



CATCHING MELODIES

Hidden away in the Arctic is an artist so unexpected, and enigmatic, that I had to seek him out for myself.

When a sound sculptor is compared to Brian Eno, the godfather of ambient music, it's time to sit up and take notice. But Odd Jensen would prefer that you do the opposite; "I wouldn't mind people falling asleep while listening to my music, that's kind of perfect," he says.

Meeting the man behind *Havdis*, Jensen's ambient alter ego, is an experience not to be forgotten. In order to find this elusive artist, you must travel to northern Norway and make your way offshore from Bodø, the capital of Nordland, to the small, windswept archipelago of Fleinvær. Perhaps Jensen might be found sitting on the rocky shore of Langholmen, his ancestral island, gazing out to sea, a roughly rolled cigarette in one hand and a black coffee in the other with a clichéd Arctic sunset as the backdrop; soothing, spectacular, breath-taking. Perhaps. Or perhaps he is out at work, on his 30-foot fishing boat, where he will be pulling in the days' catch, all the while composing his next piece, "I sometimes dreamed of having a machine that could record what's in my head," he says with a grin, "With ambient music, you have a lot of freedom. With ambient music you do not have any prescription as such."

It seems such a contrast. Jensen is a Norwegian coastal fisherman; tough, wiry and rugged and yet from his mind achingly beautiful ambient compositions are crafted.

If the combination of cod catching and composing seems, well, odd, Jensen explains, "It all starts with a



sound sketch, often a field recording taken from my boat while working, and then I just let it evolve." Such a simple description for music that has sent waves through the generally reclusive ambient music scene seems rather understated, and yet Jensen is just that. This is not a man who seeks praise and he is certainly no self-promoter; he made music before all the attention and he would go on making it if the attention vanished.

Jensen grew up loving music, "When I was young I was very interested in music in general; hard rock, punk, pop. Like all 15 year olds, I wanted to be a rock star." And although life carried on without rock'n'roll fame, Jensen composed at length in his head, a habit he wonderfully describes as a "sleeping pill, a kind of meditation". But he was unable to get the sounds out, "Back then, you needed synthesisers the size of a house", and living on a remote archipelago in the Arctic on a fisherman's wage made that difficult. The mental compositions racked up,

but the chance to record was wildly beyond his means. And then the late-80s came along and solved the need for vastly expensive equipment and studio time; Jensen bought a computer and suddenly new possibilities were before him. Over ten years, he had composed more than a thousand files; some of them in Fleinvær, others during the hectic skrei fishing season in Lofoten where Jensen is one of 2,000 fishermen still to make the annual journey.

Then, in 2010, he posted a track on Soundcloud; it was snapped up by Mark Harris in an instant and Jensen "was floating on a cloud for weeks." He just didn't believe that his music could make waves.

But it did, and within months Swedish indie record label *gterma* heard rumours of the sound sculptor hidden away in a remote archipelago in the Arctic, "We found Odd on Soundcloud and we realized we needed to contact him immediately to see if we could help to bring his music to another audience, one that routinely dismisses



digital material". Jensen admits he wouldn't "take it personally if people don't like it", but it seems he is unnecessarily cautious; his albums have sold well in this small industry and his fan base is spreading across Europe and to the US, emulating the success of other Scandinavian sound sculptors such as the 'father of Arctic Ambient' Geir Jenssen (Biosphere) and field recorder and artist Mathias Grassow.

So, why are there so many renowned Scandinavian ambient musicians?

"I have seen it written in the foreign press that Scandinavian ambient is said to be the best, because [we] are connected to the nature and the light and the long darkness," Jensen says. And his reviews would certainly suggest this is the case. "Nightbreeze (2012) exquisitely portrays all the natural summer magic of untamed Norwegian hinterlands...you will be carried away to discover all these jaw-dropping panoramas," writes ambient critic Richard Gürtler on RelaxedMachinery.com.

As for a new release, Jensen is elusive; but he will comment on his keen following, "I am very honoured by those reviews... I don't know how to put it, but it feels good." His quiet philosophy is reminiscent of a guru, "You do what you want, do what you feel. That's what I did with music. I did it for almost 10 years, without anyone to listen."

Well, *Havdis*, people are listening now. ■■

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For more info, see: databloem.com to purchase Nightbreeze (2012) and The Hidden Islands (2013). Clouds into the Sea (2011) remains free and can be downloaded from soundcloud.com.

