-place around the year 1000, and today Ålborg is the fourth largest town in Denmark.

Halkær has about 50 inhabitants. A little to the south, among green slopes and winding roads and under the vast skies, Eskil Romme has a farm with views over the beautiful Halkær Lake in the Halkær Valley.

Eskil Romme is an organic farmer who also plays saxophone, composes music, and is extremely active in the cultural life of the area. One brain child of Eskil Romme's is the exclusive little Halkær Festival. Every June, the local people invite all comers to a fest celebrating "Nordic, Celtic and Organic cultures, independence and the environment."

-and it is at this very special Halkær Festival that five experienced but very diverse musicians met back in 2010 – Those days, from the start, including formerly member of Himmerland, Danish guitarist and singer Morten Alfred Hoirup.

A New Danish Band Takes Shape

The debut concert at the Halkær Festival went well. The band's Ghanaian percussionist, Ayi Solomon, remarks contentedly, "I was personally in harmony with each of the band members playing joyfully with smiles."

The first concert is soon followed by others at the Faroese Festival, Summartónar, which focusses on new music of many types. This positive development leads to the five musicians agreeing to form a permanent band with the name Himmerland.

Himmerland was launched, and started on their travels almost from day one. Eskil Romme, in particular, is an energetic booker, using his vast network to sell the band to the whole world. His attitude is that a band does not develop unless it is out playing live concerts.

For Ayi Solomon, whose daily musical work is with Denmark's top world and jazz names, building Himmerland's repertoire is his first experience of European folk music.

Ayi Solomon says, "Building the band required a lot of discipline as we all came

from different musical backgrounds. I am a Ghanaian and from a tradition of drum and dance (Folklore) music. However, my musical career began with me playing highlife music, reggae Music, funk, soul, soukous, etc., so when songs are presented for the band to work on, my contribution to the composition would come straight from the elements of my musical background and the kind or style of music I am acquainted with, mostly contributing rhythms and beats and also the form of a song.”

Himmerland's first bass player, Andrzej Krejniuk, is originally Polish, but grew up in southern Denmark. He has played masses of jazz and rock, and has also played world music. He sees the challenge in starting a band with so diverse musicians, but he has been happy to be part of the process. "My intuition told me that this band would amount to something, since we all got along so well," he says and goes on: "The greatest hurdle in this band – and doubtless many other bands, no matter what kind of music they play – is to find the right balance between each musician's own personality and the shared soul of the group. We each bring our own background, and it is really important to be able to lay aside your musical tropes and to listen, to discover new ways of doing things. It has been very entertaining to see an African percussionist play a fast Danish keraus dance, or see a Danish guitarist play African Soukous”.

Himmerland and the Music

Formerly member of Himmerland, Ditte Fromseier is a trained violinist adept at both folk music and classical. Meeting

the new styles meant she had to revise her whole attitude to music.

“Suddenly I was obliged to discuss details in the music that, as a folk musician, I had taken for granted. This made me see my music from the outside, which brought new aspects to light for me. I have been fortunate enough to have Himmerland play some of my compositions, and it has opened my eyes to see how my tunes were given new

life at the hands of the group members. Sometimes in ways I had not seen coming.
It's great!"

For Eskil Romme, who has both a jazz and a folk music grounding, Himmerland has provided the opportunity compose much more than before.

"My inspiration comes from working on the farm, and from working in the music association and the festival, where I meet lots of people. It gives loads of very varied musical input, so I never run out of sources of inspiration for my composing.

Introducing new material for the band is a revelation every time. The Himmerland team are such talented, inquisitive musicians who seem to have unlimited ideas for what we can do with the music we each bring in.

Touring and album release

The years to come will see the Himmerland musicians expanding their common repertoire, while continuing to travel and tour with great success in Denmark, the Faroes, Sweden, Hungary, Bulgaria, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Scotland, Canada, Ukraine, Russia, South America, Australia and New Zealand.

-Along the way of busy touring activities, Himmerland manage to record and release a nr of albums. The first was called New Roots Music from Denmark(2012) and second

"The Spider in the Fiddle"(2014) – Last cd from Himmerland came in 2019 "Folktone from a Global Corner" including Irish singer and Flute player Nuala Kennedy.

Gathering material for the bands repertoire is an intense and demanding process when five very different musicians have to find what they calls the band's shared soul. They work away, discuss things, argue, try various things, disagree, then agree.... But, as Solomon says with a wide smile, "Nevertheless, all is good. We are one happy Himmerland!"

HIMMERLAND is:

ESKIL ROMME (Soprano Saxophone) is from Funen, but has lived in

Himmerlands in Northern Jutland, most of his life. During the 30 years Eskil has played, he has mixed traditional Danish music with jazz and other related genres. On his many travels in Scandinavia and the UK, he has developed his very own "North Sea blend" of sounds and styles. In 2009 he released the album "Himmerlandsmelodier", which also was the beginning of the band Himmerland. Eskil is the artistic director of the small but well-reputed Halkær Festival, and he is known for its many international tours with bands like "Færd" and "Kryss".

JENS ULVSAND (bouzouki, vocals) From Sweden, has been an integral part of the Swedish folkmusic scene in the last 25 years. Beside his work as a touring musician, Jens is a highly respected teacher at the Music Academies in Malmø, Sweden and Odense, Denmark, and he has a long career as composer for Swedish theaters. Jens Ulvsand has years of experience on the Swedish folk music scene, and combines his work in Himmerland with Trio Mio, with membership of Swedish Avadå Band, and toured the world with Danish Færd, KRYSS and Jullie Hjetland & Jens Ulvsand duo.

KIRSTINE HAUGAARD SAND (violin, vocals) comes from a family of great traditional musicians and dancers on the island of Funen, including her brother, danish world champion violinist Harald Haugaard.

Kirstine has lived in the Danish traditional music life her whole life. She is trained at the academy in Odense as well as in Newcastle (UK). Kirstine plays and tours with Danish bands as Fiolministeriet and Svestar.

Kirstine is also a highly experienced teacher in both classical-, folkmusic, and traditional danish dance.

Jakob Kragesand (Electric bass guitar, vocals) Jakob joined Himmerland in the beginning of 2021, coming out of the strong new generation of Danish musicians on the Folk/World Scene .Jakob has studied Musicology at University of Copenhagen and he has a master in Musicscience. He has played in a nr of leading Scandinavian bands as Sherzandum, Skarn and Víík.

AYI SOLOMON (percussion, vocals) is from Ghana but has lived in Copenhagen for more than 30 years. Solomon enjoys great respect wherever he has played the last several years, both in Denmark and internationally. He has released two

albums in his own name, and he has performed and toured with a wide range of top professional bands and projects in genres like world music, rock, pop and jazz. Among the best known are "Pierre Dørge & The New Jungle Orchestra", "Moussa Diallo Band" and "Palle Mikkelborg".

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