

Jensen & Bugge

- specialists in Danish musical dialects

By Morten Alfred Høirup

It is early on a winter's morning somewhere in mainland Denmark, the fields and woods are snow-covered, the sun is barely up. In the gloom, a clutch of children with schoolbags huddle by the bus-stop, waiting for the bus that will take them to school. Two of the bigger children, a boy and a girl, eye each other discreetly in silence. Not that they do not know each other: they have been neighbours for some years. Mette and Kristian attend different schools, but go to a weekly folk-dancing class, and they have sometimes danced together. Mette relates, many years afterwards, that they knew each other, but were too shy to talk. "...so we stood there beside each other at the bus-stop every school-day for ten years without a word." Kristian adds with a wink, "Mette has been doing her best since then to make up for that silence." "Boys were not so interesting at that age," is Mette's riposte, "...but that has changed, too."

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Some years after their schooldays are over, Mette and Kristian meet again when they are both admitted to the Folk Music Department of the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts Southern Denmark. There are not so many folk music students that year, so when they are expected to join forces for ensemble play, and Mette and Kristian are the only ones seriously interested in the purely traditional side of Danish music, they start their own duo, under the name of Jensen & Bugge.

Today, 10 years after Mette Kathrine Jensen (accordion) and Kristian Bugge (violin) graduated as qualified players and teachers of traditional Danish folk music, both have careers as professional folk musicians. The topic of this article is thus something rare: a young traditional Danish folk music duo celebrating both their 10th anniversary, and their huge success both in Denmark and abroad.

"From the word go it's been traditional music that we cherish and we focus on. That's how we met, and we have played countless concerts and for dances both in Denmark, Germany, USA and even in South Korea - all over the place," says Kristian, and Mette continues, "We visit lots of old musicians, learn their music and the different playing styles that still exist in the various parts of the country. You could say we are specialists in the musical dialects of Denmark".

On the 2010 DVD *Project Dialect*, Mette and Kristian can be seen and heard playing for dancing with traditional musicians in different regions of Denmark. The DVD presents both music, dance and interviews, and is one of the most exciting, ambitious projects in Danish folk music.

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"We play traditional Danish music, originally composed and played for dancing in various parts of the country...", says Kristian. "We concentrate on learning the details of the local music traditions in the more isolated areas and out on the islands. On Fanø, for instance, there is a very strong tradition,

which has been alive and growing now for 300 years. People there still use their music for parties, weddings, hogmanay, midsummer festivities, and so on, so we often go to Fanø to learn the music, the dances and the rhythm, that's what I really get excited about." Mette Kathrine takes over: "We play a lot of music from Thy in the north west of Jutland, too, and we know an old accordion player there who has been playing for over 80 years. We often visit him, we play together, he teaches us tunes and makes suggestions as to how we could play them. Kristian, in particular, has played a lot for dancing with Karl Skaarup, as he is known, and I play with them when I can."

Both Mette and Kristian make their living as professional folk musicians, and they also play in other bands. Mette plays in Zenobia, who focus on contemporary and older Danish songs, and with Sula, who combine Scots songs and Scandinavian tunes. Kristian plays in Baltic Crossing with musicians from Finland, Britain and Denmark, and Habadekuk - traditional Danish folk music with horn and rhythm sections.

But what the two work on together is traditional Danish folk music and its stories of community, connection, dance and life's continuity. Curiously enough, it is not only on small Danish islands that people love that kind of music.

A couple of years ago, Jensen & Bugge were invited to play at Nisswa-Stämman in Nisswa, Minnesota, one of the few Scandinavian music festivals in USA where the focus is totally on the music. Here, they discovered that there are certain circles with a strong interest in music from Denmark and the other Scandinavian countries. "Many Americans are very interested in this culture; many of them listen to the music and want to discuss it. We have played at festivals, clubs and venues and taught music and dance around the US. We have a knowledgeable audience there, and we hope to continue to explore new areas where we can find such audiences."

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On a visit to Iowa, Mette and Kristian met the American accordionist Mr. Dwight Lamb, whose grandfather was from Denmark. Subsequently they have learned old Danish tunes from him, and toured with him in Denmark and USA.

The two young folk musicians will soon be celebrating their tenth anniversary by releasing their anniversary album with guest musicians. This will be their debut album, in spite of the fact that they have played together for ten years now. This will be followed by another album featuring the duo with Dwight Lamb, the American accordionist. Jensen & Bugge have also planned extensive tours, both as a duo, with various guests, and with their specially formed jubilee band. Their travels will take them to venues and festivals in Denmark, Germany and USA, where they also will present workshops in Danish instrumental music and dance.

For the first decade, they stood at a bus-stop daily without daring to speak to each other. During the next decade, they became specialists in traditional Danish folk music, recognised as some of the finest traditional musicians on the Danish folk music scene, and in the decade to come, accordionist Mette Kathrine Jensen and violinist Kristian Bugge take to the road, to play their beloved traditional music for the world. Come and listen!

Translation by Rod Sinclair

Links:

Jensen & Bugge: www.jensen-bugge.dk

Go Danish Folk Music: www.gofolk.dk

Nisswa-Stämman: www.niswastamman.org

Danish Roots: www.danishroots.eu

The Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts Southern Denmark: www.dfm.dk