

What is Music Mediation?

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Abstract

The article addresses the question of what is actually meant by music mediation. We define music mediation as a broadly diversified artistic-educational practice that fosters diverse relationships between people and music, and subsequently discuss formats, contexts, and stakeholders involved. After a brief historical excursion, we delve into music mediation as a professional field, debate existing definitions, and conclude the article with an overview of music mediation as a research field.

L'article vise à définir ce qu'est la médiation de la musique. Les auteurs définissent la médiation de la musique comme une pratique artistique-éducative diversifiée qui établit des relations variées entre les individus et les musiques, puis discutent des formats, des lieux et des acteur·ice·s impliqué·e·s. Après une brève incursion historique, ils abordent la médiation de la musique en tant que domaine professionnel, débattent des définitions existantes et concluent l'article par un aperçu de la médiation de la musique en tant que domaine de recherche.

Der Beitrag widmet sich der Frage, was eigentlich unter Musikvermittlung zu verstehen ist. Wir definieren Musikvermittlung als breit gefächerte künstlerisch-pädagogische Praxis, die vielfältige Beziehungen zwischen Menschen und Musiken stiftet und besprechen in der Folge Formate, Orte und Akteur_innen. Nach einem kleinen historischen Exkurs gehen wir auf Musikvermittlung als Berufsfeld ein, diskutieren bestehende Begriffsdefinitionen und beschließen den Beitrag mit einem Blick auf Musikvermittlung als Forschungsfeld.

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Keywords

music mediation, definition, terminology, history of music mediation, research in music mediation

Introduction¹

Music mediation is a relatively young field of practice and research, with existing definitions varying based on the disciplinary backgrounds of their authors and the national contexts in which they are developed. Typical formats include presentational formats for specific dialogue groups (e.g. moderated or staged concerts), participatory workshops and long-term collaborations (e.g. between music institutions and schools), and media-based formats (e.g. program booklets, radio features, apps). Music mediation formats are localized in classical concert halls as well as alternative venues (e.g. socio-cultural centers or clubs), in public institutions (e.g. schools, hospitals, or prisons), or in public spaces. Depending on the context, the offerings may be linked to various objectives, encompassing not only artistic and educational aims, but also goals connected with cultural policy, socio-political matters or cultural management.

This article aims to provide an overview of historical developments, current definitions and terminological debates within the German-speaking discourse, and proposes a definition that may have the potential to serve as common ground at an international level.

Origins of Music Mediation²

Although music mediation offerings in the German-speaking region have mainly gained significance since the turn of the millennium (Keuchel and Weil 2010; Schilling-Sandvoß 2015; Petri-Preis 2022a), some practices and formats now subsumed under this term have a long-standing tradition. Regarding the diversity of concert formats and performance practices, music mediation draws a connection to the early days of bourgeois concert life in the 18th century, a time before the establishment of commonly practiced measures for directing attention, such as darkening the auditorium, applause rules, spatial separation of musicians and audience, introduction of fixed seating rows, etc. (Schleuning 2000; Tröndle 2018; Voit 2023, 68).

Concerts for children, which remain crucial for music mediation, were already held in the United States in the first half of the 19th century (Rosenberg 2000; Thoen

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² This article mainly focuses on music mediation in the German-speaking region (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Luxemburg and South-Tyrol).

2009). In Germany, the first children's concerts took place around the turn of the 20th century, while these formats gained increased attention especially in the 1970s (Mall 2016). The *Young People's Concerts* with Leonard Bernstein, broadcast on CBS from 1958 onwards, had a significant influence on the content and dramaturgy of the formats (Wimmer 2011). Seminal predecessors or impulses for today's practice of music mediation can also be found in the fields of socio-culture, significantly shaped by Hermann Glaser and Karl Heinz Stahl (Knoblich 2002) in Germany, British community music (Higgins 2012), and participatory composition projects (Laycock 2005).

Usage and Definitions of Terms

The use of the term "music mediation" is anything but univocal, as evidenced by numerous different definition attempts in the relevant literature. Therefore, Chaker and Petri-Preis speak of a "messy concept" (2022, 14). The ambiguity of the term is partly due to its heterogeneous use in different everyday language contexts and disciplinary discourses (Petri-Preis 2023, 31). Moreover, the understanding of music mediation in the German-speaking academic discourse is shaped not least by the respective theoretical framework applied. For example, Wimmer (2010a) understands music mediation from the perspective of cultural studies, as the translation and contextualization of music. Conceptualized against the backdrop of systems theory, Mall (2016) conceptualizes music mediation as a structural coupling between the systems of education and art. Moreover, Petri-Preis (2022) views music mediation from a pragmatist perspective as a social world. These three examples illustrate that the term can be applied to the phenomena of micro-level individual actions, as well as meso- and macro-level collective actors.

"Music mediation" is sometimes used synonymously with the term "concert education", which is not surprising given the great importance of mediation offerings in connection with classical concerts – 60% of music mediators state that they are employed in orchestras or ensembles (see educult and Netzwerk Junge Ohren 2020). However, this is not justified insofar as the practices of music mediation – as Voit emphasizes – encompass not only "concerts for specific target groups" and "offerings accompanying concerts" but also "mediation activities without reference to concerts" (2019, 115). Also, the term "music mediation" is often used – in contrast to music education in schools – to refer to practices being employed in contexts other than those connected with music classrooms and thus synonymous with the outdated term "extracurricular music education" (Vogt 2008; Müller-Brozovic 2017). However, Barbara Stiller points out that "various activities, as well as independent fields of action and specific ways of dealing with music, are referred to as music mediation" (2008, 19). Indeed, the attempt to define the practices of music mediation solely through their extracurricular character is too simplistic. Not least with regard to the diverse initiatives and formats that have emerged at the interface between schools and cultural institutions in recent decades, and given the importance of pupils as a dialogue group

for music mediation, this strict separation between school and extracurricular mediation areas seems less meaningful (see Voit 2018a, 12).

Hendrikje Mautner-Obst makes it clear in her attempt at a definition that music mediation is a hybrid practice which not only shares interfaces with other departments within the respective institution (e.g. dramaturgy, artistic planning, marketing) but also beyond that with related artistic and educational fields:

At present, music mediation proves to be an artistic, educational, and communicative practice that aims to open up access to music for heterogeneous audiences in various formats, ranging from artistically creative to cognitively reflective orientations, and thereby to enable and deepen aesthetic experiences and to test and expand the possibilities of creative expression. In doing so, matters connected with cultural policy or cultural management can also be supported. (Mautner-Obst 2018, 339)

On the other hand, Wolfgang Rüdiger, in his definitional approach, highlights the specific artistic dimension of music mediation when he characterizes it as “the sum of all non-school or cooperative artistic ways and forms of connecting people with music, enabling personally and socially significant aesthetic experiences with music” (Rüdiger 2014, 9).

In this significance of the artistic dimension might well lie the difference to music education in schools. That is why those involved in music mediation usually strive to make a certain music experienceable in its respective artistic context (for example, during a concert visit). Also, professional artists are often involved in the mediation process, and the artistic quality of the musical performance is given central importance. However, to enable musical learning and music-related aesthetic experiences, music mediators – like music teachers – also use educational means, as emphasized by Ernst Klaus Schneider: “It is becoming apparent that mediation in concerts or in the media and the organization of new offerings will become core competencies of artists in the future. Artistic aspiration and educational responsibility go hand in hand.” (Schneider 2001, 118)

Our Definition of Music Mediation

Music mediation, as we understand it, is a broad artistic and educational practice that fosters diverse relationships between people and musics. This highlights the fact that music mediation is situated along a continuum between art and education, with the balance shifting towards one or the other depending on the context. For instance, creative workshops with children tend to be more educationally oriented, while innovative concert formats that explore new spatial settings and configurations have a stronger artistic focus. Furthermore, our definition makes it clear that music mediation, from our perspective, is not limited to the mere transmission of knowledge, although that can be part of music mediation activities. Rather, music mediators establish connections between people and musics, bringing together individuals and communities who might not encounter each other in everyday life, and create links to di-

verse musical practices. In doing so, educational processes may occur, but are usually not the central focus. Thirdly, we deliberately refer to musics in the plural, although current music mediation practice is still largely focused on European art music. On the one hand, we acknowledge tendencies towards the inclusion of non-European art musics, as well as traditional and popular musics. On the other hand, we are convinced that music mediation should be based on a broad understanding of culture and music, encompassing a wide range of genres and styles. In an increasingly diverse society, music mediation cannot limit itself to introducing new audiences to the offerings of so-called high culture, thereby perpetuating its hegemonic position. Instead, it must contribute to a shift towards a more inclusive and diverse public musical life, fulfilling the idea of comprehensive cultural participation and cultural democracy.

Music Mediation as a Professional Field

As a result of institutionalization and professionalization processes over the past 25 years, music mediation represents a continuously growing professional field (Chaker and Petri-Preis 2022). The formal educational backgrounds of the practitioners, including not only professionally active music mediators but also “musicians, music educators, journalists, and dramaturges”³ (Wimmer 2010a, 7), are as diverse as their fields of activity, as described by Irena Müller-Brozović:

Music mediators work for orchestras, concert halls, festivals, or in the independent scene. They conceive and organize mediation projects, perform as musicians or moderators on stage, and act as coordinators in cooperation projects between professional artists and amateurs. They design program series, concert formats, spaces, and atmospheres as dramaturges and write texts for traditional and new media about various kinds of music and their contexts. Music mediators (and thus also musicians) work for very varied target groups, in interdisciplinary teams, sometimes also within a socio-cultural framework. (Müller-Brozovic 2017, n.p.)

Since within the contexts of music mediation (in contrast, for example, to music education in schools), dialogue groups usually first need to be identified and addressed, special communicative efforts are necessary. However, this central task cannot be accomplished solely by an individual employee (or department); rather, it ultimately requires an entire cultural institution to address it. Music mediation is therefore a cross-cutting task that has the potential to sustainably change the structures and attitudes of cultural institutions (Mörsch 2012, 118). Therefore, communicative strategies are needed not only externally but also within the respective institution. This results in an extremely complex profile of requirements for someone who is a music mediator and in projects may need to assume the role of “an initiator or companion, a role model, or even a facilitator” (Mautner-Obst 2018, 342), ideally combining artistic, educational, communicative, organizational, and leadership skills.

³ German quotations have been translated by the authors.

Research in Music Mediation

Even 25 years after the publication of the first academic study in the field of music mediation in the German speaking region (see Eberwein 1998), the demand for research in this field remains high. While there is now a large number of practice reports, the empirical investigation of the processes actually taking place in mediation projects has so far only been carried out sporadically. However, the steadily increasing number of studies, not least within PhD projects, over the past 15 years contributes to establishing music mediation as an independent field of research (Mautner-Obst 2023, 59). Scientific insights have so far been gained on topics such as the goals and quality criteria in mediation projects (Wimmer 2010b), the particularities and success factors of concerts for children (Stiller 2008), the possibilities of cooperation between schools and orchestras, as well as the musical self-concepts of the practitioners in cooperation projects (Mall 2016), the experiential opportunities for young people in classical concerts (Bernhofer 2017), the musical references in ‘response projects’⁴ (Voit 2018b), and the learning paths of classically trained musicians (Petri-Preis 2022b).

The establishment of the *Forum Musikvermittlung an Universitäten und Hochschulen* [Forum for Music Mediation at Universities and Conservatories]⁵ in 2016 can be considered as an expression of the increased interest in research in the field of music mediation, bringing together lecturers and researchers from across the German-speaking region. However, to better understand the success factors and effects of mediation formats, to establish more precise links to music education in schools, and to further develop training structures consistent with needs, a greater intensification of research activities in the field of music mediation is desirable and necessary. This might also help establish music mediation as an independent academic discipline within the university landscape in the German-speaking region.

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⁴ Response projects are composition projects in which pupils compose their own music inspired by the works of contemporary composers. This format is usually conducted as part of a cooperation between schools and concert halls.

⁵ See www.forum-musikvermittlung.eu (accessed May 8, 2024).

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