

Mirka Mora was a prominent French-born Australian artist who owned the Mirka cafe, which was between Bourke St and Little Bourke St on Her Majesty's Theatre side. Bims and Vagn Gunness bought it in the mid 1950s, and renamed it the Danish Delight.

Bims and Vagn were from Denmark. Vagn, who had been a pastry chef, was in the Resistance during World War Two. Bims told me hair-raising tales of Vagn, badly injured, being stretchered out the back door of the hospital as the German soldiers came in the front, and Bims herself smuggling guns on her bicycle and talking her way past German guards.

They originally lived over the restaurant, but after they bought their home in Kew they turned the upstairs front room at the small cafe into a meeting place for the actors and dancers who worked in the nearby theatres. They could occupy all the tables in the small cafe and make a single cup of coffee last all day, so upstairs became the place where they drank coffee, watched TV, slept, wrote letters and sewed ballet shoes. I practically lived at the cafe both when I was at university and afterwards. If my mother didn't know where I was she phoned Bims.

In 1964 they opened Bims, an up-market restaurant in East Melbourne with a view across the road to the Fitzroy gardens. From the East Melbourne Historical Society:

*The new tenant of 366 Albert Street was Vagn Ove Gunness. Gunness was born in Odense, Denmark, in 1918. He served with the Danish resistance during the war and emigrated to Melbourne in 1948. He opened Bim's Restaurant which served Danish food and was one of the pioneering restaurants introducing Melburnians to 'foreign' food and paving the way to Melbourne's multicultural restaurant scene.*

When they opened the restaurant they left behind almost all the theatricals, because of both distance and price. However I regularly went there, sometimes simply to say hullo and have a coffee, sometimes to eat, and I always sat at the 'family' table. On occasions they would offer me a meal, and after a while I suggested that if I requested anything I paid, but if they offered I didn't. The arrangement suited us all.

Bims was an extremely elegant restaurant with beautiful antique tables and chairs, and a grand piano with a resident pianist. The waiters were of the old school, and if I ordered a whole fish they would bone it out for me. They would then take a detour as I could (accidentally) hit a waiter at 20 paces when I squeezed the lemon. And when cheese was requested the waiter would wheel up a huge trolley with a vast array of wonderful cheeses.

I was in the Eye and Ear Hospital and someone brought me an avocado. I asked the staff if they had French dressing (silly question). So I rang Vagn (close by) and said I couldn't eat an avocado without some dressing, so could he bring some any time he was passing by. About 15 minutes later Vagn's head waiter Derek appeared, in black suit and bow tie, with a white napkin over his arm, and a silver tray on which was a silver jug of dressing (this was the 1970s). He enquired from the startled hospital staff the way to my room and said, "Can't stay, Wendy, have to dash back. We're in the middle of lunch service."

Before Christmas one year Bims and Vagn asked if I'd mind running the restaurant for a few weeks as they wanted to go back to Denmark for a visit. I was a professional concert pianist. I'd never worked in a restaurant, let alone run one, and they wanted me to do this during the mad rush leading up to Christmas. Needless to say I was appalled at the prospect. They said: The chef's terrific and the waiters know their jobs. Of course if there are two sittings booked in you might have to dash

out to Kew to get some extra chairs! I asked weakly, Why me? and they said, You're the only person we trust.

I was hugely relieved when in the end they didn't go to Denmark.

Bims died of a heart attack in the mid 70s and Vagn eventually sold the restaurant and moved on.