

***Musikvermittlung* as Everyday Practice**

The Cello Quartet *Die Kolophonistinnen*

Sarah Chaker

Artists

Hannah Amann, cello

Marlene Förstel, cello

Elisabeth Herrmann, cello

Theresa Laun, cello

Programme

Andreas Lindenbaum: "Streich für vier Cellistinnen" (2011)

Saverio Mercadante (1795-1870): "La Poesia" (undated)

Wilhelm Fitzenhagen: "Ave Maria" op. 41 (1896)

Georg Goltermann (1824-1898): "Serenade" op. 119 (undated)

Johann Strauß Snr./Leonhard Roczek (arranger): "Radetzky March" op. 228 (1848)

Johann Strauß Jnr./Leonhard Roczek (arranger): "Wiener Blut" op. 354 (1873)

Performative concepts

Die Kolophonistinnen & Axel Petri-Preis

The Quartet's Approach to *Musikvermittlung*

For the Austrian cello quartet Die Kolophonistinnen, which is as young as it is successful, *Musikvermittlung* is not something exceptional, but rather quite natural, an essential part of their everyday professional practice, playing a

significant role in determining the planning and design of their programme.¹ The quartet decides its respective programme for an event from case to case, independently and in agreement among themselves, in accordance with the respective framework, i.e. the venue, and with the desired character of the event playing an essential role in the choice of pieces and suitable *Musikvermittlung* concepts. In general, the quartet favours the combination of different, not overly long pieces, since in their experience this is a very good way to help maintain the listeners' excitement. In this respect, according to Förstel, *Musikvermittlung* plays an important role, since it is especially suitable for generating and holding attention in alternative performance concepts. Furthermore, as they themselves admit, the musicians very deliberately attempt to use the conceptualisation of their programme to shape and modulate emotions via the music.

The amount of original music available for four cellos is negligible and generally, due to the unusual instrumentation, tends to be less well known. Besides the attempts by the quartet to unearth and rehearse further original music, arrangements play an important role, when aspects of *Musikvermittlung*, in the sense of presentation practice and performance, very frequently have to be taken into consideration from the outset: "Then there are pieces which we definitely want to play, and these are then arranged by someone, either [it's done by] one of us or, for instance, Leo [Roczek]" (Förstel 2021). In doing so, however, the ensemble at present proceeds, much to their own regret, and as they remark in a quite self-critical way "rather from feeling [...] than from specific training" (ibid.), also because *Musikvermittlung* does not at present play a role in the context of their artistic training at university: "Everything that we know about *Musikvermittlung* comes from outside, has been learned externally or through participating in a course" (ibid.). For that reason, additional access to the field of *Musikvermittlung* as part of artistic-university studies would be "very helpful" (ibid.), on the one hand, because they "are of course also further artistic training" (ibid.), and on the other because it can be foreseen that the field of *Musikvermittlung* will become even more important in future.

1 The information in this article derives, on the one hand, from details provided by the musicians during our lecture series in December 2019, on the other hand it is based – and this concerns above all the original quotations in this article – on an interview which Sarah Chaker conducted with Marlene Förstel on August 16th 2021.

In response to the question of how it has come about that *Musikvermittlung* plays such an important role in the work of the quartet, even though the research, conceptualisation etc. that is involved demands considerably more effort and expense in comparison with traditional performance contexts, the musicians affirm that they “just didn’t know anything else. We began [with this kind of performance practice] at the age of 14; at that time we had hardly any concert experience at all” (ibid.). The BePhilharmonic Strauß Music Contest of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, which was the quartet’s first large-scale competition, in which they achieved great success with a Strauss arrangement by Leonhard Roczek, proved in retrospect to be indicative of the ensemble’s future direction as far as their programme is concerned: since then, formats related to *Musikvermittlung* have constituted a standard component of their performance culture. Among cello quartets, the Kolophonistinnen have thereby successfully established a stand-out feature for themselves in their live performances, and the reactions to this by their colleagues are described in thoroughly positive terms: “Most of them encourage us and like what we do. They also find our built-in gags funny. However, if people don’t know us yet or haven’t been to one of our concerts, it can be that they underestimate us because of the unusual line-up or the wide-ranging selection of pieces. They are definitely very difficult pieces, technically.” (ibid.) *Musikvermittlung* and the alternative performance concepts associated with it, which could possibly disturb the “church service” (see Schulze 2009: 46ff.), therefore still seem to pose a certain risk especially for female musicians, insofar as they are all too quickly suspected of wanting to use performance elements to compensate for a lack of quality.

One particular reason why *Musikvermittlung* also seems to be of great importance to the Kolophonistinnen is because it makes a special kind of collaboration and concert performance possible, one which the quartet experiences as particularly fulfilling – especially in direct comparison with the more traditional settings, which the musicians are also musically involved with individually. In general, *Musikvermittlung* ensures “a better understanding on all levels” (Förstel 2021) – on the level of the artists during the development and appropriation of the piece, as well as on the level of the listeners, who in their turn, through the performance, can experience and understand the quartet’s approach to the piece and the process of appropriation that it has undergone. It is through *Musikvermittlung* that a certain piece first really becomes “one’s own”, or “one of ours” (ibid.). Through an open and playful approach to a work, through working on and developing suitable performances together, one can

furthermore “put much more of one[self] into it” (ibid.). In this way, one also gets to know a piece “completely differently” (ibid.).

The audience also plays an important role in the quartet’s considerations, as Marlene Förstel points out: generally, in music, it is always a matter of wanting to pass something on. However, to do that, one first has to practically “mediate it for oneself” (ibid.). In the process of doing so, one thinks about it and considers how the reproduction of a piece of music could best be achieved, although with regard to the listeners, one “always [has] something a bit freer and more modern in mind, moving away from this ‘just sit up straight, and one has to pay attention and be quiet’, und so on. I just find it so much more pleasant, when there’s a bit of freedom in the audience” (ibid.). The fact that the audience’s reactions are not clearly predictable and that they react differently to what is performed each time means that the performances remain exciting for the musicians, although the ensemble format obviously favours experimentation with new performance practices: “With four of us, each one is brave enough, because we have one another.” (ibid.)

Concepts Presented during the Lecture Series

For our lecture series, the Kolophonistinnen, together with Axel Petri-Preis, elaborated a multifaceted programme in the run-up to the event, which was organised in such a way as to show the audience which was present a variety of approaches to and possibilities of *Musikvermittlung* in direct comparison.

The programme began with Andreas Lindenbaum’s “STREICH für vier Cellistinnen”, dating from 2011, which is as short as it is physically performative, and sonically interesting with regard to the use of the instruments. It has since become part of the quartet’s standard repertoire – a recording of the piece from the Schubert Hall of the Wiener Konzerthaus, as part of the *Musica Juventutis* programme, can be listened to and viewed under the following QR-code below.



Listening and watching are firmly intertwined in this piece. The kind of performative execution and presentation required is exactly stipulated by the composer in the form of directorial-like instructions, which are inscribed in the composition – so that it constitutes a *Musikvermittlung* composition *per se*. However, this leaves the musicians comparatively little interpretative leeway as performers, even if the interplay has to be tested and rehearsed in a completely new way. It is exciting for the audience to follow the purposeful staging of interaction, as the bodies of the musicians, using their cellos und cello bows like tools, are brought into harmony and counter-harmony with the sound. Within the framework of the lecture series, the concert hall was, at the suggestion of Axel Petri-Preis, additionally bathed in blue light, in order to further emphasise the machine-like nature of the performance.

According to Marlene Förstel, experience has shown that listeners and spectators react to this piece in very different ways, although in the meantime it has become a fixture in the Kolophonistinnen's programme, and especially in children's concerts – “because the children find it funny. I always found it a very exciting piece, but I would never have had the idea that it was funny” (Förstel 2021). Many adults, however, approach Lindenbaum's composition in a rather intellectual manner: “everyone in the audience is very concentrated during this piece because they want to understand it” (ibid.). So even though an open approach to music and an appetite for and pleasure in the alternative use of musical instruments seems to have been unlearned in the course of socialisation, Lindenbaum's piece is suitable for focusing the concentration and attention of all present – and thus it has a good chance of succeeding (regarding attention as a kind of glue “that holds the concert event and the audience together”, see Tröndle 2009: 26f.).

As part of the lecture series, the quartet played the compositions by Mercadante, Fitzenhagen and Goltermann with different light settings and spatial positioning. For Fitzenhagen's “Ave Maria”, the musicians were spread out in the four corners of the hall, which was bathed in complete darkness for this piece. Further, the audience was asked to put on sleeping masks, which had already been placed on the chairs for the purpose. By deliberately blanking out everything visual, undivided attention was given to what could be heard and felt, thus also providing a contrast to the Lindenbaum piece performed at the beginning of the programme. For the musicians, the darkness, and the fact of being positioned at a distance to one another in the room, created the special challenge of finding a way to play together by concentrating on each other as much as possible, even though they were virtually “blind”. Dur-

ing Goltermann's "Serenade", the musicians then began singing and slowly moving towards each other with their instruments, until they finally came together again in the front third of the hall.

Fig. 1: Die Kolophonistinnen performing at the lecture series at the mdw, December 2019



Source: private

Finally, the Kolophonistinnen performed two arrangements of the famous pieces "Radetzky March" (Johann Strauss the Elder) and "Wiener Blut" ["Viennese Blood"] (Johann Strauss the Younger), which Leonhard Roczek was specially commissioned by the Kolophonistinnen to create for the ensemble's instrumentation. According to Förstel, Roczek, himself a cellist, paid particular attention to giving the four cellos equal opportunities to play, so that "each cello part becomes the centre of focus at some point in the piece" (Förstel 2021). The interventions in the originals vary in intensity – the "Radetzky March", for example, begins in a minor instead of a major key, which gives the mood of the piece a completely different colouring. Moreover, the arrangements contain frequent references to films or film music and so to popular culture: "Star Wars", for instance, is quoted in the "Radetzky March", and Roczek integrated a middle section into the arrangement of "Wiener Blut" which, although it is not a direct quotation, is strongly reminiscent of film music in its compositional structure. Furthermore, the arrangements contain theatrical and choreographic elements, for example when dialogues between the musicians are developed and integrated into the piece, or when, as in "Wiener Blut", a

scene with a dispute and thus an interaction is set in motion by one of the cellists hitting another on her instrument with her bow, which is accompanied in the composer's instructions by "look angry".

As their performance during our lecture series demonstrated, the Kolophonistinnen have practically no fear at all of engaging with new and unusual performance concepts and contexts. Not to be underestimated is the shared courage and strength which the young female musicians summon up each day in order to once again swim against the tide in the field of classical music, with its handed-down performance practices and mostly rather traditional understanding of roles and gender concepts. Perhaps, due to their alternative and playful approaches to music, they have to experience and process not only approval but also rejection, nevertheless remaining curious and creative. The innovative potential of *Musikvermittlung* can only unfold with and through such female musicians, which is why appropriate support and promotion of it must be more firmly anchored at the institutional level during the years of (higher) music education and also later on in professional life.

Bibliography

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- QR-code: Die Kolophonistinnen, performing Andreas Lindenbaum's "STREICH für vier Cellistinnen" at the Wiener Konzerthaus in 2019; source: YouTube [online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjr4c_LzJGA].

Biographical notes

The cello quartet **Die Kolophonistinnen** was founded in 2014. The quartet was able to celebrate its first great successes in the competitions *Prima la Musica* and at the BePhilharmonic Strauss Music Contest of the Vienna Philharmonic. As prize winners, they were able to perform at the dress rehearsal of the 2016 Summer Night Concert and in the film shown worldwide during the intermission of the 2017 New Year's Concert of the Vienna Philharmonic, which is broadcast worldwide. Within the framework of the *Musica Juventutis* competition, the quartet were awarded a performance at the Wiener Konzerthaus in November 2018. Since autumn 2018, they have been members of the Live-Music-Now Yehudi Menuhin Organisation. The Kolophonistinnen performed outside of Europe for the first time in January 2019, when they embarked on a two-week tour of Chile. In February 2019, they won 2nd prize at the Fanny Mendelssohn Förderpreis [Sponsorship Prize] in Hamburg. The following year, the quartet released their debut CD "Heldinnenleben" (Gramola). The Kolophonistinnen have given concerts in the Glass Hall of the Musikverein Wien, the Schubert Hall of the Wiener Konzerthaus and the Stefanien Hall of the Musikverein Graz. More information is available on their website: <http://www.diekolophonistinnen.at/>.

Hannah Amann (born in 2001 in Vienna) is currently studying with Stefan Kropfitsch at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. She has performed both as a soloist and as a chamber musician at the Wiener Konzerthaus, the Musikverein Klagenfurt and the Palace of Justice in Vienna. Within the framework of the summer academy in Radolfzell, she received a sponsorship award from Gustav Rivinius. In spring 2021, she won 1st prize at the international competition *Musica Goritensis* in Gorizia, Italy.

Marlene Förstel (born in 2000 in Lower Austria) is currently studying with Reinhard Latzko at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. She has won several prizes in the Austrian *Prima la musica* competition. In April 2018 she won her category in the international *Svirel* competition in Slovenia. Her solo performances include appearances at the Festspielhaus St. Pölten (2016), at the Palace of Justice in Vienna with the Franz-Schmidt-Kammerorchester (2018) and in Slovenia with the Slovene-Philharmonic-Chamber Orchestra (2019).

Elisabeth Herrmann (born in 2001 in Vienna) is currently studying with Stefan Kropfisch at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. She plays as both a soloist and a chamber musician in chamber music ensembles at Vienna's concert houses, including the MuTh, the Wiener Konzerthaus (Musica Juventutis prizewinner 2019) and the Musikverein Wien. In addition to her studies in Vienna, she is a pupil of Sol Gabetta in a master class at the Musikakademie Basel.

Theresa Laun (born in 2001 in Vienna) is currently studying with Reinhard Latzko at the mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. Active as both a soloist and a chamber musician, she has performed at the Palace of Justice in Vienna with Franz-Schmidt-Kammerorchester, at the Mozart House, at the Wiener Konzerthaus, at the Biennale Horn and elsewhere. She is a prizewinner of the Musica Juventutis competition, and as such will make her debut in a performance at the Schubert Saal of the Wiener Konzerthaus in spring 2022.

