

De Splittergale ~ The Crazy Ones



Translated into English **splittergale** means (stark) raving (*el. stark staring*) mad. Shobi had the privilege of playing with them in Copenhagen. As explained below they are a group of psychiatric patients that meet to sing and to play and most of all to encourage each other towards healing. What a joy it was to be among them. Although some are talented musicians and singers, the only requirement seems to be to love and bring each other joy.

A clown and a musician started this group -the clown Johan Plesner and the musician Jacob Høgrebe. Johan is pictured above upside down in the upper right corner. Jacob is playing the accordion. Johan studied clowning and juggling in Denmark and France, and started a little circus together with some friends. He had the possibility of becoming a hospital clown The Skejby Hospital together with Birgit Bang, but refused the offer because he preferred to stay with "De Splittergale" He was the one who dressed them up as clowns and taught them some simple and funny tricks. Before he came into the picture ten years ago, the group was only normally dressed musicians. Now they are this riot of colors and sounds and movements. Both Johan and Jacob not only facilitate the group, but perform with them.

Facts: *De Splittergale* started in 1990 as a music class for psychiatric patients in Aarhus, Denmark. They soon started to tour the provinces in Europe with their crazy and very musical show. There are 12 – 15 people in the core of the group but beside that they have a lot of musical friends scattered all over Denmark who join the group when possible.

By Bent Eikard and Pernille Plaetner

[Bent is a retired Anesthesiologist (See page 12, Pernille is a Danish journalist. Both volunteer and play with the group]

Ladies and gentlemen!. Welcome to a show with De Splittergale (The Raving Mad Ones ~ the Crazy Ones). We are a group of people having a little psychiatric nervous breakdown, but that we'll sing and play away for the next 12 – 13 hours! Have a seat, lean back and enjoy the show ...

The show has started. On the stage a group of 12 – 15 people, all dressed up in the craziest costumes, begin to sing. The little harmonica player is running around the scene, falls down on his knees in front of one the singers, jumps up again - all the time playing like the devil himself. Others play coffee pots (with kazoos), the tub bass (baljebas) [a wash tube base], rummage stick (rumsterstang), and washboards.

De Splittergale is a group of mainly psychiatric patients, who got together in this music and clown group 12 years ago. Every week they meet each other for 3 hours to sing and play, and – even more important – to help and support themselves and each other. Some are suffering from depression; others have diagnoses like schizophrenia, autism and paranoia. And then they have a lot of fun and a strong self-ironic attitudes, which helps a lot to minimize all their heavy problems.

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If Jonna, for example, forgot the text in one of her songs, somebody will scream: “Karsten, you’re the autistic, what’s next?” And then Karsten, with a little, warm smile in his eyes, will put Jonna back on track, so the show can get on.

The shows are a very important part of *De Splittergale*’s business. The group performs all over Denmark; in prisons, in psychiatric hospitals, different kinds of institutions of higher education, in the streets, everywhere they can get a job – and at the same time get the opportunity to push away normal peoples prejudices about mental diseases.

By playing really “crazy,” by juggling with feelings, and taboos and by making people laugh *De Splittergale* creates an open space, where difficult things can be named – and talked about. Therefore a show is often followed by a question hour, where the audience can have a dialogue with the members of the group.

The different members in the group are at different levels of illness. Many of them will never get back to work and are therefore on a constant pension paid by the state. Others recover so much that they can start an education or a job. But even if they do so, they hold on to their engagement in *De Splittergale*.

“I have never before been member of a group where people are so warm and show so much solidarity to each other as here,” says Bente who still joins *De Splittergale* even though she has returned to a nearly normal social life and job situation after a long and severe period of depression some years ago. She is now what she calls “socially recovered” and she is not in doubt that an important reason for that is her involvement in *De Splittergale*.

“Openness is the only way to get better if you are psychic ill,” says Bente. “It is not possible to stop the illness by not speaking about it. I already understood that before I met *De Splittergale*, but the way they realize openness is quite unique. And that is damned good! A quite different and much more human way of togetherness than I have known before,” says Bente.

“I have been much more free and unrestrained in my work at a nursing home. I can suddenly start to sing for the old people or take a couple of dancing steps to amuse them. Things I never dared to do before. I have been more glad, but I have also learned to cry and show my feelings when I am sad,” Bente finished.



Karsten og Jonna er blevet forlovet.

[For Shobi, the picture above best describes the feelings she received from the group!]



De Splittergale works with the Gallo Aktivitelterne, De Splittergale, Blåmunkevej 6, 8240 Risskov, Denmark