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A Life Outside the System: How Handpan Music Changed Kone Moerman's Life

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From a childhood spent alone in forests, meditating and experimenting with percussion, to street performances in Copenhagen, and now traveling the world with his handpan, Kone Moerman has built a life outside the conventional path. "I ask myself what my biggest fear is? Doing what everybody does, high school, university, a stable job, 50 years at the same company, retiring, and dying. That's my biggest fear, not really doing what I'm here for," he says.

Origins: The “Weird Kid” Who Loved Sound

From a young age, Kone Moerman questioned the life path expected of him. His greatest fear, he says, was not failure, but conformity, without ever discovering what he was truly meant to do.

That feeling began in high school, where he struggled to feel connected to those around him. “I didn’t feel like I belonged there at all,” he says. While others socialized, Moerman often spent time alone in the forest, meditating, listening to music, or playing instruments. “I was the weird kid”.

He first picked up an instrument at the age of six, when his parents returned from a trip to North and Middle Africa with a Darbuka drum. He played it every day. A family friend, Johan, a professional percussionist, noticed his sense of rhythm and began giving him weekly lessons. Over time, Moerman added more instruments, gradually developing into a multi-instrumentalist.

“I never heard it in person. I didn't see it. I didn't hear it in person. It was just like a YouTube video. And then it was like love at first sight..”



Handpan

Two years ago, Moerman decided to focus on the handpan professionally. He first encountered the instrument through a YouTube video around 2014 or 2015. “It looked like a metal turtle,” he says. “I thought, this is the coolest thing ever.” He even pretended to play it on tables, and the impression stayed with him for years before he finally got his first handpan.

The instrument itself is still relatively new, made from two metal shells shaped and tuned by hand. Made from two metal shells shaped and tuned by hand, it has existed for only about 20 years, and only recently begun to gain wider recognition. “It’s a really weird, undiscovered instrument,” Moerman says. Its unique design and sound immediately appealed to him, who was already drawn to paths outside the mainstream.

International setting

“I found the feeling of home in other places. I’m more like a resident of the world. That’s kind of my identity now with travelling a lot and not being here in the country.”

Over the years, his sense of home shifted. Rather than feeling tied to one place, he began to see himself as someone shaped by movement and travel. That perspective deepened during a university exchange in Copenhagen, where he was studying Law and Economics. “I found it interesting,” he says, “but I didn’t see myself doing that. Music is my thing.” He explained that this realization led him to perform street concerts in Copenhagen even while completing his studies.

It was during this period that he co-founded the duo Tribal Twins, and the pair began performing street concerts across Copenhagen. What started as spontaneous performances soon expanded beyond the city, eventually leading them to give concerts in other European cities while he continued his academic studies.

His family, he says, is only beginning to accept that it is possible to earn a living from music. “They have more of an employee mindset,” he explains. Coming from a background that values stability and fixed income, they struggled to understand his lifestyle. Even now, he says, his grandparents sometimes ask, “When are you actually going to work? You’ve been on holiday all the time.”

During his master's exchange, Moerman began questioning what he would do after finishing his studies. "For me, life is a game," he says. "I didn't want to do something I didn't love." While scrolling through social media, he came across images of vans converted into living and creative spaces. The idea stayed with him. "I thought, is that possible? I could build a studio there." Eventually, he bought a van and rebuilt it to include a small music studio.

Since then, he has been traveling and producing music on the road. "When I live through new things, the emotions, the struggles, that's what inspires me to write new music," he says.



A turning point came in Portugal, where he met the handpan player Cabecao. “He told me, ‘You’re a great player, but you’re not saying anything,’” Moerman recalls.

The comment pushed him to rethink his approach. “I’d never really thought about expressing something meaningful through my music.” The shift led to a deeper emotional connection, one he says can be overwhelming at times. “Sometimes I even cry while playing.” Moerman began focusing less on technique and more on emotional expression, allowing his experiences to shape his music.

Cabecao became an important mentor, shaping both his technique and artistic direction. Moerman is now finishing his first album, with several tracks ready for release.

“The biggest tip I can give is just take the leap and do it now. Even if you’re far in, because there’s no other time than now. There’s only now because in the future you’re also in the now. For me life is so precious and you don’t even know if there’s tomorrow.”

First handpan academy in Copenhagen

Kone Moerman is opening what will be the first handpan school and store in Scandinavia, filling a gap in a region where dedicated spaces for the instrument are still virtually nonexistent. Located in Copenhagen, a city he calls his favorite in the world, the academy will bring together a team of teachers and offer weekly jams, concerts, and monthly workshops. “It’s going to be a school, a store, and a celebration of the handpan community,” Moerman says.

Moerman will act as the academy’s manager, while a business partner runs the day-to-day operations, allowing him to continue traveling. “I can do all the practical stuff in Copenhagen and still be wherever I want,” he adds. The launch will also feature an ambitious attempt to break the world record for the most handpan players performing a song together, with 70 to 100 instruments on site and hundreds more joining online.

Lessons from the Road and the Handpan

For Kone Moerman, music has been transformative. “I think music saved me and changed my life in such a profound way that I really became happy. It was my way to personal growth as well as to happiness,” he says. Music, he explains, brings him joy and allows him to share it with others.

Moerman is critical of the conventional life path that many people feel trapped by. “Many people feel stuck in the system because of a house, a family, or money,” he says. His advice is simple: pursue what brings you joy, but take it one step at a time. “Just take steps, and don’t expect to do it from today to tomorrow. Small steps working towards it mean you don’t have to quit your job tomorrow. Think about what really brings you the most joy, start working on that, and improve little by little. After a few years, you’ll be able to quit your job and fully pursue it. And that’s what I think everybody should do.”

This approach has shaped both his music and his life, allowing him to build a path guided by personal fulfillment rather than convention.

