

## The Shetland Folk Music Festival

Sometimes folk music is understood simply as the music of one's own place. In Scottish folk music I hear the landscapes of the land that spewed me forth, Scotland. It is (to me) beautiful, wild and ancient. It also reflects a culture that is at times political, at times melancholic. This was what I thought of as folk music.

The folk festival challenges the idea that folk is that which is familiar by bringing music from other countries to Shetland. Next on the bill at Whiteness and Weisdale were Ahimsa, a four-piece ensemble based in India and Germany who play a blend of Indian classical music and jazz.

Ahimsa were introduced to the audience as "world music". It is a rather strange term sometimes used to describe music that is just from somewhere else, usually far away. But it also has a sense of meaning music that is indigenous and traditional, folk music. Ahimsa play the traditional music of India, in this case in The Carnatic tradition. This is music from Southern India that is based on a range of specific melodies and rhythms but also on improvisation.

Neyveli S Radhakrishna played a ten-string double neck violin, an extraordinary beautiful instrument and captivating to watch. Add to this the mrudangam (an Indian drum) and ganjira (a percussive instrument that is part of the tambourine family), played by R Yogaraja and tabla, played by Udai Mazumdar, and Ahimsa create dreamlike sounds that connect to the landscape and culture of India. Unsurprisingly, it is very different from Shetland or Scotland's folk music. However, a sense of playfulness was somehow the same.

In the midst of what sounded so classically Indian was the influence of western jazz traditions courtesy of German guitarist Matthias Muller, the resulting sounds and improvisations were refined and delicate. Ahimsa took great pleasure in building up the intensity and speed of their music towards feverish crescendos. Then there were mischief stops and false endings. It seemed that the music laughed, the group laughed and the audience laughed, particularly when the improvisation momentarily strayed into the Pink Panther theme.



Udai Mazumdar, Ahimsa



Neyveli S. Radhakrishna, Ahimsa