

ECMTA Notes

From the Chairman of the European Chamber Music Teachers' Association

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"Adieu Monsieur le Professeur...": Festival and Workshop models (2)

At the ECMTA general meeting in Gdansk in 2010, we explored the challenges of organizing a festival or concert series with student participation. The central issue had to do with finding a balance between pedagogy and the needs of a commercial entertainment enterprise. Is there a conflict? After all, it can always be argued that performance experiences are necessary for the shaping of young artists and that presenting them is an economical way to organize concerts. To look at it in a positive light, concerts and festivals can thus be organized in many places where it otherwise would have been impossible, and students get to perform outside of the school environment. For many this is a win/win situation. But pedagogy means taking into account the needs of the students in terms of repertoire, preparation time, level of experience, dangers of over-exposure, quality and orientation of instruction; a commercial enterprise must take into account questions of marketing and communication, variety and interest of programming, scheduling and logistics, finances, criteria of excellence, relations with the public and with sponsors. It is in fact easy to imagine that the two levels might not always coincide, but our discussion showed that there is no end of excellent models in use.

One of the most interesting models was used for 20 years by the now-suspended Ajassa! Festival at Metropolia University in Helsinki (see *Ensemble Magazin* 3/10); but such integration of festival repertoire into a study program is unusual, although a similar strategy was recently adopted by the new festival Musiq3 in Brussels, in collaboration with the Conservatoire Royal. This model assured that the selection and preparation of students or student groups was integrated into programs already in place in the school, so that whatever repertoire is to be played by students will be practiced in supervised workshops well in advance of the festival itself. This seems to be one of the best ways to make sure that students are not just "producing" but are benefiting from a true apprenticeship.

Among the speakers at the meeting was a former ECMTA board member, Stefan Metz, who described the concept and structure of the Orlando Festival, which follows yet another model. In this case, student participation was integrated into an already existing project providing both professional entertainment and pedagogical spaces for growth and experimentation. Each component of the festival is both distinct in its organization and public, and yet all are brought to together and are connected in numerous highly productive ways. Seen more broadly, it is a model that in many ways is a key to the survival of musical culture in society.

Metz founded and directed the Orlando Festival until just this summer, retiring after the 30th anniversary of the festival, with performances including seven string quartets who had been prize-winners in competitions at which he had been in the jury, some of them performing works which had been commissioned by the Orlando Quartet when Metz was a member of the ensemble¹. The extraordinary outpouring of gratitude, friendship, conviviality, and admiration during the festival were a testament to the fact that he has been doing something very, very right.

Speaking with Professor Metz on the last day of his festival, we learned that the basic formula has been the same from the beginning. The point of departure was the desire to form a temporary chamber music community in residence. Metz did not want to have a series of concerts by visiting ensembles parachuting in and exiting as soon as the applause died down. But he did not want to invite a disparate roster of individual artists either, because he knew that the repertoire would then have to be limited to works that could be quickly thrown

¹ Among those present: Casals, Pavel Haas, Danel, Atrium, Ad Libitum, Arcadia, and Anima Quartets, and the Grieg Trio.

together. He needed coherence in the line-up, so he invited pre-formed chamber music ensembles to be in residence for at least a week or two, and in every season he employed these ensembles both separately and in mixed groups, occasionally with other guests, in order to construct varied programs. These then were the basic principles: the chamber music coherence in the line-up, the residency structure to allow participants to make musical friendships, the possibility to explore unusual repertoire in highly varied programs, the liberty to mix and match participants.

Many festival directors would have been content to stop there. But Metz also intended from the beginning to include adult amateur musicians in his formula, partly because he loved coaching them and also because he felt that they would be the ideal partners in his utopian conception of a temporary musical community. Just as he wished for the performers to be in residence and engage each other, so he wished for an audience that would be present and integrated into the activities of this community. Amateur musicians playing all day, coaching with festival artists, sitting in on festival rehearsals, and sharing the same living and eating space with professionals will not be passive listeners, consuming a musical product as only one of many entertainments. They will be an engaged presence. So that professional and amateur met and mingled, Metz not only wanted all participants to lodge, eat, and relax in the same residence (the magnificent Rolduc Abbey), he initiated a workshop structure in which amateur chamber music ensembles would coach with different resident professionals in rotation during the week. And if the amateur ensembles wished to perform, they would also be able to do so in pleasant conditions.

Of course, 30 years ago many professionals were not as accustomed to coaching amateur ensembles as they are now, but Metz did not give anyone a choice: if they were to be in residence they had to engage the community. They did not choose with whom or what repertoire they would coach, each had simply to listen, to dialogue, and to share experiences. Although the success of this project is in some ways linked to the strong tradition of amateur chamber music playing in Holland, the formula proposed to chamber music playing amateurs seems especially well-constructed: every summer hundreds of amateur musicians flood the rehearsal rooms of the Abbey in pre-formed groups and many have been coming years in a row. Thus develop real friendships both with other amateur musicians and with festival artists.

There again, Metz could have been content to stop, but he wanted the festival to integrate a professional pedagogical element as well. And so, from the beginning, there was also an intensive professional-level masterclass series, in which young post-graduate string quartets could work daily with an invited master teacher. Held in a magnificent baroque library in the Abbey, both festival artists and amateur musicians could sit in on the sessions on a daily basis, and interact with the student groups during leisure time, at concerts, or at meals. This provided the student ensembles with a great deal of high-quality but low-pressure exposure: in this context, they could be listened to not as a finished product, but as part of a process. For many in the public, hearing great performances as a *work-in-progress* was a special opportunity. If the level of the student groups was already sufficiently high – or if they were already enrolled in Metz's Netherlands String Quartet Academy (NSKA) in Amsterdam - they could also be called upon to participate in concerts in the regular series. In this way, even as they remained "students-in-residence" they would integrate the community of artists of the festival.

And so it was for the first 20 years of the festival. Metz likes to underline that musicians never stopped wanting to come back year after year, in spite of the absence of big fees and the fairly intense work schedule. Metz states clearly that the success of the festival comes from the fact that musicians enjoy the special atmosphere that animates this festival: "Without their enthusiasm, I could not have done it". There is a tremendous amount of hard work, especially for the festival artists who must teach, practice, rehearse, and perform in an infernal cycle all day every day for up to two weeks. But as was clear at the festivities for Metz's retirement

that this kind of schedule brings happiness and satisfaction when it arrives in an atmosphere of trust, conviction, and principle.

Finally, about ten years ago a youth workshop was added, which then allowed an even more complete circulation of both artistic and pedagogical energies. To do this an important exception was made, since few children aged 12 to 18 already were playing in pre-formed ensembles. They adopted an external selection process: the workshop would be reserved for 60 or so winners of the Princess Christina competition, a regional and national scheme to encourage and reward excellence in individual performance. Metz recognized the need to provide chamber music experience to these young talented children, many of whom had no possibility of playing trios or quartets in their local communities. Here again, emphasis was placed on total immersion, daily lessons with the resident artist/teachers (they change coaches no more than twice), and although the friendly, community spirit remained central, there was a great deal of very hard work to do. These young people must play in concerts throughout the region, and during the festival there will be about 20 such concerts.

Cellist Maarten Mostert will be taking over the direction of the festival. Cello and chamber music teacher at the Amsterdam Conservatory, founder of the Amsterdam Sinfonietta and the Amsterdamse Cello Biennale, Mostert was one of the first students at the Orlando festival. Later he returned both to play and simply to listen, and has in all been present for almost half of the festivals as a teacher and performer. His nomination to carry on Metz's work is a natural choice: he brings over 25 years of experience as a performer, teacher, and festival organizer to the task, along with his deep familiarity with the festival and its participants. When asked what direction he is planning to take, Mostert is categorical: "The concept is fantastic and it works." But even as he explained that one should never change a winning team, he added, "I asked everybody, I wanted to have complaints, to know what people didn't like. I'm happy to hear the things people want to improve. I like to make things better." He hopes to bring in more younger students, increase connections with conservatories, and open the festival up to other genres and styles of music. But even though some aspects of the communication and marketing of the festival could perhaps be improved, the fact remains that the academies are already full, so there is not much room for getting bigger!

Mostert organized the surprise ending for the final gala concert, which featured Metz playing Schubert's string quintet with the Casals Quartet: when the artists returned for a standing ovation, the capacity audience burst into a surprise rendition of "Adieu, Monsieur le professeur," with a special text in Dutch and accompanied by festival musicians on stage and throughout the concert hall. As they sang "Thanks, thanks, to Stefan and Isabelle...²", the emotion in the hall was testament to a great idea realized with intelligence and love.

Dr Evan Rothstein, Chairman ECMTA

<http://www.orlandofestival.nl/index.php?11>
<http://amsterdamsecellobiennale.nl/>

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EIN WEG, UM MUSIKER ZUSAMMENZUBRINGEN

EIN WEG, UM MEHR ÜBER MUSIK UND DARBIETUNGSKÜNSTE ZU ERFAHREN

EIN WEG, UM UNSER MUSIKALISCHES ERBE WEITERZUGEBEN UND MIT NEUEM LEBEN ZU ERFÜLLEN

² Isabelle Bensa, married to Stefan Metz, was also the festival manager for many years.