



# STEELBAND MEETS BIG JAZZ BAND

**For the first time in Denmark, a steelband teams up with a big jazz band to produce a series of concerts as one ensemble.**

This ground-breaking band, named Big Band Pan Jazz for the occasion, is comprised of the joined forces of Hot Pans Steelband and Big Apple Big Band. The new band has commissioned 7 completely new compositions and 2 arrangements from the author of this article to form a 50 min. programme of music. The concept behind the music - apart from creating great tunes - has been to investigate the new textures and possibilities that arise when these two rather different ensembles are combined, as well as to build a sort of musical bridge between the two idioms.

The idea of bringing the two bands together came from the leader of Hot Pans, Thomas Mehr, who has worked

with steelbands for 25 years and always liked the sound of large bands stated - "When so many musicians play together, they need to communicate on a very high level. It is always a big experience for me to hear a lot of people listen intensively to each other, perform precisely, and at the same time navigate in a complex field of musical communication. **That's why the idea of combining a steelband with a big band was so alluring - the big sounds, the new textures - it's fantastic! I am anxious to listen to the result!** I hope that this project will give Hot Pans a great experience of working and performing in a completely different musical culture. Big Band musicians are excellent sight-readers, and it would

be great for the steelband to get a feeling of their way of working with the music. The music that Sune Borregaard has written for the band is rather different from what we usually play, and I anticipate that we will gain a lot of musical experience from it, that we wouldn't get from our usual repertoire. I've worked with Sune before, as he has written for us on other occasions, so I know his style. But it still surprises me how talented he is as both a composer and arranger. There are many nice and catchy melodies and phrases in his music, but also a lot of interesting and surprising elements. Elements that may not catch the attention of the careless listener, but they get under your skin when once you are aware of them. **This**

**music gets better and better, each time one listens to it, and the listening process is vital in educating young musicians. Actually, I've made bets with some of the band members that the phrases they now have difficulties in understanding will end up being the ones they just can't get out of their head when they are done with the project."**

Bringing a steelband together with a jazz big band is one of the many exciting blends with steelpan going on in Denmark. Another one is the avant-garde trio, SUMI, that blends steelpan with guitar, Fender Rhodes,

and plenty machines. Since Danes, and in particular Danes playing steelpan, are somewhat of a traditional-minded breed, it is vital to the steelpan community that projects like these occur so they can open people's minds to different ways of using this wonderful instrument. It has such a potential sound that can add a lot to many musical genres, but it is often - in people's mind - confined to the Caribbean genres.

**As Thomas Mehr says - "I hope that the members of the big band will revise their view on the steelpan as being an instrument in it's own right that is just**

**as real and versatile an instrument as for instance a saxophone or a trumpet. We in Hot Pans are very aware of the folkloristic element in steelband music, and we love playing calypso and soca. As a matter of fact, the best part of our repertoire is music from the Caribbean. But we also like to challenge ourselves and the instrument once in a while with other genres and now by blending it with other instruments"**.

The Big Band Pan Jazz Project premieres in early 2008 in Hillerød, Denmark.

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[www.sumi.dk](http://www.sumi.dk)

By Sune Borregaard.

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