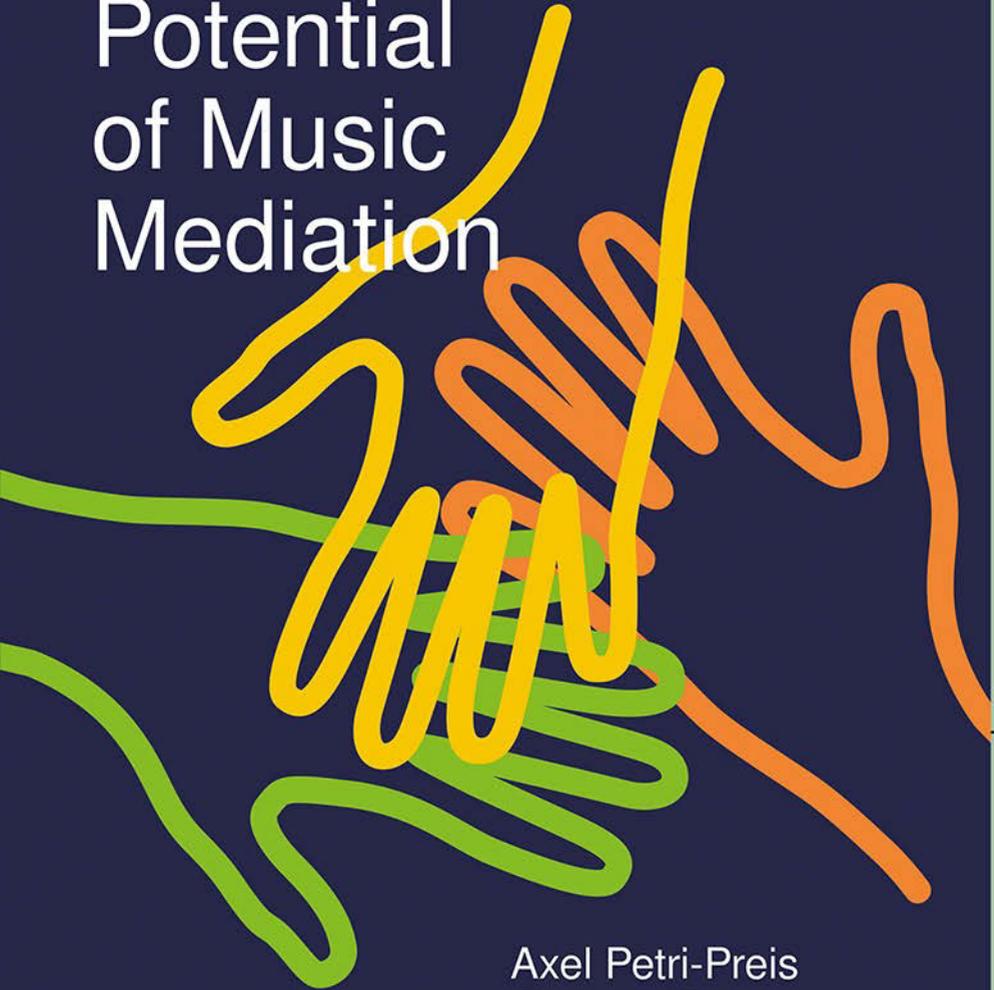


# TURNING SOCIAL

## The Social- Transformative Potential of Music Mediation



m<sub>d</sub>wPress

Axel Petri-Preis  
Annette Ziegenmeyer  
eds.

Axel Petri-Preis, Annette Ziegenmeyer (eds.)  
Turning Social

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Axel Petri-Preis, Annette Ziegenmeyer (eds.)

# Turning Social

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[transcript]

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## Foreword

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The question of participation in the cultural life of our city is, for me, one of the central challenges of Vienna's cultural policy, for which I have been responsible since 2018. With the slogan "Culture for All", a vision has been formulated that provides us with orientation both now and in the future, and further determines our cultural policy decisions. All institutions, organisations, associations and initiatives face the task of communicating what they have to offer, in order to build bridges to both known and yet unknown audiences. Once considered more of an accessory, mediation formats today belong to the programme of every institution. The impact of this is strikingly visible in the field of music, where hardly any concert event or music festival can do without professional music mediation. In this way, new professional fields have become indispensable in the cultural landscape. It is essential to focus on, develop and research this still young professional sector, because we are only at the start of recognising the possibilities and opportunities of this cultural work.

I am pleased that, with the conference *Turning Social. On the Social-Transformative Potential of Music Mediation*, Vienna is taking on a pioneering role in this research field. It is interesting to observe how thinking has progressed from classical audience development and is now reaching new audience groups. The future of music mediation, according to the research approach, lies in the motif of mediation-between-people, and ideally is to be regarded as a socio-transformative project. The special aesthetic experience, participation in the cultural heritage, can be intensified in new formats, and music can utilise its cohesive effect to unite and strengthen society. The work of future music mediators may lead to very independent formats that redefine the experience of music. Research in this field sets itself the ambitious goal of achieving a social turn, thereby creating new methodologies in music mediation and a deeper understanding of a new professional field.

In our day and age, when democracies are increasingly exposed to erosion, and populist, nationalist currents are undermining the cohesion of societies, it is of great importance and value for us to explore the profound questions inherent in social-transformative music mediation and to use the power of music as something for everyone.

Sincerely,



*Mag.a Veronica Kaup-Hasler*  
Executive City Councillor for Cultural Affairs  
and Science in Vienna

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A big thank you also goes to the City of Vienna, especially to the Executive City Councillor for Cultural Affairs and Science, Veronika Kaup-Hasler, who financially supported our conference and also wrote a foreword to this volume.

Special thanks, of course, go to all the authors of this book for their willingness to contribute and to endure the extensive publication process, including the double-blind peer review. In this context, we would also like to warmly thank all the reviewers, whose expertise significantly contributed to the quality of this book. We would also like to thank Viktória Várkonyi, who, as associate editor, provided invaluable support with her comments and substantive remarks throughout the editing process. Thanks are due to Peter Waugh for his meticulous copy-editing and Karoline Spöring for her support in proofreading the manuscript. Last but not least, thanks go to Lisa Hacek, who provided enormous organisational support both during the conference and in the publication process, and was particularly supportive during the formal revision of the contributions and the creation of the manuscript.



# Doing Music = Doing Society

## The Social-Transformative Potential of Music Mediation

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Axel Petri-Preis, Sarah Chaker, and Annette Ziegenmeyer

How can diverse musical interactions be productively used to promote inter- and transcultural communication, support human thriving and flourishing, empower marginalised social groups, or make society as a whole more sustainable, just and inclusive? This question has gained significant relevance in recent years (Baker 2024b; Hesser and Bartleet 2021; Westvall and Akuno 2024). François Matarasso even speaks of a “normalisation of participatory art” (Matarasso 2019, 25) and emphasises that it “has spread from the marginal urban and rural spaces it occupied in the 1970s to the centres of cultural power. It can be found in arts and cultural institutions; social, urban and economic policy; health and education services; criminal justice; housing; the voluntary sector; the media; across the Internet, and in communities everywhere” (ibid., 21). Some background to this development might be provided by the finding that humanity is currently in a “multi-crisis”, as the philosopher Byung-Chul Han calls it in his latest book *The Spirit of Hope* (Han 2024). We are faced with global challenges of a magnitude that has led the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* to set their Doomsday Clock<sup>1</sup> to just 90 seconds to midnight, warning of an impending global catastrophe. The arms race of the major military powers has reached a new peak in light of new geopolitical instabilities, man-made climate change and the exploitation of nature are progressing inexorably despite better knowledge, the rise of right-wing, nationalist and anti-democratic movements is eroding democracies, societies are becoming increasingly polarised, and social inequality is higher worldwide than ever before.

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1 The Doomsday Clock, created in 1947, is a symbolic representation designed to warn society about the imminent threats posed by human-made technologies that could potentially destroy the earth. For more information see <https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

“Music-makers” – by this we mean, in the sense of Christopher Small (1998), all people who are involved in musical interactions in any way, thereby questioning and overcoming the established binary division into professional and non-professional musicians (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016; Matarasso 2019) – employ the cohesive power and the great importance that music has for most people (DeNora 2000; Rüdiger 2023) “as a catalyst for positive social change” (Hesser and Bartleet 2021, 8). In other words, the social-transformative potential of music is deliberately explored to constructively shape democratic society collectively and to enable as many people as possible to participate in and contribute to it through artistic-educational practices. Music and music mediation practices will not be able to solve global crises and problems (see also Lapidaki 2020, 270), despite what affirmative slogans such as “solutions for cultural, social, health, educational, environmental, and economic Issues” (Hesser and Bartleet 2021) might suggest. We do believe, however, that music-makers can trigger positive changes in their immediate environment, in the “world within [their] reach” (Erelli in Camlin 2023, 14), by deliberately initiating communal encounters and interactions in social spaces through music. “Democracy must be renewed every day”, was written last year on the construction site covering designed by David Leitner during the renovation of the Presidential Office at the request of the Austrian Federal President Alexander van der Bellen.<sup>2</sup> In the daily struggle for respectful, solidarity-based coexistence in times of multiple crises, we see music mediation as an effective means of initiating negotiation processes and developing patience and routine in this regard, to accept and share the knowledge of others, to get to know the biographies, experiences and perspectives of fellow human beings, to discuss values, to experience solidarity and develop joint actions, to access one’s own creative potential, to develop creative power in a team and to transfer it to other contexts – all these are exercises that we consider helpful, if not indispensable, for living together in democratic societies.

## Music as Social Practice

When this book refers to “music”, it does not denote a thing or artefact that exerts a particular societal effect (although music can certainly be objectified). Instead, music is conceived as a human activity, inherently social and signifying practice – something that people do, develop and practise together (Blaukopf

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2 See <https://www.bundespraesident.at/aktuelles/detail/baustelle-mit-botschaft> (accessed April 14, 2025).

1982; Elliott and Silverman 2015; Shepherd 1992; Small 1998). The purposes of music can range “from emotional expression or enjoyment, to communication or representation, to the reinforcing and transmission of social norms and/or rituals” (Westvall and Akuno 2024, 16). People actively incorporate music into their daily lives for various functions and purposes, such as entertainment, mourning, prayer, healing, or relaxation, to name but a few (Schramm and Kopiez 2008, 253–263) – all activities that exceed the purely aesthetic quality or autonomous value of music. Tia DeNora and Gary Ansdell also emphasise that what matters is “what is done with, done to, and done alongside musical engagement” (2014, 9). Thus, it is always practitioners embedded in practices, with their respective resources, who can achieve a specific – within the context of this volume, socially transformative – effect through and with music. It is also important to consider that music, as a Janus-faced phenomenon, can be used not only for positive, inclusive purposes but also for social distinction (Bourdieu 1987), manipulation (Brown and Volgsten 2005), or even as a tool of torture (Cuzick 2016). How an individual or group experiences and interprets a particular music is subject to individual differences and depends on their life experiences, as well as the specific context in which the music occurs. Music is far from being a universally understandable “world language” (Kopiez 2004), as numerous ethnomusicological studies and research into sub- and pop-cultural music practices repeatedly demonstrate. For musicians and music mediators, especially those socialised in classical music, who plan, initiate and conduct socially oriented musical interactions and mediation offers, it is of great importance to develop a critically reflective attitude towards their own social background and the privileges that may be associated with it, towards their own artistic practice and the often associated implications and traditional assumptions.

## Music Mediation as a Distinct Cultural Practice

In this volume, we focus on a distinct artistic-educational practice and approach to music: music mediation. Since understanding what this entails can be challenging, especially on an international level, we aim to clarify this concept here. By “mediation”, we do not refer to a one-way transfer of knowledge or skills in the sense of direct impartation or transmission, nor to the resolution of disputes between two or more parties. Rather, our understanding of music mediation is a broad artistic-educational practice implemented by individuals with diverse biographical, educational and professional backgrounds. It deliberately seeks to establish various relationships between people and musics

(Duchesneau and Kirchberg 2020; Petri-Preis, Kirchberg and Müller-Brozović 2025; Müller-Brozović 2017; Petri-Preis and Voit 2025).

From a structural point of view, music mediation is embedded in a network of guidelines and demands relating to cultural institutions, as well as to cultural policy and socio-political considerations, whereby – depending on the perspective – different innovative potentials are attributed to it. According to the logic of cultural institutions, it is associated with audience development, the hope of acquiring new audiences. From the perspective of cultural education, music mediation is capable of enabling intensive aesthetic experiences that stimulate musical learning processes. In terms of cultural policy, it is believed to enable access to the cultural heritage. Finally, from a socio-political perspective, music mediation is seen as having the potential to exert a socially transformative effect on concert life, (higher) music education and society as a whole.

This is realised through a wide range of presentational and participatory formats that can be considered characteristic of music mediation: concert formats for and with various dialogue groups<sup>3</sup> (which may be moderated, staged, or immersive), participatory workshops and long-term project collaborations (for example, between cultural institutions and educational or social institutions), community projects (often conducted with marginalised social groups) and media-based mediation forms (e.g. programme booklets, radio features, apps). Music mediation formats currently take place in classical concert halls as well as alternative venues (e.g. socio-cultural centres or clubs), public institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals, or prisons), public spaces and virtual spaces.

In different national contexts across Europe and North America, this practice is referred to as “*médiation de la musique*” / “*médiation musicale*” (France, Québec/Canada), “*musikformidling*” (Denmark), “*divulgazione musicale*” / “*comunicazione musicale*” (Italy) and “*mediación musical*” (Spain), to name just a few. Since the discourse on music mediation has so far been conducted largely within national contexts and the boundaries of language groups, this volume sets the ambitious goal of elevating it to an international level. To this end, the literal English translation ‘music mediation’ is used. The aim, however, is not to rename existing practices, all of which have their own lines of development and histories, or to establish music mediation as a kind of umbrella term. The decision to introduce music mediation as a new term on a global level is based on our conviction that it is a distinct, comparatively new professional artistic-educational practice, albeit one that overlaps with related fields of practice.

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3 We prefer the term “dialogue group” over “target group” as it denotes a reciprocal rather than a monodirectional relationship. See also Petri-Preis and Voit (2023).

## Overlaps with Related Fields

In the English-speaking world, community music, in particular, exhibits significant overlap with music mediation. Originating as part of the British community arts movement of the 1960s and 1970s, community music draws on a rich history of socially engaged music practice. In its narrower sense, it is an “interventionist practice” (Higgins 2012) pursuing activist goals, “challenging repressive and hierarchical social norms, and [committing] to personal growth and empowerment” (Bartleet and Higgins 2018, 3). As a counter-cultural phenomenon, it long defined itself through its explicit distancing from established cultural institutions and a “high-brow” culture perceived as elitist and exclusionary (Bartleet and Higgins 2018). Historically, community music and music mediation emerged from different contexts and directions (Hill 2020). Their development is strongly influenced by the specific cultural policy agendas and funding structures in the respective countries. Thus, civil society activities tend to be enabled within the liberal state model in Anglo-Saxon countries rather than within the welfare state orientation typical of continental Europe. This might explain why Community Music projects developed much later in Germany than in the UK, as they are at odds with the welfare state principle of provision (Hill 2020, 48). While community music functioned as a grassroots movement working from the bottom up, the first initiatives in music mediation arose in bourgeois centres of cultural production such as concert halls and orchestras, and thus in powerful and hegemonic spaces. Over time, however, the boundaries between these two fields of practice have become increasingly blurred. From the 1990s onward, community music began to connect with cultural institutions. In the field of music mediation, community-oriented projects with explicitly sociopolitical goals have been developed, particularly in light of global crises in the early 2000s, an increasingly diverse population, and a growing awareness of the social responsibility of artists and cultural institutions. Consequently, the clear attribution of the idea of *cultural democratisation* to music mediation and *cultural democracy* to community music, as described by Constanze Wimmer and Alicia de Bánffy-Hall at the conference *Rethinking Classical Music Practice: Audience and Community Engagement in Classical Concert Life*, must be regarded as overly simplistic, since reality is far more complex. Regarding their formats, however, a distinction between the two fields of practice can, drawing on Thomas Turino (2016), most readily be described as follows: community music tends towards participatory performances, while music mediation focuses on presentational performances. Yet even here, the boundaries are increasingly dissolving. For example, the community projects of the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg or the

Traction project (see François Matarasso's contribution in this volume) address both the processual dimension and the product in the form of a presentation. Not least in light of shared core values such as inclusion and participation, Axel Petri-Preis (2022a) advocates increased collaboration between actors in the two fields. In the *Handbuch Musikvermittlung* [Handbook of Music Mediation] (Petri-Preis and Voit 2023), he argues that music mediation and related fields such as community music share a family resemblance in the sense of Ludwig Wittgenstein (Petri-Preis 2023). According to Wittgenstein, such a family resemblance exists when there is not merely one essential common characteristic among two or more entities, but rather a series of overlapping similarities (Weiberg 2022, 235–242). Therefore, music mediation and community music might best be described as siblings. As such, they pursue very similar goals from different points within the social sphere.

Two additional fields of practice should also be mentioned here, as they exhibit overlaps with music mediation in an international context. *Social Action Through Music* (SATM) describes projects in Latin America initiated since the founding of *El Sistema* in Venezuela, aimed at achieving social change through playing in an orchestra, which is often idealistically referred to as a “model for an ideal global society” (Gustavo Dudamel as cited in Lee 2012). The Venezuelan model, founded in 1979 by José Antonio Abreu (Baker 2016), quickly gained international attention, which led to the creation of worldwide affiliates and programmes inspired by *El Sistema*: the *Sistema Global* website lists, for instance, 257 affiliated programmes<sup>4</sup>. Under the *International Society for Music Education* (ISME), an *El Sistema Special Interest Group* was established in 2012, although it was renamed *Critical Debates on Music Education and Social Change*<sup>5</sup> in 2019 following critical research by Geoffrey Baker (2014). *Socially Impactful Music-Making* (SIMM)<sup>6</sup> refers to musical activities that have intrinsic musical value while also aiming to effect social change on individuals and groups (Sloboda et al. 2020). According to the authors, who also founded the SIMM research platform, SIMM as a field of practice has no “rigidly-defined boundaries” and “its manifestations in different parts of the world are tempered by local conditions” (ibid., 116). This practice includes a wide range of activities,

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4 See <https://sistemaglobal.org/programme-directory/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

5 See <https://www.isme.org/our-work/special-interest-groups-and-forum/critical-debates-music-education-social-change> (accessed April 14, 2025).

6 This is the full name that is used in Sloboda et al. (2020). On their website the network uses “Social Impact of Making Music”; see <https://www.simm-platfor m.eu/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

from local grassroots initiatives to publicly funded classical cultural institutions such as orchestras or concert halls.

## Social Transformation through Music Mediation

Music mediation has its origins in so-called classical music and classical concerts, and it is still strongly rooted in this field. At first glance, it may seem paradoxical then to dedicate this volume to the social-transformative potential of music mediation. For it is precisely the practice of classical music that was and is closely linked symbolically to the white bourgeoisie's claims to power and domination. As Kristina Kolbe states: "Not only has the institutionalization of classical music been characterized by discourses of European elitism, institutional whiteness and imperialist expansion, but its aesthetic history has equally been shaped by a profoundly troubled relationship with non-eurological<sup>7</sup> music." (Kolbe 2023) The exclusive nature of classical art music, which historically excluded and demarcated socially 'downward' – benefiting a small social stratum and ruling class – now faces disadvantages under rapidly changing social conditions. With concert halls increasingly empty, its proponents are under growing pressure to justify their cultural politics.

However, music mediation has significantly disrupted the so-called classical bourgeois concert system since its emergence a few decades ago (Petri-Preis 2022b) and continues to transform it sustainably. Initially, this was under the guise of cultural democratisation, concerned with how to give the general population access to classical music – essentially, the dominant social group was prepared to allow broader sections of society to partake in 'their' culture, known as 'high culture'. Remnants of this notion persist in the cultural policy strategy of audience development. Having moved beyond its initial phase, music mediation is now following a different path, influenced by decolonial (Gaupp 2023), power-critical (Chaker 2023; Stoffers 2023) and discrimination-critical perspectives (Mecheril 2023), within the broader context of a social turn in the arts (Bishop 2006). Instead of merely aiming for cultural democratisation, music mediation now acknowledges the fundamental plurality of culture in the sense of cultural democracy. It is increasingly distancing itself from the

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7 George Lewis introduces the terms "afrological" and "eurological" in his essay *Improvised Music After 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives* (1996) in order to describe distinct but overlapping approaches to music-making and improvisation. These terms do not denote biological or geographical determinism, but rather represent cultural and aesthetic orientations rooted in different historical, social, and ideological contexts.

normative specifications and concepts of its bourgeois origins. Consequently, music mediation today focuses on using music and specific music formats to foster encounters between people from different biographical, social and cultural backgrounds who might otherwise not meet, thereby enabling cultural participation and exchange, and contributing to human flourishing. This, we believe, is where the social-transformative potential of music mediation, which we address in this volume, lies.

We recognise that aiming for social transformation through music may be justifiably criticised (see e.g. Kertz-Welzel 2025) if not pursued in a mutually respectful, thoughtful and sustainable manner. Geoffrey Baker, for example, argues in his text *Is it time to stop talking about music and social transformation?* that many socially-oriented music projects focus on changing individuals rather than structures and employ deficit-oriented attributions (Baker 2024a, 9; see also Wimmer 2012). He shows that this approach reveals colonial and paternalistic logics, making it ethically questionable and problematic. Mina Young further argues that socially oriented music projects in the US often employ a “white savior” discourse, thereby “perpetuating the status quo power structure rather than changing a meaningful number of lives for the better” (Yang 2023, 89). Echoing this sentiment, Baker polemically states: “‘Music for social control’ would often be more appropriate. Or ‘music for social reproduction’, because in many cases the underlying ideology seems to be normalisation” (Baker 2024a, 5).

Such criticism is valid and should be taken seriously, although it does not necessarily apply to all music mediation or community-oriented projects. Nevertheless, we are aware that within the field of music mediation, some projects may still adhere to paternalistic and sometimes even culturally imperialistic or neo-colonial logics, thereby contributing to the perpetuation of social inequality rather than challenging it.<sup>8</sup> With this volume, we have deliberately set out to conceptualise music mediation as a hegemony-critical practice. Identifying and clearly naming existing privileges and hierarchies, power relations, perceived interpretative authorities, and internalised mechanisms of exclusion is an essential prerequisite for establishing relationships between people and musics and co-creative work on an equal footing. This is crucial for developing the socially transformative potential that includes all participants and recognises and critically addresses existing structures of inequality and disadvantage.

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8 This is often related to neoliberal funding logics and the structural conditions at large cultural institutions; see, for example, the contributions by Matarasso and Winkel in this volume.

## Research on Socially Transformative Music Activities

The increasing number of musical projects with socially transformative aims and socio-political goals over recent decades has made a notable impact and contributed to a gradual change in concert and music life (e.g. improved accessibility, visibility, diversification of programmes, and shifts in power structures within institutions). Correspondingly, there has been a growing interest in research: networks and platforms such as *Étude Partenariale sur la Médiation de la Musique* [Music Mediation Partnership Study] (EPMM, 2014)<sup>9</sup>, *Social Impact of Making Music* (SIMM, 2017)<sup>10</sup>, *Forum Musikvermittlung an Hochschulen und Universitäten* [Forum Music Mediation in Higher Music Education] (2017) and the ISME *Special Interest Group Critical Debates in Music Education for Social Change* (2019)<sup>11</sup> have emerged. Special journal issues (e.g. Bartleet and Paireon 2021) have focused on the topic, handbooks on social justice in music education (Benedict et al. 2015), community music (Bartleet and Higgins 2018) and music mediation (Petri-Preis and Voit 2023) have been published, and relevant international journals have been established (*IJCM* 2008<sup>12</sup>, *IJMM* 2024<sup>13</sup>). Furthermore, publications addressing specific aspects such as artistic citizenship (Schmidt Campbell and Martin 2006; Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016; Westvall and Akuno 2024), music in prisons (e.g. Bánffy-Hall, Eberhard, and Ziegenmeyer 2021; Cohen and Henley 2018; Doxat-Pratt 2021; Kallio and Gorton 2022), community opera (e.g. Fabris and Cauzillo 2024; Matarasso et al. 2023), music and climate (e.g. König 2024; Eusterbrock 2022; Dixon et al. 2024), social action through music programmes in South America (Baker 2014, 2021; Rodríguez-Sánchez 2013; Rincón Prat 2015; Puche Perneth 2023; see also Baker 2024a), and the attitudes and working conditions of music mediators and socially engaged musicians (Bisschop and Van Zijl 2023; Chaker 2025; Sloboda et al. 2020; Petri-Preis 2025 forthcoming; Westerlund and Karttunen 2024) have appeared.

This volume thus joins a growing body of research and publications on socially-oriented musical practices. What sets it apart is its specific focus on relating the concept of socially transformative potential to the practice of music

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9 See <https://epmm.p2m.oicrm.org/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

10 See <http://www.simm-platform.eu/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

11 See <http://www.isme.org/our-work/special-interest-groups-and-forum/critical-debates-music-education-social-change> (accessed April 14, 2025).

12 See <https://intellectdiscover.com/content/journals/ijcm> (accessed April 14, 2025).

13 See <https://ijmm.world/ijmm> (accessed April 14, 2025).

mediation for the first time, addressing it on an international level, and integrating diverse perspectives from both research and practice.

## Structure and Contents of the Book

This edited volume is based on an international conference organised by Sarah Chaker and Axel Petri-Preis, titled *Turning Social: On the Social-Transformative Potential of Music Mediation*, which took place on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> June 2023 in the Joseph Haydn Hall at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. It represents, in many ways, a continuation and deepening of a series of events held by the two organisers during the winter semester of 2019/20 – just before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic – which explored the innovative potential of music mediation with respect to classical concert life, higher music education, and society as a whole. The contributors to the lecture series focused on practices, concepts and formats which have been attributed with transformative power regarding how music is produced, performed, and received. This lecture series led to the publication *Tuning up! The Innovative Potential of Music Mediation*, the first peer-reviewed English-language publication on music mediation (Chaker and Petri-Preis 2022).

The University of Music and Performing Arts, where Sarah Chaker works as a music sociologist and Axel Petri-Preis as a music mediator, provided a particularly interesting context for an international conference specifically on the social-transformative potential of music mediation. Established in 1817, it is one of the oldest and most prestigious higher music education institutions (HMEIs) worldwide, with a central focus on achieving the highest artistic excellence and expertise in classical music (education). At the same time, the current administration emphasises the social and societal responsibilities of the university and is committed to active socio-political engagement, which is reflected in various ways. For instance, the university hosted the international conference *Rethinking Classical Music Practice: Audience and Community Engagement in Classical Concert Life* in 2021 – still affected by the COVID-19 pandemic – organised by Axel Petri-Preis and Constanze Wimmer. The university also offers Master's programmes in *Contemporary Arts Practice* and *Music in Society*, which critically examine the relationship between music and society on both artistic and academic levels. The university's own press, mdwpress, publishes the *International Journal of Music Mediation (IJMM)*, the first scholarly journal on music mediation, edited by Axel Petri-Preis together with Irina Kirchberg (Université de Montréal) and Irena Müller-Brozović (Anton Bruckner Private University). There are also close collaborations with *Music is a Great Investment (MIAGI)*

and *Musethika*, and in 2024, the festival *KlangBildKlang* took place, focusing specifically on community-oriented musical activities. Although the ideas of “international top-level” excellence through supreme artistic mastery, on the one hand, and “culture with a stance” that advocates diversity, equality, and democratic values, on the other, often seem like separate worlds with little apparent connection, there is a fundamental tendency to understand social engagement and musical virtuosity (MacDonald and Saarikallio 2024) not as “competing concepts” (Gaunt et al. 2021, 4), but rather as “partnering values” (*ibid.*) that can, ideally, enrich and enhance each other.

The conference was held in a hybrid format, allowing participation both physically and digitally. Keynotes, lectures, practice reflections, discussions, and artistic contributions approached the topic from diverse perspectives and were provided by renowned researchers, practitioners, musicians, and university leaders, initiating lively and stimulating discussions among the participants. This variety of formats is reflected in the volume, which includes not only scholarly articles, but also transcriptions of discussions and practice reflections. For the latter, we as editors emphasised that these should not be polished best-practice examples, of which there are already more than enough. Instead of promoting their projects, we asked contributors, in accordance with the ideas of Donald Schön (1987), to engage as reflective practitioners in reflection-on-action – that is, in critical reflection on their own practice from a temporal distance. We believe that, in the spirit of a positive failure culture, valuable insights for future work can be gained from mishaps and problems. As Bernhard König, music mediator and advocate for a resonance-aesthetic in community-oriented projects states: “Where everything always succeeds, transformative effects seldom occur.” (König 2024) In addition to the conference speakers, we invited other esteemed authors to contribute to this volume, aiming to expand and deepen the initiated discourse.

Our book is divided into five major thematic sections that address essential aspects of the topic. These include the concept of “cultural democracy”, approaches to decolonising music mediation practice, the attitude of artistic citizenship, and the implications of embracing a socially transformative potential of music mediation for higher music education. Since we do not want to remain static in the present with this publication, our final section looks ahead and constructs possible futures for the field of music mediation, and for music and societal life as a whole.

To present the thread that runs throughout the book, we will next delve into the theoretical foundations and individual sections and their interconnections, providing a brief overview of the contributions.

## Cultural Democracy

In the 1990s and 2000s, the practice of music mediation was largely characterised by a cultural-political approach known as cultural democratisation (Matarasso 2019; Petri-Preis 2025 forthcoming). This approach emerged from the increasing awareness that publicly funded cultural institutions produce numerous exclusions and generally target a wealthy, formally educated, white bourgeois audience. Its goal was to reach new audiences and diversify the public. The idea was to provide a broader population with access to existing ‘high culture’ offerings. While this aim is commendable, as fundamentally everything should be done to overcome and eliminate undemocratic structures, this approach also reveals problems. To put it bluntly, access is granted to a curated cultural offer based on the cultural tastes of the ruling class. This approach is underpinned by a normative understanding of culture that attributes more value to a “legitimate culture” (Bourdieu 1987) – in this case, classical music – than to other forms, such as popular or orally transmitted musical forms of expression. François Matarasso expresses his scepticism towards the cultural democratisation approach, due to its risk of perpetuating social inequality, in his book *A Restless Art*: “It risks implying that people lack knowledge, skill, confidence, awareness or even taste. It defines one person as proficient and the other as deficient.” (Matarasso 2019, 66)

Increasingly, however, there is a growing awareness in music mediation of the at times paternalistic nature of opening up culture to the masses and the need for a broad concept of art and culture that includes all artistic expressions and considers them fundamentally equal. This is quite likely related to the increasing academisation of music mediation, i.e. the education of music mediators at universities, and the subsequent critical engagement with issues such as cultural participation and the societal responsibility of artists and power structures in the cultural sector. With the rise in socially oriented projects, there is a noticeable renaissance of the counter-concept to cultural democratisation – that of cultural democracy (Petri-Preis 2025 forthcoming). This concept was developed and promoted by the British community arts movement in the 1960s and 1970s. In 1984, a group of community artists succinctly expressed it as follows:

Let us tell the story... We believe that people have the right to create their own culture. This means taking part in the telling of the story, not having a story told to them. This story of ours... We believe that people have the right to put across their own point of view in their own particular way. This means not being told how to do this by people who don't understand it. Now listen to our story... We believe that people should have the right to

reply. This means that people should have equal access to resources to give them an equal voice. (Quoted in Matarasso 2019, 73)

In his contribution *From Us & Them to We. Some Thoughts on Co-Creation, Cultural Democracy and a Human Rights Approach to Music Inclusion*, François Matarasso first discusses the invention of the ‘fine arts’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as the origin of a dichotomy of *us* and *them* in culture. He then describes cultural democratisation and cultural democracy as the two central cultural-political approaches of the post-war era. To the latter, he attributes the potential to overcome the dichotomy of artists and non-artists – *us & them* – in favour of a co-creative *we* of professional and non-professional artists on an equal footing. As an example of a co-creative approach in the field of opera, Matarasso discusses the project *Traction – Opera Co-Creation for Social Transformation* and draws on Amartya Sen’s and Martha Nussbaum’s capability approach to argue that co-creation has the potential to enlarge people’s capabilities to do and be what they want.

Annette Ziegenmeyer, in her contribution *Change of Perspective as a Starting Point for Social Transformation? Relevance and Design of Musical Meetings with Delinquent Youth*, explores whether the work of music students with delinquent youth can trigger transformative learning processes. Based on observations and informal conversations with students from her course at Luebeck University of Music, the author uses Jack Mezirow’s transformative learning theory to reconstruct how confrontation with the realities of the young people leads to reflections on the students’ own privileged situations, how they reflect on issues of interpretative authority and artistic control, and how they develop a strength-based approach to teaching from their experiences.

Ana Čorić’s article *From the Bottom-Up: On the Potential of a Festival’s Music Mediation Program in Innovating the Music Education Ecosystem in Croatia* focuses on the music mediation programme of the Music Biennale Zagreb, questioning its specific characteristics and, above all, whether the programme is capable of critically addressing existing hierarchies and power structures, as well as inclusions and exclusions in the Croatian education system.

## **Decolonising Music Mediation**

The idea of “cultural democracy” as an anti-hegemonic concept is closely related to post- and decolonial thinking. Matarasso, for instance, notes that many community artists of the 1960s and 70s were inspired and significantly influenced by Paulo Freire’s postcolonial thinking in his book *Pedagogy of*

*the Oppressed* from 1968 (Matarasso 2019, 69). For this volume, the section on decolonisation holds particular significance both in the context of music mediation's historical development and in light of some current projects. As mentioned earlier, music mediation is deeply rooted in classical music, which holds a hegemonic position primarily in Western Europe and North America. Therefore, music mediation must face the critical question of whether it "is also an attempt by those in power in the artistic field to define the artistic practices of other groups as deficient, deny their value and legitimacy, and thus maintain their own power, e.g. their cultural subsidies" (Ardila-Mantilla, Busch, and Göllner 2018, 200). The discourse on enabling cultural participation could, from a critical perspective, also be analysed as a moment of oppression by construing members of "certain social groups as (still) unmusical and (still) not culturally engaged" (ibid., 200). Due to its close ties with classical concert life and the frequently imposed requirement of audience development, music mediation always risks participating in the perpetuation of the canon of male, white composers, existing exclusions and discriminations, and the maintenance of (patriarchal) power structures. The project of decolonisation involves, in a broad sense, recognising and working towards overcoming the diverse impacts of colonialism across different societal spheres (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2020).

In her article *Otherring Mechanisms vs. Empowerment. Toward a Decolonial Agency in Music Mediation?*, Lisa Gaupp describes the socio-cultural foundations of various group concepts, discusses their potential connection to social inequalities, and examines current societal developments and efforts towards empowerment in the cultural field. She concludes by calling for power to be transferred to plural networks, where collective agency with a diversity of perspectives continuously redefines and negotiates music mediation while unlearning established positions and hegemony in institutions.

Barbara Balba Weber, in her text *The Project Villaggio Culturale. Intercultural Co-Creation in Times of Uncertainty*, reflects on how decolonial approaches can be applied in a concrete music mediation project. Her project, *Villaggio Culturale*, brings together people of different backgrounds – refugees, locals, and students – in a remote Swiss mountain village to develop songs, dances, or scenes through artistic interactions, which are then presented in various social contexts. She highlights the importance of continuous learning, reflection on discrimination and exclusion mechanisms, and the unlearning of established hegemonies and power structures.

## Artistic Citizenship

While previous discussions have focused on the cultural-political programme of cultural democracy and the importance of critically examining classical concert life for colonial structures in order to overcome them, this section attempts to shed light on the underlying attitude of music-makers. The concept of “artistic citizenship” has gained significant attention in the academic field over the past decade, particularly due to the publication of the highly regarded anthology *Artistic Citizenship: Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Practice* by David Elliott, Marissa Silverman, and Wayne D. Bowman in 2016. Elliott and his colleagues define artistic citizens as individuals who “are committed to engaging in artistic actions in ways that can bring people together, enhance communal well-being, and contribute substantially to human thriving” (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016, 7). Their theoretical foundation is primarily based on Aristotle’s ethics of virtue and understanding of praxis, which connect artistic action with ethical responsibility for a good life, as well as on American pragmatism, as shaped by John Dewey. Dewey argues in his seminal work *Art as Experience* (1934) that artistic action should be integrated into personal and communal life. Since then, the concept has been extensively adopted and critically expanded. Helena Gaunt et al. (2021) note that Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman construct a dichotomy between artistic citizens and “mere artists”. They counter this by arguing that social orientation and artistic excellence are not “competing concepts” but “partnering values” (ibid., 4). One does not exclude the other; rather, they can ideally enhance each other. Wolfgang Lessing (2023) extends the theoretical foundation of the concept from an instrumental pedagogical perspective by incorporating ideas from the spatial sociology of Martina Löw (2001). He observes that a key characteristic of artistic citizenship might be the disrupting of spatial institutionalisation (Lessing 2023, 40). He understands musical action as a space-constituting element “capable of altering existing spatial configurations” (ibid.), while spatial-structural changes can also enable different kinds of musical practices (ibid., 44). While Lessing illustrates his theses with an example from instrumental pedagogy, we will use an example from music mediation to illustrate this point: Rineke Smilde et al. describe in their book *If Music Be the Food of Love, Play On: Meaningful Music in Healthcare* (2019) how musicians, through their person-centred approach, transform the spatial configurations of a hospital. Patient rooms, corridors, and staff break rooms become sites of musical interaction and attentive listening. “Artistic Citizens never operate solely within the boundaries assigned to them but change spaces through their artistic or artistic-pedagogical work” (Lessing 2023, 46). At the same time, as “relational (dis)orders of social goods and people (living beings)

at locations” (Lów 2001, 271), these spaces also influence the musical practice of musicians, who react situatively to the conditions and needs in this intimate and vulnerable setting. The most recent discussion of the concept comes from Maria Westvall and Emily Achieng’ Akuno (2024). In their anthology *Music as Agency: Diversities of Perspectives on Artistic Citizenship*, Charles Carson and Maria Westvall coin the term “artizenship” for a negotiated and co-creative practice: “The concept of ‘artistic citizenship’, as we see it, is less about ‘helping others’ in a traditional, top-down way and more about facilitating the kinds of engagement and empowering interactions that are perhaps best understood as a form of co-creation” (Carson and Westvall 2024, 11).

In their contribution *Accessibility and Sustainability in Higher Music Education through Artistic Citizenship*, Maria Westvall and Charles Carson advocate a “diversified norm” in higher music education institutions, including a variety of musical genres, styles, and expressions. This, they argue, can critically question and overcome hegemonic and exclusionary structures in music education and artistic practices. Against this backdrop, they see their concept of “artizenship” as “a position, a process, and a lens that can mirror civic responsibility and empathy in inclusive ways” (Westvall and Carson in this volume). According to them, in the context of higher music education, this expanded notion of artistic citizenship could improve accessibility and sustainability, while also enhancing the relational and co-creative potential of critical democratic practices.

In their practice reflection *New Concert Formats and Music Mediation at Stegreif – The Improvising Symphony Orchestra*, Immanuel de Gilde and Lorenz Blaumer describe music mediation not as an add-on but as an integral part of their artistic practice. In particular, they discuss their *#bechange* project, which musically engages with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In this context, the concept of “artistic citizenship” has a role for the orchestra to play, in that each musician sees themselves as having a responsibility to contribute to society and become artistically active in collective and co-creative processes with different communities.

In *The Gum Goddess in the Opera Lab: On Participatory Devising Processes and the Courage to Fill Gaps*, Krystina Winkel reflects on her work with the *Opera Lab* of the Vienna State Opera. In collaboration with Superar, an NGO offering free music education for children and young people, artists work with adolescents to develop pieces based on reference works from the current repertoire of the Vienna State Opera. In particular, she focuses on the transformative potential of her work for a publicly subsidised, state cultural institution and how new artistic energies can emerge from the tension between ‘high culture’ and a diverse urban society.

In conversation with Axel Petri-Preis, Djanay Tulenova, Avri Levitan, and Johannes Meissl present the *Musethica* programme and reflect on its significance for students and faculty, as well as for HMEIs as a whole. While the programme remains rooted in the logic of cultural democratisation, it offers music students an initial opportunity to expand their focus on artistic action for art's sake towards a societal perspective. The programme aims to provide music students with diverse performance opportunities, while also offering people with limited access to live cultural events the chance to experience classical concerts in a relaxed setting. Djanay Tulenova, a former student at mdw and participant in the programme, describes how her experiences fostered an attitude as an artistic citizen, aligning high artistic standards with a sense of social responsibility.

### **Music Mediation in Higher Music Education**

Sloboda et al. (2020, 1) note that, over the past few decades, socially oriented music projects have increasingly moved from the margins of the global music industry to the centre (see also Matarasso 2019, 19–21). This development naturally has implications for the university education of young musicians, which has traditionally prepared them mainly for solo careers or orchestral positions. Therefore, it is not surprising that graduates of HMEIs often do not feel adequately equipped for their later careers (Bork 2010; López-Íñiguez and Bennett 2020; Petri-Preis 2023; Smilde 2009) and have to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills either on the job or through further qualification measures (Baker 2024b, 6–8; Petri-Preis 2023). David Elliott, Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman criticise: “From a broadly human perspective, the agendas and objectives of many arts educators are narrow, insular, remote, and disconnected from the affairs that matter most in people’s everyday lives” (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016, 11). They argue that technical proficiency on the instrument, the primary focus of artistic one-to-one tuition, is important but not sufficient. This does not mean that the much-vaunted artistic excellence in higher music education is unimportant in socially oriented music projects. On the contrary, it is crucial! However, it alone is not enough to effectively engage with different societal contexts beyond an understanding of *l’art pour l’art*. Musicians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, who increasingly work in portfolio careers, need a form of “expanded professionalism” (Westerlund and Gaunt 2021) to establish themselves in a music labour market that is undergoing comprehensive change (Petri-Preis 2024). Consequently, remarkable transformation processes are now taking place at some higher music education institutions: new study programmes are being established, existing curricula are being adapted, and

both traditional and popular musics that were not previously part of university research and teaching are being included.

Heidi Westerlund and Sari Karttunen, in their text *Transforming Higher Music Education: Systems Learning through Counter-Stories of Finnish Socially Engaged Musicians*, provide insights into the reflections of socially engaged musicians in Finland and discuss how these might impact the training of professional musicians. They argue that higher music education institutions should provide their students with spaces for “systems reflexivity [...], the capacity to identify, critically challenge, and reimagine the structures of current systems” (Westerlund and Karttunen in this volume), and “triple-loop learning”, which shifts the focus from the knowing subject to the social conditions of knowledge construction and the potential for institutional transformations. They advocate the incorporation of the knowledge and expertise of socially engaged musicians into the training of professional musicians, in order to further develop and transform it.

In their conversation with Sarah Chaker and Axel Petri-Preis, Lydia Grün, Ulrike Sych, and Sean Gregory – three individuals in influential positions at renowned higher music education institutions – discuss the societal responsibility of tertiary music education, the limits of social engagement for musicians, the redefinition or realignment of the concept of ‘artistic excellence’, and the role of artificial intelligence in higher music education. The conversation concludes with a reflection on exclusion mechanisms in tertiary music education and appropriate strategies to overcome them. In addition to the three conversation partners, students also voice their perspectives on the current state of higher music education through transcribed video messages.

In his chapter *Towards Community Engagement in Music Curricula: Students’ Perspectives on the Master’s Programme Contemporary Arts Practice (CAP)*, Axel Petri-Preis offers insights into a new artistic-academic master’s programme from the students’ viewpoint. By allowing students to specialise in study profiles (elemental music-making, music mediation/community music, improviser\*composer-performer, and transmedial performance) and providing connections between them, the MA innovatively responds to societal and musical challenges and changes. Through semi-structured interviews with students, Petri-Preis paints a nuanced picture of their expectations and experiences in this programme and their definition of community engagement as musicians. The many valuable findings show that programmes like the MA CAP are a crucial contribution towards a stronger focus on community engagement and societal responsibility in music curricula.

In her article *Doing Music Difference, or: What Do We Do with Other Musics?*, Shanti Suki Osman provides a theoretically grounded insight into

an anti-discrimination workshop she conducted at the symposium *Diskriminierungskritische Perspektiven in die Curricula an der Schnittstelle von Bildung und Kunst!* [Discrimination Critical Perspectives on the Curricula at the Interface of Education and Art!] which was hosted and initiated by Carmen Mörsch at the Schauspielhaus Dortmund in June 2023. She argues that discrimination-critical music mediation, which centres on listening as a means of critically questioning power relations and power imbalances, can contribute to the development of diversity-sensitive approaches in transcultural projects and society in general.

### ***Towards Possible Futures***

At the end of our volume, we venture a look into the future. Based on the findings and premises of the preceding sections, the contributions in this section are intended as impulses that can and should be taken up to actively work towards constructing desirable futures in concert life, higher music education, music mediation, or society at large. The articles may offer perspectives on actively shaping possible futures in the sense of *doing* future or “futuraing”, which Oomen, Hoffman, and Hajer define as “the identification, creation, and dissemination of images of the future, shaping the possibility for action, thus enacting relationships between past, present, and future.” (Oomen, Hoffman, and Hajer 2021; specifically for the future of classical music, see also Smith, Peters, and Molina 2024).

In her contribution *We urgently Need a Social Turn*, Sabine Reiter reviews the development of music mediation in Austria over the past quarter-century. She places particular focus on the networks that have formed in the field of music mediation and the needs of practitioners in this area. She concludes by advocating for the consistent continuation of the social turn in music mediation and calls on established cultural institutions to reflect on their self-understanding and initiate substantial transformation processes.

In her article *Why Don't We Discuss it? How to Get the Evaluation of Music Mediation Activities out of its Procrustean Bed?*, Irina Kirchberg addresses the topic of evaluating music mediation activities. Based on group discussions with musicians, cultural managers, and representatives of musicians' professional associations, she identifies three central problem areas and presents suggestions on how evaluations can transform from an unloved and restrictive practice into a tool for the critical and reflective further development of music mediation activities.

Daniela Bartels, in her text *Music Mediators as Builders of a Public Culture Based upon Love? Philosophical Concepts of Love as a Compass for Music Medi-*

ation Practice, delves into philosophical concepts of love and examines their significance for socially oriented music mediation activities. Reflecting on a project she conducted with students and a shanty choir in Luebeck (Germany), she argues that local initiatives like these can establish an ethic of love, with potentially transformative effects on society as a whole. Concerning the university education of music mediators, she advocates supporting and strengthening students in developing their emotional and social capacities.

In her text *Music Mediation and Potential for Change. An Approach via Convention Theory*, Anke Schad-Spindler takes a convention-theoretical perspective and illuminates the potentials, conflicts, and resistances in collaborative music mediation projects through a fictional case study. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's thinking, she focuses in particular on the role of music mediators as intermediaries who often bring organisations with divergent orientations and goals into dialogue and are expected to know the respective logics and conventions and to communicate with different stakeholders. She concludes that critical-analytical thinking, negotiation, and mediation skills are central for music mediators and should therefore be given greater consideration in their training.

We wish you, dear readers, an inspiring read.

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# I. CULTURAL DEMOCRACY



# From Us & Them to We

## Some Thoughts on Co-Creation, Cultural Democracy, and a Human Rights Approach to Music Inclusion

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François Matarasso

### Introduction

We are living through difficult, dangerous times. It is not necessary to catalogue the global events of recent years, from the pandemic to war in Ukraine, in order to show that. Much that was once taken for granted, notably the commitment of some countries to democracy, is proving to be unreliable. Each of us will have been affected by these events in different ways and to different degrees. In my case, they have contributed to a profound questioning of the work I have done over the past 40 years. I am far from having worked out what I think this means, or what conclusions could be drawn from it, so the best I can offer today is some thoughts on co-creation and human rights. This is work in progress and I ask for indulgence towards the gaps and incoherences in what follows.

### The Invention of the Fine Arts

In 2019, I published a book called *A Restless Art*, to which I gave the somewhat cheeky subtitle *How participation won and why it matters*. It is an account of the history, theory, and practice of community and participatory art. (I should say that, after many years of holding stubbornly to the unfashionable concept of community art because I believe that it has a meaningful theoretical basis, I am increasingly using the term “co-creation”, first because it describes the central act more precisely, and secondly because it translates more easily into other languages; I will speak of co-creation from here onwards.) To return to *A Restless Art*, part of its thesis was that, over the past two decades, participatory work had moved from the disreputable margins to the centre of the art world’s

preoccupations. In the book, I saw this as a generally positive development, but expressed concerns about the misuse and appropriation of co-creation. Today, I think I not only underestimated that danger, but also failed to see that even the work on the margins risked being conscripted into a moral and political framework that I reject – a way of thinking that divides society between two groups: *us* and *them*.

In order to explain this, I need to go back to what Larry Shiner calls the invention of the fine arts:

The great fracture in the older system of art [...] occurred in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, finally severing fine art from craft, artist from artisan, the aesthetic from the instrumental and establishing such institutions as the art museum, the secular concert, and copyright. (Shiner 2003, 9)

As soon as you invent the concept of the “fine arts”, you automatically, inexorably, invent the concept of the “not-fine arts” or, to use some of the more familiar terms that are applied to this sub-category, folk art, craft, traditional art, popular art, entertainment, world music – the list could go on, but the only thing these labels have in common is the attempt to separate in a fundamental way the culture they point to from the unquestionably dominant form designated as fine art. What the Enlightenment gave us, in effect, is a two-class system for the arts, and we have lived with that since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, what was then called fine art is actually so socially, culturally, and politically powerful that it gets away with just calling itself art – or music – while the rest gets labelled pop, or rap, or muzak or whatever it may be.

## The Definition of High Culture and Its Consequences for Cultural Policy

The Enlightenment’s idea of fine art was simply the cultural tastes of European elites at the time – oil painting, architecture, court music, poetry, ballet, and so on. These art forms share one key characteristic: uselessness. For that reason, a Meissen figure is fine art, while a ceramic jug or plate is not because, whatever cultural values it may be thought to embody, however skilfully it has been produced, it is tableware and serves a purpose. Why this distinction? Because only the wealthy can afford to own what is useless. Other people make art as part of living – like the songs people invent to enliven their daily labour in the field or at home, the stories shared on long winter nights, or the beauty invested in household objects. The fine arts are a deliberate expression of privilege – what Pierre Bourdieu would define as cultural capital 200 years later – and it is

bad for all forms of cultural expression, as the American writer, Wendell Berry, recognises: “This definition of culture as ‘high culture’ actually debases it, as it debases also the presumably low culture that is excluded.” (Berry 2019, 564) This has had negative consequences for cultural policy in Europe since the 19<sup>th</sup> century – understanding, of course, that cultural policy exists whether or not it is expressed or formalised in government publications. Cultural policy is simply the way in which things are organised. There are two contrasting forms of cultural policy in Europe. The first is top-down. Once you believe in the fine arts, it is a small step to believing that we should generously pass on the great merit of high art to less fortunate people. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, that largely took the form of philanthropy. Many of our great cultural institutions – opera houses, museums, libraries, and galleries – were created by wealthy aristocrats and industrialists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The more democratic civic world that emerged from the ruins of the Second World War was less accepting of such paternalism and the philanthropy of rich individuals was renamed “cultural democratisation”. As a part of the post-war Welfare State, this became state policy on both sides of the Iron Curtain, though expressed in contrasting ideological terms.

Arts Council England manages public funding for the arts in England. For some years in the 2000s, it used the slogan “Great Art For Everyone” and, essentially, that’s what cultural democratisation means. It is the idea that everyone would be better off if they had access to art. In the spirit of democracy, we avoid calling it the fine arts, but we all know what we mean. Since most people, for reasons of location, education or poverty, among others, do not attend galleries or concert halls, a variety of access, inclusion, and participation programmes are put in place to make it easier for them to do so. The original idea placed culture within the framework of public services that the state should provide for its citizens, alongside employment, health care, housing, and education. As a child of the welfare state, I believe there’s a lot to admire in that model of social democracy, even if its paternalism was rejected by the cultural revolutionaries of the 1960s.

But the problem with that model now is that neoliberalism has been dismantling the Welfare State for half a century. The idea that the state should ensure full employment would strike most people as bizarre today. When I was an apprentice community artist, 44% of the British population lived in public social housing; today it is 8%. Social services, education, and health have all seen varying degrees of privatisation in different countries. But public provision of art and culture, strangely, have grown in that period. There is no space to address that seeming paradox here, but three points can be made. First, culture has become a key driver of the neoliberal economy, inseparable from new digital means and formats of creation, production and distribution. Secondly,

compared to other elements of the welfare state, public funding of the arts has a symbolic value out of all proportion to its cost. Thirdly, the arts that benefit from public funding are, as they always were, those which are valued by the elite – the fine arts which hold and add to their cultural capital. It is not a coincidence that cultural democratisation also continues to serve the interests of the people who produce, manage, and live from culture.

In the 1960s, an alternative form of cultural policy was proposed, although I argue in *A Restless Art* that it had roots going back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and might even be considered a reaction to the emerging ideas about the fine arts. Then, from Great Britain to Bulgaria, we see working people mobilising to create their own cultural and educational organisations, pooling their own resources for cultural empowerment. That idea of self-determined change coming from the grass roots was renamed “cultural democracy” in the 1960s and 1970s. The simplest way of distinguishing it from the alternative model of cultural policy is to say that if cultural democratisation is *great art for everyone*, then cultural democracy is *art by, for, and with everyone*.

Note that you cannot call it great art, because you don’t know what it is until people have made it. Consequently, you cannot presume that it will be great; it might be bad, it probably will be okay. In truth, most art is, by definition, average, whatever standard is applied to judge it. The rhetoric that inflates every orchestra, theatre company, and museum into being world class is absurd. It is not possible for them all to be world class, or the term ceases to have any meaning, except perhaps as virtual artistic imperialism. Some have to be ordinary – and there is nothing wrong with that; most of us are ordinary. Over the years, I have consistently defended a realistic understanding of what culture and art is, and does, which generally is to be good enough for its own time and situation. That is not to suggest a lack of aspiration – I have rarely met an artist, professional or non-professional, who did not want to achieve their best, and never one who felt they were good enough – but a recognition of the real worth of what is created. To give a concrete example, in valuing excessively what is truly outstanding – like the prize-winning young musician – we neglect thousands of very good musicians who learn only that they are not considered good enough. In any case, as Avram Alpert explains:

In the very act of seeking the best, we are already no longer talking about the best flautist; we are talking about the person who plays the flute best under conditions of pressure and performance. We are finding the best *competitor*, not the best flute player. (Alpert 2022, 57)

One indisputable consequence of the competitive nature of music education is that most people who begin formal instrument tuition as children give up play-

ing altogether sometime between the ages of 16 and 25. All that effort, learning, and hope abandoned by a musician who is good enough to take and give great pleasure through their playing, but who is left only with a sense of failure and dislike for an instrument that stays hidden at the top of a wardrobe. In my view, if we can be good enough, then we are already doing pretty well.

Cultural democratisation and cultural democracy have been in tension since the 1960s. Indeed, in my view, the visions of culture and society that underpin these terms have been opposed since the Enlightenment, albeit in different language and forms. They certainly shaped political and cultural discourse in the 1970s and into the 1980s. (Matarasso 2019, 73–78) The problem is that few policy-makers, or even people in the cultural sector, seem to understand their meaning or importance today, although they are used, often interchangeably, to give credibility to the plans and projects of cultural institutions (Matarasso 2021, 18–21). For example, Arts Council England's *Let's Create Strategy 2020–2030* uses the rhetoric of cultural democracy in saying that

[t]he vision of this Strategy, therefore, is of a country in which the creativity of everyone living here is celebrated and supported: in which culture forms and transforms communities, and in which cultural institutions are inclusive of all of us, so that whoever we are and wherever we live, we can share in their benefits. (ACE 2020, 62)

However, nothing in the organisation's subsequent planning or decision-making translates into a meaningful shift from its established policy of democratisation, or *great art for everyone*. However, these policy ideas define real and divergent visions of the place of artists in society and they have real life consequences. If we do not understand the concepts, or how they translate into actions, in reality, we are left without being able to have effective discussion about what we're doing and still less why.

## The Benefits of Participation in the Arts and the Problem of Social Impact

I suggested earlier that, from my perspective, things have deteriorated in important ways since policy-makers got interested in participatory art and co-creation. That has happened in part, I think, because the more interested they became, the less they understood its values and processes, including how it can bring benefits to individuals. In 1997, I published the first large-scale research into the social impact of participation in the arts in Britain (Matarasso

1997). It included new studies undertaken by me and several other researchers in the UK and abroad, but it was also informed by my own experience as a community arts worker over 15 years. The research showed that there is a social impact to participation in the arts, mainly positive, but that there could also be costs (Matarasso 1997, 76–78). Put simply, people get a lot from participating in art and culture. That was positive news for the sector and widely welcomed. But two other aspects of the findings have, I believe, been widely and perhaps deliberately, misinterpreted.

The first is that many of the benefits identified in the report are associated with participation, not with art (Matarasso 1997, 83–85). The report is clear that human beings benefit from participating with other human beings in activities where we are doing and learning together. That could be sport, it could be environmental campaigns, it could be political action, it could be religious life. All of those things bring different benefits and problems. But a lot of the benefits reported in *Use or Ornament?* are the benefits of participation, not the benefits of art. There are specific benefits to art, and they are discussed in the report, but the critical distinction between the benefits of participation and the benefits associated with participation in artistic projects was missed by most commentators.

The second misinterpretation relates to the policy response I proposed in *Use or Ornament?*, on the basis that people generally do benefit from participating in cultural activity. Some people understood that to mean that it is therefore possible to ‘produce’ those benefits when people participate in cultural activity. That is completely wrong. First, it is not possible to control those benefits. Even as an artist, as a musician, you cannot control how a listener responds to what you do. Why then would you think that you could control what people feel about participating in your music project? It is simply not in the artist’s gift. Secondly, even if it were possible, why would you think you had the right to interfere in other peoples’ lives by trying to change them through your work? Although I was far more inexperienced as a researcher and naïve about politics than I am today, my report was cautious and specifically clear about this:

[I]t is necessary to stress that participation in the arts is not being advocated as a form of, still less an alternative to, social policy. The current problems of British society will not be solved if we all learn to make large objects out of papier-mâché, play the accordion or sing Gilbert and Sullivan. Nor will British culture be improved by being sold into bonded labour to a social policy master. (Matarasso 1997, 85)

In short, the arts should not be used as an instrument of social change: it is ethically unjustifiable and, even if it were not, artists are not able to achieve it.

That has always been my belief and my position, and it has only become clearer as I have seen more and more initiatives that set out to do exactly that. Today, throughout Europe, and in many other parts of the world where I have worked, funding is offered to artists on the basis that their projects will produce a social outcome, benefit or change. And that, for the reasons I have just given, is both ethically and practically wrong.

What has also become clearer to me in the intervening years is how profoundly damaging that idea is, to the practice and value of co-creation, and to society more widely. The problem is that it rests on a deep, if generally unconscious, idea about society held by those who occupy positions of responsibility – not only politicians, but also people in the corporate sector, the media, the academic and educational fields, and, of course, the cultural sector, among many others. Between them they shape and organise the ways in which society functions, largely by virtue of the positions they occupy and the education that brought them there. For the avoidance of any doubt, I include myself in this group, by birth, education, culture, and profession, even if, as an artist working in co-creation, I am one of those who are able to pass relatively easily between this group, whom we might call *us*, the governors, and the rest of society, *them*, the governed.

Even if I am painting them in bold strokes, such divisions are as old as Plato, and perhaps there is no society where versions of them cannot be found. But that does not mean they should be accepted, nor that the problems that they create should be tolerated. In a still bolder, even caricatural gesture, let me suggest that those who govern tend to think of themselves in these terms: “We understand how things should be. We have good intentions and work for the common good. We are dependable, we make judicious decisions. We are the good people. We are cultured, we have taste, we understand how things should be done. And it is our responsibility to organise things for those who do not have all those things, the people whose lives need to be improved by us, because we know.”

As I said, that is a caricature, but the reality, in the arts as well as across society as a whole, is that policy is largely based on not trusting people to know what is good for them, to make good choices, to have important skills, knowledge, capabilities or even, in some cases, to have the ‘correct’ moral values. Some people will be shocked and offended at this idea, and I believe they should be: it is shocking and offensive – although not because I am expressing it, but because if even a fraction of this is true, it would raise fundamental questions about the basis of our social contract. What evidence then is there for believing it to be true, apart from my own experience of co-creation, research, and policy-

making in the arts? Here is an assessment of decades of social policy in the United Kingdom, published by the Local Trust in 2021:

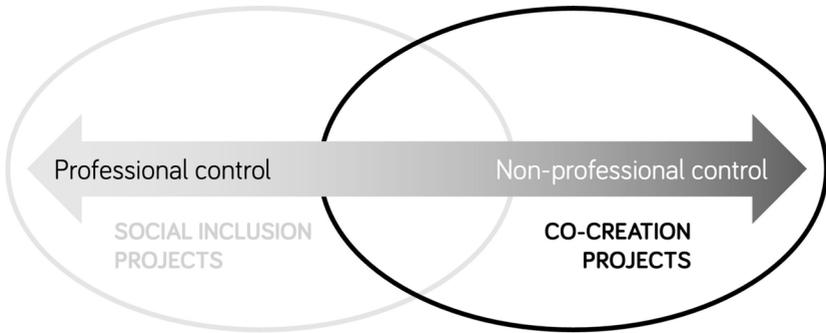
This is a mindset that undermines the best of intentions. It is characterised by an assumption of superiority and a fatal need to control, and just below the surface we can sense toxic undercurrents of contempt and fear. (Boyle and Wyler 2021).

All the evidence shows that it does not work, for the same reasons I just outlined about why you cannot run a cultural project and have an effect on people – you have neither the power nor the right to do so.

## Cultural Participation as a Human Right

This is important, because unless we understand clearly what we are trying to do, what we are capable of doing, and what it is ethical or not ethical to do, then we end up in a marsh, lost and stuck in the mud, and doing all sorts of things badly or ineffectually. The foundation of cultural participation is anchored in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as it has been since 1948. All European Union members are signatories and their citizens have the right to participate in the cultural life of the community. We might reasonably argue about what participating in the cultural life of the community means. For some people it means cultural democratisation, so you can go to a museum, you can go to a concert. For me, it means cultural democracy, being able to create art, being able to represent yourself in culture and being able to do it on your own terms. But either way, it is a human right. It is not a concession that is being given to some people, on the basis that it will somehow improve them or make them more acceptable as fellow citizens to the people who make the decisions. It is a human right and the basis of the concept of human rights is equality between people: not *us & them*, only *we*.

How might we get to *we* from *us & them*? The spectrum of co-creation (Figure 1) is adapted from a version in *Co-Creating Opera*, a short book I wrote at the end of *Traction*, a European research project in which I was a partner (Matarasso 2023). The spectrum is defined by who is in control of what is happening – the professional artists or the non-professional artists. Mostly, I think social inclusion projects happen towards the professional end, which is why they are rooted in *us & them* logic. They belong there because they are conceived by professionals and then packaged and presented to people like ready meals. There is nothing to do but consume.



**Figure 1:** *The spectrum of co-creation. Source: Own illustration.*

## My Definition of Co-creation

In *A Restless Art* I propose that participatory art is the creation of art by professional and non-professional artists (Matarasso 2019, 48). That also applies to co-creation. There are differences of language in these terms, but I will not untangle them here. Rather, I would like you to register two things. First, co-creation is about making art. If you are not making a work of art, intended to be shared as an act of creation in the world, then you are involved in education, or social work, or something else. Unless you are making a work of art or a performance, you are not involved in co-creation, or community art, or participatory art.

The second thing about this definition is my use of the term “professional” and “non-professional artists”. I am saying that being an artist is an act in the world, not an existential condition. No-one is born an artist. That is a fiction of Enlightenment philosophers who sought to turn art into an alternative religion, because they did not like the one they had. No one is born an artist, you become an artist by doing what artists do, which is to create art. You might do it well, you might do it badly but, just as everyone in the Berlin marathon is a runner, and some of them will be world class and break records while others are only trying to finish, every one of them is a runner. When people are being artists, they are acting in the world, but doing it differently.



**Figure 2:** *O Tempo (Somos Nós)*. Source: Joaquin Damaso SAMP.

Figure 2 is an image taken before the performance of the Portuguese prison opera, in the Gulbenkian concert hall, in June 2022. The man with folded arms is an inmate; the woman is a professional opera singer: they performed together a few hours after the photo was taken. In my terms, one is a professional artist, and the other is a non-professional artist, but both are artists in what they are doing. And when you come and see the opera, you may not know who is professional and who isn't, depending on what is happening. Both bring capabilities to the co-creation process, but their capabilities are not the same, and it is in the differences that the unique possibilities of co-creation lie.

The professional artist has an artistic education: they have skills and expertise acquired over time. They have knowledge of their field and perhaps of the practice of co-creation, although that is not necessarily the case. They have experience on which to draw. They have done this or versions of this before; they have a context, they understand the field. Opera is not new to this singer. She knows her peers, she knows the standards in her field, whatever she thinks of them, and that allows her to make an informed judgement about her work and about everything that is happening. Finally, professional artists have talent.

Professional artists	Non-professional artists
Education	An open mind
Skill and expertise	New ideas
Knowledge	Knowledge
Experience	Experience
Context	Something to say
Informed judgement	A need to say it
Talent	Talent

**Table 1:** *The different assets and capabilities artists bring to co-creation. Source: Own illustration.*

So, what do the non-professional artists bring to that? First, they bring an open mind, akin to what Zen Buddhism sometimes calls a beginner's mind: knowing that you do not know. That is liberating because you can ask questions. Professional artists, on the other hand, tend to think they do know. What often happens in co-creation is that the non-professional artists will ask, "Why don't we try this?" and the professional will answer, "I don't know, perhaps because I've never thought of doing it like that, or because I was taught not to do it like that, or just because it's my habit not to do it like that" – all the practices that build up around experience.

The non-professional artists, like all human beings, also have knowledge and experience of life. This opera, after a number of false starts, settled on the story of Penelope and Ulysses, and the professional artist in this photo sang the role of Penelope. The reason it settled on that story was because it is about the experience of being separated from people you love and the life decisions you made that caused that separation. It corresponds closely to the experience of the young men detained in this prison. It is their lived experience that shapes this story and its meaning. So, they also have knowledge and experience – it is just different from that of a professional opera artist. They might not know the difference between A flat and B flat, but does it matter? They know other things that matter much more in co-creation.

Finally, because of that, they have something to say. That is not always true of professional artists, for whom each production is another job in which they may or not feel much invested. In contrast, this co-creation may be the only chance the non-professional artist will ever have to express themselves, so they will seize it. They are motivated and they know what they want to say. In truth,

they are only there because they want to express themselves artistically. They want to create meaning in the world, to make sense out of their experience. And finally, non-professional artists can have as much talent as professional ones. It may not be the talent anyone expects, or that fits with established criteria, or aesthetics, but it is certainly there.

What happens when you bring these people together? Figure 3 is from the finale of the performance at the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian in Lisbon on 16 June 2022. On stage there are many non-professional artists and four professionals, not forgetting the professionals in the orchestra and those involved in the co-creation of the libretto, the music and the production itself. Some of the families of the non-professional artists who also played a role are on the stage too. To me, the photograph is very moving: it captures a lot of contrasting emotions – pride, joy, certainly, but also sadness at the circumstances behind this performance.



**Figure 3:** ‘O Tempo (Somos Nós)’. Finale of the performance. Source: Joaquim Damaso SAMP.

Audre Lorde, the American poet and feminist, wrote: “Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic.” (Lorde 2007, 104) There are immense social, cultural, and life differences between the people on this stage, not for-

getting all those around them who are not visible in the photo. They extend to the reality that some slept at home after the performance while others slept in prison cells. Again, this is a bitter reality from which we should not turn away, either as people involved in co-creation or as human beings. At the same time, in artistic and human terms, that difference is not a liability – it is the soil from which a genuine equality can spring. It may be fragile, short-lived, and even compromised, but what matters is that, like the art work that bore it, it exists. And it is precisely because of the differences that it can happen.

## The *Traction* Project

The opera performed in Lisbon was part of *Traction*, a three-year project to explore how new digital technologies could make opera co-creation accessible and relevant to people who are at risk of social exclusion. Funded by the EU Horizon programme, it was led by Vicomtech, a research institute in San Sebastián, and brought together opera producers, universities, and other partners from Ireland, Spain, the Netherlands, Portugal, France, and others. My role was to guide the co-creation processes of the three new opera productions: a virtual reality opera with rural communities by the Irish National Opera, a main stage production at the Liceu Opera House in Barcelona, and the opera developed with inmates of the prison by the SAMP community music school in Leiria, Portugal. Alongside the creative work, new digital tools were developed to support the process by the technology partners. It was a huge and complex project, made more challenging because it began in January 2020 and so coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the many restrictions, we were able to bring it to a successful outcome, with the three operas being performed between June and October 2022. A website<sup>1</sup> was created to present the work, with videos of the operas and many other resources, among which is a book that sets out the key guidance from the project in the form of guiding principles for co-creation (Matarasso 2023).

## Guiding Principles of the *Traction* Project

A principles-based approach is appropriate for co-creation projects, because it reflects the fundamental diversity and flexibility I see as inherent to co-creation itself. Every co-creation project is different. It is not possible to know what

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1 See <http://www.co-art.eu/> (accessed April 9, 2025).

will happen until you know who is present and taking part. If you do know what is going to happen, it is not co-creation – you are doing a project where people are being invited to take part in an existing artistic initiative. That may be worthwhile, but it is not co-creation. Without uncertainty, you are not opening the work to other people’s creativity. Guiding principles are ways of thinking through some of the questions that arise from that necessary uncertainty. I am not sure that we got these right when we worked on them in late 2022. They are as far as we could get, but I continue to reflect on this question.

Principle	Comment
Aware	because a conscious, informed understanding of people, context and actions is the foundation of good co-creation
Equal	because each participant has the same right to contribute to co-creation
Ambitious	because everyone deserves to benefit from the best process, artistic work and human outcomes
Honest	because integrity is the foundation of trust, learning and empowerment
Responsive	because complex situations require flexibility to meet changing needs and opportunities
Patient	because relationships, learning and growth all take the time they take
Hopeful	because hope in uncertainty enables us to work towards the outcomes we want

**Table 2:** Traction co-creation principles (Matarasso 2023). Source: Own illustration.

The first principle is about being aware of the context in which you are working, and the people who are being invited to take part in the work with you. Equality is fundamental to co-creation because everyone must have the same place within it. They may bring different resources, abilities, and skills, but they have the same right to influence and to be part of the process. Of course, the work should be ambitious. There is no good reason to do less ambitious work than normal because it involves non-professionals. Honesty is essential because good intentions are not enough. Few people come to participatory or co-creation work without good intentions but they can lead to bad decisions, like telling someone that their work is good when you do

not really think it is. Honesty is saying this is not yet good – this is why and here is how it could improve. Without honesty, there cannot be learning and empowerment. Co-creation must be responsive because, as we have seen, in co-creation you cannot know what will happen until it happens. If you know what is going to happen, it is like inviting people to eat a meal you have already prepared. Co-creation means inviting them into the kitchen to find out what might they want to cook. This is a key difficulty with the *us & them* logic, which provides funding against outputs and deadlines that cannot, and in my view, should not, be accepted. Instead, we need to begin a much more sophisticated discourse about what co-creation is, how it works and what it can achieve, if we are to change the simplistic ways it is often seen in the cultural sector and by funders and policy-makers. This approach may take longer and be more complex, but it is far more valuable. The journey is as important as the destination: neither can be good unless both are. The final principle is the one that I am least comfortable with now, because I do not feel as hopeful as I did last autumn. But perhaps that is a good lesson for me, because we will not get anywhere unless we do this work with hope in our hearts.

## From Social Impact to the Capabilities Approach

As I said at the beginning, my ideas about co-creation and its socio-political context are developing as a result of the *Traction* project and other experiences, so I am sharing work in progress that I hope can be outlined more fully in a new book. The key problem is finding a way to escape the paternalism inherent in almost all participatory art projects financed by public or philanthropic sources – what I have called, somewhat uncomfortably perhaps, the *us & them* relationship. One of my key ideas for doing that is to move from thinking about social impact or even social inclusion to the capabilities approach, which has been developed over the last 25 years in the context of development by thinkers such as Amartya Sen (1992), Martha Nussbaum (2011), and others. Crucially, the capabilities approach is founded on ideas of justice and human rights, so it aligns with my belief that approaches to co-creation should also rest on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

*Traction* aimed to advance thinking in this area by adapting the capabilities approach to the practice of co-creation. Sen and Nussbaum use the term “approach” to recognise that human capabilities are evolving and contingent, and there is no consensus as to what they should comprise in all polities and cultures. For Nussbaum, capabilities are “the answers to the question, ‘What is this person able to do and to be?’” (Nussbaum 2011, 20) There are many ways

in which a person's capabilities could be enlarged through opera co-creation, e.g. through developing skills, acquiring social capital, building knowledge or self-confidence etc. (Matarasso 1997, 2019). The capabilities approach provides a new theoretical basis for a contextual analysis of these changes. It also invites us to ask what we can do and be as human beings. What freedom do we have? If I ask myself that question, it is clear that the degree of freedom that human beings have over what they can do and be varies enormously, not only globally, but within our own societies. I am very conscious that I have benefited throughout my life from a high degree of freedom, and all I have done in my working life is the result of that privilege. Nussbaum puts our individual capabilities firmly into that social context: “[Capabilities] are not just abilities residing inside a person but also the freedoms or opportunities created by a combination of personal abilities and the political, social, and economic environment.” (Nussbaum 2011, 20) She sees that personal capabilities (such as skills, knowledge, talent or confidence) are essential but not sufficient to human flourishing. Unless a person lives in a socio-political environment that offers the freedoms and opportunities to develop and use their capabilities, their potential is limited. Women gained the right to take degrees at Oxford University in 1920. Until then (and arguably for many years afterwards) they were structurally excluded from academic and professional life, whatever their personal capabilities. So, the environment in which we live determines our capabilities. The discourse about the social impact of participation in the arts has mostly concerned the individual, which aligns it with the focus of neoliberal ideology. Nussbaum's work shows that the social, economic, cultural, and political environment within which we try to use our capabilities is at least as important in determining the true extent of our freedom. So, in considering the social impact of *Traction*, we asked two research questions:

- Has participation in opera co-creation extended the person's capability to do and to be what they choose?
- How far do the social entities within which participants aim to exercise their capabilities enable them to do and to be what they choose?

In fact, I think that the second of those questions is inadequate. It focused on the social entities involved in the project, notably the opera producers and voluntary organisations supporting the process, because that was the extent of the wider environment that could be reasonably considered and, more critically, the only part that might change. There have been some significant changes in that respect. For example, inmates' regular access to the arts has increased at Leiria youth prison and the Ministry of Justice is engaged in the issue, but these

positive changes have taken years and remain dependent on local managers and national policy-makers.

## From Us & Them to We

Is there a path from *us & them* to *we*? Honestly, I do not know. Today, after decades working for social change through co-creation, I doubt what contribution I have made. My ambitions were modest, but perhaps even they were too great. I know that many individual people have benefited and that their capabilities have been enhanced through their participation in projects like the *Traction* operas. At the same time, I fear that the work has allowed the system to continue unchanged and that I may even have reinforced its *us & them* logic by accepting the terms on which public funding of arts projects is awarded. I have fallen into the self-deception of doing good projects and thinking it is enough. And it is not enough. A good project is no substitute for a good policy. And we lack good policy, not just in culture, but across the board. In the absence of good policy frameworks, I fear that, however good individual projects may be, all we do is alleviate symptoms without resolving their causes.

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# Change of Perspective as a Starting Point for Social Transformation?

## Relevance and Design of Music-Related Activities with Delinquent Youth

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*Annette Ziegenmeyer*

### Introduction

In order to unfold its full social-transformative potential, music education and music mediation must relate to society in all its diversity, not only to those from music-supportive backgrounds. Therefore, music educators and music mediators should strive to initiate music-related activities welcoming people with different biographical, social, and cultural backgrounds, whose paths would otherwise possibly not cross. Why is this important?

Even if music is omnipresent, and almost everyone has some kind of musical experience and the constant opportunity to consume and enjoy music (Wickel 2018, 7), the challenge of reaching all young people through the classical path of music education in schools still remains far from being solved. Thus, even though schools are considered to be the places where theoretically all children can be reached, in the subject of music this might best be achieved by qualified music teachers in most upper secondary schools [Gymnasien], although to a large extent not in all other school forms, including primary schools and especially those in rural areas. The unsolved challenge of reaching particularly socially disadvantaged young people by music education (programmes) emerges from many studies carried out in the German-speaking countries (see e.g. Burkhard et al. 2024/2023, 1; Lehmann-Wermser and Krupp 2017; Theurer et al. 2020, 27). This deficiency leads to the question of how far formal music education in schools and music mediation as “a broad artistic and educational practice that fosters diverse relationships between people and musics” (Petri-Preis and Voit 2025) can be understood as inclusive and welcoming also for socially disadvantaged students, whose needs might appear unfamiliar to educators and facilitators coming from rather privileged backgrounds. In other

words: to what extent are music educators and music mediators aware of the challenges and needs socially disadvantaged students have to face in their daily lives? Many of them experience school as a place of permanent failure and have no stability in support of their individual paths, since they are torn between the educational institutions such as school and youth welfare. In consequence, they are much more at risk of being “decoupled” (Mögling, Tillmann, and Reißig 2015), for example in terms of school, training, and leisure activities, or facing the risk of slipping into delinquency.

Of course, music educators and music mediators cannot replace the educational support that is normally the responsibility of the students’ families. But what they can do, is to build up an awareness of the challenges these young people have to face in their socially disadvantaged upbringing and take that into consideration in their own teaching strategies and attitude. Here, the internationally grown concept of “community music” offers a rich lens through which music practice in society can be understood and shaped in a more inclusive and value-based way. With regard to reaching especially marginalized and at-risk youth, the broad expertise and work of Phil Mullen provides a rich foundation for facilitating music-related activities in the context of youth work (Mullen 2022).

In order to better understand the challenging circumstances and context that at-risk youth find themselves in, it is helpful to get a closer look at *all* the pillars of the educational system that these young people can be confronted with: besides school, child and youth welfare, child and youth psychiatry, this may also include the pillar of juvenile justice (see Walkenhorst 2015) that comes into play when delinquent behaviour is reported. What most people do not know within this context is that juvenile imprisonment is only “a sanction of last resort, if educational or disciplinary measures appear to be inappropriate (see §§ 5 and 17 (2) JJA<sup>1</sup>)” (Dünel 2016). Thus, the priority is for first educational and then disciplinary measures to be imposed, instead of youth imprisonment. Disciplinary measures of the juvenile court include a formal warning, community service, a fine, and short-term-detention for one or two weekends, or up to four weeks in a facility for short-term juvenile detention (*ibid.*). Of all activities that take place during the time of short-term juvenile detention, the implementation of music activities largely depends on the individual strengths and interests of the staff. According to my observations in Schleswig-Holstein, most staff would rather not integrate music into their educational concept because they relate more to conducting sports and other leisure activities. This is concerning, since cultural activities – and especially ones involving music – can make a

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1 Juvenile Justice Act (JJA) = Jugendgerichtsgesetz (JGG).

particularly important contribution to the acquisition of skills that promote the process of democracy education and thus resocialisation. In this respect, music can act as a medium or door opener and open up a safe space and learning field in which everybody can try to express themselves, but also learn how to create something together, to listen, and to give feedback to each other. Thus, people in detention can experience themselves in a positive way as self-efficient and self-determined (Ziegenmeyer and Mühlinghaus 2021, 21) and learn how to engage with others (e.g. Hartogh and Wickel 2019, 458). Finally, the young people also get ideas for what to do in their leisure time (Ziegenmeyer and Mühlinghaus 2021, 21). Thus, the fact that the measure of short-term juvenile detention primarily serves an educational purpose (§13 JGG) highlights the potential value of exploring how the integration of music-related pedagogical activities into the structure of this measure can have positive effects on many delinquent young people.

This paper discusses the social-transformative potential that music-related activities between students with different backgrounds can develop in such contexts of short-term juvenile detention. Within the framework of a university-based learning setting at the intersection of music education and music mediation, students from the University of Luebeck (Germany) plan and facilitate a music-week with the young people detained in a facility for short-term juvenile detention in Moltsfelde (Germany). The example of this specific learning design, which is part of the music education and music mediation programme at the University of Luebeck (Germany)<sup>2</sup>, provides insights into the framework and specifics of the learning context and target group. Moreover, it gives insights into how such experiences leave traces on the participating university students. My observations in recent years (2021–2024) show that musical activities facilitated by students of music education and/or music mediation with young people in detention can stimulate valuable changes in the students' perspectives and, along with this, critical questioning and correction of their own convictions and patterns of action. The reason the potential is being referred to only from the perspective of the students (and not yet from that of the young people in detention) is due to the vulnerability of the context and the detained young people, and the wish to build up a maximum degree of trust with the facility for short-term juvenile detention and its staff. I wanted to get

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2 The course can be credited within the curriculum of the studies of Bachelor of Arts and Master of Education, both as a compulsory or elective course. Furthermore, it is also open to students from the Bachelor and Master of Music programme.

to know the students' needs first and get an idea of how, to what extent and by which means the process of collecting data would be appropriate.

## **The Context: Short-term Juvenile Detention as a Space for Cultural Learning**

The disciplinary and educational measure of short-term juvenile detention is a response to juvenile misbehaviour in the form of a short-term deprivation of liberty for up to four weeks. As a means of punishment, it is to be distinguished from a juvenile sentence as a genuine criminal penalty, and can be imposed if a juvenile sentence is not deemed necessary, but warnings and conditions alone are not sufficient to punish the offence; thus, it is meant as a last warning and intended to make clear to the young student that they must take responsibility for their own delinquent behaviour (§ 13 JGG). Following an educational mission, this specific measure of short-term juvenile detention aims to enable the detained young people to leading “a socially responsible life without committing offences in the future” (§ 2 JStVollzG).

Educational courses are therefore provided for the detainees, in order to train them in behaviours that can, for example, prevent offences, or help them overcome problems. As cultural education is crucial for acquiring competences for resocialisation (such as participation in society and expressing oneself), it should also be integrated into the educational design of juvenile detention, and young offenders should thus be “encouraged in the development of their abilities and skills in such a way that they are enabled to lead an independent and socially responsible life with respect for the rights of others” (§ 3 JStVollzG). Sports and music activities as an aspect of cultural education are of particular importance here because they help to introduce rhythm and structure into everyday life. Nevertheless, the potential of musical activities seems as yet to have been barely utilised in the context of short-term juvenile detention.

## **The Learning Setting: Change of Perspective - Music Mediation in the Context of Short-term Juvenile Detention**

The learning design was developed and set in motion in 2021 by the author of this article, in cooperation with the director of the facility for short-term juvenile detention Moltsfelde, which is the only one in the German state of Schleswig-Holstein and thus the place where all forms of short-term juvenile

detention, for both male and female offenders takes place.<sup>3</sup> The course is part of the curriculum of the study programme in music education at the University of Music Luebeck. Even though it mainly addresses future music teachers and educators, it is open to all music students at the university.

The learning design consists of three parts: first, a preparatory course, second, the music week at the facility for short-term juvenile detention Moltsfelde, and third, a follow-up evaluation and (post-)reflection. Within the first part, the students get to know the context. Therefore, an excursion to the place (within the first two to three weeks of the semester) gives them the possibility to meet the staff and get a better picture of the context and idea of short-term detention and how it is organised in Moltsfelde. During the preparation of the music week, the participating students are introduced to central approaches and methods of community music, the overall ideas of social work and strategies on how to deal with young people with challenging behaviour (Mullen 2022). They then develop their own concept and plan the music week for and with specific focus on the possible interests and needs of the detained young people. Here, it is crucial that they start their planning with their main overall goals (e.g. empowerment and self-efficacy) in mind, and then decide on ways and methods they can use in order to achieve them. The heart of the course is the facilitation of a one-week music project for a group of young people who are detained at the Moltsfelde facility for short-term juvenile detention. During the week, the teaching team is on-site every day, takes part in the project and supports the students as mentors between the individual phases. A very valuable perspective emerges from the learning effects on all parties involved in the project (the students, the staff from both institutions and the detained youth), in the form of an evaluation and (post-)reflection at the end of the learning course.

Since then, four successful courses have taken place, each with music students (groups of around three to five) and detained youth (groups of around three to seven). At the start of the fourth cycle (winter semester 2024–25), the course became part of the larger project *Auftakt*, which seeks to develop a research-based strategy on how to integrate music into the framework of short-term juvenile detention and thus into the cultural infrastructure of the state of Schleswig-Holstein. It is accompanied by the researcher Julia Peters.

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3 See [https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/justiz/gerichte-und-justizbehorden/JAA/jaa\\_node.html](https://www.schleswig-holstein.de/DE/justiz/gerichte-und-justizbehorden/JAA/jaa_node.html) (accessed April 7, 2025).

## Theoretical Background

During all the cycles that I have initiated and accompanied so far<sup>4</sup>, I could observe one main thread: the participating students emphasised the high value of this specific learning-experience for themselves, as part of their studies, and that was not only visible in their high engagement in the project, but also in the fact that the experiences seemed to be very present even for a longer time afterwards.

In an article by Jeananne Nichols and Brian M. Sullivan (2016), who facilitated a similar university-based learning-format, I found hints regarding the transformative potential of experiences in such contexts. Within the format of critical service-learning<sup>5</sup> as a fruitful way to enable encounters between university students and people from different communities (Nichols and Sullivan 2016, 156), Nichols and Sullivan sought to foster students' social awareness. One characteristic that I found interesting in their research is the correlation in the dissonances between participants' prior frames of reference and the reality they encounter in the learning setting of a short-term juvenile detention centre (ibid., 158). Thus, according to Richard Kiely, "the intensity and duration of the dissonance is positively correlated with the transformative potential of the service-learning experience" (ibid., 158). Following this train of thought, I browsed the literature of transformative learning and found that Jack Mezirow's theory seemed to provide a theoretical lens and heuristic framework for analysing the transformative potential in this specific learning setting.<sup>6</sup>

### ***What is the transformative learning theory?***

The theory of transformative learning was developed by Mezirow within the context of adult learning and constantly further developed. Mezirow's theory is based on the concept of meaningful perspectives which are influenced and shaped by different factors (e.g. social and cultural norms, individual socialisation). As frames of reference, they structure our individual reality and selectively shape and guide our perception, cognition, feelings, etc. (Mezirow 2012, 82). According to Mezirow, "a frame of reference is composed of two dimensions: a habit of mind and resulting points of view" (ibid., 83). Whereas a habit of mind as

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4 I also initiated a similar format in previous learning settings, such as a juvenile prison in Wuppertal (see Ziegenmeyer 2020; 2019).

5 In critical service-learning projects, participants not only learn and develop through active participation in service-learning experiences, but also seek to understand the systemic social issues that make their service necessary.

6 First observations are documented in Ziegenmeyer 2023.

a set of assumptions “acts as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (ibid.), a point of view “comprises clusters of meaning schemes [...] that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causality” (ibid., 84). Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning aims to raise awareness for individual perspectives on meaning and make them accessible to fundamental changes (Mezirow 1991, 34–46).

According to Mezirow, transformations often happen in a certain sequence, as shown in the following steps (that can of course vary):

1. A disorienting dilemma; 2. self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame; 3. a critical assessment of assumptions; 4. recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared; 5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions; 6. planning a course of action; 7. acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans; 8. provisional trying of new roles; 9. building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships; 10. a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective. (Mezirow 2012, 86)

These steps can be further summarised in the overarching phases of deconstruction, reconstruction, and integration (see also Schild, Leng, and Hammer 2019, 34; see furthermore Ziegenmeyer 2023): The first phase of deconstruction – containing the confrontation with dilemmas – forms like a trigger for processes of transformative learning. This is followed by the phase of reconstruction, in which individual experiences are shared with others and critically reflected upon together, and new perspectives are developed and tried out. In the third phase, that of integration, the new perspectives on meaning are integrated into one’s own life, thereby constructively resolving the initial dilemma (Schild, Leng, and Hammer 2019, 34).

The Moltsfelde facility for short-term juvenile detention provides a protected learning environment in which music education and music mediation students can experience and reflect on their pedagogical and musical actions. The encounter with a group of young people in detention creates room for dialogue and reflection on perspectives, assumptions, and beliefs.

## Methodology

The model of transformative learning by Mezirow forms the theoretical lens and heuristic framework in which significant moments with potential for transfor-

mative learning experienced by the students are analysed.<sup>7</sup> The data is drawn from two main sources: firstly, from my own observations as initiator, coordinator, and mentor of this project (Ziegenmeyer 2023) during the music week, as well as from reflective and informal talks with the participating students within all four cycles of this course. Besides the organisation of the main overarching ideas and framework of the course-setting, including the communication with the cooperating partners, I give feedback and accompany the project. Secondly, from reflections in the form of voice messages from former participants that I gathered in March 2024, after the individual courses, thus covering a longer time period (between six months and two years). The former participants were asked the following two questions: When you look back on the course and the music week, what did you take away from it, and to what extent does this experience influence your learning and actions today? The voice messages were fully transcribed. Direct quotes were translated by me into English using additional support from translation software such as DeepL. The voice messages were important as a way to get an idea about how sustainable the experience of the course is and if any traces remain when students reflect on the project retrospectively. Out of 11 students that I contacted via email, I received 9 reflections.<sup>8</sup> The data was first coded in themes that occur as main threads in the post-reflections. In the data analysis, I followed the model and process of qualitative content analysis developed by Mayring (2015, 70) with an inductive approach, deriving the categories from the material (*ibid.*, 85). In a second step, the overarching characteristics of Mezirow's transformative theory deconstruction, reconstruction, and integration (see Schild, Leng, and Hammer 2019, 34) were used as a heuristic lens in order to analyse and interpret the data.

In the following section, I will present key experiences appearing in the data of students' reflections which show characteristics of transformative potential according to the transformative learning theory and which can be assigned to the different phases of the theory of transformative learning.

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7 See also previous findings from this setting documented in Ziegenmeyer 2023.

8 So far, 16 students have participated in this specific learning-design. Each team included 3 to 5 students from the university and 3 to 7 young people in short-term detention.

## Findings and Discussion

### *Deconstruction*

How does the experienced reality contradict or question existing assumptions, patterns of action and thoughts? This question is key to the first phase of deconstructive learning and can be seen in the students' reflections concerning their experiences. In all previous rounds, the participating music students emphasised that the encounter with the detained young people made them aware of their own privileged status and the value of their sheltered upbringing in a supportive environment from an early age:

I've definitely learned to appreciate how I grew up myself, how sheltered I grew up, how much support I received from my family on the one hand, but also from friends when I was young, and how important that is in order not to fall into the hole that you might fall into before you're taken back into juvenile detention. (Participant 1)

This increased awareness finally led to a rethinking of existing preconceptions regarding delinquent people and towards a wider view of them and their life circumstances. Thus, during the musical interaction, it was almost impossible not to get an idea of the stories the young people bring. That is why the students value the special moments that helped them to understand the individual backgrounds of the group members and which they sometimes describe as intimate.

Nevertheless, students observed many things that surprised them and that they thought would have been different: unlike their assumption that it might be difficult to deal with the young people in detention, they were surprised at how easy it was to socialise with them and to exchange thoughts, values, and emotions. The directness and openness with which the young people revealed their stories caused consternation and showed a different side of growing up, since it was in great contrast to the (usually) rather supportive and nurturing environment in which the participating music students grew up.

Interestingly, many students describe the quality of the learning experience as a connective one, where they felt this cohesive quality of music for the first time in practice: "But here, in the facility for short-term juvenile detention, I really saw for the first time that music can really bring different people together and it worked." (Participant 2) An aspect that the students did not expect was how much the detainees value their family and especially their mothers (e.g. when writing their thoughts down for the song lyrics, but also in informal talks). Considering the fact that very often these young people do not come from very supportive backgrounds, this was surprising for the students to see:

And this one aspect, that they all come from very broken families, but in the rap they all said how important family is and that family is above everything, and that the mother is a person they miss very much. And I thought that was so special, because at first you might think that they hate their family or don't get on well with their family. But family always comes before anything else. (Participant 2)

Furthermore, the students emphasised that the high value which music had in the lives of the young detained people took many more forms than they would have thought. Some students explained this as being because there had been a strong focus on making music in their own musical socialisation (e.g. learning to play an instrument or to sing) which had led them to easily overlook the variety of forms that music can take in everyone's life, e.g. listening to music, secretly singing along, writing lyrics for oneself.

### **Reconstruction**

The specific characteristics of the phase of reconstruction – the sharing and critical reflection of individual experiences with others and finally the exploration and trying out of new roles, relationships, and action perspectives – can be seen in the following key experiences reported by former students of the course. Reflections in this phase mostly deal with the interaction with the group and its dynamics. Students emphasise that in this specific setting they were really able to see for the first time how music crosses the boundary between different groups. They described the power of music as a door opener that enabled conversations about emotions, feelings, vulnerability, and difficulties in life, and also left room for new ways of exploring this together:

I found it fascinating how much the confrontation with music enabled conversations about emotions, about feelings, about vulnerability and difficulties in life. I had the feeling that it opened a door that would not have been there otherwise. (Participant 3)

Due to very thorough conceptual planning that started with the overall aims and then from there derived the individual paths, ways, approaches, and methods, the students could easily focus on their teaching and on the group later on and step back from their planning. One student described this feeling as follows: "Planning has helped me to feel better about not working with a plan." (Participant 4) Finally, a new perspective on a more open and flexible approach to their own planning with regard to the target group can be recognised: the insight that intensive planning helps one to be more flexible afterwards and that it is perfectly fine to deviate from the plan if the group provides impulses that

work better. In facilitating the course, the students experienced themselves in new roles they had not yet tried out in that dimension within conventional school and teaching contexts. With regard to this specific setting, the students emphasised the value of communication at eye level instead of suggestions for improvement and assistance. This did not mean that they gave up their leadership, but rather made room for the ideas of the participants. The idea of learning from each other contributed to creating an appreciative atmosphere in which it was possible for all participants to open up. Furthermore, the music students noticed very quickly that the participants had more expertise in the areas of hip hop and rap music and switched into the role of learners:

Although we came from the music academy, and also brought something with us and gave input, at the same time it was also very much about the music of the young people, about hip hop and rap music, and they were much more experts than we were, and we were able to learn from each other, and that contributed greatly to a very appreciative atmosphere. (Participant 3)

### ***Integration***

It is not easy to evaluate the dimension of how the students integrated the new perspectives in their lives. Nevertheless, the post-reflections show that they were able to build up competences and self-confidence in exploring new roles and relationships and also mention changes in their attitude towards people. One common thread in all the students' reflections (both short-term and long-term) is that this course was experienced as a very valuable and meaningful experience and described as a highlight within their studies. Furthermore, the students expressed that this experience of leaving their own bubble and comfort zone helped them gain the confidence to do "something similar or the same" (Participant 4), i.e. to facilitate a similar project with a similar target group. Some students are even thinking of facilitating music activities in a prison in the future, e.g. leading a choir. Furthermore, the experience of direct encounters with the young people in short-term detention, with whom they would otherwise have no contact, is described as a grounding and enriching experience. Alongside this, students mentioned an increase of openness towards people, as the following quote by a student shows:

Something has already changed in my actions, and I think that since I've had this experience, I no longer treat other people so harshly. In other words, I'm no longer so quick to judge people, or I give people more chances, forgive people much more, don't put people under so much pressure when

things don't work out, and simply accept more that things might not work out. (Participant 4)

One main thread that emerged from the data could be conceptualised as a new perspective: exploring a strengths-based approach and learning at eye-level in mutual appreciation as pedagogical method in the music week. It became clear that focusing on the detained young people themselves and their music in an appreciative way is crucial for the success of the project. The powerful experience that resulted in a successful building up of trust in all courses led the students to wish to integrate this approach into their teaching.

Another key aspect was an increased understanding of the young inmates' social background, giving the students a better feeling and understanding of how to deal with young people who might appear challenging at school.

Finally, a certain sense of responsibility and professionalisation can be seen in the reflections. As has already become clear in the phase of deconstruction, with an increased consciousness of their own privileged status and thus their power, a sense of responsibility can be seen emerging in the data:

And yes, I feel even more responsible now, as someone who, in social comparison, has been given a lot of privileges by life, at least privileges [...] that I want to use the luck I had in my life for the benefit of the community and give others something of it, because I have a certain power to do something like that. (Participant 5)

Thus, some of the students feel a certain obligation to give something back to society and to create more musical meetings with people who have limited access to programmes or activities of music-making.

## Outlook

This paper discusses the social-transformative potential that music education and music mediation can develop in an extracurricular learning setting such as a facility for short-term juvenile detention between different groups who might not normally meet. In addition to my own observations, post-reflections on the project by the university students served as data and were analysed through the heuristic lens of Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. During the music week in the facility for short-term juvenile detention, students are confronted with a social reality with which they normally have no connection in the context of their usually rather straightforward educational biography. During the week, they gain a more differentiated view of juvenile offenders and use music to its

full potential as a connector, creating a safe space for aesthetic experiences and thus experiencing self-efficacy. Their own lives' reality (such as the perception of their own privileged status and support by many people) is now seen differently by the students and leads to an increased awareness of the effects which social injustice may have on young people growing up.

The depth of the statements made by the students in the post-reflections, along with their ongoing involvement, which I repeatedly encounter in personal conversations where students still ask me about the continuation of the project, give rise to the assumption that these experiences have some kind of transformative potential that needs to be further studied. Moreover, this should justify more musical encounters with people in detention or other marginalised groups in society, as one of the students remarked:

So, I was actually very inspired and pleased to simply have this encounter, and I asked myself why I don't do this more often, why our society is so divided and compartmentalised and separated with institutions where disabled people, well, are shut off from society, arrested young people and so on, although it clearly makes sense with the prison and so on. (Participant 5)

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# From the Bottom Up

## On the Potential of a Festival's Music Mediation Programme in Innovating the Music Education Ecosystem in Croatia

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Ana Čorić

### Introduction

The *Music Biennale Zagreb (MBZ)* is a festival of contemporary music which has been located in the capital of Croatia since 1961. It has played a pivotal role in positioning Croatian contemporary music within the international scene. During the 1960s, and up until the 1990s, the festival offered a unique platform for renowned composers and performers of contemporary music to convene and showcase their works to a wider audience. From its inception, MBZ expanded beyond traditional festival boundaries. For instance, in 1971, it brought diverse programming to the streets. Prominent guest artists engaged directly with the community, exemplified by John Cage's memorable stroll through Dolac market with Croatian musicologist Nikša Gligo.

The festival is described on its website<sup>1</sup> as an “incubator of musical poetics, attempts, and excesses”, a “laboratory that affirms the ‘borderline’ by respecting its borderlines and upholding tradition by questioning its established concepts”, a “platform that brings people together”, and a “celebration of togetherness in sound and music”. The social perspective of the festival becomes obvious in the manifesto of the festival, which begins with the premise that “art should continually respond to the various aspects of culture and society, especially ecology as the current crisis point”.<sup>2</sup> By employing diverse collaborative approaches, ecologically designed artistic exchanges and residencies, and facilitating meetings between artists and scientists to reaffirm STEM as STEAM<sup>3</sup>, the festival aims to

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1 See <http://www.mbz.hr/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

2 <https://www.mbz.hr/en/2023/mbz/about-mbz> (accessed April 14, 2025).

3 STEAM is an educational approach that integrates “arts disciplines into curriculum and instruction in the areas of science, technology, engineering,

“pave the way for future generations and an inclusive ecosystem of the cultural sector that treats its resources in a responsible manner” (ibid.). To summarise the festival’s manifesto in three categories, it is evident that MBZ seeks to: (1) develop the ecosystem of the cultural sector; (2) cultivate openness and inclusion; and (3) create a dialogue that inspires and raises awareness. Within the last category, the manifesto states that the festival aims to “bring the adventure of contemporary music to younger generations of visitors and listeners, inspiring in them curiosity and openness to new and unexpected, experimental, critical, and bold listening, watching, thinking, and acting” (ibid.). This chapter aims to explore this statement further, demonstrating that the MBZ festival, through its programming, organisation, and production, impacts not only the cultural ecosystem, but also the music education ecosystem in Croatia.

My research on the MBZ festival focuses on the connection between the festival and the music education ecosystem, looking especially at the music school system, which has had a long history since the Yugoslavian era, progressing with a very clear path and a focus on Western classical music only. Conducted in the second half of 2023, the research explored the following questions:

- a) What are the specificities of music mediation offered by the MBZ Kidz festival?
- b) In what ways does the MBZ Kidz festival critically examine existing hierarchies and power relations, as well as mechanisms of inclusion or exclusion in the Croatian music education ecosystem, with a special focus on the music school system?

To answer these questions, I focus in this chapter on the MBZ’s *Festival for Children* and map the content of its innovative online music mediation platform MBZ Kidz<sup>4</sup>, which aims to engage children from the youngest age and not just biannually, during the live festival encounters, but during the whole year. To analyse how MBZ Kidz critically re-examines and expands the music education ecosystem in Croatia, I use an ecological approach to sustainability in music, covering key aspects of sustainability: systems of learning music, musicians and communities, contexts and constructs, regulations and infrastructure, and finally, media and the music industry (Schippers 2015; Schippers and Grant 2016).

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and mathematics” (Katz-Buonincontro 2018, 73). The concept has grown in popularity, but it still requires research and scholarship to be established as a discipline.

4 <https://kidz.mbz.hr/> (accessed April 14, 2025).

In the theoretical frame of reference, I refer to power dynamics and hierarchies within the music education ecosystem with a specific focus on understanding classical music as a genre, as well as the role of festivals as social innovators for fostering institutional resilience. In the following sections, I present research on the MBZ *Kidz*, based on the multimodal discourse analysis of its vivid online platform, and conclude with a critical view of the innovative potential of the bottom-up approach to initiate change at the systemic level.

## Theoretical Background

A diverse music education landscape today offers a manifold model of learning and participation in musical experiences, crossing borders between formal, non-formal, and informal contexts. Supporting learners in the lifelong journey of discovering their possible musical selves means taking into consideration all possible experiences and interactions that form their relationship with music (Creech, Varvarigou, and Hallam 2020). Living meaningful musical lives in changing societies requires removing disciplinary boundaries between music education in formal contexts, music mediation both in performance contexts and in community-based programmes, and self-directed learning. In this chapter, the focus is on connecting the festival's music mediation programme with the system of music schools, by using an ecological approach. Schippers and Grant (2016, 11) offer a framework of five interrelated domains that encompass elements of ecology common to musical practices and relevant to their sustainability:

- 1) Systems of learning music (balance between formal, non-formal, and informal contexts of music learning and participation, modes of transmission, institutional learning, and learning in the community, etc.);
- 2) musicians and communities (position, roles, and interactions of musicians within their communities);
- 3) contexts and constructs (social and cultural contexts of musical traditions – values, identities, gender issues, prestige, diversity, etc.);
- 4) regulations and infrastructure (places to perform, learn, practice, and compose, virtual spaces, rights, laws, etc.); and
- 5) media and the music industry (dissemination and visibility in media and community, connection with the music industry).

This framework can be applied to any music practice, as well as to any music genre (see Schippers 2015, 140f.), when approaching it as an organism rather than an artifact.

Viewing music education as part of an ecosystem raises questions about power dynamics and hierarchies within it. As well as hierarchies of value relating to a) wider social inequalities or differences (including gender, race, class, disability, nationality, sexuality, and age); b) status and role within the institution (e.g. level of study, status in the institution); and c) inter-personal or individual differences; hierarchies also exist within and between musical genres (Bull 2021). Western classical music has more often been approached and studied “as a text, rather than a contemporary cultural practice” (ibid., xiii). Understanding classical music genres as texts in relation to social practices often involves making internal divisions of the Western classical music canon based on different aspects, such as a gendered division of hierarchies of musical forms (e.g. symphony and concerto are more associated with the ‘masculine’ and the ‘public’), perceiving other musical genres (e.g. popular) as less prestigious and serious, positioning classical music from certain periods of time as being more important than contemporary classical music (e.g. Mozart’s and Bach’s music as the most important), etc. Bull and Scharff (2021) write about classical music as a genre associated both with universal identity and particular identities, with the top position in the hierarchy of all music genres, which is often produced and reinforced by the cultural and educational institutions, in interactions with musicians, and in relation to network-based labour practices. Analysing classical music as a genre and identifying its subgenres requires understanding of genres as relational, which implies that the relationship between subgenres within classical music is hierarchical. Genre hierarchies are (re-)produced in institutional settings, especially in (higher) music education institutions. Thus, in the case of formal music education institutions, it might be interesting to challenge exclusive and still-prevalent values and beliefs about e.g. classical music’s autonomy from social concerns, the pedagogical idea of long-term investment in practising to “get it right” (Bull, 2019) which does not make space for improvisation, as well as exclusive and elitist views of music education.

Perceiving music festivals as social innovations<sup>5</sup> could tackle injustices in music education institutions, creating opportunities for institutional change. Educational institutions (in this case, music schools) are today often affected

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5 Social innovations are initiatives in “an organisation, a practice, or an area of activity” in the society that can indicate a path for wider social change (Mangabeira Unger 2015, cited in Väkevä, Westerlund, and Ilmola-Sheppard 2017, 130).

by the silo effect, meaning that different departments and disciplines within the same institution operate in isolation from one another, causing a lack of dialogue and collaboration. On the other hand, designing institutional innovations can help expand the boundaries of a music school's system, making it more resilient by redefining its identity and purpose (Väkevä, Westerlund, and Ilmola-Sheppard 2017). Institutional resilience counteracts an institutional silo effect, which occurs when institutional systems reproduce social injustice by maintaining existing institutional culture and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion without questioning what could be improved. Music teachers can play a pivotal role in driving change within institutions and society, as shown in two Finnish cases of grassroots teacher-driven examples of inter-professional collaboration<sup>6</sup> based on civic professionalism (Laes et al. 2022). Mutual problem-solving involves the overlapping of different practices and expertise. This is why connecting music school teachers and festival music mediators through social and institutional innovations might be a gamechanger and also a challenge, especially in terms of the structural and organisational nature of their work. The intermittent nature of music festivals, as well as the lack of fixed structure, continuity and stable budget complicate their sustainable effectiveness. In this context, festival music mediators face numerous challenges related to working life. These include the absence of fixed production locations and their own ensembles, the difficulty of maintaining a balanced workload throughout the year, and the challenge of establishing stable relationships with collaborators and stakeholders from festival to festival. Conversely, the carnivalistic nature of festivals, their potential to reach new performance spaces and audiences, agile budgets, and the ability to focus on specialised themes, often position festivals as innovators within the music mediation landscape (Rademacher 2023).

The case study of the MBZ Kidz Festival presented in this chapter highlights the fact that positioning the festival's online music mediation platform as a social innovation, alongside the school's contemporary music ensemble as a bottom-up institutional innovation, can offer new perspectives on enriching music school curricula. By embracing repertoire expansion and integrating diverse learning and teaching approaches, these innovations demonstrate how curricular development can be advanced within the existing educational framework. Furthermore, as described in the continuation of this chapter, the innovative and miscellaneous festival's online platform makes its multimedia

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6 Inter-professional collaboration is “collaboration across professional groups (...) particularly necessary in institutional situations where institutional boundaries need to be crossed in order for the system as a whole to be able to respond to new demands and problems” (Laes et al. 2022, 20).

content accessible to its audiences beyond the time- and space-related boundaries of the festival and formal music classrooms, offering content that fosters the agency of the audience in various forms of engagement with music (listening, music-making, and creating processes).

## Music Mediation at the MBZ Festival for Children

### *The programme of the MBZ Festival for Children*

Although the MBZ has a history of providing musical pieces for children and collaborating on concerts with Jeunesses Musicales in past decades, the introduction of the MBZ Festival for Children took place for the first time at the 30<sup>th</sup> edition of the MBZ. From February to April 2019, the new programme edition featured nearly 15 workshops, 5 concerts, and 4 performances of the theatre play *Queen Frog*. Since then, the festival has expanded its educational offerings to various community contexts.

In 2019, the festival produced a *Body Percussion Workshop*, catering to children aged 6 to 14. This workshop was facilitated by the percussionist and music educator Josip Konfic. Additionally, the festival featured a series called *Glazba u mom kvartu* [Music in My Neighbourhood], comprising interactive concerts for children aged 10 and above, moderated by the musicians Ana Batinica and Aleksandar Jakopanec. Another initiative, *Music, Space, Me*, engaged children aged 6 and above in creating their own music theatre within their classrooms. Additionally, the Festival introduced *Svirkaonica*<sup>7</sup>, a contemporary music workshop for children aged 4 and above, under the motto ‘Music for all’. *Svirkaonica* provided children with opportunities to improvise, compose, engage in body percussion, perform, listen to music and create instruments. Both formats are designed and facilitated by Lucija Stanojević, a violinist and music educator. Many of these workshops and concerts were developed in collaboration with Jeunesses Musicales Croatia.

Besides workshops for children, in 2019 the festival offered the format *Knapanje: zona za slobodnu kreaciju i izražavanje studenata* [Knapanje: the zone for free creation and interpretation of students], which gathered 120 students from all the Croatian higher music education institutions for a collaborative creation of music. The festival’s programme partner was Peščenica Cultural Centre KNAP. The programme was created based on the festival’s internal research and

7 Probably a compound of the words *svirko* or *svirka* (“gig” or “jam session”) and *učionica*, the Croatian word for “classroom”.

the students' survey responses about their artistic needs and affinities, as well as their attitudes towards the content and the opportunities offered in higher music education institutions. In this way, the MBZ festival provided a space for future music professionals to access specific knowledge and practices in contemporary music, as well as the chance to collaborate with their peers and composers.

A noteworthy development from 2019 to today is the focus on producing musical works tailored for babies and toddlers. In 2019 MBZ Kidz featured repeated performances of the musical puppet play *Žabica kraljica* [Queen Frog], which originally premiered in the 2017 edition of the festival. Diverging from the familiar Grimm Brothers' tale, where the frog seeks a princess's kiss in order to transform into a man, this story emphasises the auditory experience – the prince proposes to the frog solely after hearing her sing, disregarding visual appearances and warnings from those around him. Directed by Rene Medvešek, the play challenges the deceptive nature of sight and its societal conditioning, encouraging its audience to engage in subtle and attentive listening. Musically, what distinguishes this piece is the combination of elements utilised by composer Sara Glojnarčić: it is composed for voice, piano, percussion, double bass, and puppet theatre. The recommended age for experiencing this musical puppet play is 4 and above.

In 2023, the MBZ festival took a significant leap forward by introducing the first Croatian opera designed for babies, titled *Opera Rosa*, in co-production with the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb. This groundbreaking production, composed for opera voice, two violins, small percussion, and electronics, marked the inaugural festival's project in the *Palette Musicale* series. This initiative aims at putting on productions in cooperation with leading cultural institutions in Zagreb in order to introduce the youngest children to the world of sound, music, and movement through stage-works created exclusively for them. *Opera Rosa* is imagined as an interactive journey shared by babies and their caregivers. The performance, presented by four female interpreters, engages the audience through voice, movement, and instruments, creating a multisensory experience. The performers and creators of the concept, Ivana Đula (dramaturgy), Tena Novak Vincek (music), Irma Unušić (dance and choreography), Lucija Stanojević (violin and other instruments), Ivana Lazar/Mima Karaula (soprano) and Selena Gazda (costume and set design), envisioned the opera as a live installation that invites the audience to listen, discover, and play in a comfortable, gentle, and secure space reminiscent of the mother's womb.

In 2023, the festival introduced its latest offering, *Raspjevane priče* [The Singing Stories], presented as an encounter with children and adult audiences

through an audiobook and concert format. In terms of content, both formats feature musical adaptations of Ukrainian children's literature, including folk tales and works by authors, translated into Croatian and musically interpreted by composers from both classical and popular music backgrounds. Each musical story is uniquely shaped: *A Story about Bugs*, composed by Ivana Kiš for voice, violin, and vibraphone, integrates music with theatrical multisensory expressions. *A Drop*, composed and performed by Ivanka Mazurkijević and Damir Martinović Mrle, draws from popular music genres. Composer and singer Maja Rivić created *Ivasik Telesik*, experimenting with vocal techniques, colours and breath. In the concert presentation format at MBZ, the stories are narrated in both languages by Croatian and Ukrainian actors and professionals from various fields. This programme collaboration involves the Croatian Literary Translation Association, book&zvook app<sup>8</sup>, and Solidarna Foundation, with all proceeds from sales donated to Ukrainian children currently residing in Croatia due to the circumstances of the war in their home country.

The festival's commitment to community engagement is further exemplified by its specialised workshops for children, which are extended to the participation of general schools in remote regions, such as islands, through the *Backpack (Full of) Culture* programme. This joint national initiative, organised by The Ministry of Culture and The Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, provides support for arts curricula in schools and is recognised on a European level<sup>9</sup>.

### **The MBZ Kidz online platform**

The MBZ Kidz online platform was established and co-created in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic by Nina Čalopek, festival producer and programme curator of MBZ Kidz, and Lucija Stanojević, a violinist and instrumental music pedagogue. Besides the map of live programmes offered in different editions of the festival, the specificity of the music mediation online space includes three classrooms: a) Listening Room; b) Watching Room; and c) Classroom.

The Listening Room<sup>10</sup> comprises four musical pieces: (1) Igor Kuljerić: *U klaunovu vrtu* [In the Garden of the Clown], for flute, tuba, and piano; (2) Frano Đurović: *Kvartet za kraj radnog vremena* [Quartet for an Ending of the Working Time]; (3) Davor Branimir Vincze: *Šest minijatura za očajnu kućanicu*

8 <https://www.bookzvook.com/knjige/raspjevane-price--> (accessed April 15, 2025).

9 See UNESCO (2006).

10 <https://kidz.mbz.hr/hr/slusaonica> (accessed April 14, 2025).

[Six Miniatures for a Desperate Housewife]; and (4) Sanda Majurec: *Šetnja gradom* [Citywalk]. Each musical piece is presented through several media: a recording of the musical composition, a textual introduction, a photo gallery and/or video and a worksheet.

The Watching Room<sup>11</sup> of the webpage features a series of six episodes: (1) *Pitalice* [Questions]; (2) *Od kamena do čipa* [From the rock to the chip]; (3) *Tjelofon* [Bodyphone]; (4) *Skladam* [I Compose]; (5) *Makov Nokturno* [Poppy's Nocturne]; and (6) *Igroglazb* [Playmusic]. The primary medium is video, supplemented by textual introductions and often graphic scores that it is possible for children to play. Additional interesting media include video tutorials for creating a music theatre in a box (similar to the Japanese *kamishibai*) and instructions for building instruments to create a soundscape for their theatre plays. *Poppy's Nocturne* is another example of connecting music and sound with storytelling. This educational music piece, created by composer Mak Murtić within the Festival's contemporary music workshops for children (*Svirkaonica*), is written for flute, viola, violoncello, and guitar. The video features visual stimulation of the musical content performed on the overhead projector, creating a holistic experience of image, sound, and words. The story is conveyed through musical, semantic, and visual languages, forming a unique experience. In addition, the video provides a graphic score, enabling children to play it themselves, as demonstrated by the pupils of Elly Bašić Music School, who performed and recorded it, imitating the sounds of birds, horses, rain, and more on their instruments. Almost all episodes of the Watching Room gather together children, *Svirko* (the animated mascot of MBZ Kidz), and visiting artists in dialogue and active musicianship. While the Watching Room is not primarily focused on repertoire, each video episode concludes with contemporary compositions such as *Dolce Furioso* by Dubravko Detoni, *Meko & Rahlo* by Gordan Tudor, and *Poema* by Ivan Josip Skender.

The Classroom<sup>12</sup> section features a collection of 18 materials linked to various parts of the Watching Room and Listening Room. Its primary focus is to explain terminology related to (contemporary) music in a child-friendly manner, with references to selected contemporary musical pieces and composers.

11 <https://kidz.mbz.hr/hr/gledaonica> (accessed April 14, 2025).

12 <https://kidz.mbz.hr/hr/ucionica> (accessed April 14, 2025).

## MBZ Kidz Research

### Methodology

The MBZ Kidz research design consisted of two phases. Since the only reliable source of data about the festival at that moment was the official website, the first stage of research involved collecting and organising data from the MBZ Kidz online platform with the aim of describing and analysing content and activities related to the festival's music mediation in various contexts. It was conducted using multimodal discourse analysis (MDA), an "approach to discourse which focuses on how meaning is made through the use of multiple modes of communication as opposed to just language" (Jones 2013, 1). MDA has made important contributions to education and literacy studies, particularly in how digital multimodal text affects the way we learn and teach (Jewitt 2006; Jones 2013). Specifically, the aims were to examine how different modes of communication are integrated within digital content based on contemporary music, and how the content and formats of mediation shape the identity of the festival within the community, with the emphasis on the music education ecosystem.

The analysis sought to understand how music mediation affects the entire music learning ecosystem in Croatia. A relational approach, rather than an analytical orientation (Jewitt 2011), was used to observe the multimodality, integration, and interplay of different senses and modes in the mediation of contemporary music. The relationship across and between modes and interactions on the MBZ Kidz website as a multimodal text is the central focus. The modes observed were aural, linguistic, visual, gestural, and spatial, while the media observed were musical pieces, written text, images, videos, graphic scores, and worksheets. Multimodal data was represented using the technique of multimodal transcription. Since it is a selective and interpretive process, because it involves the researcher's transcription choices, the research is limited to aspects relevant to the main research questions. Using a social semiotic approach to MDA (Kress 2010), I analysed how the MBZ Kidz online platform uses sounds, music, words, images, and videos to guide and educate its visitors. Using a systemic functional linguistic approach to MDA (Van Leeuwen 1999), I analysed how MBZ Kidz online platform uses dialogue, narration, and sound effects to transmit contemporary music to children. Finally, using a critical discourse analysis approach to MDA (Weiss and Wodak 2003), I analysed how MBZ Kidz music mediation formats, in both online and live formats, challenge dominant discourses and power dynamics in the Croatian music education ecosystem. As sample units of research, multimodal representations from the website were used: the programme of the MBZ

*Festival for Children*, Listening Room, Watching Room, and Classroom. In the analysis, special emphasis is placed on the meaning-making and construction of knowledge created by the patterns of educational interaction (West 2011), which was particularly relevant for mapping and analysing data in the unit Classroom.

The second part of the MBZ Kidz research aimed to organise the findings from the MDA in order to answer the two main research questions. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology was employed, with an ecological approach to music sustainability. This approach, developed in the research project *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: Towards an Ecology of Musical Diversity* (Schippers 2015; Schippers and Grant 2016), comprises five domains essential to the ecology of most music practices: (1) systems of learning music; (2) musicians and communities; (3) contexts and constructs; (4) regulations and infrastructure; and (5) media and the music industry. Each domain was analysed using the set of questions and explanations proposed for each domain. A special focus for assessing the sustainability of MBZ Kidz was on measuring the vitality of its content and practices in relation to the state of the Croatian formal music education system. Results are thematically coded and organised in several different categories, following the logic of the five ecological domains.

## Results and discussion

### *Systems of learning music: exploring the sound of music*

MBZ Kidz reaches diverse audiences, both online and offline, and expands its programme to include families. It offers various ways to engage with music, such as live performances of stage works, workshops, audio-stories, video-tutorials for music-making, and listening activities. Analysis shows that the festival's music mediation incorporates both music pedagogy<sup>13</sup> and sound pedagogy in its activities, combining different types of music and an interdisciplinary approach. Contemporary music inherently intertwines with natural and social processes (e.g. background noise, bodily functions, environmental sounds, and industrial noise). The MBZ respects these intertwined categories of music and sound, systematically transcending “the boundaries of the institution, the festival, the performance, [...] the beginning and the end

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13 The term “music pedagogy” is used as a reference to the discipline, while the term “music education” refers to the ecosystem.

of the composition in which it is woven"<sup>14</sup>. As stated in its manifesto, the MBZ festival seeks to create a space for “imagining new forms of existence and social organization” by restructuring “the entire human sensorium”<sup>15</sup>. Transforming “auditory perception in the everyday life of the subject” (Tinkle 2015, 222) is the focus of sound pedagogy, an analytical framework in sonic arts with references to: (1) counter-pedagogies (e.g. Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy); (2) Raymond Murray Schafer’s concept of “ear-cleaning” (Schafer 1967, 1); and (3) John Cage’s idea of listening without carrying a cultural backpack filled with codes related to the learning of a music piece “4’33””, often mentioned as an example on the MBZ Kidz online platform, that transformed perception of auditory experiences in a musical way, and that was the moment when sound pedagogy emerged as an approach that opened “possibilities for broader and more immediate participation than in Western art music” (Tinkle 2015, 223).

For the purposes of listening education, Recharte (2019, 78) offers an “acoustemological, cultural production approach to music education” based on Steven Feld’s term *acoustemology*, conjoined from the words ‘acoustic’ and ‘epistemology’. The paradigm offered by Recharte is rooted in generating knowledge through and within the ecology of relations during listening practices in our everyday lives. Unlike the approach taken in Croatian music education, which is predominantly centred around Western classical music, based on learning by reading sheet music, the synergy between sound pedagogy and music pedagogy might cross the limitations of existing systems and open up new and multimodal ways of learning music. One of the ways might be to expand the established perception of the music literacy that is connected exclusively with music notation. In that sense, Paul Broomhead (2019) provides an expanded perspective on literacy in music, suggesting that reading and writing scores are not the only significant music resources. He argues that interactions with music notations – understood as resources that are negotiated and created – can be perceived as texts, and the ability to engage meaningfully with these can be termed literacy. Consequently, any meaningful interaction between a music learner and a music resource constitutes a music literacy event. Common texts in music are not just “instruments, surrounding sounds in an ensemble, conducting gestures, musical modelling, music scores, and musical presentations (live performances and recordings)”, but also “performing spaces, audiences and practice rooms” (ibid., 15).

Multiple literacies, multimodality, and the synergy between sound pedagogy and music pedagogy can be noticed in all digital classrooms within the

14 <https://www.mbz.hr/en/2023/mbz/about-mbz> (accessed April 14, 2025).

15 *ibid.*

MBZ Kidz learning platform, highlighted by the use of graphic notation, DIY culture, experiential learning, and peer-to-peer learning. In the Listening Room, the text that accompanies the musical piece invites children to engage with listening by linking familiar elements from their world to the complex nature of the compositions and contemporary music. All textual examples and worksheet tasks employ storytelling to engage listeners in a multimodal way, accompanied by questions designed to stimulate visual and aural imagination and innovation. For instance, in the first piece (*In the Garden of the Clown*) listeners are encouraged to imagine and draw their version of a clown, his behaviours, and a clown's garden, based on their listening experience. In *Six Miniatures for a Desperate Housewife*, listeners receive reflective questions about their music listening habits and tasks that prompt them to imagine their own method of preparing a piano. The composition contains quotations from examples of popular music, manipulated electronically to contrast with the piano, inviting listeners to rethink their spatial surroundings when they listen to the music. Another example of expanding the listening space is found in *Citywalk*. Composer Sanda Majurec, in the accompanying video, invites listeners to connect their listening experience with the soundwalk activity, encouraging them to recognise that the sounds in our surroundings can become music if we choose to perceive them that way. Both the text and video provide the composer's statements about the piece, inviting listeners to step into the composer's shoes and think creatively about compositional approaches. This promotes MBZ's idea that active listening and perception of music are "an exceptionally important socially engaged act". The piece also includes an excerpt from the graphic score as a visual element.

In each episode of the Watching Room, the protagonists are two children and Svirko, the mascot of MBZ Kidz. Svirko is an animated character who slips into various roles, such as facilitator, narrator, musician, etc. Despite having a male name, the character is voiced by an adult female, resulting in a gender-neutral perception. The only episode without children present is *From the Rock to the Chip*, which narrates the history of music. In this episode, Svirko acts as a narrator who awakens in the stone age as a sound researcher, inviting children to join the adventure. The video includes tutorials on creating musical instruments from various historical eras. Aurally, Svirko's voice changes to reflect different spaces and historical periods, illustrating, for example, the specific echoes in a cave and a church. Other episodes are recorded in a room filled with various instruments and objects, serving as both a sound laboratory and a playground. This space also functions as an animated whiteboard. For instance, in the episode *Questions*, Svirko appears as a musician and facilitator who answers children's questions. The children explore the space first, trying to define terms that appear as words in the air. They discover the term "cluster"

next to the piano, with a visual mark at the keyboard indicating how to play a cluster, after which Svirko explains its meaning. A similar process is used for the term “aleatoric”, with the term appearing in the room along with a corresponding object, such as a cube, to illustrate the concept.

In the video *I Compose*, the guest is conductor and composer Ivan Josip Skender, who uses the space as an empty canvas for writing a graphic score, which appears as animation. The children mimic his gestures, creating their own graphic scores, using geometric shapes, as well as drawing a comic strip. In the end, they perform their graphic scores using various sounds, learning in this way about sound effects. Graphic scores and the extension of the space are also evident in the video *Bodyphone*, where children perform by reading graphic scores through body percussion. This video features a guest dancer whose gestures, while performing the musical piece, create a visual echo.

The multimodal analysis of the content in the Watching Room shows that all modes explored are meticulously detailed. A special emphasis on knowledge production is given to the interactions between (1) the children and the sounds/music; (2) the children among themselves; (3) the children and Svirko; (4) the children and guests from different professions; (5) the collective interactions of children, guests, and Svirko. Although the audiovisual and textual mode are predominant, the creative use of space, showcasing the synergy of material world and the digital media (animated parts), makes these videos particularly engaging. Through interactions and the expanded vision of space, the festival's online platform becomes a playground, showing that learning and innovation occur in a democratic, collaborative, and supportive environment.

The Classroom section offers children the opportunity to learn approximately 80 terms related to (contemporary) music, explained in child-friendly language. Important words are highlighted in bold to emphasise their significance. The inclusion of pictures often depicts children and young people, highlighting the fact that contemporary music is not solely for adults and professionals. Throughout all the tasks and text, emphasis is placed on encouraging the child's agency and the connection of content with examples in their everyday lives. Terms are enriched with references to composers and contemporary musical pieces, fostering diversity by bridging the gap between Western classical music and popular music. Among the numerous contemporary music composers presented on the website, one prominently featured is John Cage.

To put these findings in the Croatian context, it is evident that using MBZ Kidz festival's content might refresh music school curricula still focused on the Western classical music canon, predominantly from the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic era. Although one of the advantages of the existing system of music

schools in Croatia is its deep dive into content related to Western classical music, it is worth noting its limitations, such as the lack of contemporary classical music repertoire and the related specificities and transmission processes (e.g. improvisation, graphic scores, extended techniques, etc.). The system is still characterised by its closed curriculum, with a traditional subject-hour system, outdated formal curricula, as well as the absence of a holistic approach to music, especially in terms of integration with other musical disciplines (Matoš 2018). Furthermore, the type of learning that occurs in Croatian music schools is learning by reading sheet music, which mostly includes classical music notation and rarely the graphic notation characteristic of contemporary music. In this sense, the holistic approach, contemporary music repertoire and expanded perspective on music literacy used in *MBZ Kidz* creates opportunities for the pupils to engage with music in a new way.

The audience can approach the festival's content in three different contexts of music learning and participation: (1) informal – on the *MBZ Kidz* online platform, at their own pace; (2) non-formal – by attending the festival's workshops in the city of Zagreb during the festival; and (3) formal – at workshops in general schools across Croatia (the festival's music mediation produced and financed through the *Culture Backpack* programme) and at the Elly Bašić Music School within *The Group for New Music*. Using simple language to describe contemporary music and its techniques, as well as different forms of graphic scores and creative ideas, *MBZ Kidz* online content is guided by the idea of a democratisation of musical repertoire. In this way, music learning and participation in the festival's programme becomes accessible to everyone, beyond the borders of the festival timeframe, the Elly Bašić Music School and the city of Zagreb.

### ***Communities of professional practice***

The content analysis of *MBZ Kidz* reveals that since 2019 the festival has developed a comprehensive music mediation programme both live and in online space. Currently, it is the only music festival in Croatia with a long-lasting tradition of music mediation, dating back to Yugoslavia and the festival's collaboration with Jeunesses Musicales Croatia. It is worth noting the importance of these facts, because music mediation as a field of practice and study does not yet officially exist in Croatia. Bearing that in mind, it is certain that the festival's music mediators could act as role-models for music teachers and musicians of all profiles, especially those who are still in training and interested in creating new formats for dialogue with their audiences. The festival has created the platform *KNAPANJE*, mainly for the students whose focus is on performing. It also offers internship positions to students of the

Academy of Music at the University of Zagreb, mainly for production and organisation purposes during the festival. In this way, through its bottom-up approach, the festival creates a chance for situated learning in higher music education. What remains open is the need to advocate for similar internships focused on music mediation in future editions of the festival, allowing the professional learning community of music mediators to expand and take the field of practice to new levels. Collaborative learning in the professional musical community might inspire music professionals to work differently on all aspects of the music education ecosystem in their future employment positions, using the festival's experiences and networks to expand and sustain contemporary music repertoire in institutions and society.

Both through its offline and online programme, MBZ Kidz offers composers of contemporary music the opportunity to meet and share music and ideas, as well as to join different communities (e.g. families, or workshops in schools across the country). In collaboration with professionals from different fields, innovative pedagogical approaches and formats of music mediation are being developed, reaching a variety of audiences, starting from the youngest. Through the festival's activities, professionals enter into the realm of everyday life, expanding the space of contemporary music performances both in the online and offline sphere. What might be improved in the future is to also offer music mediation activities for adults and elderly people, since they are audiences that are often hard to reach.

### ***Contexts of music mediation and music education in Croatia***

Through the MBZ Kidz programme, the MBZ festival offers activities during the whole year, which expands the time of the festival's biennial nature to everyday access, especially through its online platform. By expanding the time, space, and programme of the festival, especially in its music mediation formats, MBZ contributes to the diversity of the music education ecosystem in Croatia, offering innovative approaches that do not exist within the formal system.

Socially and culturally, music education in Croatia has a long tradition, both in general schools and in specialised music schools. It encompasses a diverse range of activities across the formal and non-formal learning continuum. State-funded formal music education remains predominant, marked by a long-standing tradition of music as a subject in general schools, alongside a wide array of musical subjects available in specialised music schools. In general schools, music education consists of two main subjects: Music Culture in comprehensive schools (elementary level – 8 years) and Music Art in post-compulsory secondary schools (4- or 2-year programme). Unlike previous curricula, the

current curriculum *School for Life* (MZO 2019) emphasises a diverse range of musical styles and genres, reflecting the multicultural nature of music. Previously, the focus was primarily on listening to Western classical music repertoire, but today the curriculum also includes traditional music, popular music, jazz, film music, etc. However, when looking into the changing school practice, it becomes evident that the Western classical canon continues to be regarded as the most important repertoire. Most likely, this stems from the education of music teachers in higher music education institutions in Croatia, where programmes are still focused solely on Western classical music and preparing future professionals for potential jobs in concert halls, orchestras and (music) schools, without any community engagement.

In addition to music education in Croatian compulsory schools, a well-established system of music schools has existed for several centuries, having grown significantly after the Second World War during the Yugoslav era (Kovačević 1974). According to statistical data<sup>16</sup>, approximately 4.7% pupils in Croatia attend music schools, funded by the state and divided in two levels: 6 years of elementary music school and 4 years of secondary music school. The programme is governed by the state regulations outlined in the curricula for music and dance schools (MZO 2006, 2008), as well as by the *Law on Arts Education* (2011), which in theory promotes open entrance to music schools for everyone, but at the same time has, in practice, a strict age limit, and only offers open access to children and early youth. According to data on the webpage of the Ministry of Science and Education<sup>17</sup>, “music schools are attended by students with pronounced abilities for musical expression. The goal of the music education system is to enrich society with musical art by nurturing and educating professional musicians of various profiles and occupations”. These statements clearly indicate that the focus of music schools is still on the specialisation of future professionals, which makes them quite exclusive in terms of access.

There is one exceptional music school in Croatia that stands out for its philosophy and innovative methodology, offering a comprehensive education from preschool through high school: the Elly Bašić Music School. Named after its founder Elly Bašić (1908–1998), an exceptional music pedagogue, ethnomusicologist, and researcher of creativity in childhood, the school

16 <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiZWE3YTE4OWQtOWJmNC00OTJmLWE2MjktYTQ5MWJlNDNiZDQ0IiwidCI6IjJmTFJYmNjLWl3NjEtNDVky1lhOWYlLFRhYzY3ZTk0ZTFkNCIsImMiOiJh9> (accessed April 14, 2025).

17 <https://mzo.gov.hr/istaknute-teme/odgoj-i-obrazovanje/umjetnicko-obrazovanje/glazbene-skole/465> (accessed April 14, 2025).

embodies her belief in every child's right to access music education and culture. Bašić, the inventor of Functional Music Pedagogy (FMP), advocated for holistic development and syncretism in music education, aligning her views with those of her contemporaries Carl Orff, Zoltán Kodály and Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. She managed to establish her own school, whose curriculum is officially accredited by the Ministry of Education (MZO 2006 and 2008), as a counter-measure to the programmes in 'standard' music schools, in this way providing teachers from all over the country with legal possibilities to use this curriculum in their classrooms. The school's unique approach includes its own type of solmisation, an interdisciplinary and multimodal approach to learning music, descriptive assessment methods, continual professional development for teachers, existence of both an A-programme (for specialised professional focus) and a B-programme (for broader musical culture), etc. The curriculum is flexible, and the school does not hold admission exams, reflecting its inclusive philosophy (Letica 2014; Vasilj 2023). As the continuation of this discussion will show, this school is also special due to its bottom-up innovations related to MBZ festival. Although the Elly Bašić Music School already has improvisation in its curricula, as well as the Exercises in Composition as one of the subjects, forming *The Group for New Music* within the school shows that the festival can contribute innovation and encourage institutional resilience through a bottom-up approach.

### ***Bottom-up approach to regulations and infrastructure***

MBZ challenges the infrastructure of the music education ecosystem in Croatia by offering new offline and online spaces in which to perform, create, learn, collaborate, and share music. The establishment of the online platform has created a repository for contemporary music and its learning materials which is accessible to every music pedagogue. There is still no relevant research related to the real usage of online materials in classrooms, yet it is significant that the MBZ Kidz materials were recognised by the Ministry of Education in the school year 2021/2022, during the Covid-19 pandemic. The video *I Compose*, from the Watching Room, was included in the e-classroom<sup>18</sup> lesson about music professions in the curriculum for the fourth grade in the subject Music Culture at general education schools. Furthermore, the website offers didactic materials

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18 The e-lesson can be found here: <https://www.mbz.hr/en/news/mbz-kidz-program-is-recognized-by-the-ministry-of-science-and-education-and-included-in-e-teaching> (accessed April 14, 2025).

(e.g. an interactive poster with terminology explanations and digital games<sup>19</sup>) that might be used both in general education and music schools.

The festival's partnership with the Elly Bašić Music School has evidently had an effect on the music school curricula, but the question remains as to how it could potentially affect the infrastructural and policy aspect of the national school system in the long term. Since 2007, the festival has collaborated with the Elly Bašić Music School, where one of its teachers, Maja Petyo Bošnjak, with the support of the composer Berislav Šipuš, has established *The Group for New Music*. This ensemble specialises in performing contemporary music, making it unique within the Croatian music school system. In 2019, the group participated in the *D#connected* project, developed in collaboration with the composer Ana Horvat and the new media artist Miodrag Gladović. Leading up to the performances at the MBZ Festival in 2019, held at the Vatroslav Lisinski Concert Hall, Kino Europa, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, students engaged in workshops with Horvat and Gladović. During the performances, students utilised their smartphones and acoustic instruments, with the music generated through a mobile application specifically designed for the festival and played through Bluetooth speakers. This combination of acoustic instruments and technology enabled students to create music that could relate to or be disconnected from other ensemble members, giving them the opportunity to experiment with sonic performance in various spaces. The *Youth and Contemporary Music* project, which encompasses the *Group for New Music*, also includes subjects such as Exercises in Composition, with exercises typically taught by composers. Such a curriculum empowers students to develop and perform their own compositions. In addition, the school introduces concepts of graphic notation, fosters improvisation skills, explores artistic interpretation, demonstrates various performance techniques, and introduces the use of electronics. The Elly Bašić Music School therefore not only stimulates artistic growth, but also provides a comprehensive educational experience. The MBZ festival offers a platform to showcase the results of this education to a wider audience and further refine them artistically. Since MBZ is a biennial festival, it is to be noted that, today, the group also performs during the year, i.e. between two festival editions, demonstrating its autonomy and performing not just the musical pieces offered by the festival's composers, but also pieces composed by pupils attending the school subject Exercises in Composition.

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19 Memory game: <https://kidz.mbz.hr/games/memory/hr>, Poster: <https://kidz.mbz.hr/hr/novosti/interaktivni-poster-glazbenih-pojmova> (accessed April 14, 2025).

Thanks to its rich history of performing or presenting their own music within the context of one of the international hubs of new music, pupils frequently transition into professional musicians or highly successful amateur musicians. Even if they no longer actively engage with (contemporary) music, they maintain their enthusiasm for it. Most importantly, they develop into individuals who are receptive to progressive artistic ideas, integrating artistic versatility into other aspects of their daily lives. In this way, one of the ideas articulated in the festival's manifesto is realised: that contemporary music, despite its divergence from everyday life, undeniably belongs to it, transforms and enhances it.

### ***Media and the music industry***

What can be noticed on the MBZ Kidz online platform is that the festival is highly present in all types of media, including apps and podcasts, and that it tends to grow with each year. The pandemic clearly contributed to the process of re-thinking access to the festival. This is why the festival even expanded its live-performances and workshops throughout the whole year, disrupting the usual weekly form of the festivals, but also leading to the point where the festival started to co-exist with the city at different times of the year. Through the online platform and workshops, the festival crossed its borders and started to exist all over the country, especially in the form of workshops offered under the *Backpack (Full of) Culture* programme.

### **Conclusion**

Of all the approaches to strengthening the music education ecosystem's sustainability, festivals may not be the first examples that we see as relevant in achieving this task. However, MBZ Kidz presents a different story. Expanding its structure since 2019 to offer diverse live and online content throughout the whole year in different spaces and collaborations, as well as crossing the borders of its home city Zagreb, has made a significant change in terms of examining existing hierarchies and power relations, as well as the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in the system. Live workshops and online pedagogical content offer an expanded view of the music classroom, which brings music and music-making back to families and everyday life. In this sense, the festival's focus on contemporary (classical) music and its mediation strengthens the vitality of the genre not just in the music education ecosystem, but also in society as a whole. Furthermore, a recent tendency of the Croatian school

system to make a transition to the whole-day school (still in an experimental phase) presents a potential threat to the sustainability of music schools, for technical and organisational reasons, so that continual collaborations like the one between the MBZ Kidz festival and the Elly Bašić Music School might help to open new bottom-up perspectives on how to proactively cope with the possible change.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many festivals were central catalysts of the revitalisation and vitality of certain music genres (Grant 2016). In the case of MBZ, the learning-based approach of the MBZ Kidz programme shows that a festival can be a significant and effective way to disseminate the knowledge and practices of contemporary music in a range of formal, non-formal and informal music learning contexts, which may contribute to the sustainability of contemporary (classical) music as an at-risk music genre. For example, Huib Schippers has written about the sustainability of the Western classical opera over the past 400 years, noticing vulnerabilities caused by the high demands in terms of infrastructure and the high-level training of the participants, but also about the fact that the genre unexpectedly survived because of the “carefully constructed prestige that inspires an elite community and associate markets” (2015, 146) to support it. In the case of the Croatian state-funded music schools, which are still elitist in terms of their Western classical music repertoire and career-path orientation, it does not have to be like that. Although the elite community might be inspired to preserve the music schools in their current form, what is suggested here (by presenting the example of the social innovation at MBZ Kidz and the institutional innovation at the Elly Bašić Music School) is that the system’s sustainability could be approached in a different way. Music education today needs to be relevant, accessible, and important to the children’s and the teacher’s everyday lives. The approach offered by the MBZ Kidz online and live formats, which combine sound pedagogy and music pedagogy in order to understand contemporary music as part of our overall soundscape, might be a good, bottom-up way to inspire not just the elite and professional musical communities, but also the community in general, to make it important in their homes and schools, and to bring it to other spaces where people spend their time.

What still needs to be explored is in what way the festival’s bottom-up examples of good practice at the Elly Bašić Music School, along with the innovative pedagogical approaches offered through the festival’s online platform, might affect long-term changes in the formal music education system. A similar bottom-up approach already exists in Croatia with Citizenship Education as an elective subject, expanding from one school in the city of Rijeka to many schools

across the country. In the context of the MBZ and music education, only time will tell. The most important thing is to keep our critical ears open and to listen.

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## II. DECOLONISING MUSIC MEDIATION



# Othering versus Empowerment Decolonial Approaches in Music Mediation<sup>1</sup>

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Lisa Gaupp

## Introduction

Music mediation fosters “diverse relationships between people and musics” and is often designed “for specific dialogue groups” (Petri-Preis and Voit 2025). The term “dialogue group” is gaining acceptance over the more one-directional “target group”, since it acknowledges the negotiation processes inherent in music mediation. However, music mediation still aims to define and include (heterogeneous) groups (Schippling and Voit 2023, 179). This paper explores the foundations of group concepts from the social sciences and cultural studies, examines their link to social inequalities, and discusses how contemporary social movements influence aspirations for empowerment in cultural fields. Finally, it considers decolonial approaches that emphasise individual and collective agency and their relevance to music mediation practices.

Music mediation, including various marketing efforts, typically considers both the people and the music, as well as the quality of the relationships formed between them. This chapter primarily examines how dialogue groups should be addressed or included. Social developments can serve as an indicator of how appropriate a specific group concept is. Earlier approaches to music mediation focused on addressing (Reh and Ricken 2012) target groups, which were often defined on the basis of social identity categories or socio-demographic traits such as age, gender, ethnicity, or class. While numerous sociological studies on audiences and cultural consumption (DiMaggio 1992; Lena 2019) have sought to justify or broaden the reach of target groups (Renz 2016; 2022; Mandel 2014),

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1 This text is a modified English version of the German original: Gaupp, Lisa. 2023. “Othering versus Handlungsmacht?” In *Handbuch Musikvermittlung – Studium, Lehre, Berufspraxis*, edited by Axel Petri-Preis and Johannes Voit, 183–187. Bielefeld: transcript. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783839462614-032>.

these group classifications frequently reinforce “othering” effects. By categorising individuals on the basis of predetermined social identity labels, they are reduced to a single characteristic, reinforcing their status as the “other” (Sökefeld 2004, 24). These classifications contribute to exclusionary mechanisms and discriminatory practices, again reinforcing social inequalities and power imbalances between the addressers – those who define the groups – and the addressees – those being addressed (Stoffers 2023, 107).

Criticism of these effects has led to calls for empowerment in music mediation, challenging or reinterpreting both identity attributions (Gaupp 2016) and reflections on the relationship between people and music. The concept of dialogue groups, which encourages re/addressing (Reh and Ricken 2012) and redefinition through active participation in “mutual communication and negotiation processes”<sup>2</sup> (Petri-Preis and Voit 2023, 25), aligns with this shift. This change is not just about terminology, but must be understood within broader social discussions and movements such as *Black Lives Matter* and *#metoo*, which highlight the need for more inclusive and participatory cultural practices.

## Social and Cultural Group Terms

Different fields in social studies often define and describe social groups, society, and social belonging. When sociology first emerged as a discipline in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, society was understood in two main ways: as a group connected by shared interests, and as an organised structure where people follow common rules and traditions. These shared norms and values, known as institutions, help maintain social order (Durkheim 2016).

Early theories took a structuralist approach, meaning that people’s roles and identities were seen as shaped by their social group and institutions (Bourdieu 1996). Based on this view, past research on music mediation treated target groups as uniform and categorised them by specific traits. This approach often overlooked social inequalities and reinforced stereotypes by linking ethnic backgrounds to specific cultural practices, a tendency referred to as the “fallacy of conflation” (Archer 2005), or culturalisation (Barth 2013). These practices contributed to exclusion and power imbalances, reinforcing a divide between dominant groups and marginalised “others” (Gaupp 2021a; Stoffers 2019).

More recent theories in social studies take a constructivist view, emphasising that social identities are flexible and shaped by different factors, including

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2 German quotes have been translated by the author.

context and personal experiences (Luhmann 2012, 12; Hirschauer 2021). This perspective acknowledges contingencies (Reckwitz 2004, 3) and overlapping identities (Mecheril 2023, 205; Winker and Degele 2015), and warns against simplifying people's identities into one category, a mistake known as "tokenism" (Hess 2015). These ideas have influenced music mediation, encouraging a shift toward open dialogue and negotiation processes with diverse dialogue groups (Schippling and Voit 2023, 179), in recognition of the fact that people engage with culture in varied ways (Peterson 1992). A more inclusive approach values participation, reflects diversity, and encourages broad cultural engagement (Gaupp 2016).

However, despite efforts to promote dialogue and individual perspectives, many approaches still assume that people have limited power to challenge dominant gatekeepers and institutions (Berger and Luckmann 1994). The next section explores newer theories that focus on empowering individuals and groups to take an active role in shaping their cultural experiences.

## Individual and Collective Empowerment

The crisis of representation (Geertz 1973; Clifford and Marcus 1986) in anthropology, combined with the rise of post-structuralist and post-colonial critiques from around the 1960s and 1970s, has led to an increasing focus on constructivist approaches in social and cultural studies. This shift, known as the "reflexive turn" (Bachmann-Medick 2016; Gaupp 2021a), emphasises the importance of individual agency in understanding group dynamics, especially when contrasted with older, more structuralist viewpoints (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 103). These new approaches acknowledge that power relations influence how we categorise and label people, but they also highlight how individuals can act within and challenge these structures. This creates space for both resistance and regulation: individuals can resist oppressive norms while simultaneously confronting how these norms are enforced (Stäheli 2000, 62–63).

A key debate within sociology centres on the balance between the social structures which shape people's experience and individual agency, or the ability of people to act independently (Kirchberg 2017). In his major work *The Constitution of Society* (1984), Anthony Giddens elaborated the structuration theory, which offers a framework that blends both perspectives, showing how social structures and individual actions are deeply interconnected and mutually influential. This theory can be applied to understand how individuals in various cultural or social settings influence, and are influenced by their environments.

In the broader social and political sphere, liberation movements have emerged to challenge exclusionary practices and unequal living conditions. Movements like *Black Lives Matter*, *#metoo*, and *Fridays for Future* are pushing back against established power structures and advocating for social justice on a global scale. These movements have also sparked internal critiques within their own ranks, similar to the way in which feminist groups have re-examined their structures in order to ensure inclusivity.

In German-speaking countries, these global trends can be seen in the evolving cultural policies and practices, particularly in music mediation. Efforts are being made to promote diversity and to empower under-represented groups. Educational approaches that emphasise participation (Gaupp 2016) encourage a shift away from external labels (addressing) – such as identifying young people with a migration background – as the focus moves towards self-definition (re/addressing), e.g. BIPOC. Changing the terminology, from exclusionary to inclusive, is just one part of this transformation. The goal is not just to update language but to address the deeper, systemic inequalities that affect these communities and challenge longstanding power dynamics in established social institutions.

These efforts, however, have had limited success, as deeply rooted inequalities persist in the cultural sector (Gaupp 2020). To address this, the emphasis is shifting from individual agency, as often discussed in sociology, to collective action. An intersectional perspective is used to highlight how different social categorisations – such as ‘race’, ‘gender’, and ‘class’ – interact and shape experiences. This shift focuses on challenging the dominant power structures rather than reinforcing them. It also critiques canonical sociological approaches such as Giddens’, which often overlook voices from “non-Western” or marginalised communities. These intersectional approaches, in turn, are also criticised for constructing and pinpointing group categories that intersect but are still rigid. In response to this critique, more recent approaches seek to dismantle such rigid group categories, focusing instead on fluid and dynamic relations between individuals (Walgenbach 2007).

This decolonial shift is not limited to academic theory (e.g. Bhabra et al. 2018; Gutiérrez et al. 2016; Icaza and Vázquez 2018; Dussel 1998; Mbembe 2016; Gaupp 2021b). There is a growing movement within cultural production itself, where self-organised groups are gaining more visibility and support. These groups, committed to dismantling unequal power structures, are working to promote the decolonisation of cultural fields, pushing against dominant norms and stereotypes (Bundesministerium für Kunst, Kultur, öffentlicher Dienst und Sport 2023). Music mediation, for example, offers a powerful opportunity for such work by creating spaces where marginalised voices can redefine them-

selves, rather than be defined by external labels. In practice, music initiatives that emphasise diverse participation and representation can be seen as part of a broader effort to transform cultural landscapes and contribute to a more equitable society.

In conclusion, movements that advocate empowerment and decolonisation are increasingly shaping both cultural and academic spheres. These efforts are not just about changing words or policies, but about rethinking power dynamics and creating opportunities for marginalised groups to reclaim agency. By focusing on collective empowerment and intersectionality, these movements offer concrete paths toward social and cultural transformation.

## The Decolonisation of Music Mediation? Looking Ahead

The various perspectives aimed at decolonising the cultural field, including those discussed above, share the common goals of challenging unequal representation, uncovering power imbalances, and avoiding exclusionary practices. In music mediation, this involves a “social orientation of music mediation” (Voit 2023, 71), e.g. breaking down the traditional divides between so-called ‘highbrow culture’ and ‘community culture’ or between us and them through inclusive, participatory approaches. For example, projects that encourage community building (Stibi 2023), and transcultural perspectives<sup>3</sup> (Bernroitner and Crnko 2023, 397) help bridge these gaps. These initiatives are often shaped by the communities themselves and aim to redefine established cultural labels, promoting a more equitable exchange. One example of this shift can be seen when individuals from the Global South, who were historically treated as minorities, reclaim their identity by referring to themselves as part of the global majority<sup>4</sup> (Tan 2021). This self-definition helps reveal power dynamics and emphasises collective empowerment.

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3 See for example Forum Transcultural Perspectives of the *Netzwerk Junge Ohren* [Network Young Ears], <https://www.jungeohren.de/transkulturelle-perspektiven/> (accessed June 5, 2025).

4 Here too, as with other othering mechanisms, the danger of adopting such a self-designation from a privileged position and using it to describe others must be reflected upon. Furthermore, even using this self-designation, there are diverse positions and dynamics, each with different contexts and power relations, which cannot be subsumed under just one collective self-designation. For example, a person in a South-Eastern Asian country may belong to the minority but dominant group there, but in the global context want to associate themselves with the global majority (Yachita 2022).

Despite the growth of community-driven efforts, political and funding structures in the cultural sector largely remain tied to dominant, traditional norms. For example, although networks like the *PostHeimat* network<sup>5</sup>, which represents actors from the global majority, receive significant funding and temporary recognition from the German Federal Cultural Foundation, these efforts are not always sustained or supported by larger, established cultural organisations. Similarly, initiatives promoting “feel-good” (Ahmed 2012, 69) concepts like participatory music or cultural democracy – ideas that emphasise public involvement in cultural life – face challenges. According to article 27 of the International Charter of Human Rights, people should have the right to “freely participate in cultural life”<sup>6</sup>, but this participation must be meaningful. This means that cultural organisations need to engage *with* communities as active participants rather than designing content *for* passive audiences (Matarasso in this volume).

Looking ahead, the institutionalisation of music mediation offers pathways for deeper, more sustainable decolonisation. To make this happen, it is crucial to broaden the range of voices and perspectives involved in decolonial approaches. This diversity can help identify and challenge institutional hegemonies, allowing for more inclusive practices. For instance, concepts like adhering to the practices of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011), diversity, and inclusion (Gaupp 2021a; 2021b; Stoffers 2019) can help foster a more open and dynamic cultural field. The decolonisation process cannot simply be about avoiding addressing, and resorting to re/addressing through individual agency; it requires ongoing collective agency that continuously redefines and negotiates the practice of music mediation. Hegemonic practices at institutions have to be unlearned, in order to allow power to be distributed more equally among a range of multipplural networks.<sup>7</sup> This shift calls for a deeper examination of power dynamics, where cultural practices are not controlled by a few dominant organisations, but are instead shared across a multiplicity of voices and experiences. By supporting such pluralism, music mediation can become a powerful tool for promoting sustainable change in the cultural sector.

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5 See <https://postheimat.com/de/> (accessed April 18, 2025).

6 See <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (accessed April 18, 2025).

7 The event “*Critiques and Disruptions of Power in the Arts*”, organised by about 40 different members of the co-curation board at mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna in April 2024, was an attempt to try out such concepts in practice (see <http://www.mdw.ac.at/ikm/veranstaltungen/critique-of-power-in-the-arts>, accessed April 18, 2025).

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# The project Villaggio Culturale

## Intercultural Co-Creation in Times of Uncertainty

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Barbara Balba Weber

From 2021 to 2023, young people with diverse life experiences, histories, and educational backgrounds became cultural mediators in a remote area of Switzerland's border to Italy. The main protagonists were the so-called storytellers – a group of 40–50 people, primarily of Afghan origin, along with arts students from Northern Switzerland and Germany (Stocker 2021). Meeting once a month in Terra Vecchia in Centovalli/Ticino, an area accessible only by foot, they engaged in different forms of artistic interactions, from creating songs to inventing theatre scenes or making art together. Alternating groups of unaccompanied minors and other refugees, children, teenagers, families, and school classes joined them in this endeavour. Starting in 2024, the model project entered its next phase under the umbrella of *Musikvermittlung Schweiz*<sup>1</sup> [Music Mediation Switzerland], expanding the successful initiative into a large-scale intercultural project throughout Switzerland.

A diverse society needs space and time for encounters, both in the real and figurative sense (Rosken 2015). The intercultural project *Villaggio Culturale* is an example of how a thoughtful interplay of place, time, participants, and methods can help people from extremely different backgrounds come together, forming a diverse group that learns from each other through the arts. The *Villaggio Culturale* project positions itself as a constantly evolving platform for learning how to engage in intercultural work and co-creation. Regular intensive reflection with a focus on intersectionality forms the basis for the continuous development of this complex social system (Biele Mefebue, Bührmann, and Grenz 2022). Such a process needs time in order to enable people – professional and non-professional artists, individuals with and without refugee backgrounds, and students from different artistic and non-artistic disciplines – who would otherwise seldom meet, to create songs, dances, and theatre scenes together and perform them in schools, asylum centres, public concerts, and community events. The

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1 See <https://musikvermittlungschweiz.ch/> (accessed April 22, 2025).

project can be discussed as an example of whether and with which methods decolonisation can be implemented on cultural, artistic, and social levels (Meling, Fadnes, and Mittner 2023).

## Preamble from the First-person Perspective

Where silence blooms. Like a flight of souls together with the diversity of beautiful thoughts and nationalities, the different languages and dialects, the presence of rich and fascinating cultures, the precious feeling of love and humanity, art and mutual acceptance. These are all feelings that I have experienced during this project and that are dear, precious, and unforgettable to me. They touch souls that seem to have known each other for years. I love you. (Esmat, *Villaggio Culturale* participant)

Is it possible to construct a paradise<sup>2</sup>? And what ingredients does it take to do so? I asked myself this question for the first time as I stood in a small, completely empty village in the Ticino mountains in 2020, knowing that this was a unique situation in the world. It was the first day of the lockdown, and I was given the chance to create from scratch a community that could serve as an exemplary society in a place that was only accessible by foot, in the middle of the forest, seemingly occupied by nothing and nobody. How I imagine Noah must have felt when, guided by the dove of peace, he set foot on solid ground after many days of uncertainty and started all over again with a team of very different creatures. The result of this is what we, later generations, are currently experiencing: a ruined world whose foundations of life have been largely destroyed by the human species. But the hope of being able to start over again has been with us since Noah. That is why I tried. And that is why I would like to encourage other cultural mediators to give it a try, with some transferable insights from the *Villaggio Culturale* project.

## Location

One of the first young Afghans who came to the empty village as a co-thinker put it this way: that these shapes of roofs, which he knew from online games, had been the symbol of protection and safety for him and that he had always longed to one day live in a country with saddle roofs instead of flat roofs (Schnell

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2 The image of paradise here does not refer to a biblical concept, but to a term originally from ancient Iranian that describes an enclosed park as the centre of a healing living space.

2018). To start an intercultural project, a place that represents safety is what is needed first and foremost. Whether the safety of a specific place is evoked by pitched roofs, old stone walls, historic buildings, a lovely design, or green surroundings is of secondary importance. But in the world of uncertainty in which most participants in an intercultural project find themselves, the factor of safety is crucial.

After having experienced the village of Terra Vecchia for several years, other factors that contribute to its being an 'ideal place' are a certain simplicity, the availability of retreat options, and that – in addition to at least one spacious room for artistic co-creation – there are facilities for communal cooking, eating, sleeping, dancing, and playing. However, a place becomes a meeting space not only because of the communal and retreat options, but also because it can be shielded from the rest of the world at any time and turned into a safer space. Only then does a place become a protected space where you can show yourself, where you can be heard and seen, where you can empathise with others and learn from one another. So it takes a certain place to form a community, but with which people can you create a space where people do not have to be socially afraid of one another?

## Group

To create an almost paradisiacal place, you first need to create a group that works together in a careful and conscious way. The primary focus is on achieving maximum diversity and inclusion (Liebau 2015), even though, initially, there is a need to establish some degree of homogeneity and associated exclusivity, which may seem paradoxical. Additionally, a fluid structure around a fixed core group, as well as hierarchies that are as flat as possible also play a role (Weber 2018). Dimensions that can be transferred to other intercultural projects from the case of *Villaggio Culturale* include age, origin, skills, gender, education, language, and life experiences. Representatives of the relevant dialogue groups were brought into the planning and implementation team right at the beginning for the dimensions of origin, life experiences, and language: young people with a refugee background, young people from different arts backgrounds, and young people from different language regions within multilingual Switzerland.<sup>3</sup> For the gender dimension, young women with a refugee biography were a partic-

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3 Juliet Hess (2015) rightly points out that representatives with diverse backgrounds must be included from the outset to prevent tokenism.

ularly difficult group to reach and could only be included during the course of the project by establishing a women's space.

Along with origin – which over time focused primarily on Afghans and Swiss – the levels of education and life experience varied significantly and influenced each other reciprocally. This group characteristic was then used as an extremely fruitful driving force in the method: some have something to tell, the others can make the stories told visible and audible (Micieli and Weber 2021). Initially, there was a deliberate restriction on diversity in terms of age: apart from the team members, only people between the ages of 20 and 30 were included in the project. This exclusivity had the function of creating a connecting element between people from sometimes extremely different backgrounds and was loosened as the project progressed – partly because the participants in the core group were themselves getting older and because the women who joined over time needed to take their children with them.

To give a provisional answer to the question posed at the beginning, about the creation of a paradise, the initial targeted composition of a group certainly plays a central role. It must subsequently be possible to renegotiate this again and again, so that a fluid, plastic, constantly changing structure emerges, in which there is a balance between participants who are permanent, those who have newly joined, and those who are leaving. However, one question remains: What does such a diverse group do in such a secluded place and how does it connect with the outside world?

## Method

The arts have a clear function in the *Villaggio Culturale* project and are used as a creative activity that makes the characteristics and peculiarities of the place and the group visible and audible. These are the history and stories behind the village and the region, some of which have astonishing parallels with Afghan stories (Weber 2022). They are oral traditions beyond the written word, which can be combined with the arts on non-verbal levels in a variety of ways. And they are the very different aesthetics which are inherent in the arts and cultural forms, are mutually enriching and stimulate discourse between the participants. Initially, the creative processes were led by people from the fields of culture and social work – over time, it became possible for the resulting formats to be adopted by the younger participants, as tried-and-tested processes and as templates for their own workshops, outside the village and with external participants, and also applied in new variations:

We work with the media of creative writing, (movement) theatre, and music. Each person is an expert. We learn from and with each other, to express our experiences, our thoughts, and our stories. Our aim is not only to guide groups but to encourage them to become artistically active themselves, to take responsibility, and to develop individual forms of expression. (Zoë, *Villaggio Culturale* team member)

Today, the team consists of young people from diverse cultural backgrounds who use co-creative artistic methods to convey cultural assets from different countries and to share them with other young people, as well as with a diverse audience in Switzerland. The members of the organisational collective know one another from several years of development, and work as a well-coordinated team, with a good communication culture and efficient implementation skills. Individual team members are responsible for the creation and implementation of a women's space while others are responsible for theatre and play development or the mediation between the Afghan and Swiss languages and cultures (Weber 2023). A young singer and singing teacher leads the work on voice, composition, and the choir, and a young ethnologist and cultural mediator enriches the team with inputs on intersectionality and post-colonial structures in cultural work. In the field of creative writing, the team draws on the experience of all those involved in the project so far, who are very familiar with the method of storytelling and its transformation into various artistic and performative formats. The boundaries between the respective disciplines are fluid and the participants support each other with inputs, performances, and mediation work (Weber 2019). If necessary, external artists and cultural mediators are invited for specific workshops.

In addition to experimentally tested processes, informal elements such as dancing, cooking, games, and repeated discussions and mediation both internally and externally are also required. This raises the legitimate question of whether a project with such a high standard can even be realised in terms of time and if so, how.

## Time

In terms of location, group composition, and method, an artistic-social project that wants to seriously address intersectionality and decolonisation needs, above all else, time (Biele Mefebue, Bührmann, and Grenz 2022). It needs a long research phase, several years of development, reflection formats and in this particular project: regular weekends, choir rehearsals, as well as rehearsal blocks for performances. Thus, the *Villaggio Culturale* project began with a one-

year research phase in which the initiator of the project lived on-site, learned the language, talked to the local population, read up on historical information, and invited representatives of the dialogue groups to the village for several days as consultants. This resulted in a concept for a three-year development phase, in which the project was carried out from the beginning of May to the end of October each year in a complex structure of monthly residencies, monthly weekends for the core group, weekly stays of external groups, regular invitations extended to the local population, and public performances in the village and the surrounding area (Gordon and Weber 2022).

Already in the first year of the project, it became clear that the concentrated joint artistic work and intensive encounters over a longer period had a great lasting impact on the young people involved, extending into their personal lives. For the locals too – some of whom initially expressed fears about ‘the foreigners’ – there was a clear benefit because of the fact that something was going on again in the previously empty village and there were young people on site. The most important transferable lesson for other intercultural projects: Building relationships and alleviating fears takes considerably more time than cultural mediation projects typically allow (Weber 2019).

In the two years that followed, the project was continuously expanded as more and more people with a high level of commitment to the cause were willing to take part. After the start-up phase, the project became so well established that it also worked outside this location. The team members now hold artistic workshops with the core group over at least six weekends at various locations in Switzerland, involving asylum centres, music schools, and communities in their programme. In parallel, they lead intercultural choirs and theatre groups, some of which are based on the templates produced during the development years, such as a songbook (Micieli and Weber 2022) or a collection of texts (Micieli and Weber 2021), to facilitate encounters within and outside their own culture and language through artistic co-creation.

The last and perhaps most important question which can also be applied to other intercultural projects often only becomes apparent once the project has fully developed. That is why it is particularly challenging and always involves a great deal of learning: How can quality and professionalism be guaranteed in an intercultural project with a high experimental component?

## Reflection

As intersectionality research shows, structural changes can only be made if the problems are seen and not negated. It is therefore necessary to go through painful processes, to uncover privilege and underprivilege and to create possible structural changes in response. Adopting an intersectional perspective in cultural mediation work poses various challenges. (Anna, *Villaggio Culturale* team member)

In order not to miss out on current discourses, such as an intersectional or a decolonisation perspective in an intercultural project, a great deal of learning and unlearning is required, which is associated with extensive joint and individual reflection. In terms of practical work as a cultural mediator, this means constantly acquiring knowledge about various forms of discrimination and undergoing further training to reflect on oneself and one's own behaviour. In addition to various feedback formats with all participants and analysis by experts from other disciplines, the *Villaggio Culturale* project was therefore scientifically accompanied in its third year of development by Anna Sofie Gebhardt, a young cultural mediator, for a whole year, as part of her Master thesis at Karlsruhe University of Education (Gebhardt 2023). In a study that focused on structural racism and intersectionality, Gebhardt conducted 11 qualitative interviews with representatives of all participating groups and carried out several phases of participant observation. Her results show that it can be very helpful to look at such a project from an intersectional perspective. The arts in particular often lack the awareness "that all social dynamics are integrated into power structures, which are reflected, for example, in the arts and cultural sector in a lack of access and are thus currently often reserved for only a part of our society" (ibid., 96) and "that people who hold a position of power in the social structure bear the responsibility for these processes of change, as they can initiate these processes." (ibid., 96). In her summary, Gebhardt states that this claim was fulfilled in the *Villaggio Culturale* project because, among other things, a broad concept of culture was applied. Furthermore, she found that important factors for professionalism and quality in the field of intercultural cultural mediation are sustainability and future orientation, systematic feedback methods and adaptations, equal access to the arts and encounters through art for all participants, learning and change processes, flat hierarchies, and the influence of the location. (ibid.)

## Coda

This brings us back to the beginning: it all started in and with a certain place. We came together again and again, from very distant regions of the world, in this tiny place in the middle of the forest and learned, laughed, cried, sang, and discussed. And we have impressively experienced the central role that the arts can play in the peaceful coexistence of a diverse society:

I've been in Switzerland for over five years and I have to admit that life here as an asylum seeker is a bit difficult. Nice things rarely happen in our lives. Fortunately, I got to know Terra Vecchia about a year ago. (Cetin, *Villaggio Culturale* participant)

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### III. ARTISTIC CITIZENSHIP



# Accessibility and Sustainability in Higher Music Education through Artistic Citizenship

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*Maria Westvall and Charles Carson*

## Introduction

Can music be both the expression and cause of social change? In what ways can more diversified approaches within higher music institutions – including a diversity of ideas, cultural expressions, peoples, and perspectives – inform and enrich the roles and goals of these institutions? Moreover, can increased and equitable accessibility to art and arts participation potentially lead to more democratic and sustainable societies?

UNESCO places particular emphasis on the value of culture in society. It is described as central to health, climate, economic, and development policies and approaches, but it is more than that, too. It is vital for ensuring “human-centred, inclusive and equitable” practices (UNESCO, n.d.). In their discussion of Sustainable Development Goals (ibid.), they advocate the promotion of cultural diversity by stressing its central role in “facilitat[ing] cultural understanding and peace” and “prevent[ing] conflicts” (ibid.). Article 27 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* expresses that “everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community, to share scientific advances and its benefits, and to get credit for their own work” (ibid.). In the Rome Charter of 2020, five aspects of cultural capabilities for more “inclusive, democratic and sustainable” cities are highlighted as factors for cultural democratisation. They are: the discovery of cultural roots, creating cultural expression, sharing cultures and creativity so as to deepen social and democratic life, enjoying cultural and creative resources and spaces, and protecting cultural resources so that more people can benefit from them (The Rome Charter, 2020).

As a cultural art form and social practice, music – for example – has significance not only for the individual, but also for the collective life of local and global communities. It is used as a means of building and sustaining community identity and engagement. It also provides a means for connecting these communities to larger social contexts (Westvall, Lidskog, and Pripp 2018). If music

as a cultural form plays a meaningful part in people's lives, then the education through/in music imparts our institutions of higher learning with a great deal of significance. This goes beyond just art as practice: increased access is an important democratic issue, as it may prevent cultural stratification and exclusion in a society. Helena Gaunt et al. highlight the importance of the partnering of artistic and social values in order to empower higher music institutions “to respond dynamically to societal need” (2021, 1) and Marissa Silverman (2024) emphasises that the valuing of ethics, civic responsibility, and empathy needs to be at the core of music education practices. Artmaking can provide opportunities and greater inclusivity, enabling people to engage with art in sustainable and multi-faceted ways.

In this article, we aim to connect these aforementioned questions of equity, inclusivity, access, and democracy to the concept of artistic citizenship in order to critique structural conditions and commonly held ideas of what is traditionally perceived as the role and potential of art and higher arts education in society.

### The ‘artistic’ and the ‘social’

The concept of “artistic citizenship” (Elliott 2012; Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016; Schmidt Campbell and Martin 2006) has appeared in various contexts over the last decades, often with a focus on the artist(s) as (a) potential contributor(s) to the communities with and through their arts, and sometimes explicitly with an activist or activist intent<sup>1</sup>. Common understandings of this approach have often characterised it as quite unidirectional, with a focus on the artist(s) ‘sharing’ their artistic expertise and practice with ‘others’. This one-way approach has sometimes been used to legitimise artist practices as autonomous and self-evident within social contexts. However, recent literature has questioned the legitimacy of this unidirectional perception and has gradually moved towards what could be described as a more inclusive, participatory, and relational approach to involvement with the arts, through co-creation between those involved (see for instance Gaunt et al. 2021; Westvall and Akuno 2024; Turino 2016). These co-creative practices are evident in Thomas Turino’s (2016) description of participatory performances with others, e.g. practices that include “participants with an eclectic range of abilities in the same performance to create a basis for inspiring and motivating participation

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1 The term “artist” as a portmanteau of “artist” and “activist” is used in critical literature to capture the overlap between each role.

for all” (Westvall 2021, 102). This participatory approach relates to the concept of musicking that Christopher Small has introduced as a way of describing the practice, or the actual doing of music in multiple ways:

To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing. (1998, 9)

Musicking is portrayed by Small as a purposeful social act of music-making, in which performers, listeners, composers, and dancers are equally involved. Small’s approach offers a critique of the limited scope of traditional (Western) music education, and he underscores the importance of an interplay and interconnection between the social and musical meanings of music in educational contexts. Lilliestam (2006) suggests an even broader definition of musicking and argues that musicking encompasses all activities in which music is incorporated, such as listening, singing, playing, composing, improvising, dancing, talking about music, reading about music, collecting music(s), constantly “having music on one’s mind” or “remembering music within oneself” (ibid., 24).<sup>2</sup> Such a broader understanding of musical practices – as musicking – offers the potential to reimagine (higher) music education and its priorities.

## Contesting Priorities in Higher Music Education

For higher arts education institutions – often with an identity and a reputation of being highly competitive – it might come across as challenging to consider how artistic and social meanings and values can be partnered in more impartial and constructive ways. A means to take on this challenge is to identify and defy some dominant narratives and binary divisions that surround these institutions, such as artistically committed vs. socially committed, targeting the elite vs. the community, practising excellence vs. contributing to the public good and presentational vs. participatory music-making, to mention but a few. Instead of enhancing these divisions by making artistic and social aspects competing priorities, we can consider the dialogic degree of quality between them. With these aspects in mind, Dave Camlin argues that,

the quality of any given instance of musicking – including participatory music – needs to be measured by reference to an integrated and dialogic measure of quality across aesthetic, praxial and social dimensions. This

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2 Translated from the original Swedish by the current authors.

same dialogic approach might also be pertinent to other artforms. (Camlin 2014, 115)

This approach is closely aligned with the concept of artistic citizenship, where the core tenet is co-creation, making it more about interactive practices and processes. Here, the key role of an artist is to create spaces for inclusive artistic practices (broadly conceived) that negotiate between the common influences, contexts, goals, and aspirations of the musical and social actors involved. This process can best be described as “artizenship” (Carson and Westvall 2024) wherein the artists’ practices reflect their citizenship, while citizens’ practice reflects their artistry.

### **Artizenship Defined vis-à-vis Artistic Citizenship**

Some of the critiques of “artistic citizenship” as a concept rest in the concerns about its constituent terms. Artists, often reluctant to cede autonomy to larger institutions, may be reticent to join the term “art” with a term that is so closely aligned with governmental policy, as is the traditional understanding of “citizenship”. However, our re-reading of the compound term addresses these concerns by expanding the parameters of both arts and citizenship in ways that reflect the lived experiences of both, thus making them more inclusive and empowering. Elsewhere, we have proposed the term “artizenship” as a concept that illustrates an interactive approach to, and overlap between, more traditional understandings of artist and citizen. It is characterised by more commonplace and quotidian artistic practices that may or may not engage in traditional modes of activism. These modes often rely on clear divisions between arts and citizenship, but may still carry meaning and value for artist-citizens (Carson and Westvall 2024). Political scientist James Tully emphasises that citizenship is not only a fixed status, but is also a process of “negotiated practices” (2014, 35), in which actors and activities are immersed in a wide range of community engagement. Like musicking, such negotiated practices require a degree of responsiveness between all participants, wherein individuals must necessarily collaborate to create and share knowledge and to achieve collective goals. Artizenship does not, automatically address the kinds of far-reaching practices that many artists may feel are cutting edge – nor does it dismiss them outright. Instead, it considers them to be one of many possibilities amongst a broader range of existing and everyday forms of artistic practices, as a way of fostering a larger understanding of community engagement and collaboration. As such, it exists outside of an amateur/professional dichotomy, because the

focus is on the quality of meaningfulness of the integrated artistic and social experiences of those involved, rather than on the quality of the product/performance as such. Artizenship measures the value of art by its socio-cultural impact.

Instead of underlining the selectiveness often associated with the arts, artizenship is profoundly inclusive, as it highlights various experiences of art and the engagement with art in different ways. It encompasses the range of diverse artistic competences that have the potential to mirror our societies in a more enhanced way. Artizenship is a societal or communal practice that allows the individual to interact with their community both with and through the arts in multiple capacities, thus promoting a more active citizenry in novel ways. As such, the negotiated practices that Tully highlights require interaction and co-creation within and between communities and individuals in order to achieve their intended goals. By practising artizenship, we can be connected to each other and the world in numerous and various ways. The flow of art is thus not uni-directional. It radiates outwards in multiple directions, like a web. This web also has the added feature of being expandable, shaped by a complexity of influences of personal, educational and societal experiences.

Artizenship – as a position, a process and a lens – thus suggests opportunities for broader access to art and citizenship through an emphasis on co-creative relationships and manifestations. This perspective can also be useful beyond the higher arts education contexts by accentuating the broader potential that arts engagement can have in and for our communities.

So how then does artizenship relate to the realities of higher arts institutions? Most immediately, through the institutions' task of situating music and musical knowledge in its social context while simultaneously considering the democratic values musical knowledge represents for their students. It is this investment in a diversity of musical relationships and cultural practices that is directly related to ideas of cultural democracy or cultural equity (see for instance Belfiore et al. 2023; Matarasso 2000).

## Stretching the Cycles of Influence in Higher Music Education

Sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1972; 1974) considers human interests that generate knowledge grounded in various aspects of social life. These can be defined as the technical, communicative or practical, and emancipatory aspects of interests (Månson 2003). Transferred to the musical realm, the technical aspects may represent people's interest in controlling, mastering and/or predicting music (skills, hands-on activities).

Communicative or practical musical knowledge is signified by a wish to understand and relate to each other and collaborate musically (social bonding, self-expression, co-creation). It follows then that the emancipatory aspects of musical knowledge may signify the individual's unique, creative, and frameless relationship to music (musical identity, musical autonomy), where any restrictive 'musical oppression' whether from family, friends, education, media or their communities is not accepted (Westvall 2007).

Our early socialisation determines our store of emotional and socio-cultural experiences of music. These experiences are affected by local and global representations of music and music education, the functions of music that we become aware of, and the value that is ascribed to various musics and forms of musical engagement in our communities. These experiences shape a web of musical experiences and implications that consist of interacting occurrences, experiences, influences, opinions, and representations of music (*ibid.*). The strong threads in our personal webs of musical significance can, on the one hand, represent security, thus enabling us to evolve; yet they can also represent inflexibility, which might hinder us from breaking patterns and developing in new directions. The thin threads symbolise influences that we internalise through unique experiences with music and co-musicians. It can be for instance one-off events or involvement in temporary musical groups and participation in various cultural contexts. The spaces between the strong and thin threads symbolise dual aspects of security and rooms for development in which we take on, shift, or develop new relationships to music (*ibid.*).

The professional tasks of higher music education institutions are, among others, to situate music in its contexts, to relate it to democratic values, and to encourage and display a diversity of musical experiences, understandings, and musical practices to their students (*ibid.*). This may be acquired when those involved (students, teachers, and leadership) develop an awareness of the structures and mechanisms within the interwoven relationship between music, educational factors and the societal aspects that are at play. Higher music education contains elements that consist of cyclical processes in which students are influenced by a transmission of certain understandings, values, and beliefs in relation to music and music education, as communicated by their significant educators, the (labour) market, as well as the general orientations of their institutions. This can lead to self-replicating cycles which could have a restraining effect on methods, values, and beliefs about music and music education. This cycle, however, can be challenged if the institutions encourage diversities of perspectives amongst its people and their practices to a greater extent. This focus on nurturing individuals with multiple perspectives, rather than multiple people – each with their unique perspectives – is key. This is

particularly effective if it is followed by discussions with regards to quality criteria (Camlin 2014; Gaunt et al. 2021) and an encouragement of co-creative method development, which might empower students to further experience and extend their relationship to music.

## How Can Diversity Support Democratic Ideals and Goals?

One of the key tasks of education has historically been to transmit cultural heritage and codes of ethics to students. This process of enculturation remains an important undertaking of education institutions today; however, our societies rarely represent one homogeneous culture to be enculturated into. It is thus important for the institutions to investigate how people relate to various forms and contexts of music, and to provide broad representations of musical practices and a variety of possibilities for the recognition of musical expressions. Hence, music education also needs to include the *unfamiliar* in order to challenge individuals to extend and diversify their knowledge of music.

What do people mean when they say diversity? One reading of the controversies surrounding diversity might point out that many critics of diversity are, in fact, responding to the term itself, rather than the potentials it represents. The meaning(s) of the term are often quite culturally and socially situated. For example, in the Scandinavian context, two words – *diversitet* and *mångfald* (to take Swedish as one case) – may seem to overlap, but in fact attempt to distinguish between subtleties held by the concept. *Diversitet* translates more directly to the English word diversity, but seems to highlight difference in ways that it does not when used in the (American) English context. However, the related term *mångfald* – which might be more literally translated as multiplicity – perhaps best describes a more complex relationship, one that highlights variety in such a way that it invites more expansive and inclusive definitions of what might be more commonly understood as diversity. Diversity, then, has multiple angles, yet this complexity should be seen as a resource, not a limitation. It represents a more expanded sense of the norm, rather than deviations from or rejections of it. We can see diversity as highlighting potentials. It can offer pathways to new experiences and perspectives that might otherwise have gone unforeseen. Diversity (or a multiplicity) of ideas, peoples, and perspectives is key to developing and making substantive changes to the arts institutions by informing and enriching the educational and artistic approach. Increased diversity in higher education addresses various aspects such as student admissions, staff recruitment and retention, content and curriculum, as well as community and public engagement. Gaunt et al. (2021) highlight the importance

of addressing the systemic exclusion and marginalisation of people and ideas in higher arts education by questioning the roles that the institutions can play within their communities, especially where a main concern is the institutions' relationship with society (or the lack thereof).

## Mediating Democracy Through Diversity

Although ideas and ideals of cultural democracy and cultural equity are present in many music-makers' realities, higher education institutions often focus more on a particular kind of democratisation of culture, one which aims to make 'fine arts' (or any art form and genre that is recognised and established in the institutions) accessible to more people (Matarasso 2023; Belfiore et al. 2023). In a previous publication we have advocated for "diversified normality" which aims at "shifting the center" in terms of the "who, what, and how" in higher music education, especially when new approaches to music are becoming more accessible, can enable greater flexibility in musical exploration, and are characterised by various forms of diversity (Westvall and Carson 2014; Carson and Westvall 2016). We suggest that students should be exposed to a wider range of musics and methods during their education in order to be encouraged to "continuously undertake new approaches to new repertoires beyond the borders of their knowledge" (Carson and Westvall 2016, 48). While perhaps concerns related to insecurity and defensiveness might prevent individuals from expanding their musical comfort zones, a decentring of their understandings and experiences of music might result in more self-assurance, curiosity, and knowledge development on their part. This kind of "diversified normality" in (higher) music education can highlight issues of democracy and equity and thus develop critical approaches to hegemonic and exclusionary structures in arts education and art practices (ibid.).

Democracy demands an openness towards, and a willingness to engage with, difference. Thus, diversity is an essential aspect of democracy. This common engagement with diversity is a threat to authoritarianism because it decentres power. Tradition or heritage is often employed as a discourse of protectionism. While tradition itself is not inherently negative, the means through which it is employed as discourse in order to gatekeep for the status quo (often at the expense of the marginalised) is questionable. This discursive move relies on the emotional impact of romanticised nostalgia in an attempt to unify the public. However, in practice, this nostalgic imaginary can actually alienate more people than it unites. So, the centre becomes concretised, and rarely reflects the reality of the larger community and society. In this

context, compromise can be seen as weakness; yet compromise, negotiation and flexibility are at the heart of the creative practices central to art making. Improvisation, creation, and co-creation are all generative acts of compromise. They imagine and create new ideas, perspectives, and realities. Instead of listening to what people have to say, or approaching new artistic expressions with openness, higher music institutions often fall back on gatekeeping, relying on conventional discourses of legitimisation – quality, appropriateness, ‘high’ standards, etc. We should try to avoid a top-down, prescriptive approach in favour of a sense of discovery and possibility. This can be empowering in other ways, since even though it sidesteps qualitative discourses, it allows us to make new connections and see broader potentials that might not have traditional qualitative value at first glance. This is not to neglect familiar or valued aspects, but rather to empower artists and audiences to decide how they wish to express or experience their art. This starts at the level of training, so it is key that we begin this conversation at the institutional level, but also continue it beyond just institutions of higher education.

## **Artizenship for Increased Accessibility and Sustainability in and of Higher Music Education**

In this article we have shown how more diversified approaches within higher music education can enrich the roles and goals of the institutions. Consequently, we also considered the institutions’ roles as musical mediators for their communities, initiating, fostering, and disseminating ideas and practices towards equitable accessibility to art and arts participation. In doing this, we advocated for the reconsideration of some aspects related to quality and the arts.

Lundberg, Malm, and Ronström (2000) suggest that music can be the expression of societal transformation processes, and at the same time be the cause of such changes. If that is true, it indicates that the ways in which we engage with music as an artform and cultural expression can potentially lead to more democratic and sustainable societies.

By expanding the concept of artistic citizenship, we have proposed the term “artizenship” that highlights aspects of co-creation in a diverse web of artistic competences. Artizenship offers a position, a process, and a lens that can mirror civic responsibility and empathy in inclusive ways. Beyond that, however, it can also be applied as a practice that allows individuals to endorse active citizenry through the arts by discovering, creating, sharing, enjoying, and also protecting the arts (The Rome Charter, 2020). This extended

notion of artistic citizenship can potentially increase the accessibility and sustainability in and of higher music education, while enhancing the relational and co-creational potential of critical democratic practices.

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# New Concert Formats and Music Mediation at Stegreif – The Improvising Symphony Orchestra

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*Immanuel de Gilde and Lorenz Blaumer*

## Music Mediation at Stegreif

Without a conductor, without sheet music or chairs: Stegreif demonstrates new ways of what a modern orchestra can look like. In radical recompositions, the group combines symphonic music with improvisation and influences from other genres, and integrates the audience in a unique auditory and spatial exploration. Using these innovative formats, the young ensemble continues to inspire a growing audience with different backgrounds and interests.

Furthermore, since its foundation, the Stegreif Orchestra has focused its artistic work on music mediation. Music mediation in this sense is used as an important tool to bring together certain social and musical fields, in order to work on a common artistic idea (Petri-Preis 2022, 89). This field of activity is quite diverse, as the orchestra positions itself as both an initiating and performing entity frequently collaborating with various partners. In 2020, for example, the community music project *BE:community* was created in close collaboration with the Konzerthaus Dortmund, bringing together neighborhood residents with different musical backgrounds to become part of a new production of *#bfree*, based on Ludwig van Beethoven's *9th Symphony*. Additionally, the orchestra has developed and implemented various formats tailored for children such as the *symphony of change* concert for children and young people at the Elbphilharmonie in 2023, workshops (including 16 workshops in 16 federal German states as part of the *#bechange* project) and concert introductions for young audiences as well. The two-year *#bechange* project, focusing on the intersection of music and sustainability from 2021 to 2023, was pivotal in the further development of the orchestra's music mediation activities. As *#bechange* serves as a demonstration of the orchestra's engagement with diverse audiences, including those with varied backgrounds, the following sections will further introduce this project.

## ***The #bechange project***

With the *#bechange* project, Stegreif approached the topic of sustainability from a wide variety of perspectives. Over the course of two years, four premiere programmes and the final premiere of *symphony of change* were developed in line with the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on four historical female composers. Consisting of the works of Wilhelmine von Bayreuth (1709–1758), Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179), Clara Schumann (1819–1896), and Emilie Mayer (1812–1883), musical and scenic productions were created, arranged, and recomposed by members of the Stegreif Orchestra.

However, the core identity of *#bechange* was laid with 16 workshops in the 16 federal states of Germany. The focus was on highly diverse dialogue groups, different sustainability topics, and a playful, musical approach. Many of our general workshops and all the workshops that form part of *#bechange* take place under three thematic focal points: music, sustainability, and education. These three concepts are always at the centre of our preliminary considerations and always relate to each other to varying degrees. The central question, however, is what we mean by such a comprehensive term as sustainability. First of all, for us, it means breaking up and questioning old structures, focusing on female voices and new perspectives on ecological problems, as well as sustainable music-making and the creation of a social community. Added to this is the very specific discussion in the workshops: What is a lively and sustainable sound installation? What do the 17 Sustainable Development Goals sound like?

A special feature of the *#bechange* workshop format was that the focus of the content also resulted from the topics that the cooperating institution and the workshop participants brought to us, as the workshop leaders. The differentiation of the major topic of sustainability, the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the associated artistic exploration, was therefore not achieved through a definitional limitation, but through the workshop group. Based on the concept of “artistic citizenship”, this approach assumes that every individual sees themselves as a social actor in a diverse field. Accordingly, his or her artistic output is not an end in itself, but rather a socially aware endeavour to create something new, especially in a collective development process. (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016, 64f.)

The participants in the workshops came from very heterogeneous social environments, cultural contexts, and age groups. In addition to organising school classes, music school ensembles, visits from social institutions, and professional orchestras, workshops were held with, among others, young international musicians, people from an initial reception centre for asylum seekers and students of music education and social work.

## **#bechange Workshops – No Two Days are the Same**

In the *#bechange* workshops, six Stegreif musicians spent a total of three to four days working with varying groups of 10 to 30 individuals. The aim was always to develop workshop concepts that provided a structure, while remaining open to the creative inputs of the participants. For that purpose, a well thought-out and flexible daily structure constitutes an efficient and sustainable tool for organising the workshop content in the best possible way for everyone. This is why the first day of a *#bechange* workshop always looks similar on paper, but is never so in reality.

### **10.00 a.m.: Body Warm-Up, Games to Get to Know Each Other**

It starts with the body. Arriving in the room. The here and now. All participants and the workshop leaders get to know each other through play and feel their way around.

### **11.30 a.m.: Room of Opportunities**

Now it's time to get down to business: the first sorting, teasing, and testing of content begins. Participants receive an initial thematic overview and their reactions influence the content of the next few days.

### **1.00 p.m.: Break and Silence**

One of the most important tools in the Stegreif catalogue: providing enough space for quiet voices, for taking a step back and reflecting, enabling new contexts. Whether through lunch together or a short walk.

### **2.00 p.m.: Immersion and Deepening**

After a lunchtime warm-up, a broad topic, such as aspects of sustainability and free improvisation, will be addressed in the large group, followed by the first musical work in small groups. All participants have their say and their ideas take centre stage.

### **4.00 p.m.: Presentation**

After everyone has rejoined the large group, the first small beginnings of the group work are shared. In this way, participants learn right from the start to share their results in front of the others and to listen to each other without judgement.

**4.45 p.m.: Feedback Round**

What was good, what was not so good, what should be improved? In the final feedback rounds, each person is invited to express their opinion. An invitation, not a must!

**5.00 p.m.: Collective Closing Ritual**

A short, end-of-day ritual helps to bring the workshop day to a close together. Have you ever tried clapping your hands together at the same time, without anyone leading the way?

### ***Sustainability and Social Responsibility***

Every music mediation format by the Stegreif Orchestra raises the question of social responsibility, in one way or another – especially when both the content and the dialogue group specify certain thematic focuses or approaches. In the best-case scenario, sustainable partnerships are created that extend beyond workshops and projects and provide meeting spaces for mutual learning and musical diversity. Open stages, community engagement and small, sustainable rituals are among the many wonderful results of the *#bechange* workshops, which are already bearing fruit for many of our workshop partners and participants. For example, the workshop concert in Augsburg has already been recreated twice and has led to an ongoing music mediating partnership. In this respect, we always see our music mediating practices as reciprocal processes, in which we – for example as facilitators in a workshop – learn just as much as the participants. On a small scale, social processes of togetherness are negotiated and given a new form through musical engagement.

The aspiration to enable high-quality mediation work for every institution and every participant often hangs like a sword of Damocles over the planning, but is resolved in action on-site. The knowledge of having thought, laughed, and worked together, of having collectively shaped change on a small scale, along with the confidence to listen to and respect each other is a core element of every encounter. After all, this is also what sustainability means to us: the healthy use of our own resources and letting go of what is beyond our reach.

### **Integrated Music Mediation at Stegreif**

Having discussed the so-called ‘classical’ music mediation practice of the Stegreif Orchestra through the example of the *#bechange* workshops, the following section will build a bridge to the orchestra’s general artistic practice, which

sees itself as explicitly mediating. To this end, we assume that most of Stegreif's artistic formats consider the participants or the audience as a constant in the creative process, thereby enabling a transfer process between all subjects in the space. This naturally takes place under certain rules associated with a kind of ritualised concert practice, but is disrupted by moments of irritation. Among other things, this can be described as the practice of integrated music mediation, as it does not necessarily follow an explicitly music-educational approach, but is nevertheless understood as an immanent part of Stegreif's musical-scenic work. Integrated music mediation for us means an interplay of collective culture, artistic work, and the deliberate blurring of the areas of concert and mediation.

### ***Current Performance Practice and the Breaking of Conventions***

With the constant development of the practical performance possibilities of music, there is nowadays, in addition to the approach of the Stegreif Orchestra, an almost endless variety of forms of the so-called classical concert. Once considered as a "holistic act [and] flawless event" (Heister 1983, 516), progressive institutions and ensembles are now increasingly abandoning its grandiose reputation and attempting, among other things, to create a reception-aesthetic event that actively integrates the audience as a constant. The spectrum here ranges from direct one-to-one interaction between musicians and the audience during a concert situation, to shared musical moments – such as collective singing – and to the guidance of the audience through various spatial aspects of the production. Other parameters of the concert event, such as the use of space and movement, are also being rethought and integrated into the existing practices. This can be described as an ongoing trend that can be attributed, among other aspects, to a stronger social connection between space, active subject, and the event itself (Bourdieu 2006). If one agrees with the assertion that the "crisis of art music [...] is less a crisis of the music itself than of its form of performance" (Tröndle 2011, 9), then a progressive approach goes hand in hand with a breaking up of concert conventions.

One pivotal moment in the founding of the Stegreif Orchestra was a breach with conventions, when horn player and Stegreif founder Juri de Marco stood up during a rehearsal in a professional orchestra in order to better see the solo trumpeter and thus be able to better synchronise with him. Among other things, this gave rise to the idea of an improvising symphony orchestra that moves freely in space and is close to the audience, incorporating sensory experiences of the listeners through the addition of movement, scene, dance, light, video, singing, proximity, and silence. The individual components of what

we call integrated mediation are so subjective on the one hand and so diverse on the other that they cannot be described here in their entirety. However, certain parameters can be demonstrated on the basis of the different concert programmes of the orchestra.

### ***Concert Programmes and Formats at Stegreif***

One of the Stegreif programmes that presumably enjoys the greatest musical and performative freedom, as it is not based on a genuine work of the classical canon like the other Stegreif programmes, and therefore leaves the greatest possible scope for interpretation and active participation of the audience, is *#improphonie*. Here, the audience can move freely between the musicians and decide for themselves how closely they want to engage in the programme. Large parts of the musical programme are improvised, which means that everyone in the room can respond to impulses, most of which can come from the orchestra, of course, but also from the audience. The latter is not only actively involved in the scene, but also in the sound, such as through improvised choral moments. For example, the premiere of *Giovanni. Eine Passion* [Giovanni. A Passion] at the Neukölln Opera, which was performed as a concert in Berlin's Prinzessingärten, was an affectionate departure with the conventions of opera, merging musicians and singers. In addition to the described moments of connection between orchestra and audience, we incorporate participatory elements into our performances. For example, during our performance of the *symphony of change* at the Philharmonie Berlin, cardboard boxes were passed from the stage into the auditorium, which then travelled through the rows of seats. There are also repeated rupture-like elements, such as the premiere of *#bechange: Thinking* at the Dresden Philharmonie, in which the workshop participants from the previous workshop were integrated into the programme and became part of the concert with a spoken chorus from the audience.

This list of examples is complemented by parameters related to the framing of the concert. These include an active concert introduction, which can be tailored to the audience. In some cases, there is also a musically staged introduction to the actual concert programme, such as at the premiere of *#bechange: Feeling* in Bad Kissingen, where the audience was led from the foyer into the concert hall with excerpts from *#freemahler*. In addition, there are post-concert discussions, accompanying programmes, etc. to enable as many visitors as possible to take part.

## Reflection and challenges of the Stegreif approach

The described approach of the Stegreif Orchestra is of course accompanied by some difficulties and problems, which should be briefly mentioned here in the sense of self-reflection.

Each Stegreif programme is adapted to the performance space after a relevant rehearsal phase. This is necessary because scenic and choreographic elements play a major role, so that one has to take into account the spatial conditions. In addition to time and resource-related factors, there is above all a dispositional problem here, as other professional orchestras require significantly less rehearsal time at the performance venue than we do.

In addition to this production-specific ‘sand in the gears’, there are also content-related hurdles and complexities that the orchestra has to deal with – sometimes more, sometimes less, but continuously. These include ambitious and large-scale programmes such as *#bechange*, which, over the course of a year and a half, includes five separate premiere programmes and 16 workshops on topics (in this case, Sustainability) that some experts have been dealing with for decades. Although working with complex social issues creates social relevance and topicality, it can also be overwhelming in terms of content, and can increase the gap between collective creative power and artistic overload. Working in a collective is incredibly productive in many ways, but of course some processes, especially when it comes to focusing on artistic content at a premiere, are not necessarily easier.

Last but not least, the described extensive mediation formats in musical-scenic concerts and in classical mediation formats can appear ingratiating and pretentious. By attempting to create and allow closeness in the moment, Stegreif very consciously runs the risk of appearing pathetic or even empty of content. In our opinion, this can only be countered by active action in the form of professionalism, persuasiveness, and the unconditional will to fail with relish and a twinkle in the eye. The Stegreif Orchestra has been pursuing this for ten years now – and has a lot of fun doing it!

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# ***The Chewing Gum Goddess in the Opera Lab***

## **On Participatory Devising Processes in Opera and the Courage to Fill Gaps**

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*Krysztina Winkel*

### **Intro: Get Up and Go**

Receiving, discussing, and co-creating music theatre and dance, combined with the curiosity to initiate individual, societal, and organisational transformation processes (even if only on a microcosmic level), forms the core of the outreach work at the Vienna State Opera. Since 2020, under the leadership of Dr. Bogdan Roščić, this work has been carried out a dedicated department for the first time. One of the various project formats developed since then is the *Opera Lab*, a participatory devising project in cooperation with Superar, a Europe-wide NGO that offers free music education for children and youth. In weekly rehearsals, around 24 teenagers and young adults between the ages of 14 and 24 develop their own music theatre performance, critically engaging with personal and contemporary societal issues. This performance is presented at the end of the season, accompanied by professional musicians, such as the stage orchestra of the Vienna State Opera, in front of an audience at the Kulturhaus Brotfabrik [Bread Factory Cultural Centre]<sup>1</sup> in Vienna's 10<sup>th</sup> district. There are no auditions or expectations regarding the participants' prior knowledge. The project is free of charge, and everyone is welcome. Some participants are reached through social media posts, while others are recruited proactively in nearby schools and youth centres, or through the relationship-building efforts of the cooperation partners. At an initial kick-off rehearsal, the project idea and philosophy, artistic methods, and goals are introduced to potential participants.

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1 The Bread Factory Cultural Centre is a former industrial building that belonged to the Austrian bakery Anker. Since 2009 it has been transformed into a cultural space, housing galleries, ateliers, restaurants, and performance venues. See <https://brotfabrik.wien/en/home.html> (accessed April 7, 2025).

The following text critically examines the transformational potential of participation within the various phases of creative and collective group process or co-creation, taking the *Opera Lab* production *The Chewing Gum Goddess* as an example. It explores the artistic-aesthetic, strategic, and organisational challenges and limitations, providing insights into the realities of outreach work at a state funded cultural institution. These projects are grounded with one foot in a large, routine-based institution and the other foot firmly placed among our cooperation partners and parts of the urban community. Furthermore, a question arises about the direction which the effects of the metaphorical split-take. Moreover, how can one move from the split to a stable stance or a new movement?

### **The Project of the 2022/23 Season: *Welcome to Poseidon-Escape!***

After consulting with the Opera's dramaturgical department, the co-leading team, consisting of the musical director of Superar and the project leader from the Vienna State Opera, decides on the initial piece and thus the initial thematic framework. While previous years focused on Verdi's *Macbeth* and Alban Berg's *Wozzeck*, the opera *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* by Claudio Monteverdi, which premiered under the direction of Sergio Morabito and Jossi Wieler at the Vienna State Opera, served as the starting point and point of friction for the theatrical devising process of the 2022/23 season. Each year, the *Opera Lab*, as well as its dance counterpart, the *Dance Lab*, focuses on very different works from the opera or ballet repertoire. Although most participants change annually, the project aims to introduce various musical languages and staging styles to the project members. Another criterion for the selection of the piece is the relevance of its inherent societal themes, i.e., the potential felt in the original material to bridge to life in today's world and inspire artistic processes on local and/or global issues. It should be noted that this is not intended to defend, justify, or rework the opera repertoire but rather to serve as a starting point for a critical, society-focused discourse. The chosen source acts as a creative stimulus from which the young ensemble members creatively diverge through their own aesthetic-artistic practice. At the start of the project, no one knows what the final product will look like. It is only certain that it will not be a shortened or adapted version of the Monteverdi opera but something entirely new. Also known from the start is the premiere date, which allows for the structural embedding required by the institution through long-term scheduling and planning, involving the in-house trades and the musical and technical departments.

In June 2023, after seven months of creative work, the music theatre performance *The Chewing Gum Goddess* emerged. It tells the story of three goddesses – the Goddess of Chewing Gum, the Goddess of Facts, and the Goddess of Sarcasm – who have been demoted from Olympus and now exercise their last remnants of power by running an escape room titled *Poseidon Escape*. Here, the audience witnesses how three different groups – a family, a company outing, and the self-proclaimed ‘expert nerds’ – navigate the escape room, facing challenges akin to Odysseus’s journey home. The piece raises questions such as “Is home always a place or concrete location?” or “What voices sometimes lead one astray?”, and “Do all people have the same opportunities and conditions to determine and pursue their own path?”

## On the Phases in the Process of Devising the Performance

Typically, the devising process of an operatic music theatre performance is divided into various phases, which I will discuss in detail below. It should be noted beforehand that the duration of each phase varies from project to project, and these phases do not always proceed linearly; they can loop back or jump forward.

### ***Ensemble Building and Material Collection Phase, or: “Who voluntarily waits 20 years for a guy?”***

In the first project phase, the so-called “ensemble building and material collection phase”, themes derived from the reference work are artistically explored. In this case, the themes revolve around Greek mythology and deities, or address more associative questions related to the *Odyssey*, such as “What does it mean to return home after a long time?” “What does home mean?” or “How long is it worth waiting for someone?” Methodologically, this strength- and interest-oriented approach alternates between elements of scenic play, vocal experimentation, and movement improvisations.

Here is a small example from scenic role work and an introduction to experimenting with absurd theatre: the deities of the *Odyssey* are known for their power plays among themselves and towards humans, as well as their unpredictable use of superhuman powers to advocate for or against certain things. In addition to superhuman powers, they are characterised by distinctive behavior, appearance, and unique props and symbols. Participants were invited to develop their own absurd deities with distinct physicalities and modes of movement and articulation, who use superpowers to intervene in everyday events

to advocate for specific causes. For this, the participants used the role profile principle, thinking about concrete personal characteristics and peculiarities of the character (e.g. biographical details, deepest desire, formative childhood experience, a typical phrase and posture, relationships with others, a characteristic feature, a favourite activity, etc.). Subsequently, improvisations followed, where participants immersed themselves in the role of their self-developed absurd deities, interacting in scenic play, and learning more about their roles' particularities through improvisations, which they then collectively reflected upon and further developed.

The ensemble building and material collection phase also involves discovering the participants' creative resources and strengths, their interests concerning their involvement in the final piece, and their attitudes towards the project's content. This phase reveals whether the initial questions posed by the project leaders resonate with the young ensemble members, or if entirely different topics are coming to the forefront. In the case of *The Chewing Gum Goddess*, the latter was the case. Initially, the focus was on the question of the meaning of home, but after visiting the reference work, the young people were more interested in: "Why does Penelope wait 20 years for a guy? Who does that?" Instead of being impressed by Odysseus' wanderings and adventures, a significant portion of the ensemble was more occupied with Penelope's seemingly unbearable waiting situation, surrounded by suitors while waiting for her husband, Odysseus. They also questioned how she truly felt upon seeing someone who was once close to her after a long time, exploring the authenticity of feelings combined with societal expectations. The theme "How long would I wait for something?" thus became an unplanned but very important part of the project for the later production. In addition, the ensemble's discourse on society's structural problems intensified, questioning whether all people even have the opportunity to shape their paths independently, or which external voices (in the context of Odysseus' wanderings) or (systemic) obstacles lead them astray or keep them from their desired goals.

Another part of the ensemble building and material collection phase includes rehearsal and performance visits to the Vienna State Opera itself. Reflections on and experiences of different staging approaches to opera and theatre aesthetics can influence the participants' own development process of the project performance. While the financial resources of productions in the large house differ significantly from the *Opera Lab*, insights derived from familiarising themselves with different approaches to staging or handling props can still inspire the participants' own ideas. In the case of the *Opera Lab*, for example, stage towers from the production *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* [The Master-Singers of Nuremberg] were standing randomly on the

backstage, sparking the ensemble's idea to work vertically. This was eventually implemented in *The Chewing Gum Goddess* (albeit with much smaller heights) using scaffolding and helped solve a previously insurmountable staging problem by establishing a spatial separation between the gods (escape room leaders) and humans (escape room visitors).

### ***Filter Phase: About the Dramaturgical Lens, Frustration, and New Questions***

In the so-called “filter phase”, artistic outputs from previous discourses and artistic experiments are selected or discarded in the form of dramaturgical approaches, narratives, newly developed characters, and musical soundscapes. These negotiation processes are not straightforward and are influenced by various factors. A primary criterion for these decisions is the group's resonance. After many themes are tested during the material collection phase, it quickly becomes clear what truly moves the group and what does not. The ensemble has significant input rights here. Their stance is gauged by the workshop leaders in weekly feedback rounds at the end of each rehearsal. Each rehearsal ends with: “What did you like today?”, “What do you wish to be different for the next rehearsal or the emerging piece?”

Another framework for the filter phase involves viewing the piece through the dramaturgical lens, where many previously developed impulses are woven back together. In the case of *The Chewing Gum Goddess*, the decision was taken to set the story in an escape room<sup>2</sup> run by three goddesses. From the workshop leaders' perspective, this decision offered the potential to coherently incorporate many of the previously developed characters and texts. The decision to use the dramaturgical lens is less participatory compared to other devising processes. It is made by the workshop leaders, based on the accumulation of inputs, and taking into account the framework conditions and an artistic vision. The participatory element here almost coincidentally depends on individual inputs from a few participants. In the case of *The Chewing Gum Goddess*, one participant randomly mentioned an escape room during an improvisation, and the workshop leaders found this image fitting, and a suitable way to integrate many previous impulses.

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2 An escape room is an interactive adventure game where participants must solve a series of puzzles and tasks in a themed room in order to escape within a set time limit. The games require teamwork, communication, and creativity to succeed.

The filter phase process is socially sensitive and can occasionally contain the potential for conflict and misunderstanding among participants, as an initial project promise – that all ideas are welcome and equally important – may seem to clash with the goal of devising a coherent and dramaturgically consistent artistic product. While the workshop leaders act more as moderators of various impulses in the first project phase, their additional function of making conscious decisions becomes visible in the filter phase. Frustration and questions can arise among participants if some content and stories make it into the final work while others do not. This disappointment-prone phase is counteracted with transparency, emphasising that idea selection is a natural and important aspect of the creative process. However, this argument does not entirely negate the potentially legitimate critique that, theoretically, these steps of the creative process could continue to be democratically negotiated within the group.

### ***Deepening Phase***

The deepening phase provides space to delve deeper into retained impulses and give them more focus and attention. In this phase, the *Opera Lab* project also collaborates with guests and external partners who, without having participated in the previous process, bring new creative inputs into the rehearsal space. In this year's *Opera Lab*, once it was decided that the story of the music theatre performance would be set in an escape room, the theatre company Looters reg. soc., who have designed several escape rooms themselves, was invited. They offered inspiration for developing the characters, musical features, and conflicts and mishaps of escape rooms by sharing their experiences from observing and running escape rooms with the ensemble. The invited guests stimulated creative games, encouraging participants to consider their challenges in relation to the *Odyssey* material and previous societal discourses (such as exclusionary societies). In the deepening phase, the process of thinking more concretely about the stage design also begins, as the opera's technical departments need final information about the financial and temporal resource requirements several months before the performance. The guests' visit ultimately led the ensemble to use shield elements with neon writing and signal colors in their final production, commonly found within escape rooms and when exiting them. While scenic decisions are made in the deepening phase, the musical direction also makes initial casting decisions and deepens the musical training on already developed musical components. For example, various combinations of singing voices are tested for multi-part music pieces, such as duets or trios. In every phase, but especially in this one, the content and scenic devising process is strongly interdependent with the

musical development, as decisions on both sides (which cannot be separated in participatory music theatre work) always influence each other.

### ***The Condensing and Validation Phase***

In this phase, the elements of the developing musical theatre performance are condensed and ideas are validated. It becomes clear where cuts or deeper elaborations are needed to convey the desired content or to achieve certain atmospheres, whether theatrical or musical. For *The Chewing Gum Goddess*, it became apparent during this phase that among the characters navigating the escape room, there was a need for some who would manage the transitions between the various challenges faced by the participants. These characters would also rearrange stage elements, as the open stage setup at the Brotfabrik did not allow for curtain changes. During this phase, previously gathered material from the initial phase was revisited, and a creative idea that had been discarded in the filtering phase was reintroduced into the piece.

Outside the rehearsal room, the production process reaches its peak. Fittings are conducted, transportation for additional instruments is arranged, programme texts are written, and ticket sales commence. This process, except for fittings, occurs without direct involvement of the ensemble. This phase is also one of the most intense interactions between the various departments of the Vienna State Opera and the project, as differing realities and needs often clash. While the Vienna State Opera typically plans its operations up to three years in advance, ideas in participatory projects emerge with much shorter lead times. Initially, this caused significant misunderstandings within the organisation. Thus, at the beginning of building the outreach work at the Vienna State Opera, intensive efforts were made to collaborate with the technical department heads (especially stage and costume), in order to evaluate existing production processes and explore how long-established routines and structures could be slightly adapted to support future participatory projects and performances. Nowadays, ways have been found to react to project ideas with five months' notice instead of three years, though this requires sacrificing certain resources and forming alternative working groups and project teams. The differing timelines and flexibilities still hold potential for conflict. However, this is not due to unwillingness on the part of the departments but often related to maintaining quality standards. The internal artists and responsible parties are accustomed to (and wish to continue) equipping artistic works as securely and professionally as possible, without overburdening their teams or disadvantaging other projects. With mutual understanding and ongoing negotiations and evaluation, the collaboration with the departments remains

in a phase of continuously finding new synergies between internal and external teams.

### ***Weaving and Staging: Getting into the Room***

A limit of participation emerges in the context of weaving together the existing musical elements, especially regarding the final overall composition and orchestration. While decisions for the overall musical framework are consulted with the ensemble, the final decisions are made by the musical director and the co-leader of the devising process, the stage director. The same applies to orchestration and final staging in the performance space.

Reflecting on the *Opera Lab* project, external observers often express the thought: “I can imagine young people coming up with stories and characters, but how do you compose with young adults who may lack a background in music theory or voice training?” Especially in the context of musical work, reservations like “Who can or should compose music?” become louder. The musical director of the *Opera Lab*, Andy Icochea Icochea, works with vocal improvisation, collecting themes and melodies generated purely through reading and experimenting with the sound of self-written quotes. This does not mean the elements found are bound to the theme of the original improvisation or the person who developed those sounds. Later on, they might be rearranged or newly organised (similar to the developed text elements) – of course, in consultation with the original creators. Additionally, a significant aspect of musical theatre is the convergence of various creative disciplines. For instance, an aria can be written by someone who feels more comfortable in the process of creative writing, while another person, who enjoys improvising a solo, might set that text to music. Both creatives are equally important for the creation of that aria. The fact that the author of the libretto can provide feedback on whether the musical development aligns with their vision or suggest tonal changes closes the circle of that creative thread.

In the so-called “weaving and staging phase,” the devised piece is brought into the actual performance space, meaning the ensemble and team begin working with all associated departments (lighting, technology, costumes, props, and orchestra) for the first time. Although the piece itself, primarily text and composition, is finished, there are many silent moments that still require staging ideas and solutions. Often, it becomes apparent during this phase that ideas which worked in the rehearsal room no longer function in the new space, scenes do not carry the intended weight, or new staging solutions need to be found for certain scenes. During this phase, ideas and theatrical or musical elements from earlier phases are often revisited and utilised.

The presence of the orchestra also continues to influence creative processes until shortly before the premiere. While running through the piece during final rehearsals, it becomes clear where additional transitional music is needed or where a spoken monologue might benefit from musical commentary. Here, the orchestra remains open to trying out spontaneous requests and suggestions from the participants or the director.

### **The “Premiere Pizza” Phase**

Celebrating the success of the ensemble and the musicians is a crucial part of the process. Even though this does not affect the actual piece in terms of content or form anymore, celebrating together impacts personal reflection on the experience. Shared meals or toasting with a soft drink are among those unplanned moments that facilitate genuine and direct interactions between ensemble members and, especially, between the young performers and the orchestra musicians or staff of the Vienna State Opera. In the context of the *Opera Lab* project, such moments, where the community celebrates a shared experience, create a sense of *we* (Matarasso in this volume). It is not uncommon for a participant to show an orchestra musician their favorite Spotify playlist during the premiere party at the Brotfabrik, or for the orchestra to dance to the young people’s songs. Similar moments include rehearsal breaks where spontaneous group games might occur. In these encounters, project participants and State Opera staff get to know each other not only in their roles, but also as people sharing a moment, a quick pass, or a slice of pizza. This might lead to a conversation about opera or something entirely different. While in the first year of the project, few could imagine this practice, some musicians now proactively ask if their instrument group can be included in the *Opera Lab* compositions so they can be involved again. Apparently, these new opportunities and contexts are also appreciated by the professional musicians. This creative enthusiasm is felt by the ensemble, making them – and the leadership team – bold enough to continue incorporating their ideas.

### **On the Goals and Qualities of the *Opera Lab*: Process Orientation as a Challenge for All**

In line with the concept of “Artistic Citizenship” (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2023), the *Opera Lab* provides a space to artistically address socially relevant themes for the creative practice of the city’s youth and young adults, in co-creation with their ensemble members and professional artists. Both through the

process itself within the primary group – the newly formed ensemble – and through presenting the final product to a secondary group, namely the audience, discussions and reflections are encouraged.

The project is designed as an extracurricular, voluntary-based initiative, and its diverse ensemble composition welcomes people from various backgrounds, motivations, desires, and attitudes or interests. However, the project distances itself from social engineering attitudes and the assumption that it can or should actively change participants or teach them to love opera. Of course, social processes are inherent to the project, and positive individual and group developments are welcomed. The team and funder are also pleased when participants discover new strengths within the project or develop an interest in something that was previously less accessible, like opera, and even bring their friends and families to a performance. While the project aims to engage people in music theatre, audience development is just one of many possible side effects, not the primary goal, and only partially predictable.

The focus is more on creating a creative process and ultimately an artistic product that, with and through the qualities of music theatre, provides space for exploring current societal issues and new narratives from young people, which may lead to changes (even if on a micro-level), though these changes are also not fully predictable. Furthermore, the project's participatory approach, of considering co-creative processes, challenges existing understandings of music theatre's qualities and shifts focus to the path towards the final product. What (new) theatrical and operatic forms, aesthetics, and dramaturgies emerge when young adults, involved in interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary and performative approaches, shape their own narratives and musical languages? How does music theatre sound when it is based on improvisation, creative exercises, experimentation with individual and group sound, and further developed and performed with professional artists? What thematic tensions arise when engaging with opera repertoire and the current lives of participants? What new perspectives on repertoire, society, and artistic practice emerge when young creatives co-determine and shape major elements of the process and product? How does the perception and impact of the Vienna State Opera change in a different location and with traditional (stage-)orientations disrupted?

These questions often evoke not only curiosity but also fears, skepticism, or misunderstandings within the cultural institution and among project participants. Especially the process-oriented approach, where the outcome is not known at the start, requires not only openness and trust from participants and facilitators, but also a strong commitment and curiosity from the Vienna State Opera as an institution. For departments unfamiliar with this kind of work, or unable to form their own picture of it, concerns were raised at the beginning:

“But we are the Vienna State Opera!”, “We stand for quality! How will it look or sound if suddenly everyone can participate in an opera project here?” The idea that people with untrained singing voices might perform alongside professional musicians, or even be professionally equipped, seemed impossible and insulting to some at first. Yes, we stand for quality, but the question is what quality means in the context of an outreach project and participatory music theatre. Confidence can be partially conveyed by transparently showing which pillars can be integrated into the creative process to make a high-quality product more likely, though not guaranteed. These include assembling diverse project teams with various artistic signatures, employing trained staff with a participant-centred and strengths-based pedagogical approach, artistic expertise, societal, personal, and institutional relevance, rehearsal spaces and policies that support child welfare and creativity, cooperation partners and guests providing expertise the opera does not have, a code of conduct, and a stance agreement outlining the values of the project (acceptance and embracing of diversity and controversial views, respect and equality, anti-discrimination, equal opportunities), a positive failure culture, courage, risk-taking, and boldness in new visions, to name but a few. In short, finding a common language and mutual understanding is as crucial as seeking and finding new institutional processes.

The examination of participation and co-creation moments within the different phases of the devising processes in opera shows that, depending on the phase, a project may move between different sides of the *us* and *them* spectrum (Matarasso in this volume). The project’s desire and aspiration are to create as many moments of co-creation as possible, reflecting the attitude of *we* (ibid.) – moving from a purely socially oriented approach to a greater delegation of control to the young artists and the ensemble itself. In the context of being anchored in a large state institution, however, limits are reached, and at certain moments, the binary of *us* and *them* becomes more visible again. These are often due to the dependency on internal institutional processes.

After three years of the *Opera Lab*, it is evident that the Vienna State Opera has learned a lot from the young ensembles and the life of their worlds. The fact that their ideas from the are supported and showcased by the Vienna State Opera and its partners with the same importance as productions at the main house is highly appreciated by the project participants. Observations on language and communication use, awareness of barriers, needs, and interests, etc., are just a few examples.

While it has proven effective to anchor dance and music theatre projects, like the lab formats, outside the Vienna State Opera at places such as the Kulturhaus Brotfabrik, to build welcoming and accessible relationships with new young artists and communities and to foster intensive cooperation with

local partners, it would be desirable for the narratives and ideas of young people to be shown in the same light as repertoire productions in the future. The Vienna State Opera is taking an important step in this direction with the opening on Vienna's Karlsplatz in winter 2024 of NEST, a new venue specifically for children's and youth opera, dance, experimental, and community formats, which will form an axis with the Brotfabrik in relation to the lab projects. Here too, the house, especially the outreach department, is in the midst of new negotiation processes: What newly gained knowledge can and should be transferred, and which approaches should be abandoned? Will the newly found processes endure, or is it time to continue exploring new synergies within the strategic, structural, and content-related development of hopefully significant theatre moments and encounters?

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# “Musethica Brings Us to the Core of our Vocation”

## A Conversation with Djanay Tulenova, Avri Levitan, and Johannes Meissl

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*Axel Petri-Preis*

In her book *Journeys of Lifelong Learning in Music*, Rineke Smilde describes how musicians who play in various, sometimes new and unfamiliar, social contexts reflect on their artistic identity and how experiences from these musical practices also influence performances in conventional concert settings (Smilde 2021, 200). According to Smilde, playing music in diverse social contexts, such as in hospitals, for vulnerable groups and individuals requires a special form of excellence that goes beyond artistic excellence, which she calls situational excellence (ibid., 107f.). Musicians need to develop a sensitivity to their social environment, understanding and being able to read the needs of their respective audiences and how to reach them.

The *Musethica* programme was founded by Avri Levitan in 2012 in Zaragoza to provide music students with the opportunity to develop their artistic practice through performances for people with limited access to live classical music. Participants in the programme, along with tutors, perform in places such as prisons, schools, and hospices. Levitan’s observation that aspiring musicians often lack performance opportunities to practice building a communicative relationship with their audience was the starting point for *Musethica*. The programme consists of week-long masterclasses that include instruction from renowned teachers and two to three concerts per day, which the participants perform together with their tutors. In these concerts, young musicians can develop not only their artistic skills but also the situational excellence that Rineke Smilde discusses in her book. They also experience that their artistic practice is not either *l’art pour l’art* or social work, but that it exists on a continuum where different “partnering values” (Gaunt et al. 2021, 4) mutually enrich each other.

At the *Turning Social* conference, Johannes Meissl, vice rector of the University of Music and Performing Arts, discussed the artistic and ethical principles and objectives of the *Musethica* programme, which has been in

partnership with the mdw since 2014. Mdw student and violinist Djanay Tulenova shared her own experiences as a participant in the *Musethica* programme and performed an excerpt from György Ligeti's 2<sup>nd</sup> *String Quartet* together with her Rubik Quartet. For this contribution, Axel Petri-Preis invited the founder and artistic director of *Musethica*, Avri Levitan, as well as Johannes Meissl and Djanay Tulenova, to a Zoom conversation on June 5, 2024. The discussion addressed the relationship between music and ethics, the potential redefinition of artistic excellence, the preparation of musicians for challenging performance situations within the programme, and the experiences of the discussants in their roles as tutors and participants in the programme.

### Introduction of the conversation partners

**Avri Levithan** studied at the Rubin Academy of Music in Tel-Aviv and at the Conservatoire de Paris. He has performed at renowned music festivals worldwide. Beyond his role as a performer, Avri Levitan has devoted himself to nurturing the next generation of musicians. At the age of 25, he became a dedicated viola and chamber music teacher. In 2008, he assumed the position of Professor and Music Director of the string programme at CIEC La Rioja in Spain, and from 2010 to 2018, he held the position of Professor of Viola and Chamber Music at the Conservatorio Superior de Música de Aragón (CSMA). In 2012 he founded *Musethica* together with Carmen Marcuello.

**Johannes Meissl** is a professor of chamber music and has been vice-rector for international affairs and art at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna since October 2019. From 2010, until his appointment as vice-rector, he headed the Joseph Haydn Department of Chamber Music, Early Music and Contemporary Music and also served as president of the mdw senate from 2015 until September 2019. Furthermore, Meissl is artistic director of isa – the International Summer Academy of the mdw. Since 1982 he has been a member of Artis Quartett Wien, performing a concert series at the Vienna Musikverein. In 2014 he established a collaboration between mdw and *Musethica*.

**Djanay Tulenova** studies violin in the class of Christian Altenburger at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. The multiple award-winning violinist started her musical education at the age of 5 in Almaty / Kazakhstan. She then studied violin with Alexander Kirov at the Moscow State Conservatory P. I. Tschaikovsky and with Boris Belkin at the Maastricht Academy of Music.

She is a member of the Rubik Quartet which participated in the *Musethica* programme and concert master of the Vereinigte Bühnen Wien orchestra.

## The Connection between Music and Ethics

Axel Petri-Preis: I would like to start our conversation by talking about the name of the programme first. *Musethica* is a combination of music and ethics, which is interesting, because at first glance it may not seem like the most obvious combination, if you view music purely as an aesthetic phenomenon. However, if you consider music as a social practice, ethical questions naturally arise. In their book *Artistic Citizenship. Artistry, Social Responsibility, and Ethical Praxis*, David Elliott, Marissa Silverman, and Wayne Bowman use the verb "musicking" instead of the noun music and argue that music as a social practice contains an inherent ethical dimension. Based on this they also assert that musicians have a social responsibility and that they should contribute to human thriving through their art. My first two questions therefore are: Where do you see the connection between music and ethics? And what potential, and maybe also limit, do you see in the social responsibility of musicians?

Avri Levitan: I have a very close friend, a professor of philosophy, who said he did not like the name because he did not think it should be interpreted as a philosophical phenomenon. It is not about combining ethics in the philosophical sense, but because music is a social practice. And for many years, classical music has been mistakenly handled as a form of music that belongs to a certain part of society. It is about bringing music back to its origin as a part of basic social needs. This explains the combination of music and ethics.

Johannes Meissl: Music has always had a direct connection to societal needs. Especially now, classical music is becoming much more aware of this strong implication. As an institution, we at the university strongly pursue a combination of striving both for excellence and direct societal engagement. The experiences musicians gain from projects like *Musethica* show that this is not just an obligation, but that it brings us to the core of our vocation. It has a very immediate and burning relevance because it addresses the question of why we educate young musicians and what they should achieve.

Avri Levitan: It is interesting that we think of social responsibility as something separate for musicians. The education of young musicians is often not socially oriented, usually it is about individual achievement and competition. It is amaz-

ing that we suddenly realise we are doing something social. Music, possibly the first form of communication among humans, is deeply embedded in our DNA.

Djanay Tulenova: I have never really thought about it because, as a violinist, I was raised with exactly the mindset of egocentrism and competition. But because of *Musethica*, I first understood that when you perform, you are supposed to play for the public. However, you don't know your audience. You do not know their backgrounds or what they are feeling – maybe someone had a birthday or came from a funeral. You have to touch the souls of people who are in very different emotional and psychological states. When you play in a big, fancy hall and perform something like Brahms, you try to connect with the audience. But there is often a kind of barrier, a bubble that you cannot really penetrate. With *Musethica*, my experience was very different, because I was very close to the audience, which was mostly in mental institutions or hospices, dealing with people in various states of consciousness. It gave me an idea of the diverse emotions and states of mind of the people you are dealing with and how you can reach them. Now, when I play in concert halls for a typical classical audience, I remember these experiences. It gave me more insight into the psychology and nature of the audience I am serving.

## Rethinking Artistic Excellence?

Axel Petri-Preis: Artistic excellence is a central buzzword in higher music education. Against the backdrop of what the three of you were just saying, is it not time to rethink or redefine the traditional notion of artistic excellence, beyond just being excellent on your instrument and towards including more dimensions of being an artist?

Djanay Tulenova: I was following the *Queen Elisabeth Competition*<sup>1</sup>. Some participants were clearly playing for the public, trying to connect, rather than focusing solely on winning. Unfortunately, many of these musicians did not make it to the finals, which I found surprising and a bit disappointing. It showed that technical excellence is still heavily emphasised. But through programmes like *Musethica*, more musicians are starting to understand and approach their craft differently, aiming to reach and engage the public in a more artistic way.

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1 The *Queen Elisabeth Competition* is one of the most prestigious competitions for violin, cello, piano and voice. For more information see <https://concoursreinee.elisabeth.be/en/home/> (accessed April 15, 2025).

Avri Levitan: I understand the distinction people make between technical and musical excellence, but I do not personally and professionally see them as separate. They are one and the same. If you only play the notes cleanly without musicality, it is incomplete. If a jury focuses only on technical precision, that is their problem, not the audience's. In *Musethica*, excellence in playing – both technical and musical – plays a huge role, perhaps even more so than in big halls or competitions. What happened at the *Queen Elizabeth Competition* shows that the classical music world can be confusing and self-contained, with traditions and rules that do not necessarily serve the broader public. Sometimes people say that in *Musethica* you feel less judged and can allow yourself to make mistakes. I understand the philosophy behind it. When you play, you should not focus on potential mistakes but on the expression and the phrase. True artistry comes from striving for high quality and excellence. If you play flat or with poor phrasing, it will not resonate with the audience.

Djanay Tulenova: In the *Queen Elizabeth Competition*, everyone's technique is impeccable. What can be observed is that there are people who focus on traditions and others who strive for new ideas, new ways of expressing music and reaching the audience. The *Queen Elizabeth Competition* is a strong example of a traditional approach.

Johannes Meissl: There are still strong remnants of a system that has become quite self-referential. In my opinion, excellence requires a very high level of skill and craftsmanship. This is indispensable. However, it also needs to go beyond mere execution. Execution has dominated our educational system – you perform something correctly, and it is marked as acceptable, and audiences, trained to accept this, go along with it. When we consider the power of communication that music inherently carries, mere execution that meets certain parameters will not suffice because it does not communicate or resonate. True artistry involves looking for the personal touch, being aware of the audience, and adapting to different settings, whether intimate or large-scale. This new definition of excellence combines skill with an awareness of the audience, creating a circular interaction of giving and taking. This approach can engage even those unfamiliar with classical music, touching them deeply without needing explanations. In *Musethica*, we have seen that this strong interaction can feed back into traditional settings, making performances relevant for both the audience and the musicians. It is beyond just delivering a performance; it is about creating a meaningful connection.

## The Foundation and Idea of *Musethica*

Axel Petri-Preis: Avri, you founded *Musethica* in 2012, in Zaragoza, to provide young musicians with the opportunity to perform for audiences with limited access to classical music. Can you tell us more about your ideas behind the foundation of this programme, its development and its goals?

Avri Levitan: It actually started from a somewhat egoistic idea I had as a teacher. Our job is to make young musicians better, simple as that. I realised that learning performance without regular performances is limited. No matter how good the teacher is, if the learning happens only in the studio, in front of colleagues and professors, many elements are missing. People from outside the classical music world do not care about technical difficulties; they just want the music to sound good. This realisation led me to think that regular performances outside the classroom could be beneficial. I developed this idea with Carmen Marcuello, a professor of social economy. She supported it, and we started with performances in special needs schools, prisons, and other venues. Initially, I aimed to improve the musicians' skills, but I quickly realised the significant social dimension. Each lesson learned was unplanned, but it showed that playing for diverse audiences requires a different motivation and engages the brain in unique ways. *Musethica's* approach of giving regular performances trains musicians to transfer this experience to traditional concert halls. Last week in Spain, people were still talking about a concert where a musician played Bach at a hospital. This lasting impact highlights the importance of our work.

Johannes Meissl: For me, it is crucial to combine the idea of playing for diverse audiences and taking every single one of these performances as seriously as we would regular classical concerts, like at Carnegie Hall. That makes it special for everyone. It is not about fame or praise. It is not about comparison. It is about doing it for the sake of doing it, for all of us, the best way we can.

## Experiences from the *Musethica* Programme

Axel Petri-Preis: Djanay, would you please share some insights into your experience with the *Musethica* programme?

Djanay Tulenova: The first time I participated was in Norway and all the concerts were very unusual for me. There was one particular concert I will never forget. It was in a hospice when a nurse came to me and asked me to play Bach for a

patient who was going to die in three days. This turned everything 180 degrees in my head. It wasn't like going on stage to play for a regular audience. This person was unconscious, so I had to reach very deep parts of the brain. It was like the mythological journey from one shore to another. On one side, there was no pressure regarding tradition or technique. But on the other side, it awakened the instinct of why I play music in the first place. It brought a purity of purpose and I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility, because I realised my music would be the last thing she would hear in her life.

Avri Levithan: Part of our problematic education as musicians and teachers is that we always like to define what is an important concert and what is not. Why is one more important than the other? Because some notable people might be there, or I might be invited to something later? This dichotomy of important versus unimportant is very problematic on all levels. If you do not play an important concert, you might not care as much, and if you do play an important one, you might suddenly be unable to deliver. Djanay told the other students in Oslo that this was the most important concert of her life. And I understand that feeling. I remember standing outside the door, hearing her play. It was very special and beautiful on all levels. This change in perspective on what is important has been an enlightening learning experience for me.

## Preparing musicians for their performances in new settings

Axel Petri-Preis: Djanay, it is very impressive to hear you talk about these special moments, perhaps your most important concerts. What I wonder though is – and I am asking both you, Avri and Johannes, as tutors, as well as you, Djanay, as a participant – how can you prepare young musicians for these challenging situations? Playing for a dying person, for instance, can potentially be an overwhelming experience. I am glad to hear that it played out very well for you, but I imagine it could also be, in the worst case, a traumatic experience.

Avri Levithan: We discussed this from the beginning of *Musethica* and also considered involving therapists in one of the sessions. We found out, however, you cannot really prepare for that. It might not even be necessary to prepare because we come as musicians, acting as a bridge in these situations. We have to do our job, our function, in this context. Preparing might have the opposite effect of scaring some people. From my experience, and I think this is an open discussion, preparation might not be the best approach. Maybe having someone

on call that musicians can talk to if needed could be helpful. This is something we have considered.

Johannes Meissl: We had this consideration and discussion before we started our first activities with *Musethica*. I would agree that it requires a certain general preparation to know that musicians will not be met with the same environment as a concert hall. But we encourage them to be open to the situation and the people they meet. We did some wrap-up discussions, but it turned out they were not as necessary as we initially thought. And maybe this is an important point from the tutor's perspective. It is not just about sending people somewhere and leaving them to their experiences. There is always an experienced tutor who either plays together with them or at least plays something him- or herself. And there is always the possibility to talk about the performance, the situation and the impressions.

Avri Levitan: But I think it is important to note that there is always a guiding person from *Musethica*. Musicians never go alone.

Johannes Meissl: Exactly, it is never that musicians are just sent somewhere to figure things out on their own. There is always someone from *Musethica* ensuring they find the place and that there is a tutor present. The exchange usually covers both the performance and the artistic side, as well as the personal impressions. For example, with the prisons, you learn afterward that the people you played for were sentenced to 25 years or life. That tells you something, but it is better not to know beforehand what they were convicted for.

Avri Levitan: I never want to hear that because we are not there to judge. They do not look at my history, and we do not look at theirs. We just play, note by note.

Djanay Tulenova: As someone who experienced it firsthand, I would say that preparation would have actually ruined my experience. Imagine if someone had told me beforehand, that I would play for this dying woman in a hospice. I would have had a completely different attitude towards it. It would have felt like more of an obligation, which isn't really pleasant to do. But when you are caught off guard and you are right there, you have to prepare and play at that moment. It is your job as a musician to provide for the last journey of a dying person. We were not prepared for anything we experienced in *Musethica*. But it was much better because the experience was more sensational, stronger, and deeper.

## **Musethica at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna**

Axel Petri-Preis: Johannes, Avri has already talked about the foundation of *Musethica* in Spain. How did the collaboration with the mdw come about and why do you think that the programme is an important part of the education of mdw students?

Johannes Meissl: It has to do with my experiences as a musician, teacher, and human being. When I accepted the invitation to experience *Musethica* for the first time in Spain, I was very curious and open. It was a striking experience for me. It showed me that if everything works together in the right way, it can be very powerful. Of course, it requires good preparation in terms of organisation. Everything must be sorted out beforehand. Institutions must not feel invaded, and everything must fit well. The musicians must be at the highest possible level of artistic preparation, and everyone must be open to the experience. When these elements come together, it becomes not only an added value but a crucial tool for achieving the excellence we have been discussing. It combines immediate communication, awareness, and the ability to perform without being caught in strange conceptual bubbles. We are now on a good track to sustainably establish *Musethica* as a very important way of achieving our goals, which include addressing the needs of changing societies and the evolving classical music world and business. I am very convinced that it was the right decision and that we will continue to grow stronger with it in the future.

Axel Petri-Preis: Thank you all very much for this insightful conversation!

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## **IV. MUSIC MEDIATION IN HIGHER MUSIC EDUCATION**



# Transforming Higher Music Education Systems Learning through Counter-Stories of Finnish Socially Engaged Musicians

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Heidi Westerlund and Sari Karttunen

## Introduction

Despite increasingly critical voices (e.g. Westerlund 2006; Hallam and Gaunt 2012; Holmgren 2020; Manternach 2024), the master-apprentice model continues to be the main pedagogical model in higher music education. While securing the sustainability of such tradition, it also provides a model *par excellence* of what organisational researchers Argylis and Schön (1978) called “single-loop learning”. The latter is learning through making adjustments to correct a mistake or a problem – doing things right by following the established principles. However, the master rarely, if ever, encourages the type of learning that digs into the morality of musical practices and calls for a change of values – “double loop learning” (Argyris and Schön 1978)<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, in his *Teaching Smart People How to Learn*, Argylis stated that “highly skilled professionals are frequently very good at single-loop learning”, but when their strategies do not seem to work, professionals “become defensive, screen out criticism, and put the ‘blame’ on anyone and everyone but themselves” (1991, 4).

The concept of triple-loop learning has been further developed to refer to organisation-level learning and systems-level transformation “concerned with the underlying purposes, principles or paradigms” (Tosey, Visser, and Saunders 2011, 294), and hence shifting attention from the knowing subject to the social conditions of knowledge construction. Such a situation may occur, for instance, at a time of great societal upheaval that threatens the authority of professional

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1 We use the term “morality” of professional work (Tsoukas 2018) and of musical practices in order to refer to the musicians’ “values-in-use, beliefs-in-context, judgments-in-practical-settings” in their work (Cromdal and Tholander 2014, 161; see also Minnameier 2014), however acknowledging that ethics and morality are commonly used interchangeably.

knowledge or pushes the experts out of their comfort zones to deal with uncertainty.

While triple-loop learning may be felt as risky because it might shake the status quo of the practice and the base of established expertise causing professional insecurity, systems-level learning may become necessary for contemporary organisations that are forced to adapt to complex, rapidly changing societies (Väkevä, Westerlund, and Ilmola-Sheppard 2017). For higher music education, this adaptation may be a matter of its very sustainability, even survival, since “in vulnerable systems even small disturbances may cause dramatic social consequences” (Folke 2006, 253). Sociologists widely claim that all institutions in late modernity can be expected to respond to societal challenges (Giddens 1990; Folke 2006) and in this way constantly reclaim their legitimacy. Sustainable transformation requires abandoning the assumption of “a stable and infinitely resilient environment where resource flows could be controlled” (Folke 2006, 253).

In this chapter we will explore reflections of socially engaged musicians in Finland, arguing that their practices hold the potential for triple-loop learning in the context of higher music education. The term “socially engaged music-making” refers to practices that carry a variety of names, ranging from participatory and community-based music, to socially responsible and impactful music-making, and to artistic citizenship. Such practices manifest a social turn (Charnley 2021) in the music industry, expand musicians’ professionalism (Westerlund and Gaunt 2021), and, as we suggest, provide the potential for wider critical systems reflexivity (Westerlund et al. 2021) and change in higher music education. Involvement in such practices has been encouraged as contributing to a musician’s employability (e.g. Bartleet et al. 2019). However, as our earlier research (Westerlund and Karttunen 2024) shows, socially engaged music making can be artistically rewarding and educative for the musicians themselves and can thus inform a higher music education that wishes to “co-evolve as a part of the society” (Väkevä, Westerlund, and Ilmola-Sheppard 2017, 135) while safe-guarding the meaningfulness of professional music-making.

## Research approach

Our data consists of the survey responses and semi-structured interviews of ten musicians who are involved in socially engaged practices in Finland. This data was extracted from a larger data pool gathered through an open call addressed to musicians who were working to simultaneously achieve both musical and social goals. Out of the 63 survey respondents, 20 musicians were invited

for an individual interview via Zoom, following the principle of maximum variation among the respondents who showed interest in developing their practice. In the purposeful “second stage sampling” (Barbour 2022, 3), the data was further narrowed down to ten interviews fulfilling the criterion of a completed higher music education degree either from any of the music degree lines of the music university, the Sibelius Academy, or the universities of applied sciences in Finland (Table 1). All of these degrees involved performance and music-making as a central element of the curriculum (performance, music education, church music, composition, etc.).

Pseudonym <sup>2</sup>	Duration of socially engaged practice (years)	Musical qualifications (highest level) <sup>3</sup>	Qualifications in other disciplines (highest level)
Aaro	1–5	BA*	MA
Anne	> 5	MA	None
Iiris	> 5	MA*	None
Katriina	1–5	BA	MA
Leo	1–5	MA*	None
Liisa	> 5	MA	None
Maria	> 5	MA	None
Markus	> 5	BA	MA
Paula	> 5	MA	None
Susanna	> 5	MA	MA

**Table 1:** Demographic and educational profiles of the interviewees. Source: Own illustration.

The sampling strategy reflects an iterative, abductive analysis process in which the first-round analysis on work values and career orientation (Westerlund and Karttunen 2024) indicated that this sample involves systems-level reflections. The interviews, conducted in Finnish in 2021 and each lasting

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- 2 The participants were not asked to identify their gender in either the survey or the interviews. The pseudonyms follow the assumed gender within a binary framework of first names.
  - 3 Asterisks indicate the additional in-service training in community musicianship offered at several Finnish universities of applied sciences since 2017.

approximately 90 minutes, covered themes such as training and career path, motivation for undertaking socially engaged practice, beliefs about achieving social impact, content and process of work, internal monitoring and evaluation, as well as context and constraints. The following research question was posed for the data set comprised of the ten musicians with higher music education background: How do musicians reflect upon their socially engaged work and how can their reflections inform professional education in music?

Since the data confirmed Thomas Turino's argument that participatory practice should be conceptualised as a "different form of art and activity entirely" (2008, 25), we analyse socially engaged music-making as a distinct social system, a *sense-making framework of principles and ideas* that differs from the traditional concert hall practice. A social system can be identified when there is a boundary of some kind that is understood to mark where the system ends, or, as in this study, where the boundary is a point of recognised relationship (Capra 1997). The musicians' reflections were organised as counter-stories that provide "a context to understand and transform established truths or legitimising narratives and associated frameworks for meaning-making" (Urmitapa, Azad, and Hussain 2022, 61). They allow us to see how the musicians positioned themselves and their practices in their sense-making processes. The analytical outcomes are meant to be "devices [...] to organise a debate about 'change to bring about improvement'" (Checkland and Poulter 2006, 18); they are thus heuristic aids and tools for learning *about* reality, rather than representations of reality.

We will first outline how the relationality in the practitioners' reflections defines the purpose and quality of socially engaged music-making as a social system. We then illustrate how the musicians frame their practice as counter-stories, by organising the data in terms of what socially engaged practice does in society and education, and what the practice means for the musician's status. Finally, we elaborate how socially engaged practice, as reflected by the Finnish musicians, could enhance systems learning – the double- and triple loop-learning – in higher music education.

## Relationality Defining the Socially Engaged Music-Making System

The interviewed musicians describe their socially engaged practice in terms of relationality, interactions, and complex interdependencies. They used terms such as "a human being for another human being", "touching", "encountering", "listening to the people", "coalescence with others", "communication via music",

“encountering other people via creativity”, “mutual learning”, and “learning from participants and peers”. The practice was described as an active participatory approach in relation to people; not simply *for* people but rather *with* people. The bodily interaction was emphasised by many of the interviewees: “I can feel it in my body [...] it’s really touching. [...] it’s the moment of encountering [...]”. It’s a means of being able to be together and meet each other in it, and that’s the thing.” (Maria) The musicians explain how working outside of arts institutions had challenged them to develop a sensitivity and responsiveness towards the context:

I first thought that when you go and work in the neighbourhoods [...] people will listen. It doesn’t work that way at all. [...] You meet people who have no interest in attending a concert, so you must approach them in a completely different way. [...] I noticed that my playing style changed a lot depending on where I was and who was listening, because it became kind of automatic that I reacted to the situation. (Paula)

This social improvisation in varying situations further teaches the musicians how to learn together with the participants. They explain how relationality has changed their approach to music-making, how they have learned to give up their instrument-specific expertise, as well as to reveal their own ignorance and lack of skill, and have built up the courage to experiment with new instruments, approaches and environments. They describe how they had left behind their learned musical genre and expanded their occupational tasks, or had taken a step toward collective authorship for compositions. They describe how decision-making in collaborative processes is shared with non-professionals; how they refrain from having a ready-made concept to be applied, and instead may take a step back and listen; and how they consciously reduce their expert agency to give room for other participants and situations “where you cannot control the end result” (Liisa).

These non-hierarchical participatory music-making processes have not, however, led the musicians to give up artistic criteria. Rather, they use musical criteria as being integrated with the values that the practice provides for its participants, and have personal ways to deal with the potential conflict between their own artistic ambitions and the participants’ interests. Some of them separate their other artistic work and the socially engaged practice, while others had adjusted their entire view on their professional goals, conceptions of quality, and ways to evaluate success. While the communal working processes were found equally crucial to, or even more important than, the final outcome, the musicians describe how they enjoyed being released from the pressure to subordinate all music making to the ideal of a perfect public performance

and how participatory music-making with non-professionals was a pleasurable, alternative way to make use of their musical skills. Such a practice requires an attitude shift for a musician with a traditional education, as one of them explained:

You need humbleness, since [...] these things rarely go as you plan. [...] It demands a thinking process [to conceive] that this is valuable in itself [...] so every now and then there has been cross wrestling between one's own goal-directedness and the conditions of the community. (Susanna)

## **Socially Engaged Practice as a Counterforce to Elitism and Hierarchies in Institutionalised Music-Making and Education**

Whilst the musicians describe the purpose of the socially engaged practice for themselves, they also mentioned what it did differently compared to the established concert institutions or state-funded music education system. Their sense-making of the principles and ideas of the two systems occur not just in relation to the people, participants and the various non-conventional contexts (e.g. sheltered homes, schools, hospitals, prisons, neighbourhoods, parishes), but as “a boundary critique” (Ulrich and Reynolds 2020) in relation to the dominant institutional music industry and music education.

### ***Correcting Exclusionary and Distancing Hierarchies***

In the interviewees' descriptions, socially engaged music making differs from the traditional concert hall practice in “blurring the boundary between the artist and the audience” (Westerlund and Karttunen 2024, 503). The musicians reflect on how they became aware of the limitations of the socio-spatial arrangements of concert hall practices:

I've been thinking a lot about why the Western way, where all the halls are built so that there is a clear boundary between the performers who are on stage and the listeners who are in the audience in their assigned places, is so strong in everything we do [laughs] [...] we [socially engaged musicians] [...] dismantle it or lower it or change it in some way. That it's not so much either/or, either the performer or the listener, but that you can be both. (Iiris)

The musicians criticise how the focus on achieving the highest level of musical quality as the sole criterion of value in concert hall practice steers music teachers' awareness and actions independent of the context (schools, music schools

and higher music education) and how the socially engaged practice has developed tolerance for incompleteness and awareness of multiple context-specific values: “In these productions I’ve started to think about the question of value, what we really value and why. [...] When in a way something different can also sound pretty good.” (Liisa) Perfectionism was seen as a particular feature of the classical music performance tradition, in which socially engaged music making was *correcting* the hierarchical and one-directional communication tradition and formed “a radical alternative” (Westerlund and Karttunen 2024, 508):

There is no second prize in [classical orchestra] music, there is only a first prize. [...] Sometimes it makes me laugh, [...] that you really do go to that university and they tell you about musical creativity and stuff. Then in reality your discipline is tougher in the orchestra than in the army. Even in the army you can get away with more than you can in the orchestra. (Leo)

Socially engaged practice shifts the focus towards interaction that allows for the musician’s own improvisation.

The world of classical music pursues excellence and a certain level of technically honed performance [...]. Here [in socially engaged practice] you can at least gain access to a “world of rest” in which true communication and the meaning of what it is that we are actually doing becomes better defined. (Maria)

This deliberate distancing from the known tradition was typical of all of the interviewees. They had also become aware of how music is still used as a tool for creating divisions in society and wanted to resist exclusive categorisations, such as the talented *vs.* the untalented, the creator *vs.* the audience, or the musical *vs.* the non- or extra-musical, and instead, to promote the understanding that anyone can participate in music making, anytime, in a fulfilling way.

### ***Correcting the Harm Caused by Past Music Education***

The musicians’ reflections manifest systems awareness in which they criticised the past music education system for having reduced rather than increased people’s possibilities in engaging with music:

[...] the Western academic idea [is] that you have to be able to do it in a certain way, according to certain rules, for it to be acceptable. So if you haven’t had the right education, you’re given the impression that you have no business doing it. [...] Our concept of music education is actually rather narrow, if you think in global terms. (Aaro)

The musicians' cultural contribution to society is taken to another level when the musicians describe their work as an opportunity to 'correct the harm' that the past model of overly talent-seeking music education had caused for some parts of the population that they were currently working with in their socially engaged practice:

[P]eople whose mouths had been shut in primary school now come to me and say that 50–60 years ago they told me not to sing and I haven't sung since then. It is such a huge injustice. [...] I think it's terribly elitist. (Katriina)

People have terrible traumatic experiences with these things, for instance the school singing tests are a good example, being forced to sing in front of a class of other kids. [...] It's just horrible, it's just shocking. (Markus)

Whilst public singing exams have not necessarily been widely practised for decades in Finnish general education, the older generations can carry with them memories of these humiliating situations all their life and can seek possibilities of radically alternative practices to overcome the distress and shame. Socially engaged music-making can thus function as a curing mechanism for those who have previously been traumatised by music lessons and who wish to reclaim their cultural rights for active music-making.

### ***Correcting the Hierarchical Mental Models within Music Professionalism***

Since socially engaged practice concretely dismantles the detachment between professional musicians and the audience, involvement in such practice requires the unpacking of hierarchies with regard to who is entitled to be a performer and who is allowed to listen only. This unpacking of dichotomies may require a conscious change of once-learned mental models:

[...] It's a kind of resetting my head [...] that there are no already-musicians and not-yet-musicians. There are musicians [...]; we should look for the lowest common denominator in what we do, so that we can do it together, rather than the things that you don't know how to do yet. (Iiris)

Some of the interviewed musicians had redefined their role in relation to the specific marginalised groups with whom they interacted (e.g. residents in old people's homes, patients in hospitals, prisoners, intoxicant abusers in urban neighbourhoods or children with disabilities). They tolerated the blurring of boundaries that are meant to sustain the highest level of professional quality and excellence in music making, and instead described also other important

experiential qualities and social values that can be brought about in socially engaged music making (Westerlund and Karttunen 2024).

Working across sectors and outside the arts contexts, such as in hospitals, did not however mean giving up their identity as musicians. Rather, an artistic identity was described as an asset, for instance, in creating trust when working and reconstructing in an overly medicalised context:

When working with specific groups, especially older people with learning difficulties, but also mental health service users and young unemployed people, [...] it is important for me to keep a pretty strong identity as an artist. Because then I come from outside the system, and it's much easier for me to create the kind of relationship I want with those people. I'm not a social worker, and I'm not a nurse [...]; I want to be there as someone who is easy to approach. (Aaro)

The shift of professional interests when working with various groups of people was, however, met with scorn and astonishment by many of their musician colleagues, illustrating how systems' boundaries operate. Since the work of socially engaged musicians does not align with the dominant sense-making frame, the involved musicians can face blame for violating professional standards. As Paula says: "Other artists wonder what the point is of wasting work time playing to some alcoholics." For some, this questioning of the value of their work had created an occasional sense of shame, yet also an urge to fight against the demeaning status and service aspect of socially engaged practice. For them, the ossified way of judging revealed the one-dimensional system of professional music making. For instance, Anne wonders "how has it been thought in our structures in the first place, like what is the interface between making art and that of [...] 'being a servant', like when does valuation begin?"

Importantly, the distancing of oneself from the status quo of the dominant system and its 'star culture' was related not simply to the participants, but also to the musicians' own needs and values as artists and human beings: "I feel that [...] I have not only been giving there but also receiving, and this has been really valuable for me." (Iiris)

## **Socially Engaged Practice as Enhancing Systems Learning in Higher Music Education**

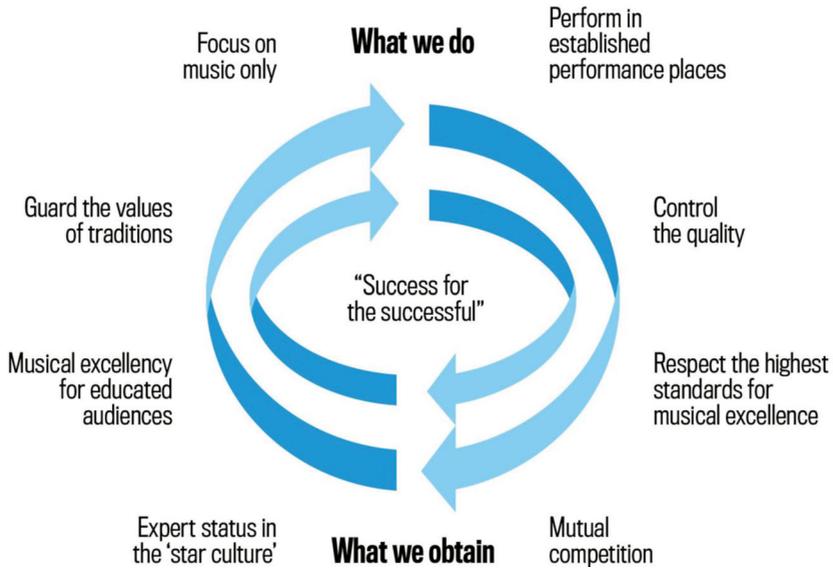
How then can the musicians' reflections on their socially engaged practice inform today's professional education in music? The data clearly indicates that the ten socially engaged musicians with traditional higher music education

background had developed systems reflexivity (Westerlund et al. 2021) – the capacity to identify, critically challenge and reimagine the structures of current systems. Their reflections can be seen as counter-stories that aim to rethink, revitalise and establish “anew the aesthetic distance from life and people” (Peters and Lankshear 1996, 16) that in the modernist era alienated people from art and artists; in other words, the counter-stories point out that the co-presence of the community in ‘an artwork’ can in itself illustrate (and perform) how the dichotomous aesthetic notion – with its inherent division between artistic production and consumption – is not a necessity but a product of historical development.

### ***Becoming Aware of Path-Dependency***

While being educated within the established professional system and still working as insiders in it, the musicians had reconceptualised their expert work and describe it as a process where they constantly learn and feel comfortable with, or even cherish, the feeling of never being completely prepared for the practice. Taken together, the musicians’ counter-stories reveal what systems thinkers have called “systems archetypes” (Kim 1992), which create stagnant path-dependencies that resist change. In depicting colleagues’ attitudes, in particular, the musicians’ reflections focus on the broader systemic and structural issues of professional music-making, such as normalised and accepted elitism and fixed mental models of what success and quality mean in music performance and education.

Väkevä, Westerlund, and Ilmola-Sheppard have described this path-dependency with “a linear model” (2017, 137), in which the music teacher’s role is to sustain the system and its once-established purpose, and in this way to create stability instead of becoming a transformative agent who can enhance cultural and institutional systems change. Moreover, according to the linear model, the music education systems are silos with “no other connections with society other than being resourced on the basis of selecting the musically talented in the population, providing the optimal conditions for training professionals” (ibid., 138). The linear model can thus create a self-fulfilling prophecy that in systems literature is called the “Success to the Successful archetype” (Kim 1992), which highlights the centrality of path-dependency in stagnant systems. According to Kim, the Success to the Successful archetype “continually pushes us to do whatever has been successful in the past” and sustains a structure that systematically eliminates “the other possibilities that may have been equally viable” (ibid., 25; see Figure 1 systems model illustrating how the archetype is produced).



**Figure 1:** Success to the Successful archetype (Kim 1992) in the music industry and higher music education (based on the identified discourse in the interview data). Source: Own illustration.

Kim has suggested that managing the problem of the Success to the Successful archetype requires looking at the situation from a more macro-level perspective and asking ourselves the question “What is the larger goal within which the situation is embedded?” (Kim 1992, 25). As the Success to the Successful archetype results from and is strengthened by single-loop learning, which does not involve critical reflexivity on the purposes and values of activities, the transformative solutions for the archetype problem require the type of double-loop learning that digs into the wider consequences of practice. The musicians of this study recognised how the elitist hierarchies as a normalised part of professional practice effectively continue sustaining unsustainability. Hence, their reflections challenged the morality of the professional system’s social distancing.

Some of the musicians could identify the moments and specific events when they started understanding how the established system operates and when their social consciousness was awakened. One of the musicians describes such a moment during her year in higher music education:

I saw a documentary from a hospital on long-term patients’ departments and I cried all the time when watching it. I thought, Oh my god, how can

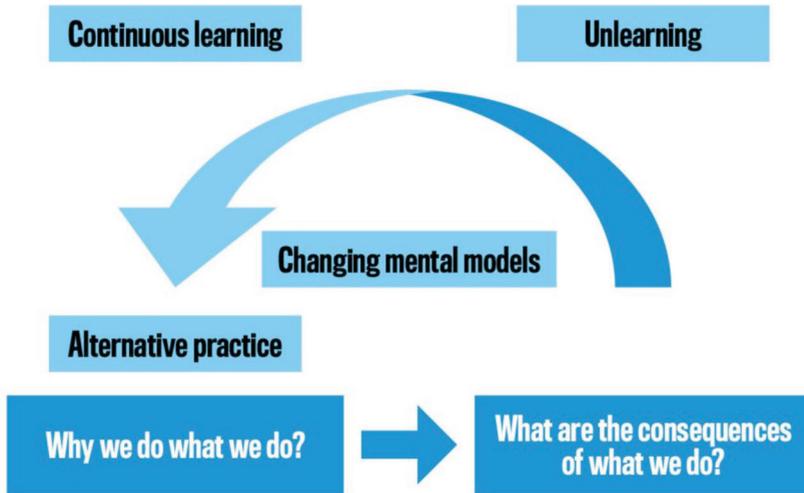
it be. And then I saw in the [local parish] journal that they were searching for volunteers to make music in these departments. And I signed on. [...] It was during my second or third year of studies and it was somehow so wonderful, because in my studies it was all circulating around my own ego, about developing my own musicianship. (Iiris)

### ***Unlearning and Developing a Learner Identity***

The multiple learnings that the musicians described can also be defined as paradigmatic *unlearning* both at the individual and institutional action levels as both are permeated by the long-established mental models. The interviewees described how they had distanced themselves from the established notions of what music is, what professional musicians' principles and aspirations ought to be, and how and where musicians should behave. Some of them expressed being tired of the very institutional 'machinery' in which they had been educated, explaining how they fought against the establishment:

I'm really tired of the institutions. [...] You always have to draw a deep breath before you have the strength to defy it. That's why, in a way, I've now somehow ended up doing research, so that there would be some base from which to [...] build up some kind of fight against the machinery [laughs]. (Liisa)

The musicians had developed what has been called a "learner identity" (López-Íñiguez and Bennett 2021) with an experimental attitude beyond any previously learned set of professional competences. As they explain, a socially engaged practice "educates the musician to understand [...] what this is all about in the deepest sense", which also translates to the traditional concert stage: it "starts making it better there as well" (Maria). Some of them had developed new conceptual understandings of professional practice in order to market their practices, whilst some experimented with shared decision-making and distributed leadership that are less typical in the music field, or co-created communities with a realisation of temporary safe spaces in order to consider a variety of participant expectations and experiences. They describe how every situation can be taken as a moment of curiosity, and how one can continuously learn from all participants: "I have taken this attitude that I always learn from every situation [...], including this situation now; I don't limit learning to some specific ones". (Aaro)



**Figure 2:** Double-loop learning leading to continuous systems learning in the music industry and higher music education (based on the identified discourse in the interview data). Source: Own illustration.

The musicians' reflections thus reached well beyond a reflection on patterns of success and failure within the single-loop learning in master-apprentice practice, which leaves the values of action unchallenged and unchanged. Instead, they described the ethico-political and moral questions they had engaged with, and how they had questioned at a fundamental level the monolithic ends of instituted practices and the deliberate ignorance of their consequential societal exclusions and vulnerabilities. They identified the value of socially engaged practices from multiple perspectives beyond tradition, any specific musical genre and any learned mental models towards transforming not just the professional field and education but also society at large. Their positioning “provides a powerful moral orientation towards alternative models of society” and resists the way “intrinsic musical values are traditionally distinguished from social values that are categorised as non-musical and extrinsic to musical values” (Westerlund and Karttunen 2024, 514).

### **Musicians as Boundary Spanners**

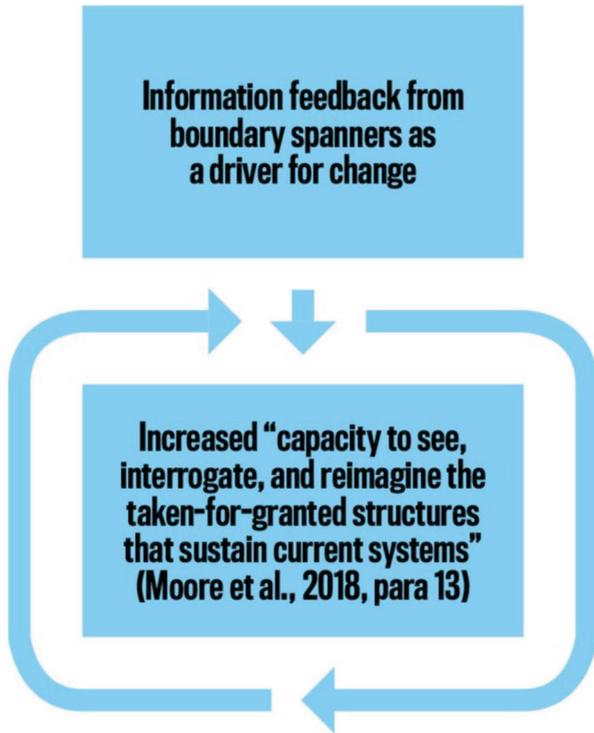
Through their systems reflexivity, the musicians positioned themselves as boundary spanners (Barrett and Westerlund 2024) between different sense-making frameworks of principles and ideas. The boundary spanning nature of

the musicians' work had taught them to navigate between systems and move from one value-system to another without experiencing a conflict. They knew as insiders how the hegemonic system operates but they were also able to break the boundaries of established mental models, taken-for-granted social designs and institutional settings. Indeed, the systems researcher David Stroh writes that "if you are not aware of how you are part of the problem, you can't be part of the solution" (2015, 4). Boundary-spanning change agents must encompass "deep insights into root causes that incorporate their own thinking and behavior" (*ibid.*, 18) in order for them "to develop a new way of being, not just doing" (*ibid.*, 20).

The kind of learning that the musicians described provides information feedback that can function as a driver for change within higher music education systems that want to be open systems and at the forefront of change (Figure 3). An example of the performative power of experiencing the difference of such practices is described by one of the musicians who had been invited to the closing event of a course in participatory music making organised at the Sibelius Academy: "[...] I remember how I woke up there to realise how their starting point was that [...] we are here for you or together with you, not simply performing to you [...] there was this element that came somehow closer." (Iiris) Socially engaged music-making in itself may therefore provide a concrete experiential way of illustrating the power of alternative practices and changing mental models. The performed information feedback – performing the difference (Laes and Westerlund 2017) – can function as a strategic driver for change.

Rather than calling for a revolution, this study's musicians embraced smaller-scale incremental change: "Personally, I'm satisfied that I can keep doing this and I can see the effects. And they are always local and small, but yes: by doing, that's my way." (Anne)

In higher music education contexts, boundary spanning may require the leaders to engage with the strategic complexity of practices and "to establish direction, alignment and commitment across boundaries in service of a higher vision or goal" (Yip, Ernst, and Campbell 2016, 3). Instead of seeing boundary spanning as a risk in a tradition-guarding context, it can be seen "in a positive light as the beginnings of exercising our moral imagination, of envisioning the possibilities and opportunities of systems transformation, and having the courage to [...] enter the unknown" (Barrett and Westerlund 2024, 84). In other words, higher music education could more actively provide spaces for the students to engage with double-loop learning and reflexivity concerning the social conditions of knowledge construction in the competitive expert culture.



**Figure 3:** *The transformative potential of boundary spanners’ insider-feedback in higher music education (based on the identified discourse in the interview data). Source: Own illustration.*

## Conclusion

The counter-stories of the ten socially engaged musicians in the Finnish context manifest the type of systems reflexivity that enabled them to identify the root causes of what they considered to be non-acceptable hierarchies and elitism in the music field in contemporary society. In the musicians’ descriptions, their practices appear as a necessary, transformative cultural force, which can open the gaze of higher music education beyond instrument-specific traditions, musical genres and the master-apprentice model for teaching and learning. The reflections reach beyond previously suggested cures for the path-dependencies of higher music education, such as including more musical

genres and improvisation in performance programmes (Sarath, Myers, and Campbell 2017). The musicians lead us to ask: Can higher music education afford to ignore the social turn that is claimed to have become increasingly evident also in the arts (Bishop 2006; Charnley 2021)? The fundamental unlearning and purposeful lowering of the exclusionary expert status quo exemplifies deep double-loop learning, hence providing the potential for higher music education to consider including the experience of socially engaged musicians' boundary-spanning knowledge in professional education and in this way enhancing triple-loop learning in higher music education institutions.

## Acknowledgements

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# Educating Musicians in Times of Transformation

## A Conversation with Lydia Grün, Ulrike Sych, and Sean Gregory

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*Sarah Chaker and Axel Petri-Preis*

The music labour market has undergone extensive changes in recent decades – this is especially true for the classical music sector (Bork 2010; Engelmann, Grünewald, and Heinrich 2012; Scharff 2018; Bull 2019; Whitney, Rowley, and Bennett 2021; Prokop and Reitsamer 2023). A growing number of graduates from instrumental study programmes at higher music education institutions (HMEIs) are facing fewer permanent positions in orchestras (Bennett 2016). Since the 1980s, this trend can be increasingly observed worldwide within the context of a globalised music labour market under neoliberal auspices. In Germany, for instance, the number of graduates increased by 38.5% between 2000 and 2014 (Gembris and Menze 2018, 305). For young, classically trained musicians, this development means that the transition from study to professional life is non-linear and is marked by numerous uncertainties. As so-called “artpreneurs” (Smudits 2008; Engelmann, Grünewald, and Heinrich 2012), as self-employed “entrepreneurs of their selves” (Bröckling 2018; 2019), they are largely self-reliant and must navigate daily through a difficult and complex job market setting: “[M]usic entrepreneurship and portfolio careers have become the ‘new’ way for graduates to transition from studies to work and to pursue a career in the highly competitive, individualised, and precarious music labor market” (Prokop and Reitsamer 2023, 112). Dawn Bennett (2016, 44f.) pointed out early signs of a changing (classical) music labour market. For instance, in the UK, the number of freelance musicians increased by 38% between 1981 and 1991. A later study by the British Musicians’ Union (2012, 14) among musicians from various genres revealed that at the time of the survey, only 10% of respondents were employed full-time. Today, musicians – including classically trained musicians – are predominantly self-employed in so-called portfolio careers (Smilde 2009; Bartleet et al. 2019), which involve various musical and non-musical activities. Within this mix of activities, which generates a mixed income, music teaching (private instrumental teaching, teaching at music schools, high schools and HMEIs) and

increasingly, music mediation practices, play a significant role both temporally and economically for classically trained musicians (Chaker and Petri-Preis 2022). Not least against the backdrop of multiple societal upheavals and crises, music mediation practices have experienced a veritable boom since the turn of the millennium, centred around the development of new concert formats for various target groups, as well as the creation and implementation of creative workshops or community projects (Petri-Preis and Voit 2025, see also the introduction to this volume). Since its “Big Bang” (Petri-Preis 2022, 47–70) around the year 2000, the practice of music mediation has continued to diversify and gradually evolved into an independent, highly significant field of work and employment, especially within the classical music labour market. Sarah Chaker demonstrated that working in this segment is economically worthwhile for musicians: The income of Austrian portfolio musicians in the field of classical music who are also engaged in music mediation is significantly higher than that of musicians who are not involved in music mediation or engage in non-musical activities (Chaker, Gruber, and Petri-Preis 2019; Chaker and Petri-Preis 2020; Chaker 2025). The outlined development means that classically trained musicians today must possess entrepreneurial, educational and social skills beyond their artistic abilities in order to succeed in a global, economically neoliberal<sup>1</sup> job market and to be effective in various social contexts beyond the concert hall (Smilde 2022, 152). With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic and, more recently, the introduction of AI tools such as ChatGPT, the importance of digital skills is also growing. Moreover, the imparting of academically critical competencies during a music degree is increasingly imperative today. This is because a medium- and long-term shift in neoliberal working conditions and contexts necessitates critical reflection on them. HMEIs have partly responded to these developments (Petri-Preis in this volume): For example, as part of the reform movements since the 1960s, there has been an openness towards previously

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1 The increasing privatisation of formerly state-owned property, a push-back of the welfare state, forcing people with different social starting conditions to act on their own responsibility and at their own risk, as well as deregulation are practices frequently linked to the concept of neoliberalism. However, neoliberalism is more than an economic concept, as it has far-reaching impact on the ways political, social, and cultural life in societies is organised and experienced, as Javier F. León, for example, has pointed out: “Neoliberalism is built on the conviction that the free market is the best and most efficient arbiter of not only economic but also social and political challenges, prompting the expansion of capitalism into all possible aspects of daily life” (León 2014, 129, in reference to David Harvey) – i.e. musical life as a whole is closely connected with and subject to neoliberal considerations.

largely neglected musics and musical traditions (popular musics, folk musics, musics of the Global South, and others), academic disciplines have expanded, offers for cultural entrepreneurship have been developed in response to the increasingly neoliberal music job market, and ideas of audience development and community music have also found their way into curricula (Bennett 2016, 62f.; Gaunt et al. 2021, 2).

Against this backdrop of a music job market undergoing significant transformation, our panel discussion, which took place on 16 June 2024, at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, featured experts from leading HMEIs worldwide who hold senior positions in their respective institutions and thus have the opportunity to significantly shape cultural life from positions of power. Central thematic reference points related to the role that music institutions and HMEIs play today in the face of global and multiple societal crises, the requirements for today's classically trained musicians, changes in musicians' education, especially in light of the new possibilities offered by artificial intelligence, the continued institutional focus on – and preference for – the concept of artistic excellence, as well as the inclusion and exclusion of individuals in higher music education and the perpetuation of social inequality. In addition to our questions, significant thematic impulses were provided by four students from the Royal Danish Academy of Music, the University of Montréal and the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, who recorded short video statements ahead of the conference, which were broadcast live to the audience. We extend our sincere thanks to Flemming Valmundsson, Héléne Archambault, Toranj Mashayekhi and Sara Glanzer for allowing us to present their essential inputs here in excerpted written form. After a brief introduction of our discussion partners, there follows the written transcription of the panel discussion in a slightly abridged and linguistically smoothed, yet unchanged, form.

## Introduction of the Panelists

**Lydia Grün** has been the president of the University of Music and Theatre Munich since October 2022. She previously taught as a professor of music mediation at the Detmold University of Music and also served as deputy equality officer there. From 2017 to 2021, she served as an expert in the Council for Cultural Education. As executive director of the *Netzwerk Junge Ohren* [Network Young Ears], she advocated from 2013 to 2019 for the importance of music in a diverse society. Previously, from 2008 to 2012, she worked as an advisor for music and deputy head of department at the Lower Saxony Ministry

for Science and Culture and has also been executive director of *Musikland Niedersachsen* [Music Land Lower Saxony]<sup>2</sup> since 2011.

**Ulrike Sych** has been rector of the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna since October 2015. She studied music education with majors in voice and piano at the University Mozarteum in Salzburg and then continued her training as a singer in New York and Italy. She has been a lecturer at the mdw since 1990. In 2007, she expanded her university work and accepted an invitation to the Anton Bruckner Private University, where she headed the Department of Voice and Music Theatre until her appointment as vice rector for teaching and women's advancement at the mdw in 2011. Ulrike Sych was also chair of the working group on equal opportunities at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna from 2009 to 2011.

**Sean Gregory** is vice principal and director of innovation and engagement at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London. He is responsible for the development and implementation of a range of programmes in the areas of innovation, research and knowledge exchange, as well as for lifelong learning at the Guildhall School and also in cooperation with the Barbican Centre. In addition to this diverse work, he is also a composer, performer, and producer and has led collaborative art projects for various age groups and skill levels in collaboration with many British and international orchestras, opera houses, theatres, galleries, and art mediation organisations.

## The Role of (Classical) Music in Future Society

Axel Petri-Preis: We are currently experiencing comprehensive societal transformation processes, crises, and upheavals: the climate crisis, wars, economic uncertainties, digitisation, the rise of artificial intelligence and much more. In addition, worrying antidemocratic tendencies can be observed globally. Right-wing populist and nationalist movements are gaining ground. Under these conditions, musicians are increasingly being called upon to contribute to a more just and inclusive society<sup>3</sup>. Let's hear what Flemming Valmundsson, a student of the Royal Danish Academy of Music has to say on this topic.

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2 *Musikland Niedersachsen* is a service centre for professional musicians, ensembles and organisers. For more information see <https://musikland-niedersachsen.de/> (accessed April 15, 2025).

3 See for example Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman (2016); Gaunt et al. (2021).

Flemming Valmundsson: I think the idea that a musician has the ability to make a societal impact and that being an artist comes with societal responsibility is something that can and should be introduced to music students. I don't feel that it is a very common notion among my co-students, or at least it doesn't have a full and sound resonance within them. Learning about community engagement, socially engaged arts and artistic citizenship will not only help the music students themselves find a deeper purpose within their craft, but it can create a feedback loop of societal benefits, stemming from more engaged and more diverse musicians who dare to take a stand and to have a voice which is not found too commonly in the musical world. Not educating and engaging students in these topics, we're missing out on a massive pool of artists and voices that don't find fulfilment in typical orchestra or teaching jobs or don't realise their full societal potential. Learning about this has been invaluable for myself as a niche, non-orchestral instrument playing classical musician, who now more strongly feels the purpose and the potential for what we can do for ourselves and for others.

Axel Petri-Preis: Flemming talks about the impact that socially engaged music practices can have on musicians themselves, as well as on society as a whole. And he essentially advocates for their incorporation into higher music education. He says that he himself, as someone who plays the accordion and thus not a typical orchestral instrument, has found a very important path for himself. What would you say then is the relationship between artistic and artistic-pedagogical education and global ethical issues and local societal problems? What can higher music education contribute to and address in this regard?

Ulrike Sych: That is a wonderful question, and I am convinced that HMEIs can make a significant contribution in this regard in several ways. On the one hand, the curricula, the training at the HMEIs, of course play an important role; on the other hand, programmes beyond the curricula that we make available to our students are also important. But I also see the responsibility of an HMEI in strongly influencing society and also the education system. With a lot of effort, the mdw helps to ensure that music and art education in schools is no longer marginalised, that it becomes a central topic again for general education. I am not only talking about the education of aspiring artists, but about the education of all children and young people who live here. Because the societal relevance of art and music education is enormous. We know that children and young people who are connected with music or learn an instrument, acquire social skills, develop stronger teamwork abilities, train their brains and memory, and so on. Another aspect is, of course, within the university itself, to expand the

curricula with exactly such topics and courses, both in practice and on an academic basis. With all the events that we organise, and with our focus on music mediation, we can make a strong contribution to society. And furthermore, we are extremely international, and there is also a great opportunity to really excel in terms of transculturality, in terms of diversity, and to contribute strongly to setting seeds worldwide, so to speak, towards world peace, towards anti-discrimination, towards equality.

Lydia Grün: I completely agree with you. Axel, you mentioned the responsibility that HMEIs have, which arises simply from the fact that every citizen financially supports our institutions and our cultural life. This entails a strong obligation on our part. For this, I think, we need two prerequisites: One is that we broaden our perspective on our institutions as HMEIs. This comes from me as a newcomer in this sector. What strikes me is that, actually, when we look at HMEIs, we primarily look at instrumental and orchestral training. And that is of course a very important part, but it is not exclusively what we do. The question is essentially, from where to where do we look when we consider HMEIs? What about topics such as folk music, all the artistic-educational programmes, dance, etc., along with the new digital arts, which are also part of HMEIs? And this is the question that leads to the second prerequisite: How do we communicate as HMEIs ourselves? Do we see ourselves as agenda setters in certain socio-political issues and differentiate ourselves from event communication? Do we drive debates ourselves, as the mdw already does? We [in Munich] still have a little way to go in this regard and we are striving towards this because I see that we have a lot of resources in this area. We have a debt to society. To give you an example: We recently organised a concert on the topic of Georg Elser<sup>4</sup>. It was a walking concert in our premises, which are known to be the former NSDAP [National Socialist German Workers' Party] headquarters, on our main campus. And for this concert, we were able to raise a societal question for a part of our audience, which consisted of different target groups. This leads to socio-political questions that we can then incorporate more strongly into the entire university community. I believe we still have a little way to go there.

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4 Johann Georg Elser, born in in 1903 in Baden-Württemberg (Germany), murdered in 1945 in Dachau concentration camp, was a resistance fighter against national socialism who carried out an assassination attempt against Adolf Hitler on November 8, 1939, which failed. For detailed information on Johann Georg Elser see <https://www.georg-elsler.de/> (accessed April 15, 2025).

Sarah Chaker: I have the impression that the societal role of musicians and also music mediators is currently being somewhat reformulated. What contribution can be made with, through or by music to society, seen from a socio-political perspective? And also where might the limits of such a claim lie?

Ulrike Sych: The limit lies in world peace. I have never seen it so much as an obligation, because, on one hand, of course it is stated in the University Act, Section One that we have to act for the benefit of society. But on the other hand, I believe it's very important that as a rector one must have a stance. And that stance must be authentic and truly advocated for, and also demanded, non-negotiably demanded, and I think it is also a way for an institution to truly embrace it as a concern. Regarding the limits: What can we do? For example, if you look into the concert world, it is very important to us that the working world also has to change for our students, that the issue of harassment, the issue of exploitation simply comes to an end. And that can only be achieved if, first of all, you empower the students to say: "Here is my limit and no further, I will not allow myself to be treated like this!" That is easy to say when your existence doesn't depend on it. In fact, it is very, very difficult to resist. That is one thing, that we empower our students. And secondly, as an institution, we also work on improving the labour market. Our big goal is world peace. Our big goal is societal respect for each other, but not just among people, but also respect for animals, for nature. If you do not respect nature and have no respect for animals, then you also have no respect for your fellow human beings. So, for me, it is a holistic issue.

Sean Gregory: I remember as a student, and this was the late 1980s, there was quite a thing around 'thinking global and acting local'. Without going into whether these are still the right words or this is the right terminology, I think there is still something very powerful in terms of how we think of ourselves as institutions. We are international, we have an international community of students and staff and what we do is dialogically international. Then we have our role in our own locality – in English we would say, our civic responsibility. And this has been a very interesting discussion in the UK more recently, even going back to the civic imperative of why universities and higher education were established in the first place. Then we have our students, who have come to an internationally renowned conservatoire. They come to be the best they can possibly be as a musician, as an actor, as a production artist. We do not want to compromise this aspiration. So then: What constitutes being 'the best'? I mean, there is the literal best, we advertise the facts that we have great graduates with great names, and this is another discussion. How do we

promote ourselves now and into the future? Is it just the great actors on the screen, the great singers, the great instrumentalists? Of course that's part of it, it is the dream, we live the dream and it is part of our hope and motivation. For me a thing, which I think we still struggle with, is not being afraid to ask our students from the first day, or week or maybe semester they arrive: "Why do you do what you do? Why do you want to do this? What difference do you want to make for yourself, for your audiences and for people you meet?" Keeping the questions open enough, so that you can immediately relate that to your impact as a performer in a concert hall, but you can start to open the door then to the social impact, or the societal impact, or the educational impact you could have with that.

Lydia Grün: I agree that one must have a stance. However, I struggle with that non-negotiable aspect. On one hand, there are absolute red lines. They are non-negotiable in terms of a democratic order and, for example, in terms of military aggression, as we are experiencing it everywhere in the world right now. On the other hand, I think we want to engage in a collective process that is not just theoretical but translated into action. Ideally, immediately, so that, like an engineer, one tries out what works and what does not. And at that moment, I have to be negotiable, because otherwise I myself will not make progress, or I will not be able to represent a resonance space for what I encounter. This adjustment is always the question, from a leadership perspective, of how one behaves in one situation or another, for example, when I want to address the point you made with the question: Why do they do what they do? When you ask students that right at the beginning, it is sometimes a deliberate challenge. What does this question mean for them and what leeway do we have in jointly finding answers to this question? And that is something I think about quite a lot. And the question is: "How do you then involve a collective, which represents the university family, in this respect?"

Ulrike Sych: I can fully agree with that. Thank you for the clarification. For me, the preservation of the dignity and rights of people is non-negotiable. But of course, in everyday practice, negotiation is necessary, that is completely clear. But precisely this responsibility we also have towards the very young, including the ones in our courses for highly gifted children, our preparatory courses, or pre-college. I think a broader perspective is also needed here. What happens to these people after their school education? I consider it fatal when the very young ones concentrate fully on music and art and then suddenly drop out of school. We have now started a school experiment for gifted children and adolescents, a high school that works modularly, where young musicians have

a lot of time for music practising, but still manage to obtain their high school diploma. This is just one example among many, where I think we really need to look beyond our own boundaries as an educational institution and not just within them.

## Rethinking Artistic Excellence?

Axel Petri-Preis: The topic of artistic excellence has been touched upon several times in our discussion, especially in your statement, Sean. This also raises the question of success and external representation. Artistic excellence plays a significant role at HMEIs. Without a doubt, it is often primarily equated with mastery of the instrument. That means success is considered to be achieved by those who win competitions, secure prestigious orchestral positions, become successful soloists, leaving their competitors behind. However, musicians who may not wish to enter this radical competition and instead engage with their art in societal contexts, developing and implementing participatory projects in various social settings, are often devalued in comparison. They are positioned lower in the hierarchy. I would like to share a quote from Rosie Perkins here, who writes that “it is not uncommon for students to feel ‘second-rate’ if they redefine their career aims to include activities beyond performance” (Perkins 2012, 11). Let’s listen to what H  l  ne Archambault from the University of Montr  al has to say about this topic.

H  l  ne Archambault: Hi, my name is H  l  ne and I started a programme in music mediation as a graduate student at the University of Montr  al in January. Why is that? Because I think that today, as a musician, we really need to be socially engaged and convinced that music can be a powerful tool that can contribute or even bring wellbeing and empowerment. In order to do this we need a good curriculum that, I think, has to be a mix of research, including disciplines such as sociology, psychology, ethnomusicology, musicology, and so on, to really understand different communities, their needs, and their relation to music. Also, I think that we have to be in real-life practice with music mediation and the more we do it, the more we learn and the more we learn, the more we improve our practice as musicians and as mediators. After all, I think that we need to review what is excellence in music, because music is not just about the performance and the performer. It is also about the public and communities we are addressing.

Axel Petri-Preis: So H el ene says that it is necessary to critically question the notion of artistic excellence. Do we need to rethink artistic excellence and, consequently, success at HMEIs? And what might or should such a possible redefinition or reformulation look like?

Ulrike Sych: I do not think it needs to be completely rethought, but rather supplemented. Because gifted individuals, I believe, want to achieve the maximum potential from their musical instrument, the highest technical level of performance possible. I think that is a natural instinct of every musician, to push the boundaries of what they can achieve themselves. That is one aspect, that is the instrument, that is the voice. On the other hand, I am convinced that there need to be complementary aspects, that social programmes are needed, training in this direction, such as our *Musethica*<sup>5</sup> programme. It is one of many examples of creating new audiences, expanding the entire spectrum here. And I believe it is up to the institutions themselves to convey to people that the global careers some pursue are just one piece of the success of an entire institution. It is just as valuable and just as important that music educators are well-trained and can celebrate successes in schools by inspiring people for music and educating many people in music. It really depends on the institution's perspective, to put this in the right context. Of course, the global careers are more visible externally due to the mass-media and the critics. But I do believe that we as an institution have a great responsibility there, and we should see such great careers simply as one possibility of a successful career.

Sean Gregory: I agree that the terms of the definition of excellence are certainly part of that, I do not think that we should be throwing that away, that this is something to keep building on and celebrating. And I think it is about doing other things really well, in different contexts. So this has been quite an interesting discussion for us as an organisation in terms of the use of the word 'excellence', and then also talking about quality, your quality and effectiveness as a musician in different contexts. So the excellence you carry as a performer in the more established contexts counts and is an important part of what we do. And then the question is how you can apply that skill in other contexts where it may not be possible to have a stage or you may not even be able to have a music stand or you may even need to be able to improvise and respond and arrange in the moment. And it is not saying everyone has to be able to do all

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5 For more information about *Musethica* at the mdw see <https://www.mdw.ac.at/magazin/index.php/2020/05/28/respekt-soziale-verantwortung-und-hoechstklassige-musik-auf-augenhoehe/?lang=en> (accessed April 15, 2025).

of those things excellently. I was very struck by what François [Matarasso] said yesterday. He said that it is enough to be good enough.<sup>6</sup> We are good enough to be able to enable those situations confidently, to bring value to yourself and that situation at that moment. So connecting to the context and using your skills in a way that it fits the purpose and the needs of that situation.

Lydia Grün: When we talk about transforming our system, we are not necessarily just talking about adding to it, but we are talking about changing what exists. With an open outcome. What is crucial, as both of you have said, is: What are our reference systems? One is indeed the *feuilleton*, which is also undergoing significant changes and pushing different standards and attention points, different news values to the fore. The other is the topic of competitions, of course. Here too, I think, there will be fundamental changes in the next ten years because these are also systems which are important as a benchmark for us. And what we can do, I think, is we already have precursors for these reference systems in our institutions, such as our own small competitions or, for example, the awarding of scholarships. Of course, we can and do change the criteria, so that alongside musical excellence, musical artistic quality, other aspects also play a fundamental role. These do not necessarily have to be pedagogical skills, but sometimes a small tweak is enough. For example, if in a competition we introduce the criterion that artists, before they perform, simply explain why they are playing what they are playing. Then, for example, the repertoire changes immediately because they have to think more carefully about it beforehand, and they engage with their instrument teacher in a different way. That is just a very small adjustment.

Ulrike Sych: For excellent education, we should be able to foster each individual in their uniqueness. That does not mean everyone is geared towards concert performance, some excel in other areas. It is very important, and the mdw has been doing this for many years, that beyond the curriculum, which applies to everyone, in talent development and gifted education, we make a concerted effort to support students individually. One person might be more suited for, let's say, digital, while another might excel in social areas, and so on. There are many tools and possibilities, and it is crucial that we do not lump all students together, but genuinely strive to identify their strengths and weaknesses and then accompany them individually on their path into the professional world.

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6 To delve deeper into this discussion see <https://arestlessart.com/2020/02/12/on-the-value-of-good-enough> (accessed April 15, 2025).

## Artificial Intelligence and its Impact on Music and Higher Music Education

Sarah Chaker: We are actually experiencing very significant changes with artificial intelligence at the moment. Machines are beginning to really make and produce music. They imitate voices very well, they can finish compositions like Beethoven's 10<sup>th</sup> symphony<sup>7</sup>, etc. We are just at the beginning of this development, and I seriously wonder, if this continues and we perhaps increasingly collaborate with machines, but maybe also compete with them as artists, as musicians: will artistic excellence even matter anymore if AI can do everything at least as well, or perhaps even better than humans?

Ulrike Sych: Well, I have to strongly disagree here because machines, at the end of the day, are just machines, and the final say, the ultimate decision, still rests with the experts in the field, not the machines. So I really have to put that into perspective. I do not believe that machines will surpass us in this regard. Rather, machines are programmed by us, they receive input and instructions from us. For instance, with Beethoven's 10<sup>th</sup>, the machine may suggest several variations, but ultimately, the composer still makes the final decision. So it is not solely up to the machine. I think that is a misconception about artificial intelligence. Of course, we will face significant challenges regarding copyright issues, plagiarism, and so on. But still, I am convinced that expertise remains with humans, not with machines.

Sean Gregory: Just yesterday I was watching a debate where Yuval Noah Harari was speaking about artificial intelligence. The thing around artificial intelligence is its increasing ability to interact with humans. It is learning from us and this starts to create an intimacy, and through that intimacy it perhaps begins to overtake us. He is not saying that this is a threat, exactly as you say, Sarah, but it is something. The question moves away from can artificial intelligence write Beethoven's 10<sup>th</sup> symphony and towards what actually constitutes creativity and connectivity, and collaboration and innovation and the human essence behind that, and how that contributes to our survival and our wellbeing, and how that sits alongside technology. I speak to students and young people who are working with AI and they are excited by its evolution in the way that through the ages we have been excited by other developments. I hope this could be part of our curriculum and our discussion and debate, not so we all have to be

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7 For more information about Beethoven X – The AI project see <https://www.beethovenx-ai.com/> (accessed April 15, 2025).

technologists, but in a way that we are embracing and connecting with those things.

Sarah Chaker: Do you think it will change the notion of artistic excellence, Sean?

Sean Gregory: That is a very important and interesting question. I think in a positive way, yes. But we should be moving towards a redefinition of what constitutes excellence and quality, again not to throw out everything we have, and to see it as a live and emergent debate which probably will not have a final outcome. We have a tendency, in our education generally, to land and define things so that we can teach and learn and replay those things and work to those things. This is the unknown. This is part of higher education and not being afraid to engage with that, as well as understanding that there are things that students want to be taught and teachers have to teach as well. And a lot of that teaching is as much through life experience and your own personal journey, rather than the given of this, followed by this, followed by that. It is a learning through the ages and our cyclic experience of things and that goes beyond eurocentricity, that goes into folkloric and other cultures and actually where we came from originally ourselves.

Lydia Grün: I want to pick up on what you just asked about whether excellence will change in its definition. Yes, of course. We simply do not know, with the keyword uncertainty, as you just mentioned, whether machines might actually surpass us. The question is, whether it is to the right or left. I can only speak for my own institution at the moment. We have had a professorship in AI at our institution for two months now, and it is already becoming clear that there is collaboration with various fields. This is already a fundamental difference from many subjects and disciplines that we have. I believe the question is how we as HMEIs ask ourselves these questions and create spaces to try them out without remaining in our own fundamentalist position.

Sarah Chaker: You mentioned that you recently appointed a professor for AI and what this triggers within the university and what it should trigger, Lydia. Perhaps we can deepen our understanding here – what do these upcoming or already unfolding developments in the field of AI mean for a forward-looking higher music education?

Lydia Grün: I cannot answer that at all because we are only just embarking on this path. For example, there is the question of the stage, of space, where are we actually moving? What is tactile, what is not? Do we need studios? Do we

need workshops? What forms of audience reception? Who is invited and how? All these questions arise completely anew. But I still cannot see any direction at this point. It is still too fresh, I believe it would be unprofessional to already prescribe a direction when we are just trying to experiment with it.

Sarah Chaker: There is this concept of “mediamorphosis” developed by Kurt Blaukopf<sup>8</sup>, saying that at the historical moment when a metamorphosis happens, the effects are “masked”. So, we are standing before it, but we cannot really foresee its effects and consequences. I think that is exactly the situation you just described.

## Exclusion Mechanisms in Higher Music Education

Sarah Chaker: I would like to touch on another area: Who can have a musical impact? For example, it is known that through entrance exams, but also through the musical instruments that one can study at an HMEI, certain people in society are included, while others are excluded, and they may not have access to our music universities. Our societies have changed significantly in recent years and decades. I would like to ask you if there are considerations on how to counteract this quite privileged access that we have at many HMEIs at the moment, if we want to do justice to society in these institutions and also give something back to society through education?

Ulrike Sych: This is really a very big issue because entrance exams of course are necessary. They simply have to be. That is one thing. The second thing, however, is that if we are just talking about Austria, the task is a bit easier because that is the country where we are located and where we can also have influence to a certain extent. It becomes complicated when viewed globally. How do we bring in children and young people who are growing up in households that cannot afford instruments, private lessons or schools? How can we be active here and intervene supportively, so that these young people can become musicians? That is truly a big issue, and we are giving it a lot of thought. On one hand, there

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8 The concept of “mediamorphosis” states that the emergence of new (technical) media in human history has fundamentally affected and changed the entire process of cultural (including musical) communication (see Blaukopf 1989). After graphic, reprographic, chemical-mechanical, electronic, and digital mediamorphosis, we may currently be experiencing a sixth stage, which can be described as AI mediamorphosis and/or, as suggested by Alfred Smudits, as “cyborg mediamorphosis” (Smudits 2019, 15).

are associations like Miagi<sup>9</sup> in South Africa. They have built up a large system that brings exactly these children into education and also prepares them for entrance exams at institutions like ours. We have a large scholarship system, an initial scholarship for young artists in the first semester who come here but actually cannot afford the studies. Then we have additional scholarships from the second semester or second year of studies. We have performance scholarships, we have emergency scholarships, in case a student's existence suddenly becomes threatened due to fate, so that they are no longer able to support themselves. The mdw is very active in this regard, and we provide a lot of help. For example, during the war between Ukraine and Russia, we organised a fundraising campaign for all our students who suddenly could not continue their studies because the money flow stopped, and we were able to really support them all. So there are possibilities. But globally speaking, it is a big challenge, and one thing we are considering, but are not sure if we can implement it yet, for example, is making the first round of entrance exams digital, meaning that travel costs are eliminated, to fly from Asia to the mdw to take an entrance exam, and then if you do not pass it, you have lost a lot of money and have to travel back. We also strive to provide musical instruments to our students. We will now expand that a bit. The mdw has succeeded nationwide in helping to ensure that the regional conservatoires are now part of the tertiary education system as private music universities. This means that many more young people in the regions now have greater access to higher music education because we simply have many more music universities in Austria now.

Lydia Grün: I believe that privilege remains a privilege. And the question is actually, who can embark on the path to this privilege? I could underline the entire range of measures from Vienna. You could add to it, for example, that we are trying to change certain strategies at the university, such as the internationalisation strategy. So, the internationalisation strategy that a university has focuses on, let's say, markets that are particularly interesting for classical music, Eastern Europe, Russia, Asia, and so on. Of course, Russia needs to be considered very specifically now, but the other question is: What about the Global South? What about the Arab world? How can we specifically build collaborations there that are unlike a cooperation with a conservatoire from the USA, that are structured differently? Another point is the question of young students. What cooperation systems can we specifically establish here with music schools? How do we rethink the pre-school, which will soon happen at our institution, not only in terms of artistic career profiles, but also in terms

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9 For more information see: <https://www.miagi.co.za/> (accessed April 15, 2025).

of academic and artistic-educational career profiles? The question is: How can we, for example, based on a federal state system and considering the size we have in terms of music universities, how can we for instance implement this as a collaborative project with other music universities? We are not talking about expanding the spectrum, the instruments, the repertoire and so on yet. But those are two small starting points.

Sean Gregory: A lot of things are the same for us and I would say the UK music education infrastructure is probably more fragmented. I think we have a very good ecology of music making in the broader sense going on, particularly through creative, collaborative, and partnership-based work between our education institutes and the wider community, as well as through the learning and participation programmes of orchestras, opera companies, etc. This has been built up over the last 30 or 40 years and supported quite well, which has been great for first access experiences for young people. The challenge remains as to how these first access experiences for young people from many different backgrounds and experiences translate into meaningful progression pathways and then sustainable careers. This requires us as institutions to be prepared to accommodate different styles and genres and young people who are incredibly talented, but are not necessarily fixed to the notated page, who are multi-instrumentalists and play electronic instruments. Unsurprisingly, our electronic and commercially based courses have grown and grown. And it is not that the more classically-based courses do not have good application numbers, but it then raises a question regarding the size and shape of specialist arts at higher education institutions. The balance between the more contemporary and traditionally based approaches to training and music-making. It is all really interesting, but a couple of quick things, in terms of auditions we have made small changes, like not just playing, but having an interview as well. Perhaps there are workshops too, so you get to see the experience of students in different contexts and they get a sense of what the institution is about, as well as the learning of their particular instrument and their teacher. Conversation is key. And maybe it is not the best thing to ask: "Why do you do what you do?"; from day one – I was being a bit provocative at the start of this panel! You time those questions, just to get a sense of where the motivation lies, facilitating reflection through conversations. And I would say that approach has brought in some extraordinary musicians for us. There has been significant diversification of our Guildhall community in drama and production arts over the past few years, from which we have learnt much as well. In some ways that may be more obvious, because it does not require the investment over the years in the instrument, but it has still required a huge mindset change, in recruitment, teaching & learn-

ing, and research. Another part of this change is ensuring that the institutional environment is inclusive and welcoming to all, whilst continuing to maintain excellence and quality in preparing all our graduates for today's and tomorrow's world as creative, enterprising and socially engaged practitioners.

Axel Petri-Preis: Thank you all very much for this highly interesting and lively discussion. Before we come to an end, we would like to dedicate the final statements in this discussion to our students. Let's listen to Sarah Glanzer and Toranj Mashayekhi from the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna:

Toranj Mashayekhi: We know that art and music are always a product of their time and society, so we should develop projects more often that are based on social themes and raise awareness of societal challenges. Another important aspect concerns the skills and abilities that we as musicians should develop in today's world. We need to be able to organise a concert from scratch, compile a diverse programme and lead projects. We should learn to develop organisational and entrepreneurial skills and use resources efficiently. Of course, it is crucial that we can implement our ideas and creativity, gained from our artistic experiences, to reach our audience and successfully convey our musical message.

Sarah Glanzer: For me, making music means communicating. To choose the right language for my audience, I need to know beforehand: What languages do they speak? What prior experiences do they bring? Perhaps also what expectations they have? And then I can adapt my programme to my audience in advance. Planning actions with regard to how I can best engage the audience, how I can provoke them, how I can move them, or how I can introduce them to some things that may be somewhat incomprehensible during the concert. And to be good at this, it would be important for me to be prepared for it in my music studies, to learn from people who are in the professional world and who themselves design concert programmes. That means learning from musicians themselves, who think about where they play, what different concert locations there are. Also to hear about what funding opportunities are available, what institutions I can turn to if I have a concept, or what different concert formats exist. There are not only children's concerts or regular concerts, there is so much in between.

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# Towards Community Engagement in Music Curricula Students' Perspectives on the Master's Programme *Contemporary Arts Practice (CAP)*

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Axel Petri-Preis

## Introduction

Conservatories emerged in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Bennett 2016, 59) as places where young individuals are educated for a career in classical music under the auspices of the highest artistic excellence. Traditionally, the main focus has been on developing mastery on the instrument through one-to-one tuition (Bennet 2016; Gaunt 2008), primarily aiming to gain an orchestra position (Hager and Johnsson 2008, 103–18; Bishop and Tröndle 2017; Bishop 2018). However, comprehensive societal changes, especially since the latter third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, present new challenges to the classical concert life and the education of musicians in higher music education institutions (HMEIs) (Gaupp 2023): Societal structures in countries of the Global North are becoming significantly more diverse due to demographic shifts and (forced) migration (Vertovec 2007, 1024), leading to a multitude of different life paths and cultural forms of appropriation and expression. Especially in the wake of social movements such as #metoo and Black Lives Matter, issues of social inclusion and exclusion, as well as anti-discrimination and diversity, are increasingly coming into focus in the cultural sector, including HMEIs (Gaunt et al. 2021; Westerlund and Gaunt 2022; Petri-Preis 2023; Tolmie 2020). Given the exacerbation of social inequalities and global crises, aspiring and already established musicians are also increasingly called upon to “bring people together, enhance communal well-being, and contribute substantially to human thriving” (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016, 7) and “to put their arts to work’ for the positive transformation of their own and others’ lives” (ibid., 89). To some extent, HMEIs have already responded to these developments over the past decades with curricular adjustments (Chaker and Petri-Preis in this volume). Dawn Bennett observes that, especially since the 1960s, there has been an increasing openness towards

traditional and popular musics, an expansion of academic disciplines, and an integration of ideas from community music into teaching (Bennett 2016, 62f.). Helena Gaunt and colleagues demonstrate changes in instrumental curricula over the last 30 years in areas such as cultural entrepreneurship, decolonisation of the canon, intercultural cooperation, digital technologies, and audience development (Gaunt et al. 2021, 2).

Despite these incremental changes, musicians are confronted with developments and innovations in concert life (Chaker and Petri-Preis 2022) for which they typically do not receive appropriate training during their studies (Petri-Preis 2022; Pitts, Burland and Spurgin 2024). These include projects and formats in unusual locations (Peters et al. 2022; Haferkorn 2018), in social contexts, such as detention centres (Bánffy-Hall, Eberhard, and Ziegenmeyer 2021) or health-care institutions (Wit and Sevendik 2024; Smilde 2022), as well as in various community settings (Higgins 2012). Thus there is an urgent need for HMEIs to drive comprehensive curricular developments forward in response to societal changes and the altered expectations of the education of musicians. The crucial challenge is not merely to be passengers carried along by these developments, but to proactively shape institutional transformation, preparing students for a changing concert life and simultaneously contributing to a more solidarity-based and just society. As Catherine Grant emphasises: “[A] socially engaged tertiary education improves learning outcomes for students, with concomitant benefits for universities and society at large.” (Grant 2019, 388)

## Research Interest and Research Questions

With the academic year 2023/24, a new artistic-academic master’s programme<sup>1</sup> started at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, one which, in many respects, responds innovatively to the outlined societal changes and associated challenges in the field of educating musicians, and thus enters uncharted curricular territory.<sup>2</sup> The aim of the programme is to provide a “contemporary, well-founded artistic qualification for artists, enabling them to act competently, innovatively, and professionally in a changing professional field at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This qualification includes engaging with artistic expressions, techniques, and processes, finding one’s own artistic voice,

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1 The author of this text was involved in the conception of the study programme and currently teaches there as well.

2 For a comprehensive discussion of the master’s programme, see Petri-Preis (2024).

collaborative work methods, the scholarly foundation of artistic practice, insights into socio-economic or socio-political structures of cultural landscapes, as well as organisational and (self-)management skills.” (mdw 2021, 5)<sup>3</sup> All students with a BA degree are admitted, regardless of whether it is in music or in any other discipline. This aims to include students with informally acquired musical knowledge and skills in the programme, thus fostering a diverse student cohort.

Students have the opportunity to specialise in one of four study profiles: elemental music-making, music mediation/community music, improviser\*composer-performer, and transmedial performance. While individual courses are specifically assigned to a study profile, joint cross-profile courses are intended to allow students to engage in dialogue with each other.

At the heart of the MA *Contemporary Arts Practice* (CAP) are three central thematic pillars located at the intersections of the study profiles and addressed in all courses: improvisation/composing-performing, community engagement and cross-arts.<sup>4</sup> The first pillar refers to the expanding professional field of musicians, who are no longer solely performers, but also engage in composing, arranging, and improvising. Improvisation as an artistic practice is central to the curriculum because it opens up possibilities for musical exploration beyond set scores, occurs as a collaborative practice in mutual exchange with other players, and encompasses a positive failure culture. Moreover, it is “a unique channel for making meaning and connecting people” (Gaunt et al. 2021, 10; see also Smilde 2009, and Wit and Sevendik 2024), thus also relating to the thematic field of community engagement, which forms the second pillar and is the central focus of this article. On the backdrop of comprehensive societal transformation processes and global crises this topic has recently increased in importance in the education of musicians. Helena Gaunt and Heidi Westerlund argue that aspiring musicians must be given the opportunity to develop an identity as change agents and to have a societal impact (2022, 13). Catherine Grant and Samantha Low-Choy (2021) argue that socially engaged curriculum initiatives can, at best, foster social awareness, social consciousness and social imagination in students, enabling them to possess knowledge about societal connections, sharpen their awareness that there is more than one valid way to see the world, and develop their capacity to envision a better society through their art. The third pillar refers to the fundamentally inter- and transdisciplinary nature of the programme, which also includes other art forms (visual

3 Translated by the author.

4 For the whole curriculum see: <https://www.mdw.ac.at/studienplaene/?stNR=33970&stArt=cur> (accessed April 14, 2025).

arts, dance, etc.) and music traditions beyond classical art music, thus serving as a basis for community engagement in the sense of a broad understanding of music and culture.

Against this background, the aim of this chapter is to better understand students' perspectives on the MA CAP and to learn about their understanding of community engagement. I will present findings from an interview study with students from the first cohort of the programme, based on the following research questions:

- What are the students' expectations upon entering the MA CAP?
- What significant experiences have they had in the programme so far?
- How do they define community engagement, and what does this concept mean for them as musicians?

## Methodological Approach

For this article, I conducted semi-structured interviews with eight of the 16 students between December 19, 2023, and February 14, 2024 – i.e. in the final third of the first of four semesters of the CAP master's programme. Four interviewees are enrolled in the music mediation/community music study profile, which places a special focus on community engagement, three are in the study profile of transmedial performance, and one student is in that of improviser\*composer-performer. The sample was determined by the students' availability and willingness to participate in an interview; invitations to an interview were extended to all students. The following table provides an overview of the interviewees<sup>5</sup>:

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5 The names of the students were pseudonymized, with the initial letter of the pseudonyms derived from the sequence of the interviews. The interviewees were extensively informed about the background to the study and my approach as a researcher, and explicitly consented to the use and publication of the data from the interviews. Four of the students had attended a seminar with the author at the time of the interviews.

Name	Gender	Study Profile
Alina	female	music mediation / community music
Beata	female	music mediation / community music
Christian	male	music mediation / community music
Dario	male	music mediation / community music
Elvira	female	transmedial performance
Frida	female	transmedial performance
Gerda	female	transmedial performance
Hemma	female	improviser*composer-performer

**Table 1:** Overview of the study sample. Source: Own illustration.

The interviews were conducted via Zoom and lasted between 20 and 60 minutes. Except for the interview with Beata, which was conducted in English at her request, all the others were conducted in German<sup>6</sup>. They were fully transcribed, coded, and inductively analysed using thematic analysis by Ulrike Froschauer and Manfred Lueger (2020). This method involves an interpretative analysis of themes and their connections in discursive data. The aim of the procedure is to develop an understanding of “the variety of themes that emerge in the conversation material, their situational expressions, their modes of representation and connection, as well as the underlying perspectives” (Froschauer and Lueger 2020, 183).

## Musical Socialisation and Evolving Artistic Self-Image

### *Making Things a Bit Different – New Forms of Presentation*

Many of the interviewed students describe how their early family environment, while not specifically affiliated with so-called ‘high culture’, nonetheless strongly supported their musical ambitions. Alina, for example, explains that her parents, despite having no professional music background, always encouraged her pursuit of music. A formative experience for her artistic development was realizing that her mother often found concerts boring. This led to an early aspiration “to play in a way that is interesting for others, my

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6 Direct quotes have been translated by the author.

mum, but also for many other listeners” (Alina, Pos. 4). Elvira mentions coming from a rural background, where her parents had little exposure to art, yet they always supported and encouraged her early desire to become a musician. Similar to Alina, she describes from this biographical experience an early urge to make her music accessible to a broad audience beyond traditional classical concertgoers. Beata and Hemma mention the crucial importance of their circle of friends for the development of their artistic self-image, a circle that lacked any special musical or ‘high-cultural’ affinity. Hemma reflects: “I played hockey and had many friends whom I saw five times a week. And then in the evenings, I always went to a concert or to the opera or somewhere else, and they didn’t.” (Hemma, Pos. 26) She always wondered how concerts could be designed in a way that they would also appeal to her friends. Beata retrospectively attributes central importance to her circle of friends for her further artistic development: “I was totally into other things from the beginning with my friends, who were not at all for music, which was important for me.” (Beata, Pos. 4) For her, the significance arises from feeling at home in several social worlds that she wants to connect through her music.

It becomes apparent that all interviewed students, already as adolescents felt the desire, as Frida puts it, “to do something a bit different” (Frida, Pos. 2) compared to conventional performance practices. This was due to profound experiences with significant figures from their childhood and youth, such as parents or friends, who were not culturally socialised in so-called ‘high-culture’ and thus had differing expectations for a concert.

### ***A Small Democracy – Collective Music Making***

All interview partners describe collective music-making in mostly self-founded ensembles as a formative experience in their musical socialisation. The ensembles were “artistic laboratories” (Smilde 2009; see also Petri-Preis 2022), where they could experiment with new performance practices, and represent safe spaces where they could work together in an atmosphere of mutual trust. Above all, what they value in collective music-making is the necessity of negotiation processes, as Alina notes: “I think it’s a good example of a small democracy. So, you learn that you have to bring your part, and the others have to bring theirs too. And then you can look together at what emerges.” (Alina, Pos. 12)

## ***Orchestra or Teaching? – Perceptions of Deficiency in Instrumental Studies***

The orientation of instrumental studies was perceived by the interviewees as strongly focused on mastering the instrument, which is not solely regarded negatively. For example, Alina says: “I felt that in my studies, there was a lot about craftsmanship, which is also good.” (Alina, Pos. 19) Beata also emphasises the importance of having the appropriate technical skills on the instrument: “I am someone who spends time on details of music, of specialisation with the instrument, of spending two hours with one sound. I mean of being completely into that, which is very important.” (Beata, Pos. 12) However, some students felt a lack of a specifically artistic dimension in their studies, which goes beyond mastering the instrument. Alina, for instance, shares that she dismissed the artistic value within herself, feeling that it remained unchallenged due to the heavy emphasis on the instrument. She primarily felt like a craftsman, not as a musician or even an artist. Some students criticise that in their instrumental study, apart from aspiring for an orchestral position or teaching, no further perspectives were offered. Alina says: “Then the question always arises: What do you want to become? Do you want to join an orchestra, or do you want to teach? [...] And this question has always seemed absurd to me because I actually studied because I enjoy making music in all its forms.” (Alina, Pos. 10) Beata particularly missed the perspective on her role as a “musician actually in society” (Beata, Pos. 12), the reflection on the societal relevance of her art. Many students found freedom away from strict classical training, in folk music, where the focus is less on perfection and more on collective music-making, and in contemporary music, which allows for an interdisciplinary approach.

## **Expectations for the MA CAP**

The interview partners formulate two main expectations for the MA CAP, which are – as I will show – very much impacted by the experiences they made in their previous instrumental studies.

## ***Looking Left and Right – Artistic Development Beyond the Instrument***

Not surprisingly, the interviewed students describe their own artistic development as a central expectation for the programme. However, in contrast to

their experiences in instrumental studies, they do not mean a “full focus on a main artistic subject” (Gerda, Pos. 4), but rather an expansion of their horizons in terms of interdisciplinary musical practices and their role and responsibility as musicians in society. Compared to instrumental studies, they expect from the CAP Master programme above all openness to be able to develop freely and to search for their own artistic language. Elvira describes it like this: “I came from classical instrumental studies, which is very, very straightforward, and has very few lefts and rights.” (Elvira, Pos. 6) What she expects is “being able to open up and look left and right and being able to take a lot with me, also from other opinions, disciplines, and impressions.” (Elvira, Pos. 6) Many of the interviewed students describe that they want to find their own, unmistakable artistic voice during their studies. Hemma says that she always felt like she was sitting between two chairs in instrumental studies, because she did not want to clearly assign herself to classical music or jazz. Ironically, she says that she is now attending the MA CAP because “I didn’t fit anywhere else” (Hemma, Pos. 6), and Elvira hopes for “space and time to find my own musical path in a protected, supportive environment.” (Elvira, Pos. 4)

### ***The Connection between Art and People – Community Engagement and Theoretical Foundation***

A second important aspect that the students address is that of societal engagement. Alina vividly describes how she feels that, in the initial months of the new programme, she has transformed from being a craftsperson, as she was trained to be in instrumental studies, into a musician capable of developing a musical vision. Subsequently, she aims to become an artist who can also effect change and have a societal impact. Christian also anticipates further development in terms of societal effectiveness, as he seeks to deepen “the question of the connection between art and humanity” (Christian, Pos. 18). Finally, some students also expect a scholarly foundation and thus a strengthening of their competence to theoretically underpin and critically reflect on their own artistic actions.

### **Understanding of Community Engagement**

One of the three central pillars of the MA CAP is community engagement, which is defined in the curriculum as “creating spaces and experimenting with inclusive practices for the negotiation and enhancement of cultural participation and inclusion.” In the discussions, I therefore also investigated what the students

actually understand by this term and what it means for them as musicians. I was able to reconstruct five central aspects, which I will describe subsequently, in no hierarchical order:

### ***Intersectional Advocacy***

All students emphasise that community engagement means stepping out of their own self-centred social world, their own bubble. They want their music to reach people with whom they would not otherwise come into contact in the classical music world. In this context, they also criticise classical concert life sharply, which they perceive as rigid in its conventions, elitist, and excluding large parts of the population. Sharing their art with the general population also means for them the necessity of confronting other life realities and social worlds. To do this, they deem it necessary to empathise with the dialogue group they work with, or always consider their audience when conceiving concerts. Alina finds a particularly vivid image for the imagined audience. In her narrative, her mother, who often gets bored at concerts, becomes the personified imaginary audience that the young musician keeps in mind when developing new formats. The students see themselves as “bridging agents” (Strauss 1978, 123), who have “knowledge of more than one social world” (Suczek and Fagerhaugh 1991, 160), which they have acquired through their multi-membership in various social worlds (Kubiak et al. 2015), including those not related to so-called ‘high culture’. They can thus develop what Anselm Strauss calls an “intersectional advocacy” (Strauss 1978, 123) that brings together people from different social worlds.

### ***Communality***

Another important aspect that the students mention is communality. Above all, they deem communal music-making by professional and non-professional musicians<sup>7</sup> a significant aspect of community engagement which can especially be realised in community orchestras and choirs. Christian recounts that he led an orchestra for several years that included both professional musicians and amateurs. He particularly emphasises the joy with which the members of the orchestra made music together and says that he has benefited not only personally from this, but also professionally, in terms of his career as a musician. And Dario describes how he rediscovered his own joy in making music in an amateur orchestra after a crisis-ridden education at the conservatory.

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7 For this distinction see Matarasso (2019).

## **Activism**

Some students also describe activism as an integral aspect of community engagement. To them it is not only about reflecting on inequalities and societal problems but actively counteracting them. Central issues such as migration or climate change should be addressed and dealt with in their own projects in order to make an active contribution to the well-being of society. At one point during the interview, Hemma rather casts doubt on the effectiveness of musicians: “Well, I often feel like I can’t really help society all that much. I can play the flute, which is great. If there is something we can change or something we can say, we should do it.” (Hemma, Pos. 36) She is convinced that “community engagement [...] simply means that we try to contribute to societal issues and present or find solutions.” (Hemma, Pos. 34)

## **Social Responsibility**

Many of the interviewed students describe a feeling that, as musicians, they bear a social responsibility. Christian, for example, says that he sees his art as “a service to society or to my community” (Christian, Pos. 8). Hemma describes that artists, as public figures, have a special social responsibility and role-model effect: “I definitely believe that art can influence societal aspects. And I also believe that artists influence people.” (Hemma, Pos. 22) She thinks that a critical stance towards power is therefore also particularly important, in order to reflect on one’s own positioning and the existing hierarchies (see also Mörsch 2012). This critical reflexivity is part of a specific attitude that the students consider important in connection with community engagement.

## **Attitude**

Reflexivity was already mentioned in the last section and from the students’ point of view it is particularly important with regard to a critical perspective on power. Socially engaged musicians should be aware of their own positioning and align their actions accordingly. Hemma expresses this somewhat pointedly: “So everything that I present on stage, someone can hear, which can impact them and lead them to carry it outward. That’s why I think it’s important to carefully consider what one puts out there.” (Hemma, Pos. 22) Alina describes how she sometimes fears falling into a missionary mode of community engagement. For that reason, a specifically educational approach is important to her, so as to create learning opportunities and open up spaces for experiences, yet without intending to instruct or patronise others. All respondents mention an

appreciation of heterogeneity and difference as an essential aspect of community engagement, as well as a welcoming attitude towards all people. For Frida, the overarching goal of community engagement is ultimately to strive towards “a beautiful society with open hearts and open minds” (Frida, Pos. 18).

## **Experiences of the MA CAP**

At the time of the interviews the students were in their first semester of the MA CAP and talk about some experiences they find meaningful. They specifically highlight four main aspects: cross-curricular learning opportunities, open teaching and learning methods, community building during the orientation week, and the student cohort as a “community of practice” (Wenger 1998).

### ***Cross-Curricular Learning***

Cross-curricular learning opportunities arise from the structure of the curriculum. While students are assigned to one of four study profiles which they already apply for in their entrance exams, they also have numerous classes together with students from other profiles. Furthermore, certain classes from one profile can be taken as elective courses in other profiles, and the central artistic subject, taught in group sessions, is hosted each semester by a different profile. The students describe these overlaps as highly beneficial and stimulating for their artistic development.

### ***Open Teaching and Learning Culture***

The students describe encountering a specific learning culture in the classes, characterised by open teaching and learning methods. They are encouraged by their teachers to engage in reflection, discussion, and independent work. They see this as positive, especially considering the highly directive nature of instrumental studies, as it creates space for exchange and conversation. At the same time, they find this learning style challenging, because it requires a lot of self-initiative. Additionally, students perceive that there is no particular hierarchy between teachers and students, which they see as a stark difference from instrumental studies, especially individual lessons.

## **Community Building during Orientation Week**

The students also emphasise the value of the orientation week that takes place at the beginning of the first semester. During this week, which is spent at a place outside the university, students have opportunities for collaborative artistic work through small projects and design tasks. In addition, they have the chance to perform and present in various social contexts. They can come together as a group and especially find themselves as a community of practice. Etienne Wenger defines this as a community in which people learn from and with one another in relation to a shared practice, and emphasises that “learning as belonging” (Wenger 1998, 5) is essential for learning processes.

## **Student Cohort as a Community of Practice**

The success of this endeavour is evident, since all students speak highly of their student cohort as an immensely valuable resource. Many express astonishment at how valuable their fellow students have become to them in such a short period. Particularly compared to what they view as a highly individualistic instrumental study, they appreciate the mutual support and the diversity of backgrounds among their peers<sup>8</sup>, since this also fosters new ideas. Elvira notes that she lacked like-minded individuals in her instrumental studies, but has now found some. The group is simultaneously perceived as a place of empowerment and a safe space for experimentation and debate.

## **Conclusion and Outlook**

Against the backdrop of comprehensive societal transformation processes and their influence on the education of musicians, my article provides insights into the MA programme *Contemporary Arts Practice* at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. The focus is on the perspectives of students from the first cohort, providing insights into their expectations for and experiences in the programme, as well as their understanding of community engagement, one of the three central pillars of the programme. It is particularly notable that students generally describe their expectations and experiences in

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8 Since an artistic BA is not a prerequisite for the MA CAP, students come from a wide variety of artistic disciplines (such as music, dance, performance) and genres (including classical music, pop, traditional music), resulting in a significant musical and cultural diversity within the cohort, although not necessarily a social or ethnic diversity.

comparison to instrumental studies. They consistently perceive instrumental studies as focused on technical excellence, aiming at obtaining an orchestral position, and also as being individualistic and competitive for the students and highly directed by teachers. Therefore, they expect the MA CAP to offer them the opportunity to develop artistically beyond their instrument and to work in an interdisciplinary way. This is especially meaningful, since they are able to acquire social, educational, and artistic skills that are otherwise usually acquired outside the HMEIs (Bishop and Tröndle 2017). Interviews highlight the experience that the students formed a community of practice within the cohort. The heterogeneity of the group is seen as a valuable resource for learning from and with one another in a trusting environment. Some students explicitly include the teachers in this community of practice, which reflects the non-hierarchical teaching and learning culture. The wide and nuanced understanding of community engagement described by the students is especially noteworthy. It encompasses aspects such as intersectional advocacy, communality, activism, social responsibility, and a specific critical and reflective attitude, thus showing overlaps with existing definitions in relevant literature (e.g. Borwick 2012; Smilde 2018; Stibi 2023) and related concepts such as “artistic citizenship” (Elliott, Silverman, and Bowman 2016) or “community music” (Higgins 2012).

While the insights from interviews with students from the first cohort of the MA CAP are not representative and therefore not generalisable, they do provide further argumentation for granting community engagement a more prominent role in higher music education (see also Smilde 2018). It is long overdue for HMEIs to ask “what (and who) a conservatoire education is for, what sorts of new subjects it might cover, and why its ongoing relevance might be important not just for musicians but for all of us.” (Tregear et al. 2016, 278) Programmes such as the MA CAP are a valuable and crucial contribution towards a stronger focus on community engagement and societal responsibility in music curricula. However, in order for HMEIs, their teachers and students to be able to address pressing societal issues, community engagement cannot remain in the margins located in specific programmes, but has to move to the centre of music curricula.

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# Doing Music Difference, or: What do we do with Other Musics?<sup>1</sup>

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Shanti Suki Osman

## Introduction

The symposium *Diskriminierungskritische Perspektiven in die Curricula an der Schnittstelle von Bildung und Kunst!* [Discrimination Critical Perspectives on the Curricula at the Interface of Education and Art!] was hosted and initiated by Carmen Mörsch at the Schauspielhaus Dortmund in June 2023 and attended by music and art educators and mediators, as well as students, researchers, and professors from arts and music education and mediation and related fields, including diversity and equal opportunity sectors. This symposium was the culmination of years of research and development of teaching materials and tools that provide a discrimination critical perspective both for inside and outside of school contexts. The symposium also celebrated the release of the research, which included physical materials and online resources. I was invited to be a part of a focus group which had two tasks: reading, reviewing and critiquing the material prior to the symposium; and leading a workshop at the symposium which was to activate, test out and critique chosen elements from the materials. In the materials and resources developed and collected by Mörsch there is an important push for challenging the canon in all aspects of art. Related to music there is *Monostatos Rache* [Monostatos' Revenge] by Vincent Bababouilabo, an analysis of school music books based on manifestations of racism, and *Postkoloniale Spuren in deutschen Institutionen für Musikförderung*

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1 I capitalise the word Other to demonstrate that it has been deemed to be different in a constructed manner. It thereby highlights that the difference is only produced or objectified as an opposition to the Self (here the dominant ways of knowing a music or dominant music). *What do we do with Other Musics?* was the title of a session organised by the author, Lea Jakob, and Julia Auer for the conference *Critiques of Power in the Arts* held in Vienna from April 25 to April 27 2024 at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna and partner institutions.

[Postcolonial Traces in German Institutions for Music Sponsorship] by Inga Marie Sponheuer, which reports on the reasons why certain non-Western instruments are not taught in music schools, and the negative structural consequences this has for the musicians who play them. In my workshop I did not however simply want to challenge hegemonic music knowledge production – that is, whose music counts as such, but to further ask: what do we actually *do* with Other Musics? Once we have rethought the canon and found space for different musics to be taught, heard, and engaged with in educational contexts, how do we then approach and *hold* these musics and the people listening to them? Furthermore, how do transcultural music projects pose their own challenges for discrimination-critical music mediation? I proposed answering and addressing these questions through the listening workshop *Doing Music Difference?* The workshop intended to shed light on the problems and possibilities of so-called transcultural music and music projects and to highlight the role of music mediators’ positionalities, whilst itself employing critical methodology to achieve these aims.

I will begin by explicating my understanding of the terms “discrimination-critical” and “discrimination-critical music mediation”. This is followed by rooting and simultaneously problematising transcultural music and music mediation based on Dylan Robinson’s four models of inclusionary music (Robinson 2020), alongside Stefanie Kiwi Menrath’s criticisms and demands of transcultural music mediation in the light of the increasing number of projects designed for refugees post 2014 (Menrath 2018). After considering these concepts, I will describe, discuss and evaluate the components of the workshop, whilst exploring the idea of music mediators’ positionalities. I ultimately propose that discrimination-critical music mediation, with a focus on listening as a means of scrutinising power relations and power imbalances, can contribute to advances in diversity-sensitive approaches to transcultural music mediation and in society in general (see also Osman 2022).

## Discrimination Critical and Discrimination Critical Music Mediation

The term “discrimination critical” indicates an approach that seeks to examine forms of discrimination and how they arise in the given situation, as well as work to remove them (Osman 2022). Mörsch notably uses this term when leaning on the notion of critical diversity literacy, as propounded by Melissa Steyn (2007). This concept includes understanding that categories of difference are socially constructed; that these categories can have combined effects in cre-

ating conditions of inequality (intersectionality); understanding privilege and power relations and recognising historical continuities in inequalities (Mörsch 2022). The approach furthermore considers the importance of knowing and understanding terminology in addressing these issues, as well as having the very will to do so in the first place, including potentially and eventually making changes to current ways of doing things (ibid.). The term points to processes of constant and critical reflection of the self as educator and facilitator (Osman 2022; 2023b; Mörsch 2022); continuous scrutiny of subject matter and the implications of materials and methodologies used; aspired awareness of innate and constructed power relations between people in educational settings; and listening<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, listening, hearing, and paying attention is an important first step to achieving the above-mentioned and for this reason was the focus of the workshop, as will be described in detail below.

The German word *Musikvermittlung* is translated both as music education and music mediation in the English language. The term “music mediation” is widely used to refer to the education programmes of opera houses, concert halls, theatres, museums, and other arts venues. The person running the programme would be a musician, often a freelancer, who develops activities as a way to communicate the arts, here the music, to an audience, although not solely through performing. Typically, music mediation happens outside of the school – either it has no connection to any kind of school context, or it is extracurricular in the sense that a school group may participate in a workshop or project at or in cooperation with a venue or institution outside of the school, such as the ones listed above (Müller-Brozovic 2017). As a researcher and practitioner of music, and both music education and music mediation, and furthermore being rooted in critical transcultural music education and music mediation at a stage when it is developing to incorporate intersectional and anti-discriminatory approaches, I am well placed to see how the different facets, sectors, and approaches overlap and mutually benefit each other. This can be understood by briefly looking at current developments in the fields.

In current critical transcultural music education in schools there is a focus on questioning and disrupting the canon and making space for less typically taught musics to gain visibility. The recent publication *It's How You Flip It: Multiple Perspectives on Hip-Hop and Music Education* (Eusterbrock, Kattenbeck, and Kautny 2024), with its focus on hip-hop, is just one example of this. Further examples of discrimination critical approaches include the progressive *A Manifesto for Music Education in Scotland* (Brennan et al. 2017) which seeks

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2 All of this and more is addressed thoroughly and accessibly in the materials devised, developed, and collated by Carmen Mörsch.

to examine everything from structural inequity to teacher training. Similarly, there is a surge in discrimination critical approaches in music mediation, such as the music-oriented social work discussed by Josties and Gerards, in which hierarchies, power relations, positionalities and racisms are critically examined in what they call “transnational and diversity-conscious perspectives of music-orientated youth cultural work” (2019, n.p.). The concept of listening combines all of these aspects. Listening in the context of arts and music education and mediation can offer a way to disrupt the canon by listening to new narratives and new musics, as I explicate in *Ein Dekolonisierendes Zuhören?* (Osman 2023a). Listening is also a tool for self-reflection, as well as a metaphor for meeting other people’s needs, which is addressed in the feminist interviews conducted by sound artists and scholars Farinati and Firth (2017). The activist, sound arts and education collective *Ultra-red* famously employ listening as a way to extend knowledge of our environments and our understanding of power relations and hierarchies in society (Ultra-red 2000). I therefore maintain that it is appropriate to speak of a discrimination critical music mediation which seeks to question the canon, create space for new voices, highlight and work against power imbalances and promote self-reflection.

## Rooting and Problematising Transcultural Music and Transcultural Music Mediation

I will now expound upon critical perspectives on transcultural music and music mediation, referring to texts by Menrath (2018) and Robinson (2020). I want to shed light on the problems and possibilities of so-called transcultural music and music projects, something that Robinson deftly does as part of his study on decolonial listening and its implications for marginalised perspectives in music in general.

In order to do this, I will briefly look at the terms and concepts used by Robinson and Menrath in their discussions and critiques. Menrath discusses and critiques transculturality and transcultural music and projects in the context of initiatives designed for refugees. The term “transculturality” is frequently used in connection with music mediation (see Binas-Preisendorfer and Unseld 2012 for one significant example). Robinson however refers to inclusionary projects in his discussion and critique. His use of the term differs from the typical use of the terms “inclusion” or “inclusionary” in music education and music mediation discourses, which are commonly rooted in disability studies (Bremmer 2023). Robinson, however, argues that using the terms “inclusion” or “inclusionary” for his discussion and critique of what he

acknowledges may seem more like intercultural projects to some scholars (Robinson 2020, 6), highlights the reality that indigenous musics are required to simply fit into the dominant music culture of Canada, even in the wake of “Canada’s official enshrinement of multiculturalism” (ibid., 6).

In Menrath’s critique she insists on acknowledging and addressing the power imbalances in transcultural music projects which also involves considering the creative control of the participants, and accordingly, Robinson discusses the abilities and inabilities of representors of marginalised or Othered musics to have their voices heard, create on their own terms, and contribute to the converged artform in a way that is not being wholly controlled or determined by the dominant culture (Robinson 2020). In both of the discussions and critiques, they explicate an apparent dynamic of convergence characterised by the following: musical cultures meeting; an implication of exchange; an expectation of working together well (and with that the assumption that there is currently no or little working together, well or otherwise); inherent and multiple power imbalances; a desire to give space to marginalised voices and musics; a desire to result in something musically coherent. Both Robinson’s use of the term “inclusionary” and Menrath’s use of “transcultural” refer to conscious decisions to work with Other musics – and the people who produce them. I will therefore be conflating these terms and my understanding thereof for the purpose of this paper.

The background and context of Menrath’s text is the surge in music projects for refugees in Germany after the increased numbers of people who fled from Syria and neighbouring countries, mainly in 2014 and 2015. The vast number of projects and the collective need to offer young people and children from these countries musical opportunities to enjoy and express themselves required practitioners to question the motivations behind such transcultural projects (Menrath 2018, 13f.). Menrath emphasises that transculturality not only concerns itself with the connecting and converging of different and differing cultures, but, by the very nature of this apparent coming together, must also highlight and critique the accompanying power relations and power imbalances (ibid., 12). Cultural representation is often a key motivation and desired outcome for any transcultural project – and it in fact occurs with or without orchestration. But in referring to Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean’s discussion of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Landry and MacLean 1996), Menrath reminds us that representation is both *Vertretung* [speaking for someone or something in a political sense] and *Darstellung* [speaking of or about someone or something, or a re-representation] (ibid., 6) Cultural representation, then, is not just reproducing or producing something artistic or aesthetic, but contains the political element of speaking for something or

someone (*Vertretung*) (Menrath 2018, 12). Referring to twenty-first century trends of inclusionary projects to include and integrate First Nations and Inuit cultural practices in Western art music pieces, ensembles, and performances, Robinson analyses a handful of projects and determines thereby four models of inclusionary projects, or a “taxonomy of musical encounters” (Robinson 2020, 123), as he describes it. These are 1) *integration*, where the Other music is found a place determined by the dominant culture, to fit into the music of the dominant culture; 2) *nation-to-nation*, where the musics are traded and shared and not converged or mixed, per se; 3) a *combination* of the two, where a reciprocal sharing takes place, followed by an attempt to integrate the musics; and finally; 4) an active *refusal* to integrate, and with that the further problematising of coexistence. In these various examples of convergences of musical difference, he details the attempts to include and integrate music, and with that the problems of so-called transcultural music and practice, which I wish to highlight now by discussing both Robinson’s models and Menrath’s text, somewhat in conversation with each other.

### ***Integration***

Within this model, Robinson observes what he describes as music and musicology’s tendency to generalise, i.e. the notion that a certain music speaks for an audience or a community (Robinson 2020, 124). Within the model of integration, he critiques musicians and practitioners for mixing and converging without considering context, as this often leads to a devaluation of meaning. One example he highlights is Spy Dénommé-Welch and Catherine Magowan’s *Giiwedin*, an opera that is about the history of the First Nation people of the Temiskaming region and is told from the perspective of Noodin-Kwe, a 150-year-old woman. In this example, the creators use jovial, consonant music, and easy listening melodies with the intention of engaging a wider public (*ibid.*, 125–27). However, this music is used to underpin a part of the story which involved horrific scenes of violence against the protagonist, and Robinson concludes that this technique minimises the brutality and the potential effect that the disruptive nature of the story could have on the audience (*ibid.*, 126). In the second example, *Viderunt Omnes* by Christos Hatzis, he critiques the composer for utilising Inuit throat games as pure “aesthetic material” (*ibid.*, 131) rather than incorporating or acknowledging it for the “culture practice” (*ibid.*) that it is and the story that it can tell.

Menrath points out that difference is also always being portrayed when things are being represented in a transcultural context (Menrath 2018, 13). For Robinson too, a key question in projects that follow the integration model is

what is being expressed and what is being ignored or not being expressed (Robinson 2020, 132). Integration implies that all parts and perspectives are equal in the process of converging to create something new (*ibid.*, 130f.). However, as both Menrath and Robinson make clear, there is an ever-present power imbalance between the dominant culture and music from a marginalised perspective (Menrath 2018, 16). Moreover, it is the role of the Other or Othered music to find a way to fit, or ideally, be found a place to fit into the dominant culture (Robinson 2020, 132f.). In this model there is little agency possible for the marginalised perspective.

### ***Nation-to-nation***

The nation-to-nation model is based on performances and projects that comprise more than one represented culture and alternate between performances of each group or each culture (Robinson 2020, 133). Here, the aim is to share traditions in an almost show-and-tell fashion, with no interaction between cultural practices, art forms or cultures, whilst still maintaining that each part is equal (*ibid.*, 133f.). The groups, or the cultures, take it in turns throughout the performance to be the host (the ones being shown and told) and to be the guest (the ones showing and telling) (*ibid.*, 135). In this example, Robinson refers to performances of a collaboration between the Pacific Baroque Orchestra from Vancouver and the dance group Spakwus Slolem, comprised of members of the Squamish nation (*ibid.*, 133). The critical question that Robinson asks in relation to this model is however linked to the definition and decolonial understanding of guest and host, namely, what if both groups partaking in the exchange of cultures are doing so in environments and places where, technically or historically, they are indeed both guests (*ibid.*, 135).

Considering this perspective on inclusionary music projects, I want to refer to Menrath's assertion that attempts at transcultural projects should not simply be concerned with teaching or conveying something that pre-exists, but rather should be guided by and oriented around and to the participants and what they produce (Menrath 2018, 15). For her, there is a need for such projects to be transformative: transforming the space, and thereby the power relations, which make it possible or impossible for some participants to engage in identity construction and expression (*ibid.*, 15f.). In a nation-to-nation project, then, there is a lack of reflection about the space being used, and whilst Robinson is referring specifically to physical and geographical land and its ownership, I contend that the notion of a transformative or transformed space can be explored by increased awareness through self-reflection (Menrath 2018; Osman

2023b) and therefore initially, by means of increased listening (Osman 2023a; Robinson 2020), as discussed above.

### ***Nation-to-nation, Followed by Integration***

Could a transformative space as advocated by Menrath, a place to create and explore new forms of expression guided by all actors involved, come into being in an extension of what Robinson calls the nation-to-nation model? In the third model of inclusionary projects, Robinson describes those which initially take on a nation-to-nation form, comprised of consecutive sharing and showing then culminate in a merged artistic performance, or, integration (Robinson 2020, 136). Robinson describes the initial alternate sharing as a progression which results in an apparent familiarisation, and therefore an opportunity to once again ostensibly create on equal terms (*ibid.*, 137). He refers to the documentary *Four Seasons Mosaic*, which followed the artistic processes and concerts of the Toronto Orchestra *Tafelmusik*, with the sarangi<sup>3</sup> musician Aruna Narayan, the pipa<sup>4</sup> player, Wen Zhao, and the Inuit throat singers Sylvia Cloutier and June Shappa (*ibid.*, 137–39). After phases of presentation and exchange, their collaboration culminated in all musicians playing Canadian composer Mychael Danna's *Winter*. Referring to Eva Mackey (2002), he points out that the phase of sharing and familiarisation is deceptive because, as soon as the integration phase ensues, the dominant culture remains intact (Robinson 2020, 136f.) and once again, the Other and Othered music is found a place to fit within this. As with the initial integration model, the music alone is used as aesthetic material and the cultural practice is removed and ignored, something that Robinson describes as being indicative of the violence endured by marginalised people (*ibid.*, 137). This combination model is further damaging since it implies a reconciliation – here with direct reference to Canada's treatment of its First Nation Peoples but also in general – between the dominant and marginalised cultures and peoples involved (*ibid.*, 136). In this example, the apparent developed familiarity further creates a power hierarchy. The throat singers, usually soloists, are placed in the orchestra and expected to fit in (*ibid.*, 139). The playful and improvised nature of the singers' music and performance is confronted by the dominant orchestra sound and ultimately loses out: it sounds 'wrong' and as if the musicians do not know what they are doing (*ibid.*). It is however only the dominant way of listening that hears these deviations as mistakes and therefore understands them as the musicians 'not getting it', despite apparently sufficient time spent

3 A North Indian bowed instrument.

4 A Chinese lute-like instrument.

on an exchange between the cultures. Therein lies the fallacy of the exchange; the dominant cultural practice, here the orchestra, is not required to adjust to anything, apart from making some space for the Other music to take on its scripted role (ibid., 137). In Menrath's view, such projects have to deconstruct difference, rather than maintain the power balances within the current states of difference (Menrath 2018, 14). Deconstructing difference creates uncertainties and ambiguities, something which she describes as being the realities of transcultural life, and something that Robinson's fourth model ultimately permits and encourages.

### ***Non-integration***

The final model that Robinson observes is concerned with refusing integration (Robinson 2020, 148). Using the example of *In Two Worlds* by Dawn Avery and Johann Sebastian Bach in which the composer and cellist Dawn Avery plays Bach's *Sarabande*, Robinson concludes that the lack of merging of the Indigenous musical aspects, such as the Iroquois bone rattle and Plains Indian falsetto singing, with the Western art music of the cello, foregrounds the "irreducible difference" (ibid., 144) and moreover the "nonengagement of musical difference" (ibid.). By refusing to integrate the musics, and by allowing the two to exist in the same space without being melded, the listener is forced to hear the Otherness of the music, here the indigenous elements. Hearing these aspects as different means that they have not been used as aesthetic materials to fit into a Western art music schema (integration), nor have they been showcased alone as part of the alternating pattern of 'show and be shown' of two different cultural practices (nation-to-nation). Whilst the listener may try to listen for similarities (ibid., 145), this non-integration signifies that the Other music refuses to adapt.

Transformative transcultural music mediation asks who is controlling the narrative and whether those of the dominant society are reflecting on their position (Menrath 2018, 16) in the power imbalance and its musical implications. It is the irritation caused by the lack of confluence which highlights the difference, and therefore the Other music, that potentially propagates reflection.

### **The Workshop: Doing Music Difference?**

The above discussion offers some examples of what we already *do* with Other musics – for better or worse. I will now turn to the listening workshop mentioned at the beginning of the paper and describe and evaluate some aspects

and outcomes of the workshop with a view to addressing the question: How can a listening workshop help to highlight what we actually *do* with Other musics?

There were approximately 10 participants in the workshop, comprised of music and arts students, music and arts educators and mediators, music education researchers, and professors of musicology and community music.

### ***Listening – Alone***

The first and main exercise involved listening to four pieces of music. I asked the participants to find a comfortable position in the room and instructed them that I would play a few pieces of music. I asked the participants to listen to the music without doing anything else such as writing or reading. After each piece of music, I asked the question “What did you hear?” to which they would then respond individually using paper and pens, in silence for 2 or 3 minutes. I instructed the participants that they could use words, images or diagrams to answer the question. After 2–3 minutes, my alarm would sound as a sign to put paper and pens down and return to the comfortable listening position. I repeated this sequence four times, each time asking the same question after the music had finished. The pieces of music I played were *Rubáiyát Blues* by Subhasis Bhattacharya, *Lámed II* by Samir Odeh-Tamimi, *Ashiki Baya* by Siti & the Band, and *Colonizer (Tundra Mix)* by Tanya Tagaq. Each of these pieces of music can be described or categorised as transcultural and/or inclusionary in various ways, referring to Menrath’s and/or Robinson’s understanding of these terms, but also to given understandings of the term that might arise in music mediation contexts. *Rubáiyát Blues* by Subhasis Bhattacharya includes a combination of tabla percussion and electric blues guitar, at times in concert with each other and at times seemingly not. The version of *Lámed II* by Palestinian-Israeli composer Samir Odeh-Tamimi was recorded by Martin Posegga, a core member of the Berlin based Zafraan Ensemble, whose repertoire typically challenges the canon. The composition for solo saxophone is based on the poem *Garden of Knowledge* by the ninth-century Sufi mystic Mansour al-Hallaj. *Ashiki Baya* is by Siti & the Band, a group from Zanzibar, Tanzania, who consciously fuse traditional Taarab<sup>5</sup> and “Turkish, Indian and African musical traditions [with] contemporary music from Jazz to Funk to Reggae and beyond” (Delicious Tunes 2023). Tanya Tagaq is a singer who combines Inuk throat singing with elements of rock, grunge and electronic music. The Tundra Mix of the song *Colonizer* includes loud, dissonant and dronelike elements, as well as electronics. As the title

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5 Traditional music from Tanzania and Kenya, influenced by North African, Middle Eastern, and Indian musics.

suggests, *Tagaq* very often centres on the voices and stories of marginalised aboriginal and indigenous peoples of Canada and their plights. By the third and fourth time, it became clear that I would always ask the same question after listening to the piece and it would therefore have been impossible to prevent the participants from already preparing the written answers whilst listening. However, it was not necessary to control this aspect, as the main aim was to find out what the participants heard, including *how* they heard.

### ***Listening – Exchange***

The participants then spent some time in small groups exchanging and discussing their answers to the songs. Invariably, people described emotions felt; perceived origin based on instrumentation, tonality and style; whether they liked the music or not; whether they knew the music or not. Some people were reluctant and uncomfortable discussing answers based on potential stereotypes and cultural categorisations, others were confident that employing and then critiquing stereotypes was part of the point of the exercise. Indeed, in line with a discrimination-critical approach, as described at the beginning of this paper, the discussion and scrutiny of *how* the participants hear, what influences their listening, what they listen out for, and the consequences thereof forms a critical reflection of self as educator and facilitator.

### ***Discussing***

For the third activity I split the participants into two groups to work on two mind-maps answering the following questions: 1) What are the possibilities of transcultural music and music mediation and 2) What are the problems with transcultural music and music mediation. After approximately 20 minutes I asked the groups to swap and therefore consider the other question and perspective. I purposefully chose this debate style activity, where participants are required to only represent or consider one perspective which may or may not be their own. By employing this technique on this particular subject, I wanted to highlight the points of contention, the contradictions and the ambiguities that we as facilitators and researchers are confronted with, and in doing so, the question of how to sit comfortably with uncertainties and discomfort (see Osman 2023a). Insisting on incorporating contradictions harkens back to Menrath's reference to the realities of transcultural life (Menrath 2018, 14). With this activity and indeed, as we discussed as a group afterwards, I wanted to bring attention to the different positionalities that partake in transcultural music mediation, and with that, the difficulty of

finding set answers to dilemmas. In this way the act of remaining aware and asking questions is bolstered. This promotes the continuous scrutiny of both the subject matter and the implications of materials and methodologies used, alongside an aspired understanding of innate and constructed power relations between people in educational settings.

The possibilities discussed and listed included creating spaces and room for new musics, listening and increased visibility for unseen or unheard musics and perspectives. It further included recognition, appreciation, and openness towards the unknown and new, as well as expanding one's own listening experiences. Having no fear of mistakes, appreciating and embracing grey areas, and using different terminology as bridges for understanding were also discussed and listed. The problems discussed and listed included questions of not knowing which musics were allowed to be shown and worked with by certain people, and which ones were not. The question of how to deal with stereotypes, including their consequences and defining what a bad stereotype is and the effort, time, and training needed to successfully facilitate were brought up, as was the necessity of a critical perspective. Here the word transcultural was criticised for being a synonym for Othering and with that, the process of marginalisation. The word transcultural was also critiqued for implying that everything that is not described as such is therefore the norm and furthermore, for failing to highlight that all music and culture is always somehow transcultural. Further problems that were mentioned included cultural appropriation, tokenism, and as with the first mind map, the ambiguities and contradictions of the grey areas.

## Conclusion: Listening and Positionality

How can a listening workshop help to highlight what we actually *do* with Other musics? How can it help to position us and situate our perspectives and attitudes, and why is that important?

Robinson's four models, as sketched out above and in conversation with Menrath's critical perspectives on transcultural music mediation projects, include questions of narrative authority and power imbalances within concepts such as exchange and integration. Understanding transcultural music projects with the help of these models can be part of a critical approach. The way we listen to transcultural music is indicative of our positionalities: what and how we hear depends on which perspective we are hearing from, or even, where in the power relation we are hearing from. Understanding the perspective from which we are hearing and from where in the power relation we are hearing, is precisely the self-reflection that Menrath and Mörsch are referring to, one that

results in acknowledging and deconstructing difference, rather than finding a place for it to fit, or even subsuming it. In mapping our listening patterns onto Robinson's models, they become less ways in which transcultural music projects are formed, and more ways in which they can be heard. They become an indicator of where we hear from: Does something sound integrated because it fits? Do we hear an equal exchange or a tiny space made for the aesthetic material of Other music? Do we hear a lack of timing and off-key notes, or do we hear Other musics played alongside different cultural contexts? And how much are we willing to reflect upon the answers to these questions as they become indicators of power relations and power imbalances that need to be addressed? What we do with Other musics, how we talk about them, teach them, listen to them, and hear them is therefore perhaps the less relevant question. In order to maintain a discrimination-critical approach to transcultural music mediation and projects, the trickier question we have to be prepared to ask is "Why do we do what we do with Other musics?". This can lead to the reflection and action as proposed by Menrath and Mörsch and as key to a discrimination-critical music mediation.

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## V. TOWARDS POSSIBLE FUTURES



# We Urgently Need a Social Turn

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Sabine Reiter

Constanze Wimmer initiated Austria's first university music mediation programme, *Musikvermittlung – Musik im Kontext* [Music Mediation – Music in Context], at the Anton Bruckner Private University in 2009:

At the time, university programmes and the *Netzwerk Junge Ohren* [Network Young Ears] had already existed in Germany for ten years. Around the same time, a sort of cultural mediation platform was established in Switzerland, and the Zurich University of the Arts already had a continuing education programme as well. We clearly had to ask ourselves how we should approach music mediation in Austria; we needed something of our own to give us a sense of identity. (mica n.d.)<sup>1</sup>

Three years later, in 2012, the two of us founded the *Plattform Musikvermittlung Österreich (PMÖ)* [Platform Music Mediation Austria] located at mica – music austria, Austria's music information centre. My primary goal at the time as director of mica was to support mediation activities around contemporary classical music, in order to follow up on the *Klangnetze* [Sonic Networks] project that had been discontinued in 2001. This groundbreaking project was launched in the 1990s, conducted by the Austrian Cultural Service and supported by Lothar Knessl and Christian Scheib, who were the music curators in the cultural ministry at the time. It was a unique and relevant music mediation project to bring contemporary music into schools, offering pupils new experiences in creating and listening to music. After its demise, nothing comparable had taken its place.

More than 50 people took part in the foundational meeting for the PMÖ on September 12, 2012. The idea of collaboratively developing guiding topics and a variety of offerings was a central point of departure; the German *Netzwerk Junge Ohren*, founded in 2007, was also present at the conference. Three working groups of music mediators considered the question of which issues the

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1 Translation by the author.

initiative should take up in the future, settling on education (including continuing education), communication, and public relations, as well as lobbying and advocacy. It was further decided that a biennial conference should take place in cooperation with Austrian music universities, with the conference themes decided upon democratically – the PMÖ was born.

Since that time, mica has operated as a sponsoring organisation, responsible for providing infrastructure in various forms, including a dedicated online channel for music mediation. This channel reports on current projects and job opportunities and also features music mediators in interviews. As of 2024, the PMÖ has a newsletter with over 1,500 subscribers; and an active Facebook page. Mica also manages the platform's administrative and organisational activities. An advisory board with experts from numerous fields of music mediation meets occasionally to plan conferences and continuing education offerings and to discuss current developments and possible activities, such as open letters.

The platform offers workshops, usually in the years between conferences, focusing on work-related subjects such as presentation formats, communication with audiences, aspects specific to music theatre and theatre pedagogy and legal questions. These workshops are often conducted in cooperation with other institutions, such as the Department of Music Education Research and Practice at the mdw – University for Music and Performing Arts Vienna, the association *auf:takt Kultur* [up:beat Culture] and OeAD, the Austrian Agency for Education and Internationalisation.

## Conferences and Key Issues

The conferences, a primary focus of the PMÖ's founding meeting, have taken place every two years since 2013 and have been a notable success. The combination of project presentations, performances, practice-oriented workshops, and – most of all – discourse and networking components have offered participants the opportunity to experience a variety of views on the conference themes.

The inaugural conference, titled *Kulturen.Vermitteln.Musik* [Cultures.Mediating.Music], took place in 2013 at the Anton Bruckner Private University in Linz, in cooperation with the Music Theatre Linz, the Bruckner Orchestra, Assitej Austria, and *Shäxpir – Theater Festival for Young Audiences*. It focused on the socio-politically urgent themes of migration and inter- and transculturality, issues affecting all areas of music mediation. Projects with strong sociocultural and inclusive components – building bridges between people with different cultural backgrounds and facilitating intercultural encounters – were presented and discussed.

The theme of the next conference, held in 2015 at the Mozarteum University in Salzburg, was also quickly agreed upon by the music mediation community: interdisciplinarity, the basic requirement for every mediation activity. *Musik in Szene – Szenen in Musik. Interdisziplinäre Aspekte der Musikvermittlung* [Music in Scene – Scenes in Music: Interdisciplinary Aspects of Music Mediation] was the title of the conference, which focused on projects working substantially with the methods of other artistic disciplines, such as dance or multimedia concert performances. Making-of workshops showcased the practical aspects of projects with experimental sound design, graphic notation, and combinations of music and visual art, such as soundpainting; a marketplace offered the chance for participants to learn about and discuss additional projects.

In 2017, the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz invited the platform to hold the conference there. This time, the title was *Neues Hören für Erwachsene. Publikum für Neue Musik gewinnen* [New Listening for Adults. Winning Audiences for Contemporary Music]. Presentations included themes of contemporary music and mediation formats for adult audiences, an amusement-park carousel playing contemporary compositions at the musikprotokoll festival, the mediation of contemporary music on the radio, and dramaturgical aspects of presenting contemporary music at festivals. Practice-oriented workshops shared a variety of mediation approaches to contemporary music.

In 2019, digital media took centre stage: under the title *Digital – Partizipativ – Sozial. Musikvermittlung 4.0* [Digital – Participative – Social. Music Mediation 4.0], and in collaboration with the Anton Bruckner Private University and Ars Electronica Center, the possibilities of digital media for music mediation were examined for the first time. Apps and tools for music-making, composition and mediation were presented; controversial questions were discussed in lectures on democratisation, digitalisation, and arts mediation. *Hörminute* [Listening Minute], an online music mediation project created by mica for elementary schools, was also introduced.

## Music Mediation at Universities

A further focus of the platform's work, defined at the founding meeting, has also born fruit: the quest to strengthen music mediation at the university level, improving awareness for the professional field in relevant curricula (instrumental and vocal studies and music education, for example), and promoting the understanding of music mediation as an educational principle. The first programme specifically dedicated to music mediation was launched in Germany at Detmold

University of Music in 1998. However, it was not until 2009, when Constanze Wimmer initiated the first programme in Austria. In subsequent years, similar programmes were established at other Austrian universities: the Music and Arts University of the City of Vienna now offers a *Master of Arts Education (MAE)*; the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz offers a master's degree programme in *Music and Theatre Mediation*, the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna is home to the master's programme in *Contemporary Arts Practice (CAP)*, and the Mozarteum University in Salzburg offers a programme in *Music Theatre Mediation*. In summary, tertiary education offerings for music mediation have improved considerably in recent years – which, of course, also contributes to a substantial professionalisation of the field. At the time of the foundation of the PMÖ in 2012, only a single music mediation programme existed in Austria, namely at the Bruckner Private University in Linz. In 2024, music mediation is represented at every music university in the country.

### **Foundation of the IG Musikvermittlung**

As strong as the sociopolitical engagement of music mediators is, their working conditions are far from being appropriate. This issue had not yet become clear at the PMÖ's foundation; the founding members' interest in lobbying and advocacy at the time was focused more on improving funding opportunities and public visibility for music mediation.

Even before the COVID-pandemic, the poor wages, often inferior status, and lack of respect that music mediators were confronted with in their organisations were becoming increasingly clear, as were the precarious working conditions of self-employed mediators. Two studies painted a dramatic picture: firstly, a study on the social situation of artists and arts and cultural mediators in Austria (Wetzel 2018), and secondly, a survey by Netzwerk Junge Ohren and Educult (2020).

As with digitisation, the pandemic also stimulated developments in this area: the Austrian State Secretary for Arts and Culture made fair pay in publicly funded arts and cultural organisations a focus of his department's work. In 2021, an initiative with the cultural departments of the individual states was set in motion and a fair pay strategy was agreed upon with regional authorities. The event introducing the arts and cultural strategy of the Federal Ministry for the Arts, Culture, Public Service and Sport (BMKÖS) effectively secured a central position for arts and cultural mediation in future cultural policy, granting it substantial space and noting the founding of an umbrella organisation for cultural mediators in all branches of the arts. It became clear that music mediators

needed a formal interest group of their own that goes beyond the rather informal network of PMÖ. The fundamentally democratic attitude of the mediators shaped the foundation of this organisation as well: in 2022, an initial poll was conducted to find out whether mediators were generally interested in founding an interest group and what they considered to be the most urgent problems of their profession. The results were unambiguous: 86% of the respondents were prepared to join and pay membership fees, over 75% held political representation to be a necessity, and nearly 60% were prepared to be active in the organisation. The poll identified the key issues facing the profession as the following: funding opportunities, fair payment, social security (pension and unemployment insurance), social insurance subsidies via the Artists' Social Insurance Fund (KSVF), and the formulation of fee recommendations for the field. The time was clearly at hand. In the course of several networking meetings, the structure and focus of the IG *Musikvermittlung* [Interest Group for Music Mediators] were defined, and the organisation was officially founded on September 11<sup>th</sup> in 2023.

## Looking Ahead: The Sociopolitical Potential of Arts and Cultural Mediation

Among other results, the considerable professionalisation and institutionalisation, including the establishment of university curricula for music mediation over the last decade, has led to the universities taking over the organisation of future conferences, rather than the PMÖ. The effects of the pandemic, the growing polarisation of society, and the rise of diversity and sustainability movements have triggered a pronounced shift in the focus of recent conferences toward the sociocultural potential of music mediation.

The 2021 conference *Rethinking Classical Music Practice: Audience and Community Engagement in Classical Concert Life* took place entirely online in the midst of the pandemic. It was organised by the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna and curated by Axel Petri-Preis and Constanze Wimmer. The presentations and workshops focused on the question of how the anchoring of classical music in society could be rethought for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A central element of community engagement is music-making together by professional and non-professional musicians, inclusively and without prerequisites. It is decidedly political, intended to encourage processes of social change, both individual and societal. Participation – not just taking part but also *giving* part – is a central element, with substantial sociopolitical potential. The following conference, in 2023, intensified the

focus on this subject: *Turning Social: On the Social-Transformative Potential of Music Mediation*, organised by Axel Petri-Preis and Sarah Chaker, again at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, was explicitly devoted to power-critical, anti-discriminatory, diversity-reflexive, and decolonial thinking. The idea of cultural democracy, advocated by François Matarasso in his keynote, defines the vision of comprehensive cultural participation for everyone: “Cultural democracy is the right and capability to participate fully, freely and equally in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and create, publish and distribute artistic work.” (Matarasso 2019, 77)

From its inception, the PMÖ has viewed music mediation in a larger context. Marketing aspects – capturing and developing new audience segments for the future – have been explored at conferences, of course, but space has always been given to the societal potential of music mediation, its sociopolitical and democracy-strengthening power, and the discourse on quality: good practice in music mediation, learning from one another, networking, and the exchange of ideas. The *Turning Social* conference dramatically highlighted the sociopolitical potential of music mediation. Artistic activities that incorporate ideas drawn from community music and co-creation are a sociopolitical statement *per se* – the germ of a small revolution, the power of which is released simply by taking part in such projects. In order for cultural democracy to flourish, the discourse has to be carried beyond the bounds of academia and the music mediation community, to cultural institutions and cultural policy.

In addition to the traditional notion of artistic excellence, which must naturally retain its place, would it not be wonderful if all the institutions of music life – opera houses, concert venues, and freelance event organisers – featured community projects as a regular, prominent part of their programming? Such a transformation must proceed from cultural institutions if it is to obtain structural significance and have a broad social effect. Beyond the artistic excellence that we value and honour, we desperately need another kind of inspiration – exactly this social turn, embedded in a larger societal context and accomplished together with partners from diversity and sustainability movements worldwide.

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## Why Don't We Discuss it?

# How to Get the Evaluation of Music Mediation Activities out of its Procrustean Bed?

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Irina Kirchberg

In Quebec and France, the implementation of music mediation activities depends on subsidies offered by arts councils, ministries of culture or social innovation, or donations from patrons. Evaluative practices have been appearing in the cultural sector since the 80s and 90s, with the development of project management practices accompanying the transformation of cultural policies now setting quantified targets. They seek to measure the 'performance' of cultural initiatives in order for them to be accountable to funding bodies (sponsors, patrons, etc.). The theme of evaluation is therefore systematically mentioned on the websites of organisations that promote local mediation activities. For example, *Culture pour tous* [Culture for all]<sup>1</sup>, a well-known Quebec organisation, states:

Evaluation is a fascinating subject. In cultural mediation, as in any other field, evaluation helps to deepen activities, strengthen partnerships and even contribute to the achievement of objectives. (Pronovost and Harrison-Boisvert 2015, 1)<sup>2</sup>

In this context, is it possible to say that music mediation – a specific musical field of cultural mediation<sup>3</sup> – finds itself, as Jean-Marie Lafortune puts it,

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1 See <https://www.culturepourtous.ca/en/> (accessed April 10, 2025).

2 All translations by the author.

3 In the French-speaking world, authors use different terms to refer to music mediation activities: “médiation de la musique”, “médiation musicale” or “médiation culturelle de la musique”. I had the opportunity to clarify the nuances between these terms in the introduction to an issue of a magazine published in 2020 (Kirchberg 2020). Like Sylvie Pébrier, I note that these activities have the common aim of “[situating] music not so much as the finality of mediation, but rather as the means of an encounter that seeks to make culture together”

“under the yoke of neoliberalism” (Lafortune 2019)? While the mediation process, in its “idealised” version, aims at “a project of political transformation” and lays “the foundations of an experimental democracy” (Faget 2022, 433), this mediation process is then reduced to a pragmatism, a technicality, an efficiency that “manages” disputes in a short-term perspective when mediation is “tossed about by the gusts of the market” (ibid.). In short, is it possible to meet the evaluation demands of funding organisations (often governed by the laws of the market) without betraying the political and social project of music mediation? This question is particularly relevant in Quebec, since one of its specificities (especially in Montreal) is that the production of knowledge about cultural mediation is based on a partnership research mechanism.<sup>4</sup> As co-director of the *Étude Partenariale sur la Médiation de la Musique* [Music Mediation Partnership Study] (EPMM)<sup>5</sup> founded in 2018 and executive director of the *Center for Research in Art and Social Engagement Artenso*<sup>6</sup>, I can only emphasise how stimulating and fruitful this research cohabitation is, “enabling a plurality of individuals to contribute to the elaboration of collective decisions” (Kirchberg and Poirier 2024). However, it sometime leads me to question the position I adopt as a researcher in these collaborations. As Michel Sebillotte puts it, by committing to partners who have a problem, which may be a problem of evaluation, the researcher “participates in the transformation of reality by accepting that his research directly helps them to act in this reality” (Sebillotte 2007). This makes me wonder: To what extent do we want to conform to our partners’ expectations when it comes to evaluating music mediation activities? Answering this question means looking at the way in which the partners conceive the practice of evaluation and the concrete consequences of these representations (i.e. the performative effects of these representations).

Thus, is it possible to carry out an evaluation whose methods and conclusions are not amputated by the contingencies of the funders or the organism? Some researchers (Deslyper, Eloy, and Picaud 2022, 3) question the

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(Pévrier 2020), and are therefore placed in the wake of the objectives of cultural mediation, but use music as a lever.

4 For example, the *Observatoire des médiations culturelles*, the *Centre de recherches en art et engagement social* and the *Étude partenariale en médiation de la musique* benefit from federal and provincial funding to support partnership research which “requires researchers and practitioners to work together, combining their knowledge, methods and resources to carry out research projects that are as relevant to the university community as they are to the practice environment”. (Sutton 2007, 6)

5 See <https://epmm.p2m.oicrm.org/> (accessed April 10, 2025).

6 See <https://artenso.ca/> (accessed April 10, 2025).

autonomy granted to researchers in this context, and the opportunity they are given to make explicit the preconceptions or biases of stakeholders – in short, to demonstrate critical distance from the partnership evaluation project. I propose instead a reflection that will provide a systematic presentation of certain types of reductionism at work in the common discourse on the evaluation of music mediation activities and which could affect the accomplishment of investigations in the field. To this end, I will analyse a few transcriptions of comments made by musicians, heads of music organisations, and representatives of professional artists' rights organisations between 2019 and 2024 at training sessions, conferences, and consultations.<sup>7</sup> By showing the limitations of this Procrustean bed,<sup>8</sup> I will analyse drifts to which these reductionisms lead and, by contrast, present some key values of cultural mediation as it is conceptualised in Quebec. Being affected by ideological biases, the evaluation of music mediation activities would then be warped by a misunderstanding of the values conveyed by these practices. Music mediation would then become the Trojan horse of other interests. That is why I propose, in conclusion, to reflect on the solutions available for transforming evaluation from the Trojan horse it often becomes when impoverished, into a battle horse for the ideals of music mediation.

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- 7 2023 Orford Musique, Formation professionnelle à la médiation de la musique, MFort, Orford Musique, Conseil de la culture de l'Estrie, CQM, Guilde des musiciens. Subventionné par emploi Québec, January 5–8, 2023; 2021 EPMM workshop #3 *Évaluer la médiation de la musique*, December 3, 2021: <https://epmm.p2m.oicrm.org/projet/atelier-epmm-3-evaluer-la-mediation-de-la-musique/> (Accessed April 10, 2025); 2019, Conseil Québécois de la musique, “Qu'est-ce que la médiation de la musique” and “Etats des lieux des pratiques de la médiation de la musique à l'ère du numérique”, Grands rendez-vous de la musique 2019, Montréal, June 5–6; 2018, Conseil Québécois de la Musique, “La médiation de la musique telle que vue par les diffuseurs et producteurs du Québec”, Montréal, September 20; 2018, Bourse rideo, “Pratiques exemplaires en développement de public”, Québec, February 12, 2018.
- 8 I am referring here to the Greek myth of Procrustes, a brigand who, under the pretext of welcoming strangers for the night, would lay them on a bed and cut off their limbs, or stretch them out, so that they corresponded exactly to the measurements of the bed. The expression “Procrustean bed” is therefore used to describe a narrow, awkward, tyrannical rule that is applied automatically.

## Additional Load and Assessment Standardisation

In the discussions I took part in, the task of evaluation is sometimes conceived as an exogenous to mediation activities. For the organisations, it is a matter of carrying out an evaluation task in addition to the many artistic, promotional, etc. tasks at the heart of their mission. This evaluation task is then considered as a satellite to the music mediation project, or as an overload, as can be seen in the following two quotes:

There's a lack of resources, a lack of time. So very often, the extra reflection and participation required by evaluation seems like an extra burden. (General Director of a contemporary music organisation)

Would it be conceivable for those in the field, organisations with little money, to be equipped with standard evaluation tools? Given the constraints you all know about (a poorly resourced environment), that would be the solution. (Musician's representative)

Given the many constraints already weighing down organisations, some of them already feel that they are showing goodwill in the face of what they see as a barrier to mediation. Since they agree to this evaluation, it should be possible to carry it out at a lower cost. This way of thinking opens the door to a form of assessment standardisation. This explains why, in the grey literature of cultural associations, generic evaluation guides are flourishing, proposing “generic inputs” (Jackson 2004), “uniform analysis grids” (Pronovost and Harrison-Boisvert 2015), and “pre-formatted reports” (Abbo et al. 2018). Researchers who always tend to grasp the specificity of their object may doubt the transferability of these standardised summative evaluation guides (i.e. those that ratify the end of the process of mediation) to capture theatrical, museum, or musical activities, regardless of the type of participation envisaged (Casemajor, Lamoureux, and Racine 2016). Such assessments run the risk of cutting out the singularities at work in mediation activities whose contexts and audiences are, by their very nature, disparate. This raises a series of questions: How can we fit the diversity of what happens during a mediation activity into the straitjacket of a standard guide demanded by a representative of a musicians' guild, which places more value on results than on processes (which generate their own effects)? How can we propose innovative mediation activities that hybridise formats, contexts, and populations, if an analytical grid already locks or imprisons the horizon of possible results? We run the risk of witnessing the imposition of mediation activities whose objectives prioritise ease of evaluation over their alignment with

genuine needs.<sup>9</sup> It is important to keep in mind that music organisations and artists must manage to operate with reduced human and financial resources, but we must also understand that this leads to reductionisms such as this one, or the one that is about to follow.

### ***Apologetic discourse and objectification of participants***

Given their limited resources, organisations must seize every opportunity to grow and perpetuate their funding. In this context, evaluation is often reduced to an apologetic discourse. By this I mean that it consists of a simple discourse defending the value and benefits of mediation activities in the eyes of funders or in the public sphere: “Mediation is so closely linked to funding issues that everyone has a vested interest in saying it went well.” (A funded artist). This form of assessment is limited to verifying the effectiveness of the actions taken (Deslyper, Eloy, and Picaud 2022) and becomes a control tool. The evaluators then find themselves caught up in a logic of legitimisation that does not sit well with an academic approach. This problem is not new to sociologists interested in social work (Ion 2020). This is all the more problematic since William Beauchemin and Noemie Maignien point out that the interest of cultural mediation is that it is “worked from within by critical dynamics and ideals of social transformation” (Maignien and Beauchemin 2019). By becoming an apologetic or enchanted discourse, these evaluations present mediation as a miracle cure for the ills of society, rather than truly being able to report on the challenges and issues faced by the populations with whom mediators work. This leads directly to another common kind of reductionism, which is very clearly shown in the first excerpt from a report on the subject of art and social inclusion written by a consortium of experts: “Of course, it [the evaluation of cultural activities] also contributes to verifying the attainment of the objectives that have been set and their effectiveness in terms of the benefits expected from them” (Boisvert and Bracco 2023, 114). Here, evaluation is reduced to a tautological discourse that simply says the same thing over and over again, to reinforce itself. In short, in this situation, the evaluation only considers the effects of the mediation activities for which it was subsidised. The first risk of this is that the decision-makers alone decide which effects are important for the participants. The second risk is that some organisations focus their actions solely on the objectives already identified, to the detriment of their intrinsic mission.

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9 For example, it will be easier to assess the evolution of musical skills than to describe the effects in terms of social cohesion or intercultural dialogue.

### ***Productivist Bias and Measuring versus Evaluation***

This confusion between measuring and evaluating, between performance and effects, has led to a preference for quantitative rather than qualitative approaches to evaluating music mediation activities. The vocabulary used in the following excerpt is clear: Evaluating has become equated with measuring and verifying:

I represent the community and I have to do evaluations for my training courses, and we're always going to try to bring that back on solid ground [...] I understand that there are very broad and political reflections that have to be made, but the granting agencies have requirements for their accountability [...] Are you able to measure what the granting agency is giving money for? Is it measurable? (Musician's representative)

As Sylvie Pébrier points out, in this context, the subjective evaluation method, aimed at assessing or estimating a project, gives way to an evaluation method focused on determining or establishing the value of the action (Pébrier 2020). Between these two methods, the gap between a judgement to be made and a measure to be implemented comes to the fore. This is what I call a productivist bias. Evaluation becomes an administrative exercise, which at the end of the project or the year consists of submitting a balance sheet to reassure the grant-makers that the objectives set beforehand have been achieved. The lexical field used by the organisations' representatives is highly instructive in this respect: Effects must be produced, and "impacts" (Quintas 2014) measured. As François Matarasso explains, this opens the door to several problems (Matarasso 2014; 2016; 2023). The term "impact" seems inappropriate in cultural mediation, since it is not necessarily the mediators' vocation to produce a continuous effect on or change for the participants. If, as in physics, impact is the way something hits an object, can this notion be applied to what really happens in a mediation activity? During these activities, are participants passively subjected to the impact – or, to stretch the metaphor, the 'shock' – of the 'culture' that is shared with them in an activity? While the impact metaphor is flattering for politicians, it assumes a passive posture on the part of audiences and participants of mediation activities, thus denying their agency. The neoliberal turn to evaluation reflected in the vocabulary identified above is particularly problematic for cultural mediation, since its "main objective is to empower the individuals and communities who need it most, through a transfer of skills and responsibilities, [whereas] the dominant economic logic instead accentuates their dependence." (Lafortune 2019, 222).

## Conclusion: Making evaluation a subject for debate

Participatory research can help us – researchers, practitioners, and funders – “work together on the meaning” (Pébrier 2020) of our actions, and highlight the ethical objectives of music mediation activities in order to transform our way of thinking about and doing evaluations. One of the mediators on our research team puts it this way:

I think we also need to take inspiration from the scientific method when we're doing an evaluation where we're posing a hypothesis and we don't really have the answer to our question at the outset [...] We can end up with something that wasn't planned and which is completely satisfactory, and we need to avoid settling for a grid that would be restrictive and that would cause us to miss out on these positive unforeseen events. (Head of Mediation Department)

Evaluation in music mediation should therefore be the pretext for “an ongoing exercise in reflection, integrated into the project” (Pébrier 2020, 12) On this subject, Jimmy Gamble points out: “The techniques that make for excellent evaluation in more static situations prove useless, or even harmful, in situations marked by uncertainty, when the rules of the game are constantly changing.” (Gamble 2008, 13) That is why it can be stated that the evaluation of music mediation activities should no longer be summative (i.e. judging the results), but evolutionary (i.e. adapting at the end of each activity to the issues encountered by the mediators and participants). Among other things, Pébrier (2020) also recommends that evaluation in music mediation should be participatory, to reflect on the ethics of evaluation, which is to encourage critical and logical thinking, and to recognise the abilities of each individual. Indeed, mediation's mandate is “to be part of a horizontal relationship between the stakeholders that he or she brings together around an artistic work, in order to encourage each person's ability to formulate his or her own judgment” (Gomez 2020). Evaluation should therefore become dialogical. It should open up a dialogue with participants on their expectations of the actions they take part in, and enable them to express their feelings throughout the activities. The conditions for voluntary, active, and inclusive participation (Zask 2011) should therefore be established for all those involved in an activity: artists, mediators, participants, and others. In this way, evaluation reinforces the identity of music mediation and reaffirms its political ambitions.

Finally, the replacement of “cultural” by “music” in the expression “music mediation” is intended to indicate that the mediation process takes on the character of music. With this in mind, shouldn't the evaluation processes for these

specific activities make it possible to grasp the specific effects of music in the context of these activities more effectively? Here, the full potential of art-based evaluation<sup>10</sup> – a technique that uses metaphor as a means of exploring concepts and ideas that might otherwise be difficult or uncomfortable to communicate – remains to be explored.

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10 See [http://www.ascevaluation.ca/Documents/Toolkits/GOAL\\_ArtBasedEvaluation.pdf](http://www.ascevaluation.ca/Documents/Toolkits/GOAL_ArtBasedEvaluation.pdf) (accessed April 10, 2025).

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# Music Mediators as Builders of a Public Culture Based upon Love?

## Philosophical Concepts of Love as a Compass for Music Mediation Practice

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*Daniela Bartels*

### Introduction

In music mediation projects that focus on the social potential of music-making, music is often used as an aid to create interpersonal encounters and to connect people – especially people whose paths would not cross for more than a few seconds in everyday life. As a philosophical researcher and a practising music mediator, I try to better understand what it takes to connect participants coming from socially and culturally heterogeneous backgrounds through music projects, and for them to interact and communicate on equal terms.

Both my practical experience and my study of philosophical literature have led to the hypothesis that there are specific emotional and social capacities that music mediators need to develop and cultivate if they want to successfully realise music mediation and music education projects in which they communicate on equal terms with participants (Bartels 2021). One of the books that inspired me to think about these capacities, was Martha C. Nussbaum's *Political Emotions. Why Love Matters for Justice*. In this book, she identifies the need “for a public culture based upon love and extended sympathy, which can support the goals of a just society” (Nussbaum 2013, 58). She states:

In the type of liberal society that aspires to justice and equal opportunity for all, there are two tasks for the political cultivation of emotion. One is to engender and sustain strong commitment to worthy projects that require effort and sacrifice [...]. The other related task for the cultivation of public emotion is to keep at bay forces that lurk in all societies and, ultimately, in all of us: tendencies to protect the fragile self by denigrating and subordinating others. (ibid., 3)

The question how philosophical concepts of love, such as the one Martha Nussbaum has developed, can guide human actions in music groups and projects – especially the actions of musical leaders – has been touched upon in several texts within the philosophy of music education and community music discourses (Silverman 2012; Lapidaki 2020; Jorgensen 2021; Lines and Bartels 2023). Marissa Silverman has referred to bell hooks' thinking, and it is my intention to also pick up this thread. In this chapter, I portray and connect hooks' and Nussbaum's philosophical concepts, which are based on analyses of society. Their definitions of an ethic of love have the potential to serve as a compass for music mediators who are willing to critically reflect on their actions, and on the social and emotional capacities they need to cultivate if they want to become builders of a public culture based upon love.

What do reflections on one's actions and their effects on others in music projects look like? In order to find answers to this question, I conducted two group reflections with participants in a music mediation project called *Marie, Musik und das Meer* [Mary, Music and the Sea] that took place after the successful termination of the project. I initiated, planned, and realised this inter-generational project with four music education students and a shanty choir between April 2022 and February 2023. In March 2023, it became a small research project. My intention was to find out whether the social and emotional elements that are defined in bell hooks' and Martha Nussbaum's theoretical concepts of love – elements that have the potential to transform communities – could be discovered in this music mediation project.

Before describing the music mediation project and its main goals, I will present the philosophical concepts that serve as a foundation for the analysis of this project. I will then portray and analyse selected participants' perspectives on the music project, because these perspectives can actually reveal how musicians realise the social and emotional elements that are needed if we decide to live by an ethic of love that bell hooks and Martha Nussbaum have described in theory. Finally, I suggest some possible consequences for the education of future music mediators.

## **The Foundation for a Public Culture Based Upon Love: Philosophical Concepts**

In my experience, discussing love in educational contexts can unsettle people. One reason for this might be that the first meanings of love that come to mind are physical attraction, or sensuality. It is a sad fact that there have been schools such as the Odenwaldschule in Germany where teachers abused their power

by forcing sexual acts on their students (Haas-Rietschel 2019). That is why it is important to emphasise: When people force others into doing things they do not want to, the exact opposite of the philosophical concept of love is realised.

hooks (2001) and Nussbaum (2013) have developed philosophical concepts in which they specify ethical ideals that humans can strive for if they want to create just communities on a local level. These ideals can be a compass for our actions in all the relationships we enter into, not just the romantic ones. hooks and Nussbaum have presented substantial answers to questions such as:

- What are central elements of a public culture based upon love?
- What does such a culture demand from the humans who create and shape it?

In this section, I intend to break down the big word: I will explain philosophical notions of love and the social and emotional elements that are linked to these notions. The underlying assumption here is that both musical leaders and musical participants can realise and develop these elements when interacting with each other in music mediation projects. If this happens, they build just communities on a local level.

What do philosophical notions and, more importantly, definitions of love look like? At the beginning of *all about love*, hooks states that it is important to believe in “the idea of love as a transformative force” (hooks 2001, xix). This transformative potential of love can only be developed by people who regard love as a human capability and develop it in themselves. Here, hooks takes up Erich Fromm’s thinking. In the 1950s, the social philosopher and psychoanalyst stated that love is an activity and as such the “realisation of a human capability”<sup>1</sup> (Fromm 1956, 33). hooks suggests that one should “begin by always thinking of love as an action rather than a feeling” which includes assuming personal “accountability and responsibility” (hooks 2001, 13). According to her analysis, all the great movements for social justice have strongly emphasised a love ethic: “A love ethic presupposes that everyone has the right to be free, to live fully and well.” (ibid., 87) This love ethic includes “various ingredients – care, affection, recognition, respect, commitment, and trust, as well as honest and open communication” (ibid., 5), and it also includes “the courage to take risks” (ibid., 11). People living by this ethic “make choices based on a belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions” (ibid., 88). These ethical choices “affirm our interconnectedness with others” (ibid., 94). In hooks’ concept, this includes “the will to nurture our own

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1 This is my translation, since I worked with a German version of *The Art of Loving*.

and another's spiritual<sup>2</sup> growth" (ibid., 6). When it comes to human relationships and interactions, many of the social and emotional elements mentioned so far can be observed and analysed. People who do this are building and cultivating awareness:

Being aware enables us to critically examine our actions to see what is needed so that we can give care, be responsible, show respect, and indicate a willingness to learn. Understanding knowledge as an essential element of love is vital because we are daily bombarded with messages that tell us love is about mystery, about that which cannot be known. (ibid., 94)

According to hooks, this awareness, the knowledge and the art of loving can best be developed in communities, not in nuclear families. She even considers the possible co-dependency in nuclear families as a "breeding ground for abuses of power" (ibid., 130). With regard to possible abuses of power, or imbalances of power between people, she states very clearly: "Cultures of domination rely on the cultivation of fear as a way to ensure obedience" (ibid., 93) and "[d]omination cannot exist in any social situation where a love ethic prevails." (ibid., 98) That is why personal reflections on possible inner fears that can influence actions are very important if people want to build a just community based on an ethic of love.<sup>3</sup>

Nussbaum also argues that an ethic of love is needed if we want to build just communities. She challenges the belief that "only fascist or aggressive societies are intensely emotional and that only such societies need to focus on the cultivation of emotions" (Nussbaum 2013, 2) and underpins this point by describing the actions of influential political leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. They "understood the need to touch citizens' hearts and to inspire, deliberately, strong emotions at the common work before them"

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2 Here, she refers to the definition of psychiatrist M. Scott Peck which was published in the late 1970s. She mentions that many people "have difficulty with Peck's definition of love, because he uses the word 'spiritual'" (hooks 2001, 13). hooks makes it clear that this definition does not mean that an individual has to be a believer in a religious sense.

3 In her book *Radically emotional*, the German neuroscientist Maren Urner also argues that personal reflections that aim at understanding our own subjective values and the emotions connected to them (Urner 2024, 37) are highly significant if we want to build just societies that can actually solve today's challenges such as the climate crisis, debates about migration, or identity politics (ibid., 30). The argument of this book is based on a critique of the widespread belief that 'reason' and 'emotions' can be separated from each other. Urner asks us to consciously connect reason and emotions and to act on this basis. This is her suggestion as to how we can live together constructively.

(*ibid.*). When it comes to power relations between people, her line of argument is very similar to hooks', because Nussbaum also states that a just society can be realised through the efforts of individuals who seek "not a dominating, hierarchical type of relationship with others, but, instead, a mutually respectful love that invites and delights in mutually responsive conversation, by turns playful and aspiring." (*ibid.*, 112) Nussbaum's philosophical concept or vision of love requires of all human beings

a delighted recognition of the other as valuable, special, and fascinating; a drive to understand the point of view of the other; fun and reciprocal play; exchange, [...] and, finally and centrally, trust and suspension of anxious demands for control. (*ibid.*, 176)

She emphasises that "only a vigorous imaginative engagement with another person's particularity will undo or prevent the ravages of group-based stigma and reveal citizens to one another as whole and unique people" (*ibid.*, 165). This thought is significant for this chapter, because music mediation projects that focus on human interaction and musical or artistic co-creation on equal terms offer manifold opportunities to engage with other persons' particularities. According to music education philosopher Eleni Lapidaki, local music projects are characterised by an "oral being-together of proximity" (Lapidaki 2020, 262). When it comes to human proximity, the emotional and social elements of intimacy and trust are central. She considers "trust in the Other [...] as central to developing interconnections across difference" (*ibid.*, 267), and suggests that in moments of intimacy "something other than mere one-dimensional information is being transmitted" (*ibid.*, 266). Lapidaki states that both trust and intimacy require "the mutual willingness to bend together toward or immerse oneself in each other's differences" and the capacity to "acknowledge and accept [...] recognition of irreducibility" (*ibid.*, 267). She argues that these elements can stimulate openness to unpredictable or unfolding circumstances. Being open in this way is of central importance if music mediators want to initiate and keep up processes of co-creation in which people coming from different social and cultural backgrounds interact on equal terms.

hooks' line of argument has already been taken up within the community music discourse: Silverman agrees that love is "one crucial dimension of social justice" and follows hooks' definition of an "ethic of love" (Silverman 2012, 157f.). She criticises that "CM [Community Music, DB] scholars often overlook and/or avoid explicit discussions of the nature and value of love." (*ibid.*, 160) This situation has changed in the last decade. Today, David A. Camlin also states that "love is a universal human value" (Camlin 2023, 15) which is realised through Community Music activities. However, when he speaks of love, he means a "sense

of ‘feeling felt’” (ibid.) which occurs when musicians attune to others. In his line of argument, Camlin refers to neurobiological research. He separates love as a value from the values of reciprocity and justice (ibid.), whereas hooks, Nussbaum, and Silverman argue that just communities can be built *through* love. They state that “love-as-action” (Silverman 2012, 162) can lead to justice, and in Silverman’s chapter, love-as-action means much more than attuning to others in the process of music-making. She portrays a music therapy session she attended in New York City’s Bellevue Hospital, which offers homeless men the opportunity to make music together, and describes this session as a “communal public space, which encourages collective judgements and creates open networks of self-reflection and critical communication” (ibid.). Silverman argues that creating this form of communal public space is an element of love-in-action (ibid.). According to her understanding, phases of conflict that are “both constructive and negotiated” are an integral part of “love-as-action” (ibid.). For this chapter, it is significant that the ethic of love Silverman depicts includes self-reflection and critical communication, because these two elements can be realised in music projects, *if* music mediators cultivate the emotional and social capacities of reflecting on the actions of participants, as well as their own. For Silverman, this ethic of love can create a life that means something beyond oneself and is based on the will to contribute to a whole (ibid., 164). In her conclusion, she suspects that community music facilitators “tend to embrace this ethic” (ibid.), implicitly or explicitly. Interestingly, in her paper on contemporary intimacy and trust in higher music education, Lapidaki also mentions the capacity to create a life that means something beyond oneself. She quotes the late Irish poet Seamus Heaney: “You have to grow into an awareness of the others and attempt to find a way of imagining a whole thing” (Lapidaki 2020, 261).

At this point, it should have become clear that hooks’, Nussbaum’s, Silverman’s, and Lapidaki’s philosophical concepts have a lot in common. The next section offers an overview of the emotional and social elements of love which these four thinkers have defined.

## In a Nutshell: Emotional and Social Elements of Love

Authors / Concepts	Social, Emotional, and Reflective Capacities
hooks (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assuming accountability and responsibility</li> <li>• making choices based on a belief that honesty, openness, and personal integrity need to be expressed in public and private decisions</li> <li>• affirming our interconnectedness with others</li> <li>• nurturing our own and another's spiritual growth</li> <li>• developing trust in oneself and others, commitment, care, respect, knowledge, and responsibility for common projects</li> <li>• developing the courage to take risks</li> <li>• cultivating an awareness for the emotional and social elements named above and critically examining human actions on this basis, i.e. cultivating an awareness for the desire to dominate and exercise power over others</li> </ul>
Nussbaum (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• touching other people's hearts and inspiring emotions that support the common work before them</li> <li>• not seeking a dominating relationship with others</li> <li>• realising a form of respect by having mutually responsive conversations</li> <li>• being both playful and aspiring in contact with others</li> <li>• cultivating the drive to understand the point of view of the other</li> <li>• cultivating trust instead of suspending anxious demands for control</li> <li>• engaging with another person's particularity</li> <li>• regarding one another as whole and unique people</li> </ul>
Silverman (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating communal public spaces in which collective judgements are encouraged</li> <li>• creating open networks of self-reflection and critical communication</li> </ul>

Authors / Concepts	Social, Emotional, and Reflective Capacities
Lapidaki (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating intimacy by avoiding mere one-dimensional information</li> <li>• creating intimacy by immersing oneself in each other's differences</li> <li>• developing interconnections across difference</li> <li>• stimulating openness to unpredictable or unfolding circumstances</li> </ul>

**Table 1:** Overview of social, emotional, and reflective capacities needed to realise 'love-as-action'. Source: Own illustration.

## The Goals and Course of Action in the Project *Marie, Musik und das Meer* – The Initiator's Perspective

In this section, I will briefly describe the music mediation project that brought university students of music education together with a local shanty choir from Luebeck. Since I was the project initiator, managed many processes and interacted a lot with both the students and the shanty choir members during the whole project, I want to make my own perspective transparent at this point.

The project was situated within the lecture series *MiniMASTER* which is a cooperation of different local universities and public institutions in Luebeck (Germany). At the University of Music Luebeck, the focus of the project is on offering children aged 8 to 12 aesthetic experiences and musical interactions. Apart from this audience (which was set from the beginning), I decided to create a connection between two more generations in the project: a little group of students in their 20s and 30s who were studying in the Master of Education programme, and the elderly members of the shanty choir *Möwenschiet* [Seagulls' Shit] who are in their 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. We had about four months to prepare our music theatre piece for the children. As project initiator and a teacher working in music teacher education, my idea was that the university students and some of the older men enter into a group process in which they co-create an interactive concert for the children, based on the shanties from the choir's repertoire.

As initiator, I had certain goals in mind that are often at the core of music mediation projects: I wanted to "initiate inter-actions between people from

socially and culturally heterogenous population groups, stimulate communication, [and] initiate communal encounters". (Chaker and Petri-Preis 2022, n.p.) The main goal was that a group of students leave their (assumed) familiar cultural environment by cooperating with the elderly singers and musicians of a local shanty choir. I told these two groups that their task would be to develop an interactive concert for children, based on a storyline that goes well with the repertoire of the shanty choir. This idea was inspired by Christopher Small's concept of "musicking" (Small 1998). My hope was that through the cooperation with the shanty choir, the students would affirm Small's point that "no way of musicking is intrinsically better than any other; all are to be judged, if they are to be judged at all, on their success in articulating (affirming, exploring, celebrating) the concepts of the relationships of those who are taking part" (ibid, 213). The idea was that the students, the shanty choir members and the children would celebrate the relational aspect of their music-making, both during the rehearsal process and the performance.

It almost goes without saying that Christopher Small's concept of musicking blends in very well with the emotional and social elements of love I portrayed above. To give an example, his statement that "all musicking is serious musicking" (ibid., 212) implies that Small regarded all musicians as "whole and unique people" (Nussbaum 2013, 165). And by saying that all musicking is serious musicking – "[from] performers and audience at a symphony concert to drunken ol' pals singing bawdy or sentimental songs in rustic harmony" (Small 1998, 212) – he clearly rejected a certain "dominating, hierarchical type of relationship with others" (Nussbaum 2013, 112) that he perceived in the musical world of his time. Instead, his concept of musicking "affirm[s] our interconnectedness with others" (hooks 2001, 94). One of my underlying assumptions about the music education students was that they are highly trained musicians within the Western classical tradition, trained to be musical craftsmen striving for technical perfection. This focus can lead to forgetting the relational aspect of music-making, which is why the design of the project asked them to enter into an immediate interaction with our project partners: the choir leader and the musicians and singers of the local shanty choir, who value the tradition of sea shanties.

There were weekly seminar sessions at the University of Music Luebeck. Apart from that, the students and I visited the shanty choir in their rehearsal space several times. One of their singers started joining our seminar sessions at the University of Music at some point, because he had decided to take part as an actor, playing the role of Johnny (an experienced seaman). At the beginning of the semester, the students visited the shanty choir in their rehearsal space in order to get to know each other and in order to get an idea of their

repertoire. As a next step, I suggested that the students pick sea shanties and other popular songs from the local choir's repertoire that they thought would be fitting and appropriate for an audience of 8-to-12-year-old children and that could motivate them to sing along. After the first encounter with the singers, the band, and their leader, the students came back to the seminar with a thick ring-binder including all songs that could become the basis of our interactive concert. It was mainly the students' creative task to develop a storyline about Marie, a teenage girl who hides in a ship and is found eventually, but after a while two members of the shanty choir started contributing their ideas as well and became co-creators.

### **The Following Research on the Project – The Researcher's Perspective**

As mentioned above, in the beginning of the project I took the role of project initiator and facilitator. The decision to contribute a chapter to this book meant that I became a researcher afterwards. In that role, I organised two group reflections with homogenous groups: the group of four music education students on the one hand, and a group of three shanty choir members and their musical leader on the other hand. I invited those shanty choir members to the discussion who were highly involved in the planning and realisation of the project. I informed both the students and the shanty choir members that the aim was a group reflection in which all participants express their individual points of view on the project and the effects it had on them personally. My hope was that the participants would reflect on personal and group processes that came into being in our music mediation project.

By explaining the goals of the project above, I have already made my own position transparent. In the first group reflection with the students, I decided to do the same: I made my own preconceptions and the goals I strived for in this project transparent once again. This was important to me as their teacher, since it had been my idea to cooperate with a local shanty choir and to contact the choir a long time before the semester started. Hence, this decision had not been taken democratically and there was one student who disapproved of it. That is why I had an open conversation about the project with the students – about the values they see, and the values I see. The group reflection with the members of the shanty choir took place a couple of months later. On that day, I had planned to be a moderator and listener who does not share her own views during the discussion. However, the shanty choir members caused me to leave this role several times. They wanted to know what I think about certain aspects

of the project. I replied to their questions briefly, because not answering them would have meant me preventing a mutually responsive conversation, which is one central element of a public culture based upon love.

In both discussions, I decided to control the topic of the group reflections (Flick 2017, 254) by giving the following discussion incentive (ibid., 255) at the beginning:

- 1) What were beautiful moments of the project for you?
- 2) What were challenges you had to deal with during the project?
- 3) In what ways did you experience personal growth during the project?

These questions were connected to the hope that the participants' accounts would provide specific answers to the question about the ways in which social and emotional elements of a public culture based upon love can be realised in music mediation projects. Apart from that, the participants' accounts have the potential to provide answers to the other important question mentioned above: What does such a public culture of love demand from the humans who create and shape it?

The following analysis of significant parts of the group reflections was inspired by Hanne Rinholm's, Ida Heiberg Solem's and Inger Ulleberg's "deductive approach, in which theoretical concepts function as lenses for studying practice" (Rinholm, Solem, and Ulleberg 2023, A62).

## Analysis of the Discussions – The Participants' Perspectives

The main aim of this section is to analyse statements from the group reflections that gain significance through the theoretical lense of hooks', Nussbaum's, Silverman's, and Lapidaki's concepts of love. Hence, I selected passages from the group reflections that I consider to be of significance in this regard.

To begin with, I want to quote some statements made by the co-participants that literally contain the words love and heart:

B1: These are [...] seniors who mean really well, these are grandpas, they probably have grandchildren, and they are people who have a good heart.<sup>4</sup>

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4 This and the following quotes are taken from the transcripts of the two discussions, which I translated into English. To differentiate between the speakers and for reasons of anonymity, I chose A1-D1 for the students, and A2-D2 for the shanty choir members. I used the transcription rules suggested by

C1: Let's suppose that students would have been chosen, and possibly led by a professor, would have performed shanties, that (.) probably would have been on a higher level, musically speaking, (.) but I believe that this (.) this VERVE, this love for this music, that was transported much better by this choir.

These statements reveal how two students perceived their project partners. With regard to the group reflection of the music education students, it was interesting that they talked a lot about the way they see themselves and their musicking, and the way they see the shanty choir and their musicking. C1's statement reveals that a reflection about different definitions of musical quality was part of this discussion. This statement also shows that she still differentiates between a "higher level" of music-making that she attributes to professional ensembles such as the ones at the University of Music. However, since she stresses the verve of the shanty choir, which made their performance special to her, she shows that she started thinking differently when it comes to musical quality. In the end, the group of students acknowledged the shanty choir's love for the music they make and seemed to agree that this love is a central quality of their musicking. It is striking that B1 stresses that the singers are men with "a good heart". This is of significance, because at the beginning of the project he really struggled with some of the lyrics the shanty choir sings<sup>5</sup> and it was my impression (as a facilitator working with this group) that this highly influenced his overall perception of the shanty choir members. At that point in the process, this focus seemed to prevent this student from overcoming "group-based stigma" (Nussbaum 2013, 165) which makes it difficult to build a community that practises love-as-action. In the end, he seemed to have opened his perspective on the shanty choir members and their musicking, which I attribute to the simple fact that he had heard several stories about the culture that forms the basis of the shanty choir's repertoire, and these stories were told by his co-participants.

One shanty choir member used the word *heart* as follows:

C2: We will have to endure this Bavarian fair [The interviewee refers to the famous Munich Oktoberfest.] [Interviewer laughs], due to the absence of, because we, ourselves here do not preserve this, OUR culture. and that (.) is

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Jan Kruse (2015). Hence, I have used capital letters to indicate when the speakers have stressed certain syllables or words and I used (.) to indicate short pauses.

- 5 One of the songs, in particular, became a topic of discussion between the group of students. The lyrics of this song alluded to sexual acts between a man and a woman in a playful way, told from a male perspective.

to bestow praise on you, on the University of Music, that you have a heart  
(.) maybe boldness (.) to get closer to THIS music.

This statement shows how a shanty choir member reflects on the values that drive the choir's (musical) actions. He states that it was something special that this choir was given the opportunity to celebrate local popular culture on the big stage of the University of Music. He asked me how my colleagues and the management of the University of Music reacted after having heard of or even seen our 'unusual project' themselves. This question not only reveals his awareness of the connection between different ways of musicking that happen in different localities and social class, it also shows his curiosity when it comes to the points of view of the people within the academic institution where our project took place. For the shanty choir, it was 'a big thing' to share their music with others in this locality which had not welcomed them until that point. With regard to this aspect, the students did not show the same awareness of the connection between musicking, localities of musicking, and social class. During their discussion, at some point I suggested that this project might have been labelled an inclusive project. C1 challenged this view:

I would like to come back to the term inclusive at this point, because I think you might see it differently, [...] it implies a certain condescension or hierarchy: we are (.) the GOOD ones, we give YOU the opportunity to join in (.) and I would prefer the term cooperation.

Interestingly, C1 was the participant who also said that music students could have performed sea shanties, directed by a professor, on the big stage of the University of Music and that this would probably have meant that they present this music "on a higher level". Her thinking in terms of higher leads to the question whether there is also a lower level of musical quality? Her statement suggests that she maybe still affirms hierarchical thinking with regard to different ways and qualities of music-making in groups. Directly confronting these two statements made by this participant shows that she might have struggled with acknowledging the cultural and social dimension of this project until the end. Apart from that, her thinking stands in clear contrast with C2's statement that it was a bold decision to get closer to the music the shanty choir makes and to give the choir the opportunity to perform inside the University of Music.

In the students' group reflection, at some point one of them started discussing the question whether the intentions of the shanty choir are actually different to their own:

D1: ONE problem in our society, in my opinion, is that (.) we are quite good at making accusations (.) toward any kind of group that is different from us, and we say: that's not us. For instance: we are not old white men [...] but we forget that we should talk to each other and (.) that often we really strive for the same goals, only with VERY different means and that this is worth being discussed, [...] and a project like this one makes this possible, that people have to talk to each other and have to discuss.

Here, D1 names an ethical problem she perceives in today's society. The point she makes comes very close to Martha Nussbaum's notion of a just society: a society that can be realised through the efforts of individuals who strive for a "mutually responsive conversation" (Nussbaum 2013, 112). In the project *Marie, Musik und das Meer*, these conversations took place over a period of three months, both in formal group contexts inside of the institution and in informal conversations in other places, and they had a visible effect on the co-participants. As A1 put it: "I have developed a great respect for shanties." The regular conversations also had a perceivable effect on D2:

This great event in the end (.) is not (.) the only moment of happiness. There are, especially for me, considerable moments of happiness, (.) that had to do with the preparations. When you say: Look, here we could shift something, and this would fit there [...] that was, well, a challenge on the one hand, but a beautiful thing on the other.

This statement is a reflection of the open setting of the project that offered opportunities for artistic participation. D2 acknowledges that this characteristic of the project presented a challenge for him and the students and I sensed and talked about this challenge and the effect it had on us a couple of times. It is significant that D2 described the openness of the project as a "beautiful thing" in the end, when looking back on the whole process. He also reflected on the effects of the interactions between the students and the shanty choir:

When people join in, when they also contribute musically, and muddle up the usual proceedings in a friendly way, (.) [...] that had the effect that all of us are basically more courageous (.) to cooperate with others who are not choir members. [...]

What made me more open, (.) we had different approaches concerning the organisation [...], with me it's like this: everything has to fit exactly, and then there is this other who says: that's going to work out [...] I acquired the openness to let go of this other, this letting go.

Here, D2 addresses three emotional and social elements that are also mentioned by hooks, Nussbaum and Lapidaki: the significance of developing trust in others

and in the common project, the courage it may take to do so, and the openness this musical and human process requires. All of the participants in the discussions also put another significant aspect of an ethic of love into practice: they spoke with great honesty about their experiences, and I want to thank them for their openness. Without this honesty and openness, it would not have been possible to connect hooks', Nussbaum's and Lapidaki's theoretical thinking with their real-life-experiences.

## The Potential of a Music Mediation Practice Based on an Ethic of Love and Consequences for the Education of Future Music Mediators

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that there are specific emotional and social capacities music mediators need to develop and cultivate if they want to successfully realise projects in which they interact with participants on equal terms. I assumed that the emotional and social elements bell hooks, Martha Nussbaum, Marissa Silverman, and Eleni Lapidaki named in their philosophical concepts can serve as a compass for music mediators in this regard, because they offer them guidance. The analysis of two group reflections connected to the music mediation project *Marie, Musik und das Meer* has shown that the project participants actually addressed several emotional and social elements that can be found in the theoretical concepts of "love-as-action".

I share Lapidaki's perspective that "music interactions cannot change the world." (Lapidaki 2020, 270). But how or where can we start, if we really want to transform societies by means of musical interactions? Our only option is to start with local groups, with the people who are around us, and then believe in the power of the ripple effect. That is why I agree with Nussbaum that "good solutions are typically local" (Nussbaum 2013, 338). Camlin makes a similar suggestion by saying that community music projects are a "kind of modest practice" (Camlin 2023, 21) that can change the worlds within reach of co-participants and audiences. The individual reflections of the participants in the project *Marie, Musik und das Meer* have made transparent how musical interactions and artistic co-creation realised by people coming from different sectors of society and stages of life can change the individual perspectives of *these* people.

The "oral being-together of proximity" (Lapidaki 2020, 263) was a significant aspect of our music mediation project. The conversations about seamen's life in the past, which were initiated by the shanty choir members, changed the students' perspectives on this musical praxis – in particular, the student who was the most critical about the choir's repertoire at the beginning, expressed a

feeling of respect for their musicking in the end. In small projects like this one, in which all participants are welcome to participate musically and artistically, music mediators provide opportunities to discuss what their common artistic work should look like. Such discussions will reveal a diversity of values if we bring together people from diverse backgrounds, with different life stories, and experiences. These discussions can evoke unpleasant emotions in individual participants. Therefore, the most significant emotional and social capacity a music mediator needs might be an awareness that participants coming from different social worlds can make each other feel uncomfortable at times. It is a music mediator's job to sense moments of discomfort and to act in a way that can help everyone to relax, e.g. by embodying or verbally expressing trust in the group and thus serving as an example for utilising emotional and social capacities.

At the end of this chapter, I want to emphasise that even small changes of perspective only happen if both the leaders and participants of music mediation projects are willing to reflect on their actions, on the perceptions of their co-participants, and on their individual ideas of how things should be done in a project. Luckily, the participants in the project *Marie, Musik und das Meer* were open enough and willing to do this. They showed and later on explained how the concept of "love-as-action" can be practised, and that they are individual actors who can start building a society that cultivates an ethic of love in the sense hooks and Nussbaum have described. Nussbaum's philosophical argument that we should not give up striving for the freedom and well-being of all citizens is significant. It can be difficult (in an emotional sense) to be confronted with other participants' points of view and values, but music mediation projects that offer participation have the potential to empower their participants to care about the freedom and well-being of each one of them. When people work together musically or artistically, when they co-create a performance or experience beautiful moments of sharing music with others, they are striving for a common human goal, and this goal keeps their collaboration up when challenges emerge.

As the musical leader of the shanty choir put it: When people make music together, and when they share their music with others, very often they want to put "something good into people's hearts. A good thought, a good feeling". The intention to put something good into people's hearts by means of music-making can be considered as universal. It transcends musical styles and affiliations, and it can serve as an "interconnection across difference" (ibid., 267). In order to get to this point in participatory projects, both music mediators and participants have to deal with their individual emotions when challenges come up. This is what we should openly address and discuss in contexts in which we educate future music mediators. They may need our support in developing social and

emotional capacities *within themselves* first. Trust might be the most important element of the list above. Without trust, there is a certain danger that people might desire to dominate and exercise power over others, and this is not how a public culture based upon love is built. To build a culture based upon love, we have to regard one another as whole and unique people.

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# Music Mediation and the Potential for Change

## An Approach via Convention Theory

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*Anke Schad-Spindler*

### Introduction

The question of social change processes – or changes towards the social, which this volume raises, is closely linked to questions about the intentions and goals of the changes. How should music organisations change to become more social? Which ideas of an (improved) social reality underlie these intentions? And what could the contribution of music mediation in this respect be?

These questions involve an examination of desirable goals and possible orientations in social situations (Zembylas 2019). In the context of music organisations and music mediation, it quickly becomes clear that these goals, orientations and the associated expectations can be very different from actual decisions and actions. For example, it was public pressure from, amongst others, US feminists that led to the first woman being accepted into the Vienna Philharmonic in 1997. Around 25 years later, 23 of the 144 positions are held by women (Kaindlstorfer 2022). This example shows that the value of (gender) justice has clearly not been realised through a rapid, measurable and assessable change (i.e. 50% of positions held by women), although this would have been a possible, socially just, value-oriented and factually rationalisable action. This is partly due to the fact that different explicit evaluations and implicit orientations are present at the same time, creating a need for negotiation. While values represent social orientations, evaluations are social and communicative processes of weighing up, negotiating and justifying (Bogusz 2013), and are therefore dependent on a wide range of situational conditions and constellations. The extent to which social changes are implemented depends not only on the ability of individuals to assert themselves and on the feasibility of the principle, but also on the ability of different actors to coordinate themselves situationally and collectively on the basis of shared interpretations. As coordination and evaluation options, conventions represent such “interpretative frameworks” (Gonon 2023, 51) that

can be used by actors in uncertain situations – situations with different options for action and decision-making – as a point of reference. Mediators play a co-constructive role in these coordination processes.

After a brief introduction to the theoretical foundations of the sociology and economics of conventions, the focus here is on the associated concept “mediators as intermediaries”. This is followed by a discussion of possible questions from the perspective of music mediation, using approaches based on the theory of conventions. Subsequently, a thought experiment is used to highlight the potential, conflicts, and resistance in cooperative formations of music mediation. Finally, both the analytical and practical possibilities of applying the lenses of convention theory for music mediation are outlined.

## **Theoretical Foundations: The Economy and Sociology of Conventions**

The economy and sociology of conventions (in short EC/SC or convention theory) (Diaz-Bone and Thévenot 2010; Diaz-Bone and de Larquier 2020) is a theoretical framework suitable for analysing different intentions, interpretations, coordination possibilities and negotiation processes, and their effects. As a socio-economic and pragmatic institutional theory (Diaz-Bone 2023), EC/SC is a transdisciplinary development in the social sciences that has been emerging since the 1980s from France, sharing basic assumptions with ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism. In the English-speaking and German-speaking world, too, researchers are increasingly turning to convention-theoretical approaches in both theoretical and empirically guided research (Diaz-Bone 2018, XXII). This also includes applications of the theory to the sociology of music (Schwegler 2024; Prokop and Reitsamer forthcoming 2025) and in educational science (Leemann and Imdorf 2019) as relevant fields of reference for music mediation. Convention theory deals with how capable, competent actors coordinate their behaviour and coordination logics, in the sense of conventions, in order to overcome uncertainties in social situations (Boltanski and Thévenot 2014). Meanwhile, eight conventions have been described as interpretative schemata and guidelines for action: the market convention, the industrial convention, the domestic convention, the convention of opinion, the inspired convention, the civic convention, the green convention and the network convention (Diaz-Bone and de Larquier 2022, 14).

The EC/SC assumes that all conventions radically coexist in markets and organisations and that there is no simple assignment of individual quality conventions to individual institutional arrangements (Diaz-Bone 2018, 161). This

can be illustrated using the example of a music organisation: When evaluating a concert, the focus is on the reputation of the orchestra (domestic convention), the originality of the interpretation of the work (inspired convention), and the number of visitors (convention of opinion). In addition, the price of a concert ticket (market convention) and the broadest possible participation (civic convention) can provide orientation, which illustrates that conventions often conflict with each other. Criteria of the green convention (CO2 footprint of an orchestra) are also gaining in relevance and must be negotiated with the productivity requirements of a touring orchestra (industrial convention).

## Mediators as Intermediaries

The example illustrates that the simultaneous presence of different conventions requires coordination. This is where the mediators, referred to as intermediaries in the EC/SC, come into play. Like Bourdieu's cultural sociology (Bourdieu 1999), the EC/SC places a particular focus on the role of mediators (as people), but it also includes the co-presence of mediating objects or organisations in mediation processes to a greater extent (Diaz-Bone 2018, 109). These human and non-human intermediaries mediate between different conventions and are not neutral in the process, but actively and productively contribute to the co-construction and organisation of situations (*ibid.*, 110). In addition, their mediating activity enables compromises to be reached. Representatives of the EC/SC argue that the French term "intermédiaire" emphasises more strongly than the English term "mediator" that co-construction takes place through these processes (*ibid.*).

Convention theory is therefore relevant for research on music mediation, especially since it deals in depth with the concepts of intermediaries and intermediation (Schad-Spindler forthcoming 2025). The concepts of convention theory enable an analysis of how value orientations and quality perceptions in music and music mediation are established by mediators and how these in turn influence the perception of actors – musicians, audiences, music managers, sponsors, funding bodies, and other music mediators. Conversely, questions can also be examined as to how other actors and objects influence music mediators or music mediation processes and which conventions are used in the process. Mediators therefore play a crucial role in music production and reception: by establishing relationships between music producers and listeners, they ensure that musicians create something that appeals to the audience. They also have an identity-forming function, because they help listeners to establish

a connection between pieces of music and their own perception (Negus 2002, 505; Diaz-Bone and Schwegler forthcoming 2025).

As mentioned, intermediaries or mediators are not only human beings. Here, convention theory also refers to the actor-network theory (ANT), which is developing in parallel. In the ANT context, Hennion (2015) describes non-human elements (so-called actants) as a complex network of music mediators – including instruments, scores, productions, concert venues, and forms of transmission in music institutions and schools (recordings and digital media in particular should also be taken into account). In their networked interaction, these mediators regulate the composition, performance, and aesthetic appreciation of music. They also discipline the bodies and expressive possibilities of the musicians and listeners through their form and the possibilities and limitations that their materiality provides (Schad-Spindler forthcoming 2025). For the audience, a spatial arrangement can, for example, restrict autonomy and mobility (because concert seats are firmly anchored in the hall and have a socially structuring effect based on price categories). Even the removal of seats can enable dance movements and temporarily dissolve social orders. With regard to musicians, musical scores can restrict the autonomy of interpretation or, conversely, expand it. Mediators enable the communication and comprehension of music – not by directly addressing its aesthetic content or social authenticity, but by shaping how both are collectively constructed through the interactions of people and objects within a shared network. (Hennion and Levaux 2021, 3)

The fact that both people and things perform mediating activities (Boltanski and Chiapello 2003, 155) suggests that an additional investment in the qualification of individuals is required in order to be recognised and valued as a music mediator. One way of legitimising and institutionalising this role is through professional, certified training at universities or colleges, i.e. professional academic competence in the sense of the industrial convention (Schad-Spindler forthcoming 2025). As will be explained later, their work not only involves mediating between music (producers) and audiences, but also involves working in cooperative relationships between different organisations and their expectations. As will be shown, this requires an expanded competence profile of music mediators as actors in the in-between, in cultural-political negotiation processes (Schad 2019; Landau-Donnelly et al. 2023), which could be more strongly integrated into education and training with regard to the social-transformative potential of music mediation.

A second path illustrates that transitions between conventions are also essential for legitimisation: the genealogy of the representation of the interests of music mediators in Austria shows that it was initially about cooperative

concerns and informal exchange, organised through the formation of a platform (network convention). Increasingly, the orientation towards common concerns over labour and employment issues also gained ground (civic convention), so that in 2023 the foundation of an association was formalised (industrial convention).

As a relevant side note that cannot be elaborated on in more detail in this chapter: a conventional theoretical view of music mediation calls for a focus on both human and other technical and material entities in joint coordination processes. The development of artificial intelligence (Solans et al. 2021) and its consequences for music production and reception, and thus also for mediation as an intermediary process, makes these connections and thus the need for research at these coordinative interfaces even clearer.

## Music Mediation in the Context of Conventions

The coordination of different conventions takes place through collective and contextual processes that can be (co-)orchestrated by music mediators: a music mediator who works with a school class in a large concert hall sets and uses different conventions than a music mediator who performs with a classical orchestra in a train station (Schad-Spindler forthcoming 2025). The example also shows that by changing situations, conventions in the sense of social potential can not only be mobilised, but also irritated and expanded: the first situation shows that children (also) have the right not only to enter spaces usually used by adults, but also to play in them. Participation and entitlement, as well as social commitment are mobilised (criteria of the civic convention). The second situation illustrates how spaces driven by efficiency and acceleration (industrial convention) can be transformed into places of contemplation and creativity (inspired convention) or lead to the spontaneous formation of a public gathering (civic convention) through music-related interventions. However, the two examples also show that these situations are only created temporarily or as exceptions to the rules: the concert hall is otherwise visited, played in and organised by adults. The train station concourse reverts to a place of passage and anonymity.

These insights into situations show that the theory of conventions offers approaches for reflecting on the connection between social power relations on the one hand, and possibilities for change through music mediation on the other. Sensitising questions are particularly suitable for training critical skills as a preliminary stage of possible changes. With the help of the instruments of the theory of conventions, the following questions can be asked:

Within the *market convention*, economic factors in the narrower sense are the reference parameters. Who has access to which resources and budgets? Who exerts influence on distribution channels and thus on the visibility and demand for certain kinds of music? What music is in demand by customers? Regarding questions of transformation: How can music mediation contribute to creating a market for certain underrated music? How much are sponsors willing to invest in music mediation, and with what expectations?

The *inspired convention* refers to aesthetic and innovative criteria. This can be used to analyse the following questions, for example: How are certain aesthetic norms and values promoted or suppressed in music mediation? Which genres, artists, and styles are preferred, which are marginalised? What is considered good or innovative music mediation? Which works are considered ingenious but uncommunicable? In terms of transformation, how can music mediation contribute to establishing new aesthetic criteria, for example by creating new listening experiences or innovative sound worlds?

The following questions are examples related to the *industrial convention*: What is the basis for professional music mediation? Who is considered a qualified music mediator? How does music mediation work in music organisations (such as orchestras, concert halls, festivals), what are its tasks, how is it integrated into overall processes? What routinised processes and standards does it develop, and according to which criteria and standards is it controlled and measured? In terms of social change, how can music mediation, for example, create new forms of cooperation through partnerships that overcome established forms of the organisational division of labour (e.g. through the interaction of educational and cultural institutions)?

In the *civic convention*, power relations in music mediation are shaped by state institutions and policies. Which music or form of music mediation is subsidised by the state? On the basis of which political objectives? Are there any forms of censorship or governmental restrictions that affect music mediation? In terms of transformation: How can music mediation contribute to enabling more socially just access to music? How can certain marginalised music styles or musicians gain more social recognition through mediation programmes?

Regarding the *convention of opinion*, questions may arise such as: How does music mediation contribute to prominence and stardom? How does music mediation create a certain image of musicians, composers, conductors, festivals or concert venues? How does music mediation co-create social media? In the frame of possible transformations, it may be a question of how music mediation can help to make musical works or musicians who have not been publicly recognised more well-known.

The *domestic convention* is concerned with such things as trust, authority, and tradition (Diaz-Bone 2018, 162). This convention can be linked to the study of issues related to the preservation of certain musical traditions through music mediation. The role of music mediation in relation to musical craftsmanship, i.e. learning to play certain instruments, is also linked to this convention. The continuation of family-based musical traditions or modes of reception (such as regular concert attendance) can also be reflected upon using the categories of this convention. Conversely, social change can be mobilised by critically questioning the dominance of certain musical traditions or by promoting and linking some traditions to others.

Corresponding questions can also be formulated for the *green convention*, which deal with the contribution of music mediation to aspects of ecology and sustainability. Last but not least, the *network convention* offers starting points, for example for investigating questions such as how relationships between people or organisations can be established through music mediation, how music mediators professionally network with each other, how working on temporary projects shapes music mediation etc.

These and numerous other questions can inspire a critical analysis of the social role of music mediation in terms of its conservative or transformative function. For such analyses, it should be borne in mind that the conventions offer guidance, but should be considered in an overall context: not in isolation, but in co-presence and co-creation. For social action is the “art of living in different worlds” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2014, 206). The worlds – conventions – take shape in concrete situations “that take place in the same space and with the same people” (ibid., 213).

## The Possibilities for Potential and Conflict in Music Mediation Co-operation

To reflect more in-depth on the role of music mediation in promoting change in music organisations and beyond, the following is a thought experiment that draws on a combination of different empirical experiences and the analysis of literature on music mediation practices (Chaker and Petri-Preis 2022; Petri-Preis 2022; Müller-Brozovic and Weber 2022). The exemplary heuristics of the thought experiment serve to analyse possible potentials and resistances against the background of the questions of social turns, changes, and transformations. As already described, music mediators not only act between music producers and listeners, but as intermediaries also coordinate social relationships in the broader sense. This includes, in particular, cooperation between organisations

that pursue concerns in the field of music mediation – but possibly with different concerns, interpretations, and logic with regard to their action. This is linked to the assumption that a constructive approach to resistance, disagreement and conflict can provide impulses for change. This is particularly important for dealing with areas of tension that arise in relation to cooperation connected to cultural participation (Stoffers 2019). The pragmatically oriented sociology of conventions (Diaz-Bone 2011) also provides a theoretical and analytical tool for representing possible obstacles and conflicts in cooperative social relationships, thus enabling criticism and discussion to serve as possible drivers for changing attitudes and ways of working.

Let us assume that there are two organisations that want to cooperate with each other in the field of music mediation: Organisation *Communico* is a socio-cultural centre that was founded in the early 2000s and is in a decentralised district of a larger city where the proportion of people with a migration background is particularly high. In this environment, the proportion of people with socio-economic challenges is higher than in other districts. The centre offers free, so-called low threshold activities for people of all ages – children, young people, and adults – such as dance and theatre workshops, club nights and concerts, choirs, film evenings, and communal meals. The average age of the visitors is 35. The team and management of the socio-cultural centre are predominantly women, the majority of whom have a migration background and speak several languages, among them Turkish and Arabic. The employees are mainly university graduates, some are artists, others come from social professions. *Communico* is guided by the objective of enabling everyone to participate in art and culture.

Organisation *Classico* is a music organisation that was founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The music organisation is centrally located, the surrounding area is characterised by tourist attractions. The organisation is frequented by an international tourist audience, in addition to a local regular audience of classical music aficionados and subscribers. The music education programme is aimed primarily at families and children up to the age of 10. The average age of visitors is 60. The organisation's staff is international, with people who have academic qualifications in music or humanities. *Classico* is oriented towards the objective of promoting musical culture through musical excellence and outstanding musicians.

On the basis of six specifically relevant conventions, both potentials and possible disagreement and resistance regarding changes can be outlined through the cooperation of the two fictitious organisations:

Convention	Possible Potentials	Possible Resistance and Conflicts
<p>Inspired Convention (creativity, innovation)</p>	<p>The collaboration brings innovation, ideas, and creativity to both organisations. Classico's music education programme benefits from the more experimental approaches and exciting spaces that Communico offers. All those involved can experience inspiring joint events, concerts and workshops.</p>	<p>Classico might have concerns about the artistic integrity and devaluation of its musical standards if it focuses on mediating activities. Communico might be unsure to what extent the musical knowledge and preferences of its employees and audience would allow it to meet Classico's expectations in creative, music-led processes.</p>
<p>Civic Convention (equality, fairness, participation)</p>	<p>The collaboration could promote cultural participation by offering all kinds of people – in particular the diverse audience of Communico – live music experiences at a high level, regardless of musical preferences and previous experience, educational background, origin and socioeconomic situation. Classico will fulfil its mandate as a publicly funded cultural institution more effectively.</p>	<p>Classico might fear that its funding might be tied to the implementation of socio-political objectives in the future. Communico might have concerns about the autonomy of its programme design. The audience of Communico might also criticise the fact that women wearing hijabs work as cleaning staff at Classico, but no musician representing a marginalised group is visible in the main orchestra. The employees of Communico may also be critical of the fact that musicians with whom they work in their programmes are only allowed to play in special community programmes at Classico.</p>

Convention	Possible Potentials	Possible Resistance and Conflicts
<p>Market Convention (demand, price, exchange)</p>	<p>The collaboration could open up new sources of income for both Classico and Communico by attracting a wider audience or finding new sponsors and funding.</p>	<p>Competition could arise over funding and sponsorship money, but also over the respective contributions to the collaboration – especially if the musicians of Classico earn significantly more than the curators of Communico, while the Communico employees feel that they are more committed to the collaboration. Nothing has changed regarding the fact that the prices of concerts in the main programme are unaffordable for Communico target groups.</p>
<p>Industrial Convention (planning, standardisation, qualifications)</p>	<p>The collaboration could bring efficiency gains through the joint use of resources (e.g. event locations, marketing channels, etc.) and the division of labour in combining expertise.</p>	<p>Different organisational structures (flat hierarchies at Communico, steep hierarchies at Classico) could lead to conflicts, especially when it comes to decision-making. Classico could have concerns about quality standards and the rules and routines (rehearsals, discipline) needed to achieve them, while Communico could express concerns about over-regulation and the loss of flexibility that would result. Overall, coordinating appointments, rehearsal times, and work processes could be difficult.</p>

Convention	Possible Potentials	Possible Resistance and Conflicts
<p>Domestic Convention (tradition, handicraft, familiarity)</p>	<p>Different musical traditions, instruments and skills can come together in workshops or mentoring programmes. The respective audiences can be familiarised with them. This enriches the repertoire of the organisations and the diversity of musical production.</p>	<p>The clash of different musical traditions, interpretations and standards of precision/handling of instruments could lead to discord between Communico and Classico.</p>
<p>Convention of Opinion (fame, glory, recognition)</p>	<p>The collaboration can increase public awareness of the two organisations and their objectives (through accompanying press and social media work). This allows the respective audiences to learn more about the other organisation. While the use of world-famous musicians for children and the socially and economically disadvantaged creates public recognition for Classico, it is the recognition and visibility of everyday social commitment through cooperation with a world-famous music company for Communico.</p>	<p>A conflict could arise if Classico fears that the collaboration could affect its perception as an elitist, high-quality, established cultural institution and thus dilute its brand image. Classico could also have concerns about the reactions of its older audience if the collaboration contributes to a diversified and younger audience. Communico could be in a dilemma not to let its audience become the visible object (token) of symbolic but superficial changes.</p>

**Table 1:** Potentials and possible disagreements regarding changes. Source: Own illustration.

## Music Mediators – Acting in the *In-between*

This reflection on cooperative music mediation activities shows that the economy and sociology of conventions offer a comprehensive approach to penetrating the complex social, cultural, organisational, and economic aspects of music mediation, as well as the associated interpretation and decision-making processes. In line with the pragmatic orientation of the EC/SC, this offers both analytical and practical possibilities for driving forward both the potential for change and exploring resistance to change. Music mediators often take on overlooked intermediary activities, not only in music production but also in cultural policy (Bennett 2020). They not only bring organisations with different orientations into exchange relationships in the sense of mediating music (production), but are also required to know about the respective logics of action and to convey them to different stakeholders. This intermediate position is as necessary as it is challenging, if it is assumed that decisions are made on the basis of different conventions, and their associated resistances and potentials. Unlike in the fictitious case, these are often much less obvious in everyday experience, due to their simultaneous coexistence. Nevertheless, models and structures can help to simulate scenarios and develop alternatives to address problems and to gain new orientation and options.

This ultimately leads to the question of how the critical competence of music mediators can be promoted in such a way that they can proactively and co-constructively contribute their specific human abilities such as empathy and imagination to the design of social, cooperative relationships in complex situations with other mediating elements and technologies. The question of qualification is particularly relevant here: music mediators should not only acquire musical skills in their university education, but also knowledge of cultural management and organisation, cultural financing and policy, legal frameworks, pedagogical and socio-cultural work, as well as networking and communication (Petri-Preis 2022). In addition, practical experience is integrated into the training, which, among other things, is used to train situational decision-making skills. The reflection in this chapter makes it clear that, in addition to interdisciplinary professional skills, the training and continuous training of critical-analytical thinking, negotiation skills, and mediation skills can be very important for the mediation activity. To return to the questions raised at the beginning: the question of the objectives of social change processes is linked to divergent conventions, which, however, are not arbitrary, due to their relation to the common good. In other words, conventions are per se hypothetical and changeable; they can be reviewed, rejected or reinterpreted by different actors. Indeed, the assumptions made with the thought experiment need to be tested

in the empirical social world. For this reason, this article ends by indicating the potentials of a research project that engages with convention theory and music mediation. *Turning (the) social* as a potential of music mediation thus includes the need for research-based and critical engagement with the various possibilities, resistances and compromises in mediation processes that arise in social situations. Empirically grounded research framed through convention theory could also further enhance reflection and exchange between music mediators on their own values, motivations, and objectives in the *in-between*.

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## VI. APPENDIX



## Contributors

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**Daniela Bartels** worked as a school teacher at a comprehensive school in Berlin where she focused on group music-making with adolescents. In her doctoral thesis, she tackled the philosophical question of how musical *praxis* (in the Aristotelian sense) can empower human beings to achieve a 'good life' for themselves and help others do the same. Parallel to that, she founded *zimmt*, a participatory choir in Berlin. At the University of Cologne, she taught democratic choir praxis. She then became visiting professor at the University of the Arts in Berlin and started her podcast *Mehr als Töne – Musikpädagogik und Gesellschaft* [More than Sounds – Music Paedagogy and Society]. Today, she teaches music education, group music-making, and community music at the University of Music Luebeck.

**Lorenz Blaumer** is a violinist, producer, sound artist, and music mediator. His freelance activities include work with orchestras such as the German Radio Philharmonic Orchestra of Saarbrücken-Kaiserslautern or the Munich Chamber Orchestra, as well as projects such as the sound art project *Schaltkreismusik*, the music theatre collective *tutti d\*amore*, or the band *Einshoch6*. In 2020–22, he was also employed by Jeunesses Musicales Deutschland as a Youth Education Officer for Music. He has been artistic director of the Stegreif Orchestra since 2022. In addition to his role in the orchestra, he is a lecturer for interdisciplinary professionalisation at the HfM Berlin Hanns Eisler.

**Charles D. Carson** is an associate professor of musicology/ethnomusicology at the University of Texas in Austin, where he teaches courses on contemporary art music, popular music, hip hop, and jazz. His research interests include African-American expressive cultures, American musics, and music and tourism. He is a founding member of the international research collective, the Center for Research in Artistic Citizenship (CREArC), based in Malmö, Sweden. He currently serves as the Mike and Patty Erspamer Scholar-in-

Residence for the Austin Opera. He has presented and published on a variety of topics ranging from smooth jazz to theme park music.

**Sarah Chaker** is an assistant professor at the Department of Music Sociology at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, Austria. She studied musicology and German Studies at the Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg, Germany. In her research, she currently focuses on street music, popular music (in particular metal), and music mediation. In 2023, she was awarded the Austrian State Prize *Ars Docendi* for excellent teaching.

**Ana Čorić** is a lecturer at the Music Education Department, Academy of Music, University of Zagreb. Currently pursuing a PhD in education at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, her research focuses on higher music education and the civic dimension of musicians' professional identity. With interests spanning artistic citizenship, universities' civic mission, music mediation, and interdisciplinarity, she brings her extensive experience to developing programmes for different audiences, as well as to international projects (AEC, Ethno Research, B-air Infinity Radio). She also serves as a lecturer at the Storytelling Academy in Zagreb and a music mediator at the *kULTRA Music Festival* in Makarska.

**Lisa Gaupp** is a professor of cultural institutions studies at mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. She majored in cultural and international studies at the Universities of Lüneburg and Barcelona before earning her doctorate in ethnomusicology at the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media (*summa cum laude*). She held an interim professorship in cultural sociology at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, which was also where she habilitated (*venia legendi*: sociology of culture and the arts). Lisa Gaupp has lived in Guatemala, Haiti, the USA, and Spain, served as organisational head of the 2009 edition of the International Joseph Joachim Violin Competition, and has three children.

**Immanuel de Gilde** studied art, music, and media in Marburg and Amsterdam, as well as musicology in Vienna. In parallel, he worked as an assistant director and librettist in the field of music theatre for young audiences. At the beginning of 2022, following his involvement in the *UFO – Junge Oper Urban* project at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein Düsseldorf/Duisburg, he took on project management roles (*#bechange* and *#freesolo*) at the Stegreif Orchester. He is currently responsible for the orchestra's education sector and, as of early 2025, has been

serving as a research associate at the Institute for Instrumental and Vocal Paedagogy at BTU Cottbus-Senftenberg.

**Sari Karttunen** is a senior researcher at the Center for Cultural Policy Research CUPORE in Helsinki. She is also a visiting researcher at University of the Arts Helsinki and an adjunct professor (in cultural policy) at the University of Jyväskylä. Her research focuses on the sociology of artistic occupations, as well as the construction and critical analysis of cultural statistics and other knowledge bases in the service of cultural policy. Her current interests include the practice of community art. Karttunen is an active member of the European Sociological Association's Research Network for a Sociology of the Arts and currently serves on its advisory board.

A musicologist and sociologist, **Irina Kirchberg** is the executive director of the Centre for Innovation and Applied Research in Arts and Social Engagement (Artens). She produced the first *Panorama des pratiques de médiation de la musique au Québec* (2020) and edited an issue of the *Revue musicale de l'OICRM* (2020) as well as an issue of *Intersections* (2025), dedicated to music mediation. As co-director of the *Etude Partenariale sur la Médiation de la Musique* (EPMM), she organised the *Rencontres Internationales sur les Médiations de la Musique* (2022). She is a member of the editorial board of the *International Journal of Music Mediation* (IJMM), and visiting professor at the Université de Montréal.

**François Matarasso** is a community artist and writer whose work spans co-creation, research, consultancy and policy, and roots theory in experience. In 1997, after 15 years in arts projects with community groups, he published the first major research into the social impact of participation in the arts, *Use or Ornament?*, a study that established key concepts in the field. He has worked in some 40 countries for national agencies, foundations, arts organisations, and international bodies, including the EU, the Council of Europe, and the World Bank. He has been a board member of NESTA, Arts Council England, and the Baring Foundation, and held honorary professorships in Scotland and Australia. From 2020–23 he worked on the co-creation of new community operas in Spain, Portugal, and Ireland through the EU Horizon programme.

**Shanti Suki Osman** is a research associate for music education at Carl von Ossietzky University in Oldenburg. Her research focuses on intersectional and critical music education, diversity, feminisms, popular music, and listening. Her PhD investigated the experiences of Black women\* and women\* of colour in German music conservatories. Recent publications include: 'Hip-Hop and In-

tersectional Music Education: Learning from Hip-Hop Feminisms' in *It's How You Flip It!* Transcript, (2024) and 'Ein dekolonisierendes Zuhören?' [Decolonising Listening?] in *Klangakt: Machtkritische Perspektiven* (2024). As an artist, Shanti Suki Osman works with song, sound, and radio. She furthermore leads workshops on diversity in music and music education.

**Axel Petri-Preis** is a professor of music mediation and community music at mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. His focus in teaching and research lies on topics such as the aims and ethics of socially engaged music making, the development of new concert formats, and curricular development. He is deputy head of the Department of Music Education Research and Practice, coordinator of the *Music in Dialogue* subdivision, and chair of the curriculum committee for the master's programme in *Contemporary Arts Practice*. He is co-founder and editor-in-chief of the *International Journal of Music Mediation* (IJMM). Most recently, he co-edited the *Handbuch Musikvermittlung* [Handbook of Music Mediation] with Johannes Voit.

**Sabine Reiter** received a master's degree in musicology and art history before completing an MBA in general management. Before joining *mica – music austria*, she worked as a cultural manager, primarily in the field of music theatre, and as a publicist for newspapers, culture periodicals, and the Konzerthaus Vienna. She has also worked as a researcher and was responsible for concert organization and public relations at the Orpheus Trust. In 2008 she joined *mica – music austria*, first as a genre expert and then as office manager; she took over leadership of the organization in September, 2009. She is a board member of the IG Freie Theater and she is also a member of the foundation board of the Arnold Schoenberg Center.

**Anke Schad-Spindler** is a researcher in cultural policy and, together with Aron Weigl, leads the Vienna-based research institute EDUCULT. She has been conducting international research and consultancy projects since 2006 and is a lecturer at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna and at the Department of Sociology at Vienna University. Her expertise includes evaluation and impact assessment, cultural policy in conflict contexts, culture and democratic development, as well as culture and education. Anke Schad-Spindler is the Chair of the Cultural Diversity Advisory Board of the Austrian UNESCO Commission.

**Barbara Balba Weber** is a musician, cultural mediator, lecturer, researcher, author, and consultant in the field of audience and community engagement. As

an expert in artistic music mediation, she combines her extensive stage experience as a trained soloist with in-depth knowledge of audience specifics and key players in classical and contemporary music. She has created and collaborated on numerous stage productions, including performances, commissioned works, and original compositions – many of them involving diverse social groups. Barbara Balba Weber heads the *Music in Context* department at the Bern University of the Arts, previously led the intercultural project *Villaggio Culturale* in Terra Vecchia (Centovalli/Ticino), and is the author of specialized literature and musical-literary essays.

**Heidi Westerlund** is a professor at the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland since 2004, and adjunct professor at Monash University, Australia. Her research interests include higher arts education, music professionalism, cultural diversity, and democracy in music education. She has led several research projects funded by the Research Council of Finland, including the ongoing projects *Music Education, Professionalism, and Eco-Politics* (2021–2025), and *Transition Pathways Towards Gender Inclusion in the Changing Musical Landscapes of Nepal* (2023–2026).

**Maria Westvall** is a professor at the Rhythmic Music Conservatory in Denmark, and she is also the leader of Centre for Research in Artistic Citizenship (CREArC). Her research focuses on the sociological and artistic dimensions of music education, intercultural approaches, musical and cultural diversity, community practices, and migration. She has published her research in several books as well as in international scientific journals such as *Music Education Research*, *British Journal of Music Education*, *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, *International Journal of Community Music*, *Música em perspectiva*, *El oído pensante*, *Intercultural Education*, *Action, Criticism & Theory for Music Education*, *Nordic Research in Music Education*, *Danish Musicology Online*, and the *Finnish Journal of Music Education*.

After studying theatre studies and educational sciences at Ruhr University Bochum, **Krysztina Winkel** worked in the Education Department at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein Düsseldorf-Duisburg from 2014 to 2018. She then completed a master's degree in Arts, *Enterprise and Development* at the University of Warwick (UK) and was hired as a community producer at the Belgrade Theatre Coventry in 2019. Further research and community theatre programmes also took her to Italy, Zambia, and Iraqi Kurdistan. Since 2020, she has been heading the Community & Outreach Department at the Vienna

State Opera. Krysztina is currently the Vice-Chair of RESEO – The European Network for Opera, Music, and Dance Education.

**Annette Ziegenmeyer** is a professor of music education at the University of Music Luebeck where she also serves as head of the Center for Teacher Education (Zentrum für Lehrkräftebildung). Her main areas of work and research include community music/music and social work, music in prisons and composition pedagogy (international perspectives). Beyond her active participation in music teacher education networks (for example Allianz für Lehrkräftebildung, Schleswig-Holstein; Kompetenzzentrum für musikalische Bildung, Schleswig-Holstein; Bundesverband Musikunterricht e.V., Schleswig-Holstein) she has also set up further training in music and social work/community music and co-edits the journal *Diskussion Musikpädagogik*.

## About mdwPress

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### About This Volume

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