

“An individual only becomes an ‘I’ through the ‘You’”

Dietmar Flosdorf and Peter Röbbke in Con- versation about *Musik zum Anfassen*.

Abstract

Peter Röbbke engages in a dialogue with Dietmar Flosdorf, a pioneer in music mediation and community music in Austria. They discuss specific projects, as well as the philosophical and ethical foundations of Dietmar’s work.

Peter Röbbke dialogue avec Dietmar Flosdorf, un pionnier de la médiation de la musique et de la musique communautaire en Autriche. Ils discutent de projets spécifiques ainsi que des fondements philosophiques et éthiques du travail de Dietmar.

Peter Röbbke spricht mit Dietmar Flosdorf, einem Pionier von Musikvermittlung und Community Music in Österreich. Sie unterhalten sich über spezifische Projekte ebenso wie über philosophische und ethische Grundlagen seiner Arbeit.

The beginnings of *Musik zum Anfassen* [Hands-On Music] and its basic structure

Peter Röbbke: Dear Dietmar, this is not the first conversation and not the first meeting we have had. I have followed your work for about 20 years: in fact, we came into close contact back in 2002, because you realised a model of music mediation that you called *Musik zum Anfassen* for the first time in Austria. And you needed someone to look at it from a music educational and academic perspective because an evaluation report had to be submitted to the ministerial sponsors. But that was just the beginning of a long collegial and friendly relationship in which I followed many of your projects. At some point, you were also a member of staff at the Department of Music Education Research and Practice, where you established and coordinated the subject area Music in Dialogue. And now, in April 2024, a moment has come when, for various biographical reasons, it might be appropriate to review the past. It is a moment that is also linked to the

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*KlangBildKlang*¹ project, of which you are the conceptual creator and which has encompassed the entire University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna in a way that no other project has done before.

In this conversation, we will now try to shed light on the fullness and complexity of your work in the areas of music mediation and community music. As far as the definition of music mediation and community music is concerned, we will not define ourselves, but we agree with the department, which calls your field ‘Music in Dialogue’ and then adds the other two terms in brackets, thus expressing the opinion that clear demarcations or crystal-clear definitions must fail. And you are a shining example of how one can and should act both areas.

Dear Dietmar, you started out in Bavaria and then continued *Musik zum Anfassen* in Austria. Can you explain the basic model, i.e. what was the relationship between the participating schoolchildren and the professional musicians, what was the relationship between the workshops and the final concert?

Dietmar Flosdorf: The idea came about because I founded a grassroots chamber orchestra with friends at the beginning of my studies and we chose the rural area as the orchestra’s location in order to work creatively there. We quickly realised that it wasn’t enough to just go there and play a concert, but that you really had to approach people. We tried that and experimented with concert and workshop formats, and it turned out that it was important to bring consistency to this work. That’s why we said that if there were to be workshops, then there had to be at least four, ideally building on each other thematically and culminating in a joint presentation of what we had worked on. And then, over the years, it also became clear that we could integrate different musical constellations into the four consecutive workshops and thus achieve a certain musical range.

Each workshop had a theme: I always started with listening, another theme was creative work with self-made instruments or how music creates emotions. And this resulted in building elements that we presented in the final concert, which reminded us of the workshop work and so there was a shared thread running through the whole project. The children who had gone through this series of workshops with us were part of a creative collaboration and brought on stage in a certain collegiality with their new musician friends: we had all become a huge ensemble and presented ourselves as such to the audience and the children’s families.

PR: Why was the professionalism of the musicians involved so important to you?

DF: I am convinced of the pull effect of professional artistry, I think it is unsurpassably effective! In this respect, I have always designed the setting in such a way that the artistic potential of the musicians who deal with different dialogue groups is tangible, that they can perform and present at a high level and that their expertise can be experienced

¹ klangbildklang.at (accessed October 30, 2024).

and appreciated. Children in particular have a keen sense of this. This has always remained a maxim of my music mediation concepts and work, also in the sense of differentiating it from what is perceived as ‘academic’, i.e. purely pedagogical teaching and explaining, and also from other practices such as music therapy approaches, although there are always overlaps.

PR: And at the same time, you very consciously choose the fields in which you work: it’s noticeable that you often go to elementary schools, where all the children in an age cohort and from different social classes are together, and also to particular elementary schools in particular districts of Vienna.

DF: Exactly, in the pilot project in 2002, for example, in which primary schools from rural areas were also involved, I deliberately did not go to the middle-class districts, so one elementary school was in Herderplatz, in the working-class district of Simmering, and the other in the so-called Schöpfwerk, a large public housing estate. I also visited these schools again and again for follow-up projects, creating long-term collaborations.

PR: I remember the Herderplatz project and realized at that time, that you were completely free of this patronizing attitude: “Make poor children happy by introducing them to classical music...”

DF: On the contrary, I’ve always found it much more exciting and enriching to work with people from such residential areas, because these groups are more open, spontaneous, and unconventional in their creative approaches.

PR: Perhaps more ‘uneducated’ in a very positive sense.

DR: Yes, and it must also be said that they treat us musicians with appreciative gratitude. In the final concerts, there is a deep response from parents who perhaps never encountered such music live before, and we receive feedback which strengthens us for our professional path.

PR: Did that reveal a hunger and real need?

DF: Yes, but – I won’t idealize it - perhaps not so much for classical music, but rather for an encounter with people who are at home in other artistic cultural contexts and musical styles, who live their musicianship with body and soul, and who can then take the workshop participants into these contexts: coming to an opera house in this way and standing on stage with a jazz bassist, for example, is simply a highlight for many people. Theodor W. Adorno once said: “What is necessary for life is precisely what is not necessary”. In authentic artistic creations, people can become aware of the possibility of

what is more than the mere existence they lead, more than the order of the world to which they are committed.

The Collaboration with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra: *Orchester zum Anfassen*

PR: You approached the Viennese institutions of so-called high culture with the black-and-white brochure containing the evaluation report in your hand. So, we now have to talk about your long-standing collaboration with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, and also about the opera projects at the Theater an der Wien. How were you able to win over the Symphony Orchestra for this work and what was important to you?

DF: I simply went to the management with this booklet, whose photographs gave you a good and immediate impression of *Musik zum Anfassen*, and they were actually ready to listen, because the time was probably right for it too: the Bruckner Orchestra Linz and the Lower Austrian Tonkünstler Orchestra already had music mediation activities.

PR: And the orchestra in the Austrian capital couldn't accept that?

DF: Actually, it was primarily the orchestra's musicians who urged the management to put money into this. And it was also immediately understood that I wasn't here to propose projects to attract future subscribers, but that the orchestra, which is well subsidized by the City of Vienna, has a responsibility to the entire city and all its residents in terms of cultural education, and that also ties in with its history: playing workers' concerts in the district of Favoriten, for example, was part of the tradition of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra.

So that was in the air² and it wasn't difficult to get approval. But the fact that they stuck with it, that it didn't remain an 'alibi project' for one season, and that the educational work was continued, was due, in my opinion, to the experiences of the musicians who went to the schools with me. The response from the very first workshop projects was gratifying for them – in this different context of encounter, their musical existence expanded to a new dimension.

² Shortly afterwards, the Vienna Philharmonic started its *passwort:klassik* project with Hanne Muthspiel, who was studying in Detmold on the part-time Master's program in music mediation - the first and only one in the German-speaking world. See www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/de/jugend/pwk#pw (accessed October 30, 2024).



Figure 1. An event of the “Orchestra to Touch” (“Orchester zum Anfassen”) ©privat

Perhaps it should be added that the first workshop took place at a time when the orchestra was on tour, and it was a perfect ‘time filler’ for those who stayed at home (laughs) to go to the schools. The great things that happened at home were enthusiastically reported back to the rest of the orchestra, and that gave the whole orchestra a real boost.

PR: And that turned into nine years of intensive cooperation, with three projects involving two school classes each during the season, each project with four mixed workshops, but of course without the final concert by *Musik zum Anfassen*, because the upcoming concert by the Symphony Orchestra and its program was the fixed point.

DF: Now attending the dress rehearsal was the crowning finale, i.e. seeing the musicians you knew from the workshops on the podium with the piece you had creatively approached in the workshops. And once there was even a project where I actually managed to get the children integrated into a Symphony Orchestra subscription concert, so they were actually on stage. The conductor at the time was Gerd Albrecht, who conducted one of his *Erklärkonzerte* [explanatory concerts] and took the ‘risk’ of having two school classes perform in the Great Hall of the Vienna Konzerthaus. Today, it is common practice for orchestras to implement such participatory projects into concerts.



Figure 2. Paul Dukas: *The Sorcerer's Apprentice (Der Zauberlehrling)*/ Vienna Symphony Orchestra / G. Albrecht / Vienna Konzerthaus on 10.12.2003 © Peter Andritsch

PR: Can you say something about how this work has influenced the orchestra? We've already mentioned that in the first project, the orchestra was actually on tour and those who stayed at home were integrated into these wonderful activities, which then made the rest of the orchestra very curious.

DF: And by the third and fourth workshops, when everyone was back in Vienna anyway, it was very much supported and driven by the orchestra board. So, this push to implement music mediation work really came from the orchestra itself and, as I said, it also put the management under a bit of pressure. Fortunately, I always had a contact in the orchestra for the organization, who then helped me to put together the appropriate line-up. Over the years, a core group of musicians has naturally emerged who particularly enjoyed the work and were especially suited for it. They have always come forward of their own accord and expressed their interest. And for some special instruments, such as the harp and tuba, it was or always had to be the same person ... (laughs).

Then there were also real friendships, and the good ideas came about through exchange and dialogue, especially for ways to gain access to the orchestral works, because I always arranged excerpts or certain prominent themes, in order to address them in school. And the contact with the musicians has continued and also helped me to win over the orchestra as a patron for the "Community Orchestra Vienna", which I later founded.³

³ www.community-orchester.wien (accessed October 30, 2024).

At the Theater an der Wien: *Oper zum Anfassen* (and an encounter with Nikolaus Harnoncourt)

PR: So *Musik zum Anfassen* ['Hands-On Music'] had now become *Orchester zum Anfassen* ['Hands-On Orchestra']. And then in 2007 there was also the first *Oper zum Anfassen* ['Hands-On Opera']...

DF: The Theater an der Wien had actually been a musical stage, which was then converted back into a 'proper' opera house due to a cultural policy decision by the City of Vienna, also in view of the history of the building, which after all had been the temporary home of the bombed-out State Opera after the Second World War and the venue for important world premieres of Beethoven's works, for example. The new artistic director had just been installed, and I approached him with a certain impertinence and said that, as a newly opened opera house, you should set an example and be visionary – also in terms of building a profile different from that of the State Opera, where nothing had happened in that direction yet!

PR: I am your chance!

DF: (Laughs) Exactly! And again, I found people willing to listen and then immediately looked through the season's schedule to find out what might be a suitable work and what would fit in with the school schedule, and that's how I came across Haendel's *Julius Caesar*. And then I went back to the school on Herderplatz because I knew that the principal would support new approaches, for example with regard to the flexibility of timetable changes. Incidentally, I now remember that the performance had to be at the weekend due to the opera schedule and, as a matinée, fell exactly on a Sunday, when the clock was moved forward by one hour.

PR: Oh my God!

DF: Everyone at the opera house was incredibly worried that the pupils from these particular social contexts wouldn't be on stage on time, but it worked perfectly!

PR: Which also shows how important the project was for the children at the elementary school.

DF: And for the families as a whole! We also documented it on film back then, and this documentary then won the *junge ohren preis* [Young Ears Award] in 2007.

PR: We still need to add a little more and to weave a laurel wreath: readers of this journal will be familiar with the *netzwerk junge ohren* [Young Ears Network], but it hadn't been around for long back then: the first winner of the *junge ohren preis* in 2006 for a

new music mediation format was the well-known project *Rhythm Is It*, i.e. the performance of *Le Sacre Du Printemps* by the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, together with the dance performance by dozens of Berlin children and young people who had learned the piece in workshops with Royston Maldoom. So you were in very prominent company.

DF: This *netzwerk junge ohren* had a history in Germany, namely numerous efforts such as the the Concerts for Children Initiative, and it was supported by the German Orchestra Association (DOV) in order to give the whole area of music mediation bigger public resonance. Incidentally, the award in material terms was a free membership for one year. I think I became member number 15! (laughs) In any case, Gerald Mertens, who was chairman of the DOV at the time, presented me with the award here in Vienna on the stage of the Theater an der Wien.

PR: So an award with a high symbolic value, but as far as the financial side is concerned, rather disappointing (laughs)... but let's talk about your second major opera project at the Theater an der Wien, on the occasion of the new production of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*, a production that then also deliberately included young people in all areas, from the orchestra to the moderation.

DF: That was actually a continuation of the first project at the Theater an der Wien, where I also brought the children on stage. At that time, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra was playing in the orchestra pit and the children brought excerpts from the opera onto stage, using the space in front of the iron curtain. This project led to the second one⁴; this time I cooperated with the secondary school Am Schöpfwerk, because the theme that the opera focuses on, namely society's temptations for a young person, e.g. especially through drugs etc., was very appropriate for the Schöpfwerk housing estate and could reflect many of the young people's own experiences.

PR: In this context, there was also a personal encounter with Nikolaus Harnoncourt, who was an important companion of *Musik zum Anfassen* from the very beginning.

DF: I had already written to him in 2002, for the Vienna pilot project, asking whether he would be willing to be a patron for it, and a handwritten letter came back by return of post in which he wrote as a greeting: "There are few things I find as important as this cause: familiarizing children with art. That way they will love music. Those who love music, and above all, make music themselves, think differently: better, richer, more fantastic, more human. All the best!"

⁴ Due to the positive response, the new artistic director Roland Geyer also created a separate position for music theatre education at the Theater an der Wien.

PR: And so Harnoncourt became the patron of *Musik zum Anfassen* and remained so until his death.

DF: Yes – and he was then the conductor of the new production of *The Rake's Progress*, and the children were allowed to take part in a press conference where they confronted him with "cheeky" questions, such as why he actually became a conductor, whether it was because of all the money you get for it.

PR: And Harnoncourt's reaction?

DF: I can't remember the wording, but at first he laughed out loud, thought that it was fantastic that a young person was asking him such a direct question and then of course replied that there were completely different reasons involved in his becoming and being a conductor – as we know from his life story.

The beginning of the activities at the mdw: *Das andere Podium* [The Other Stage] and the course *Musikvermittlung* [music mediation] – leaving the comfort zone

PR: We now come to your work at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. Given the time we have today and the limited space in the journal, if I may briefly summarize: you joined the Josef Hellmesberger Department of String Instruments, Guitar and Harp in Music Education in 2003, whose director at the time was Wolfgang Aichinger, whom you already knew from the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. You taught the viola, which is your main instrument, as a substitute for somebody on leave, and also a class in music mediation established for the first time, and the question I'd like to ask you is whether, with the beginning of your work at the mdw, your activities shifted a bit from what's typically called music mediation towards the direction of community music: you intentionally go to areas in society where you meet marginalized groups and then try to empower them by providing them with the opportunity to express themselves artistically and to find their own (musical) voice.

DF: It all started with a small teaching assignment of two hours that Wolfgang set up because he thought that the mdw students should have the chance to share this part of my life as a musician. On the one hand, I experienced a great deal of liveliness in my work with the students. On the other hand, students at a music university often represent a certain clientele that has been socialized in a certain cultural and economic bubble. However, since I also expect classical music to have social relevance and to be able to have an impact in places where it initially has no place or presence, it was clear that these students should be taken along on this rather unfamiliar path.

PR: So taking them out of their traditional middle-class comfort zone...

DF: That's why Wolfgang and I founded the format *Das andere Podium* ['The Other Stage'], where a series of concerts, combining music and readings, was given in unconventional venues such as Vienna's Gruft, by the way also in collaboration with the Max Reinhard Seminar/Department of Drama.

PR: We have to explain to our readers what the Vienna Gruft is...

DF: Well, the Gruft ['The Crypt'] is the care centre of the Vienna Caritas for homeless people and is called Gruft because the space for it was located under the Mariahilfer church, i.e. actually in the crypt, with correspondingly constricted conditions, where people cooked and then slept on and under the tables on which they had previously eaten. That's where the whole thing started, and the experiences I had there – including the gratitude of the inhabitants and the response from the students – encouraged me to go even further into areas affected by exclusion and to cross boundaries in the process.

Encounters... the “Basic word I and Thou”

PR: Dear Dietmar, before we talk about some of these community projects, let's shed some light on the philosophical and biographical background to what you do. On the website of Music in Dialogue, there is a text that has a lot to do with you, but of course also with your colleagues in this department. Under central values we find⁵

Music mediators and community musicians are concerned with creating hybrid and fluid spaces beyond the familiar, in which respect, dialogue and encounters are the basis, mutual enrichment and change is possible for all participants, musical professionals and amateurs alike, the unexpected can happen and new forms of participation as partaking and partgiving become reality. Artistic excellence, social responsibility, educational sensitivity, and the need for academic underpinning form the foundation for these values.

Would you like to comment on or add to this text?

DF: I think it's wonderfully summarized in three or four sentences (laughs). What I would like to add or reinforce is that my focus has always been on giving space to the artistic excellence of the mediator or ensemble and thereby entering into a personal and relationship-building dialogue, i.e. taking the step towards the other person and then creating something together from this encounter.

PR: Let's trace your value-oriented attitude a little further. The way you talk about encounters, the way you shape and fill the spaces of these encounters, reminds me of Martin Buber's philosophy, who says in *I and Thou* that all real life is an encounter. At the

⁵ [musikindialog.at](https://www.musikindialog.at) (accessed October 30, 2024).

beginning there is the relationship, and this is “founded” by the “basic word I and Thou”.

DF: Yes, and there we also find the famous sentence, “An individual only becomes an ‘I’ through the ‘You’”. That’s exactly how I see it, and that’s why it’s important for students to develop their personalities during their studies by experiencing encounters such as those in the Gruft. They can grow from this, precisely because they are not in their usual contexts, the usual university contexts, in which they often only rub up against their fellow students or measure themselves against them.

PR: The fact that the “basic word I and Thou” creates and effects a relationship is of course also related to the Gospel of John in terms of religious philosophy, to “In the beginning was the Word”, whereby the point with Buber is that this word is not simply “I”, but “I and Thou”.

DF: That’s exactly how it is!

PR: Where does your basic attitude come from biographically?

DF: My parents, especially my father, play a big role in this. My father ran a social institution, he worked in educational counselling and then also set up a training institution for curative educators. After the war, he was the very first psychologist in Bavaria to be employed in a social institution with the support of a foundation, under conditions that are unimaginable today. For example, his first employment contract with an orphanage, as it was called those days, stated that part of the contract included being allowed to shower or bathe once a week free of charge (laughs).

Spaces, encounters and projects: a ramble and a reflection on processes, rules and irritations

PR: We become the “I” in the “You”, and in your countless projects you have opened up the spaces in which this is possible: Each of these projects would be worthacknowledging in this conversation – we will talk about two of them in more detail – but at this point we can only take a cursory look at your work and invite our readers to visit your website, where everything is documented in detail!⁶ Let us now touch on a few things, such as your response to the call for proposals for the Mozart Year 2006, the project *Pùnkītītītī – Mozart for Children*⁷.

⁶ www.musikzumanfassen.at (accessed October 30, 2024).

⁷ www.punkitititi.at (accessed October 30, 2024).

DF: That was a name Mozart gave himself in a letter to his friend Gottfried von Jacquin on his journey to Prague in 1787.

PR: In a team with Nicole Marte, who then founded the Center for Music Mediation⁸ in Vienna's 14th district in 2010. *Púnkititi* then took place in a huge residential complex in Vienna Floridsdorf. Projects with the BBI, the Federal Institute for the Education of the Blind, and the Federal Institute for the Education of the Deaf should also be mentioned. You often cooperated with the Viennese institution Jugend am Werk [Youth at Work], which helps young people who are unable to find an apprenticeship on the open market. And you initiated and built up the isaCommunity⁹ section of the mdw's International Summer Academy (ISA) in Reichenau an der Rax, which has since become an indispensable part of the program: in 2016 you brought together people from the *ad hoc* refugee home, residents of the AktiVital retirement home in Reichenau, and elementary school children with brass musicians from the region as well as with people living in a facility of the Silberberg Association, an association for parentless people with multiple disabilities. Your last project took place in Gerasdorf prison, a juvenile detention centre. This in particular focuses on the topic of walls or boundaries, which – despite all the emphasis on crossing boundaries – are sometimes necessary: surely there is a reason why deaf people, for example, also want to be among people of their own kind and don't want to incessantly 'fail' in the company of hearing people?

DF: You allude to our Sparkling Science project *You Feel, I Hear, We Make Music – A iialogue*, where we dealt precisely with this question, i.e. how inclusive work simultaneously respects protected spaces and overcomes boundaries. Community work naturally involves irritation: whenever I noticed that I was somehow disrupting, I thought, "This is the right place for me!" So, upsetting the routine processes a little for added value is a must, but at the same time you have to be clear: these processes also have their justification, otherwise the work that my local cooperation partners do on a daily basis cannot be done and achieved. So there have to be rules and procedures, but it is all the more valuable when new spaces are allowed, when our interventions create new opportunities for experience. To come back to the project *Tschick – A Hero?* in the prison on the occasion of the new production of the piece at the Vienna State Opera: I didn't give up and said that if we were going to be there, then it was because we really wanted to be there and not just make music or present something for an hour and then leave.

⁸ ZMV 14 emerged from the Association for the Foundation of a Music School in Penzing founded by Nicole Marte and Dietmar Flosdorf in 2000. The reason and aim were to draw attention to the continuing lack of music school locations and places financed by the City of Vienna, especially in the 14th district of Penzing, the largest district in Vienna, and to call for appropriate political action. See www.musikvermittelt.at/zmv14/geschichte (accessed October 30, 2024). Nicole and Dietmar then successfully resumed this collaboration in 2020 on the occasion of the call for projects from www.kulturkatapult.at (accessed October 30, 2024) in the project *visibly audible – becoming audibly visible – a film and music education project*.

⁹ www.isa-music.org/de (accessed October 30, 2024).

And thank God we were then allowed to spend the whole day there: a musical morning session, lunch together, an afternoon session, and that six times in a row over several weeks, all in the spirit of meeting the You.

PR: You threw a spanner in the works?

DF: All sides had to be prepared to learn from each other, to show understanding for each other's situation and concerns and to approach each other. For the prison, the project meant new challenges, because we know that the prisons are extremely understaffed and there are also very clear and strict security requirements that have to be met; but it was all the more fantastic that they took on the 'risk' of our project for their inmates. I had the impression, and also got confirmation, that they didn't regret letting us in despite the effort for the institution. It was very intense for all sides, especially for the mdw students.

Spotlight on refugees and trainees: the rather delicate *Sound Machine* project

PR: I would like to talk to you again about a project that we have already discussed elsewhere.¹⁰ It was also very intense, had to do with productive disruption and, in my perception, showed your work *in nuce* and to a certain extent *in extremo*. I'm talking about the *Sound Machine*, which brought young people doing an apprenticeship at Jugend am Werk together with refugees and students: it's obvious that this was an explosive constellation.

DF: We were at the height of the so-called refugee crisis, and that's when we at Jugend am Werk wanted to build a musical instrument out of an old car body with apprentices in automotive engineering and bodywork construction (laughs), to make music with a car body, so to speak, and I also wanted to open up borders and create a meeting space. So I went to a refugee quarter and invited people to the project, with the additional offer of being able to get a taste of an apprenticeship at Jugend am Werk. Many people were interested in this, and you have to give the apprenticeship training centre credit for opening up to these people, as well as for the second, parallel part of the project with the carpenters and joiners. And in contrast to the political and media dramatization, to the exclusion and envy debates at the time, it was possible to meet and get to know people here. The apprentices experienced the realities of refugee life: we went into their neighbourhoods together and looked at the living conditions there. And at the end –

¹⁰ See the chapter "Between universalist fantasy and tangible attribution: music mediation initiatives in the face of flight and migration" in: Berg, Ivo, Hannah Lindmaier, and Peter Röbbke, eds. 2020. *Vorzeichenwechsel? Socio-political dimensions of music education today*. Münster: Waxmann.

after a joint public presentation – the refugees were allowed to take the sound machine with them and the apprentices gave it as a gift for the outside area of the refugee accommodation so that the children could make music on it. But of course: “They get everything for ‘free’ that we don’t get or have to work hard for, as we are at the bottom of the social ladder” was always an issue in the background and not only there.

Spotlight *Sofa Listening* in the Schöpfwerk housing estate: reaching limits

PR: In your attempts to design this type of space and facilitate encounters, you also came up against limits. Let’s talk about the *Sofa Listening* project, which was also intended to go very far into the private sphere in the Schöpfwerk housing estate. We shouldn’t imagine your work as if it was always a piece of cake, with everyone just waiting for it, willingly opening the doors and falling around your neck.

DF: The idea at the time was not just to do a project with school classes, but to perform for the whole estate, which was celebrating an anniversary at the time, and to become part of the big estate festival at the end. *Sofa Listening*: we actually intended to go into the apartments and play to people on the sofa. But although we had a semester, it didn’t work out that people would open the doors to their homes for us – we couldn’t get over that barrier. But it worked all the better for that, once we adapted the project goal and went to the youth centre, to the Bassena area care centre, to the doctor’s offices, to the tobacconist’s, to the supermarket, in other words, wherever the residents of the housing estate go and spend time.



Figure 3. “Stairwell Concert at Schöpfwerk” (“Stiegenhaus-Konzert Am Schöpfwerk”)
©www.wohnpartner-wien.at

PR: But you wouldn’t rule out the possibility of being able to reach the private sofa in the end if there were enough time?

DF: I am firmly convinced of that, because it was initiated in the work with the children at school. The children were to have been the bridge into the families. On the one hand, the school is an authority that people at home don’t want to have looking at their cards, as the local music teacher from the secondary school put it in the preliminary meeting, but on the other hand, the children bring momentum into the families because they get to know the musicians from the project as cool guys (who aren’t teachers...) who are easy to invite. But for that to really happen, it’s a question of trust and that just takes time.

Having an impact on the home institution: how music mediation can change the mdw

PR: Dear Dietmar, in the many conversations we’ve had recently, I’ve also become aware of something that I hadn’t previously realized about your work. You’re fundamentally concerned, and this has also become very clear in this conversation, with linking spaces and people and, in doing so, obviously also with having an inclusive and cross-border impact on your home institution, the mdw. You already hinted at this today when you talked about the concerts in the Gruft, in which students from the Max

Reinhard Seminar for Drama were also involved. On the occasion of the mdw's 200th anniversary, you realized a sound chain that stretched across Vienna and symbolically connected the mdw's various locations, and you have been very much involved in a project that owes its existence to your impetus, namely *KlangBildKlang*, in which these connections have been taken to the extreme at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. Can you explain your attitude towards your own university, what are your motives, what intentions are you pursuing there?

DF: I've always found the mdw to be a fascinating cosmos of creativity and artistic breadth. The mdw isn't just a university of music; it also has a film institute, a rhythmic department, a drama institute, and much more, so the range is immense and thus naturally also the potential that can be used for music mediation and community contexts. I have always tried to initiate cross-connections between the areas, also in the interest of the students, because they are often so involved in their departments or instrument classes that they don't even know who they could meet at their university and how this could enrich them. Starting from this approach, I came up with the idea that this should really become a 'matter for the boss', i.e. that the heads of the institution, the rectorate, should commit to making these cross-connections visible and also open up to other art universities in Vienna and venues: hence the title *KlangBildKlang*. The aim is to seek out different aesthetic approaches, to establish connections between artistic or visual and musical creation, or to focus on instrumental, vocal and performing activities in joint projects and to bring all of this to the public for a semester. Community engagement is at the heart of this; we show how our institution can have an impact on society in the spirit of the Third Mission.



Figure 4. Performance of the Webern Symphony Orchestra at the Vienna Konzerthaus as part of *KlangBildKlang* ©Stephan Polzer

PR: There is a wealth of events that is almost impossible to keep track of, and we can only invite our readers to follow the link in Footnote 1 and surf the website set up especially for *KlangBildKlang* and immerse themselves in the wealth of events on offer. One will be surprised at the extent to which the mdw reaches out to other cultural institutions and how wholeheartedly it is committed to this community involvement.



Figure 5. Project: “Painting Sounds” (Klänge malen”) ©privat

Time, consistency, reliability, respect – and the partners and networks

PR: As we approach the end of our conversation, let’s take another look at the fundamental aspects of your attitude and approach as a music mediator and community musician: taking your time and being patient is something we talked about in connection with *Sofa Listening* and with *Tschick – ein Held?* in the prison, it became clear how important consistency, continuity and reliability are: the music mediator must not just appear occasionally, a flash in the pan and then disappear again, but must take part in daily life to some extent, so no one-offs, no show effects, but lasting effectiveness.

DF: And it must be based on an attitude of appreciation and respect, so that trust can develop and grow. I can tell you a little anecdote about this. With the opera project *Rake’s Progress*, I had a preliminary meeting with all the teachers involved at the Schöpfwerk. I was working with four classes at the time, where I also encountered extreme resistance due to the topic of dangers and temptations of all kinds, i.e. everything that happens to the protagonist in the opera. When the project was over, one of my colleagues confessed to me in a debriefing that she had been extremely upset in the preliminary discussion because she suspected that just another artist was coming and

wanted to put himself in the spotlight at the expense of the young people involved, who – as she experienced again and again in her daily work – were marked by their fate and living conditions.

PR: Someone from the outside wants to exploit psychologically problematic situations for his art.

DF: But then things turned out quite differently than she had feared in the preliminary talks, and she was grateful for that and willing to revise her assessment. The point “appreciation and respect” is sometimes difficult to realize with students, because the curricula and the ECTS points system, or the whole university system, don’t allow them the space, time and flexibility to really get involved with the people in the projects.

PR: We will come back to this point at the end of our conversation, i.e. the contradiction between the growth of courses and studies in the field of music mediation and the real opportunities for students to get fully involved. But to come back to the Schöpfwerk story: you are obviously not the kind of artist who seeks to put himself in the spotlight, you have been working in the field with sensitivity, empathy and respect over a long period of time.

DF: And also with curiosity!

PR: And this curiosity leads you to blaze new trails and find new paths, perhaps initially as a lone scout and lone fighter. But you told me that at a certain point in almost every project there are comrades-in-arms – you prefer the term ‘fellow travellers’ – who complement your actions and strengthen you.

DF: The classic example is the colleague from the secondary school Am Schöpfwerk, who has been a music teacher at the secondary school since it was founded and is really a typical secondary school music teacher, in all his music pedagogical breadth and his hands-on manner, but who can also tell you about encounters with parents that scared him. He was always enthusiastic when I came with students and saw it as a great enrichment and professional reinforcement. We did a lot of things together, including the big *Musique Mécanique* project at the Technical Museum, where we converted old bicycles into sound machines together. Incidentally, the amount of material used in the project was enormous (laughs). He couldn’t believe that I was always there long before the workshop started, because the things had to be repaired again and again. And yes, you can really feel that it’s about the cause and not about self-promotion.

PR: What role do larger networks play for you, beyond the network that you naturally already have with your wonderful colleagues in the Music in Dialogue department? I know that you also worked with European project partners from New Audiences and

Innovative Practice (NAIP)¹¹ at the ISA, the mdw's International Summer Academy in Reichenau.

DF: This NAIP Master's program gave me a lot of know-how because I was connected with my colleagues in joint work. There was always an intensive week at the start of each new NAIP study program where we met up across Europe, for example in Sweden or Iceland, but also a few times in Holland. I learned a lot there and also got to know colleagues from England, for example, who already had a real head start in terms of experience due to the longer tradition of community projects in the English-speaking world. That encouraged me to break new ground and be more daring.

And at the ISA, another network with local people was created: things become possible that those coming from outside cannot achieve. Over the years, I've found partners who know the area and can build bridges, right up to the refugee quarter up on the hill, which most people didn't even know existed (but the local council did...). Keyword 'network': a new interest group for music mediators¹² has now been founded in Austria, in order to provide a forum for political lobbying and to strengthen the guild of music educators in Austria as a whole, both in terms of remuneration for their work and their role in the overall concept of cultural education.

Involving students: the overloaded curricula

PR: Finally, let's take another, perhaps critical look at the possibilities of really involving students in this work, in view of curricula that make it difficult to engage in these humanly and artistically demanding projects. After all, such activities are no longer exclusively in the elective area of studies, so let me give a brief overview of how music mediation has developed in the curricula. As I said, there were electives, but then we smuggled you into a compulsory subject Organization and Project Work at music schools in the bachelor curriculum of Instrument and Vocal Pedagogy Studies (IGP), which was not really related to your activities. This was followed by a module on music mediation in the compulsory elective area of the IGP Master's degree programme, now we also have a compulsory seminar in the project variant of the Master's degree programme in popular music and finally, since 2021, we provide a compulsory seminar for all IGP Bachelor's students – and that's 100-120 students per year – with the somewhat strange title Presentation and Social Commitment.

DF: It's a bit strange, but that's exactly how I would implement the course (laughs).

¹¹ musicmaster.eu (accessed October 30, 2024).

¹² igmusikvermittlung.at (accessed October 30, 2024).

PR: And in October 2023, a new Master's degree program was launched at the mdw called Contemporary Arts Practice (CAP)¹³, which represents an alternative to the established Master's degree programmes in performance classes or IGP and it includes music mediation/community music as one of its four profiles. So, from a purely external perspective, the field has grown and grown. On the other hand, I can remember how often you sent me urgent emails asking me to promote your projects in my compulsory classes. It was a never ending struggle to find students, whereby the problem was not so much finding people at all, but that these people could find the time and leisure to really get involved in the projects with consistency, reliability, respect and curiosity. Can you say a little more about this problem? Then we can think together at the end about what perspectives could be developed.

DF: Well, our project schedules are of course daunting at first, if you are involved in a certain compulsory subject context, in quasi-school processes with a lot of timetable requirements and fixed seminar times. But an apprentice workshop at Jugend am Werk doesn't follow the timetable of composition exercises (laughs).

PR: And a prison certainly doesn't.

DF: Exactly, so the conflict is already built into that... on the other hand: in my understanding of the work, people are not simply interchangeable, the encounter has to deepen and grow, and for that to happen, one and the same person has to really be there several times in order to resonate. I only come into resonance with someone whom I get to know step by step, with whom I work together, to whom I open myself up. So, it's a difficult field of competing demands and obligations. In addition, the time-consuming research and organizational preparation or initiation is actually always part of a project. Unfortunately, as long as it was an elective subject, I was never able to incorporate this into the classes, because then the semester would be over before you even went into the field for the first time. On the other hand, it has to be said that if you manage to inspire the students, they will fight for free spaces and are supported and given time off by their professors! At the end, when they are actually on stage together in the final presentation, it sparks such a dynamic that nobody regrets getting involved in the whole thing: the reflections speak for themselves. It is a very fundamental question of what is meant by studying and what attention is paid to developing attitudes and mindsets. In the study commission for the new CAP degree program, I have always fought to have confidence in the independence of students and in the fact that they themselves know best how their potential might grow and what stimuli they need for their growth. But this is an ongoing challenge and debate, namely to create spaces in the degree programs where this independence can unfold, i.e. to create framework con-

¹³ [mdw.ac.at/1791](https://www.mdw.ac.at/1791) (accessed October 30, 2024).

ditions that make personal growth possible – also in constant exchange with fellow students. Even in the new CAP degree program, which has many project phases, we see students struggling for free spaces.

PR: And we are talking about human, artistic, educational development and transformational learning in the spaces we have described in this conversation, the spaces of encounter and relationship.

DF: Yes, and above all artistically: you prove yourself in a different way in front of an audience, beyond the normal concert routine, and you will grow from it.

Biographies

Dietmar Flosdorf studied viola with Hatto Beyerle and Kim Kashkashian in Munich and Vienna. He is a member of the Vienna Chamber Orchestra and initiator and director of the music mediation initiative Musik zum Anfassen.

For his projects, which have been awarded the “Junge-Ohren-Preis” and the “IRIDA - Kulturvermittlung in neuen Kontexten”, he has worked for the Bamberg and Vienna Symphony Orchestras, the Lower Austrian “Tonkünstler” orchestra, the Theater an der Wien, the Vienna State Opera and the Vienna Mozart Year, among others. He teaches at Viennese music schools and the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. There he has also coordinated the subject area Music in Dialogue at the Department of Music Education Research and Practice (IMP) from 2018 to 2024. His research projects have included the EU project Artists in Creative Education, the research project with hearing and hearing-impaired pupils You Feel, I Hear, We Make Music –A Dialogue as Part of Sparkling Science and the FWF Project Demedarts in partnership with the University of Applied Arts Vienna.

Peter Röbke was Professor for instrumental and vocal pedagogy since 1994 (emeritus 2022), was director of the Institute for Music Education from 2010 to 2021 and was also chairman of the study commission for instrumental (vocal) pedagogy at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna for many years. Current activities: Music School Project “On the connection between pedagogical and ecological sustainability”; editor (together with H. Lindmaier) “Instrumental didactics artistically conceived” (Münster: Waxmann 2024).