

Case study:
Rikskonsertene in Norway – cross-cultural music encounters and concerts for children and youngsters

Today's musician will meet artistic challenges and job opportunities which were unknown for musicians trained a generation ago. This case study indicates two areas which seem to be growing all over the Western world, namely cross-cultural music making and production of concerts for children and youngsters. Two main conclusions can be drawn from the case study: 1) that conservatoires should offer training opportunities for their students to be prepared for such challenges and opportunities, and 2) that conservatoires should see it as one of their obligations to contribute to the enhancement of artistic quality in all areas of music making, also areas which seem to develop outside the traditional conservatoire remit.

Rikskonsertene (RK) is a government funded concert organisation whose aim is to produce concert programmes and tour them all over Norway. The organisation works with domestic and international professional musicians within all genres of music, annually 700-800 artists. In addition to pure concert productions it also initiates the creation of productions crossing the borders to other art forms, e.g. dance and theatre. Annually, the organisation is responsible for approx. 10 000 concert performances. RK aims at reaching all types of audiences. It has a special responsibility for a national school concert scheme which ensures that all school children in the country experience at least two high quality concert performances annually.

Some twenty years ago, after immigrants had started moving in significant numbers to Norway from many corners of the world, cultural institutions were faced with new challenges and indeed opportunities. Firstly, the new cultural communities represented new, and from an institutional perspective *potential* concert audiences. Secondly, there was reason to believe that among the new citizens there would be highly skilled artists who needed to be identified and given opportunities to share their art with a wide public in their new homeland. Thirdly, government funded or supported concert organisations were obliged to taking an active interest in and contributing to making all types of music celebrated by people living in the country, accessible to a wide audience.

RK was one of the first cultural organisations in the country to develop a targeted strategy for relating actively to the musics of non-Western immigrants and to musical artists in the immigrant communities. In brief, the main objectives behind the strategy were:

- to create understanding and respect in the Norwegian society for the values embedded in immigrants' cultures
- to give immigrant musicians in Norway opportunities to work as professional musicians
- to contribute to creating favourable contexts in which immigrant musicians could present their music to various audiences, including children and young people
- to demonstrate that music may be a bridge for dialogue and understanding between people and peoples
- to be an advocate for diversity on the Norwegian concert scene
- to build capacity and competencies in presenting music from a wide variety of cultures, and act as advisor for others in this area
- to establish co-operation between various players in Norwegian music life in order to enhance the quality in all actions taken to practice cultural equality within the field of music.

As an important aspect in implementing its strategy, RK established partnerships with the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and NORAD (the governmental development organisation) aiming at musical co-operation between Norway and various developing countries. Through a number of hands-on developmental projects in countries and communities in Africa, Asia and Latin-America, basic competencies in non-western musics were built and important networks established; both proved to be important elements in establishing credibility among musicians in the various immigrant communities in Norway.

RK bases its concert productions on the creative work among composers and performing musicians. The fact that RK, over a number of years now, has involved musicians with non-Western cultural backgrounds in its productions has provided new challenges and opportunities for creative musicians with a variety of backgrounds. It is important to note that the organisation does not just sit still awaiting artists to come up suggesting concert concepts and programmes. Its staff of concert producers continuously maintains an active dialogue with a broad range of artists, and, when a group of artists has expressed interest in exploring new ideas in terms of repertoire, expression, or concert formats, literally set the stage for experiments and explorative projects. Many of these contain elements of cultural cross-over. Obviously, not all of them are immediately successful, but a number of very interesting and indeed artistically valuable productions have been developed through such projects. Even when there is no immediate artistic result, the artists involved seem to appreciate the experience they gain from challenging artistic border-lines together. They maintain that working with musicians with different cultural backgrounds influences their own work in a positive way as performing or composing musicians.

It should be noted that many of the border-crossing productions created by musicians under the auspices of RK are made for children and youth as part of the RK school concert scheme. Some of these productions have proved to be most successful from an artistic as well as a communicative perspective.

It goes without saying that creating music which is artistically valuable and for which a diverse group of musicians can stand tall when crossing borders of culture, styles and genres, is highly demanding. It is not enough to know one's own music well and the culture to which it belongs, and have highly developed technical skills. All musicians involved must have the capacity to find elements or characteristics in "the other's" music, elements which can become part of an expressional bridge to "their" music, and – as important - they must be able to build part of that bridge themselves, based on their own music. Musical sensitivity and awareness, respect and appreciation, and special technical and improvisational skills are all important preconditions for artistic success in such artistic adventures.

The RK experience suggests that for conservatoire trained musicians there will be future opportunities in working with musicians from non-Western musical cultures and exploring the artistic potential in encounters between musicians who have different ways of expressing themselves through music. It also suggests that future musicians will be expected to be able to tailor concert productions to targeted audience groups, such as primary or secondary school children.

Based on the RK experience – which, by the way, is far from unique in its approach to artistic and communicative objectives - it is tempting to draw the conclusion that conservatoires should give their students the opportunity to qualify for the areas mentioned by offering programmes or courses including artistic collaboration with musicians rooted in various non-Western cultures, and programmes demanding the students to produce and try out concert concepts which are aimed at touching children and youngsters.

Musical cross-over seems to be popular these days, and cross-over products in music seem to be selling well. From an artistic point of view, it is important that institutions seeing it as

their responsibility to contribute to artistic quality in music, acknowledge the fact that there may be artistic potential in encounters between top trained musicians with different musical roots, and embrace initiatives to explore that potential in their programmes – with an approach which is supportive as well as critical. The well-know fact that children and youngsters are more open to unknown artistic expressions than adults normally are should also be added. However, in order to establish and sustain the interest of a group of young people for music containing other layers of expression than the immediate pop-music surface layer, it is rather important for a performing musician to have basic knowledge of children, e.g. their behavioural pattern and the way in which they typically concentrate, absorb and respond to artistic impulses.

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