

“Kompetenzzentrum für Musik: Ein Zukunftsmodell für professionelle Orchester”, by Beat Fehlmann (with further perspectives from Anna Stegmann, Christoph Emminghaus and Hannah Schmidt)

Review

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In recent years, the need for change in orchestral institutions has become increasingly urgent. With the publication *Kompetenzzentrum für Musik: Ein Zukunftsmodell für professionelle Orchester* [Competence Centre for Music: A Future Model for Professional Orchestras], Beat Fehlmann develops a practice-informed case study of a comprehensive transformation process, exemplified by the model project of the *Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz* [German State Philharmonic of Rhineland-Palatinate; short: DSP]. On the premise that the creative potential in orchestras extends beyond performance to organisational development and societal engagement, the central question is how an orchestra can transform itself from within into a collaborative and structurally more flexible “competence centre”. In response, Beat Fehlmann developed a model that enables staff to actively shape the artistic and organisational development

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of the DSP through concrete, practice-based projects. This initiative has been widely recognised, including the Innovation Prize of the *Deutsche Orchester-Stiftung*.

The book is clearly structured, moving from theoretical considerations and the derivation of project objectives to a detailed account of the project and its implementation phases, followed by reflections and future outlooks. It closes with reflections on the transferability of the model to other institutions as well as additional external perspectives on the model project. This structure already highlights the publication's particular strength: as a reflection on practice, it is theoretically grounded with a clear focus on practical application and it offers a notable degree of transparency by combining internal insights as well as external perspectives.

In the introduction of the book, the central lines of argument of the model project are presented on the basis of current cultural policy discourses and with reference to scientific findings from sociology, audience research, organisational psychology and development, as well as insights from leadership research. Building on the consideration that the societal relevance of orchestras today is particularly evident in their social dimension – where concerts become spaces for negotiation and reflection – the central tenets of the model project are defined as participation and personal encounter. From this emerges a notable shift in perspective in the debate on audience development, which the author describes as “a recalibration of the inner compass” (13): rather than tailoring events ever more precisely to the needs of different target groups, the concert is conceived as a social gathering for diverse audiences. Accordingly, the approach prioritises commonalities over differences. Also noteworthy is the critical examination of the work environment of orchestras: shaped by the undisputed authority of a central musical leader, namely the conductor, there is a tendency for “all areas of work to be structured in a directive manner” (17). This gives rise to another fundamental consideration of the model project: by flattening hierarchies and enabling musicians to participate in institutional development beyond orchestral performance, their sense of self-efficacy and job satisfaction can be enhanced.

In a philosophical excursus, the potential of aesthetic experiences with art, particularly music, is explored at a foundational level. Seven functions of art, as outlined by de Botton and Armstrong¹, are then linked to specific activities of the DSP. Reflecting its title, this chapter takes a deliberately exploratory stance, weaving together abstract yet illuminating connections to the model project and engaging with a selection of notable publications.

Against this backdrop, the specific objectives underpinning Fehlmann's model project are outlined in more detail in the following section: participation, creating meaning and fostering cohesion, identification, motivation, personal responsibility, interests and talents extending beyond the original role, positive resonance, and – as a synthesis – the

¹ de Botton, Alain, and Armstrong, John. 2017. *Wie Kunst Ihr Leben verändern kann*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

project's focal points: appreciation and value creation as well as proximity and relationship. These multifaceted objectives are again partly linked to theoretical models and illustrated through concrete examples of how they might be realised in practice. Even more so, because numerous aspects converge here, this section effectively illustrates the different levels at which the objectives are designed to operate and highlights their complex interdependencies: at the micro-level, individual orchestra members are placed at the centre, with a focus on their creative self-development, relationships with audiences, and connection to the institution; closely connected at the meso-level are the institution itself, its organisational culture, and its impact on the wider urban society.

Under the heading "Systematics", structural decisions and considerations regarding processes are outlined. A crucial – and highly consequential – lever, namely the addition of an in-house agreement to the collective bargaining agreement, which expands the musicians' scope of activity through a flexible working-hours model, is briefly mentioned at this point. In a later, separate chapter (56-58), the contractual adjustments are addressed in greater detail. It can be assumed that establishing the legal contractual framework involved considerable effort, as this represents nothing less than a precedent for publicly funded orchestras in Germany (cf. article in *nmz*, also attached to the publication, 82-84).

In the two subsequent chapters, "Structure" and "Practical Implementation", readers gain insight into the inner workings of the model project, the "competence centre", addressing how submitted ideas are developed into feasible projects, who takes part in which decision-making and evaluation processes, and how completed projects are assessed. The various process steps, combined with thorough scrutiny and clear management, also reveal the complexity of the model project – strategic transformation, after all, requires the proverbial "extra mile". The detailed documentation of practical implementation provides deep insights into workshop content, procedures, and outcomes. This constitutes a particular strength of the publication: for example, it incorporates feedback from the musicians in the first workshop of the process, such as responses to the question "What unsettles me?" (answers included, among others: "Symphonic projects might lose relevance and visibility" or "An external evaluation is not familiar with local circumstances") or the question "What am I looking forward to?" ("New audiences", "New experiences, additional competences, greater personnel responsibility"). This indicates a very open communication and a high degree of transparency throughout the process. At the same time – as reflected in the book – the transformation process, although designed to be highly participatory, was clearly guided by the initiative of Beat Fehlmann. This conveys an important insight: moving a "large tanker" and initiating transformation requires considerable energy, persuasive effort, good ideas, and trust in a strong leader.

In addition to providing practical, content-related insights, this chapter also offers methodological inspiration through the explanation of various techniques employed in the workshops.

At the end of the “Model Season 2023/24” – described in the chapter “Final Phase” – a joint and democratic vote was held among the orchestra members on whether the tested model project should be continued, which was approved by 86% of participants. The diversity and creativity of the projects already realised within the context of the model project is impressive: via a QR code (89), a separate PDF document can be accessed, in which 41 different projects (already implemented or, at the time of publication, scheduled) are described. These offer a rich source of inspiration for new initiatives across various areas, including different concert formats and projects, professional and organisational development, and new collaborations.

Finally, in the chapter “Transferability and Motivations – A Guide for Other Institutions”, the conditions for success and key learnings from the concrete case of the DSP are derived. Here, the practical value of the publication becomes evident once again: by outlining the identified success factors and hands-on implementation steps, the model project can serve as an inspiration not only for orchestras but for any cultural institution aiming to pursue change. At the same time, it becomes evident that this case represents a specific approach tailored to the DSP, offering a particular way of shaping organisational transformation.

Overall, the book is characterised by variety, transparency, and practical orientation: on the basis of well-founded arguments, Fehlmann derives his strategic considerations, highlights key questions and challenges (e.g. what is the appropriate timing and scope of participation?), and presents corresponding solutions (in this example, the separation of idea generators and project managers, as well as the traceability and transparency of processes). The reading offers insights and inspiration on multiple levels: from theoretical models and cultural policy arguments, to practical workshop methods and evaluation tools, concert format ideas, and a detailed understanding of an orchestral institution undergoing change.

It becomes evident at several points that successful transformation requires appropriate structural decisions – and also the people to initiate them: thanks to careful prior planning, clear leadership, transparency, and the courage to undertake profound changes (including on the contractual level), Beat Fehlmann has launched a model project that serves as an inspiring example within the German orchestral landscape, vividly documented in this publication.

Author's Biography

Nina Paul is currently a doctoral candidate at the Universität zu Köln, where her research focuses on the Beethovenfest Bonn from a music-sociological perspective. She studied Culture and Media management at the Hochschule für Musik und Theater Hamburg, as well as music education and English studies in Freiburg. She works as a lecturer (design and historical development of concert formats, music mediation and research methods), music mediator and cultural manager.

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