

Educating Musicians in Times of Transformation

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

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 neoliberal¹ 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

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]² 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 society³. Let's hear what Flemming Valmundsson, a student of the Royal Danish Academy of Music has to say on this topic.

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 Elser⁴. 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.

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-elser.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       Archambault from the University of Montr       has to say about this topic.

H       Archambault: Hi, my name is H       and I started a programme in music mediation as a graduate student at the University of Montr       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 Hélène 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*⁵ 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

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.⁶ 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.

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 10th symphony⁷, 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 10th, 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 10th 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

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 Blaukopf⁸, 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

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 Miagi⁹ 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

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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