

# The Promotion of Pleasure in Individual Perception

## *Musikvermittlung* as a Key Agenda in Concert Life

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It happens to many people at some point in their lives: music takes one captive. For every one of us, this beginning is connected with a different moment and with another situation. It is a deeply individual moment, one in which a musical event speaks directly to a person for the first time, so that he or she is moved by it. Whether it is in the early days of childhood, on the lap of a parent or grandparents, the first experience of singing and/or dancing together, in a sacred space or out on the street. Eventually, the day arrives when one experiences a first concert within a framework specially designed for it, within the specific situation of one's attention being drawn to the musical event. Whether, in the process, one understands an inherent structure, message or other quality in the music is an open question. Furthermore, this understanding has boundless multi-layered facets and will accompany someone who is open to it as a secret of deep longing throughout their life.

One element of concerts, and therefore also of the work of a concert organiser, which has long fascinated me is the dimension of precisely how the shared collaboration of many people creates the possibility of a deeply individual perception of an artistic event. Musical pieces or works take a variety of objective forms and structures. The dimension which moves the individual listener is connected to the world of objects and structures, and yet it is utterly individual. A collective accomplishment renders an individual disposition possible, evoking its full impact within the listener.

From the perspective of reception, it is always essentially a matter of perception. That is also the reason why the perception of music is to be understood as an act of communication. *Resonance* is the key concept needed to describe this process.

Let us envision the situation of a concert: the event is characterised by the fact that the people in the audience give their attention to other people on

the stage. Visitors to a concert therefore direct their attention towards what is happening on the stage. From there, the musicians transmit information to the audience. The resulting exchange via form and content is nothing other than communication. In a concert, this is sometimes conveyed by words, although often it is non-verbal. Decisive for the communicative process here is the artistic quality, authenticity and immediacy of the composition and the performance, although of equal significance is the attention directed towards the artistic happening by the listeners. A successful concert is a successful communicative process, a direct, unique exchange between people which is at once individual and social. Whether a concert is a success or not is therefore not only decided on the stage.

If we understand this exchange process as being a central element of a concert, then it becomes obvious that all the elements which support the audience in connecting the dialogical process of perception with an open attitude are of immediate and particular value. This is why I understand *Musikvermittlung* as the *promotion of individual pleasure in the perception of music*. Over all the years, actually decades, in which I have been lucky enough to work for ensembles, orchestras and concert halls, I have found confirmation that *Musikvermittlung* should be given a significant role and have central importance in every cultural institution which stages concerts. Based on excellent concert planning, it is a key function for the sustainable stimulation of as many people as possible to take a continuously growing interest in and an openness towards music as an art form.

In the given context, one author from whom I have received many valuable impulses for my work is the philosopher and author Günther Anders (1902-1992), born in Breslau as Günther Siegmund Stern). After studying philosophy under, among others, Ernst Cassirer, Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl, Anders earned his doctorate in 1924, under Husserl. One noteworthy aspect of his personal biography is that, from 1929 bis 1937, Günther Anders was married to Hannah Arendt. In the late 1920s, Anders worked on “*Philosophische Untersuchungen über musikalische Situationen*” (“*Philosophical Investigations into Musical Situations*”). In this paper, Anders undertakes the attempt to devise a philosophy of music which has as its starting point neither the objective formal language of this art form, nor the subjective dimension of the recipient. Günther Anders views the central communicative event as guided subjectivity and demonstrates, via phenomenological contemplation of the situation, the significance of *Lauschen* (= listening carefully, but also eavesdropping), i.e. attention as guided subjectivity directed towards the

musical event (Liessmann 2003: 6ff.). This is precisely the aspect that concerns *Musikvermittlung*. In his journey through 2,000 years of European cultural history, Jürgen Wertheimer refers, within the context of the ideas of John Locke, to studies in the psychology of perception which in the 21<sup>st</sup> century empirically prove what the English philosopher speculatively concluded in the 17<sup>th</sup> century: that perceptual patterns guide our sense impressions, i.e. ideas determine what and how we perceive. Reflection about perceptual patterns produces changes even down to the definition of what we accept or dispute as reality (Wertheimer 2020: 295).

One key to ensuring the sustainable success of a cultural institution is to align the artistic offering, i.e. the concert and event planning, with the needs and cultural aspirations of the potentially responsive people. The permeability necessary for this can be measured by whether the people working for the organisation are able to grasp the respective concrete social, cultural-political and socio-political challenges and potential, and to develop the corresponding artistic ideas. A good part of the *craft* of event organisation consists in securing the right ideas through functional structures and initiating their realisation. In view of the heterogeneity of the living conditions and realities which characterise our present-day life, cultural institutions must face up to the respective social constellations which have an impact locally, regionally und supra-regionally, and seek to provide answers in an organisationally functional form. It is obvious that, in doing so, these answers will turn out to be very varied. Nevertheless, those who are open and mentally agile can and should learn from the respective best examples, even those far beyond national borders. An orchestra or a concert house will then bring itself into the life of a society in a sustained and lively manner when it is in a position to offer programmes which correspond artistically and concretely to the variety of cultural dispositions. In designing a programme, it is necessary to challenge the fine interplay between expectation and fulfilment, and also to continuously challenge the stimulation of expectation and the fulfilment of wishes, and to consistently take delight in transforming them afresh into concrete projects. Being open to understanding artistic planning as a dialogical process brings vitality and the chance of sustained success to the organisation.

In this spirit, no less than 600 activities involving *Musikvermittlung* took place at the Wiener Konzerthaus during the last complete season before the Corona crisis, i.e. in the 2018/19 season. Of the approximately 940 events which were held during that season, the majority of the concerts therefore in-

cluded offerings which catered to the desire to perceive an artistic happening in very different forms, or which were geared to this to a finely differentiated degree.

In an EU-funded participatory project entitled “Orfeo & Majnun”, involving various municipal districts of Vienna, the *Musikvermittlung* Team at the Wiener Konzerthaus, led by Katja Frei, succeeded in connecting some 3,000 participants emotionally with given artistic themes. In close cooperation with Basis.Kultur.Wien, the Caritas-supported socio-cultural initiative Brunnenpassage, and numerous local cultural organisations and district initiatives, the parallels and contemporary relevance of the ancient Greek myth of Orpheus and Eurydice and the story of Leila und Majnun, which is widely popular in Arab countries, were given various artistic treatments. In this way there arose over many months the largest participatory project to date in the history of the Wiener Konzerthaus. An important aspect of this project was that its aim was to increase cultural participation through professional stimulation and regular, confidence-building activities outside of the cultural organisation.

Another event format, first introduced by the Wiener Konzerthaus in the same season, bears the title “klangberührt”. In this production, conceived as a multipart concert series, the attempt is made to design a social space which makes it possible both for people with a variety of disabilities and for those without disability to have a common experience of music. Moderating the events is Lilian Genn, whose expertise in *Musikvermittlung* enables her to support the musicians and ensembles, changing from concert to concert, with a compact and sensitive response to the specific situation. In this way, the audience experience of artistic excellence is facilitated by making a connection to the musical happening that immediately follows in the programme. With this series of events, the Wiener Konzerthaus opens up towards persons who, in its traditional way of operating, are often excluded from a direct encounter with (live) music. Many of the musicians who declare themselves willing to perform in this format are used to appearing on stages around the world, but are still impressed by the intensity of the communication between the audience and the performers in this special concert series. The visitors, too, whether they experience the event alone or accompanying disabled people, show that they are deeply moved by the authenticity and power of the situational energy. Yet this series of events makes use of only a negligibly small part of the far greater performance space of a concert house.

To constantly explore these performance spaces with an open mind is one of the most valuable attitudes and is thoroughly in keeping with *Musikvermittlung* in the true sense of the word. According to my observations, economic limitations are frequently adduced as an explanation for why one or another idea for expanding or differentiating the repertory season cannot be realised. Yet in the final analysis, it is the quality of vitality in an organisation which is decisive in repeatedly allowing openness, change and further development. Every connection to people who were previously not in the focus of the respective institution expands the horizon and opens up new possibilities and chances.

The immediate experience of a musical work contains within itself, among many codified or even completely concrete narratives, also the element of an artistically condensed present moment. Music brings to life the creative ideas which a composer was able to mould as a child of his or her times. In this way, musical works, of course particularly ones that are radiant with great originality, build bridges and make it possible to undertake intellectual time travel between various epochs. Through the performance of an artistic concept, often one deriving from days long past, a narrative is evoked which is able to transcend times, cultures and identities to resonate within the listener. The multi-faceted nature of this process constitutes a significant part of the fascination which characterizes the concentrated act of listening to music in communication spaces which are ideally suited to it. Due simply to the desire for resonance and the necessity for resonance spaces, direct encounters with music will continue to have special value in people's lives. A value which should be matched by the multifaceted and diverse culture of the respective spaces.

*Musikvermittlung*, in the true and most essential meaning of the word, should skilfully lend its support to people, and repeatedly give music more space in the lives of as many as possible.

## Bibliography

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## Biographical note

**Matthias Naske** holds the position of the Artistic Director and CEO of the Wiener Konzerthausgesellschaft as well as president of the Wien Modern Festival since 2013. The Wiener Konzerthausgesellschaft, operator of the Wiener Konzerthaus ever since it was first inaugurated in 1913, has always been – and still is today – a private, non-profit association with a self-financing level of 88 % of the total budget. Matthias Naske is a member of the Executive Board of Camerata Salzburg as well as being Vice-President of the Board of Trustees of the Alban Berg Stiftung. Furthermore he is a member of the International Board of Teodor Currentzis's ensemble MusicAeterna, based in St. Petersburg, and chairman of the advisory board of MICA (Music Information Centre Austria).