

Polifonia Profession Working Group



ERASMUS THEMATIC NETWORK FOR MUSIC

polifonia

Site visit report 11-12 May 2006, Reykjavik

The themes as defined by the Polifonia Working group on the Profession are quite relevant for this site visit. The most important themes are the changing nature of the musician's career and the changing nature of consumers.

Innovative practice, the creation of new audiences, rediscovering and/or establishing national heritage and relationships with societal developments is at the core of this site visit.

The music life, as it has been studied in this site visit, shows a lot of coherence within these different areas. This coherence mirrors the activities of the Music Department of the Icelandic Academy of Arts.

Programme

May 11, 2006

- *Hitt Húsid*, the programmes for youngsters aged 16 - 25
- Vocal ensemble *Voces Thules*
- Sumartónleikar, *I Skálholti* (Skálholt Cathedral Summer Concerts)
- Contemporary Music Ensemble *Caput*

May 12, 2006

- Icelandic Composers Society
- Iceland Academy of the Arts, Department of Music
- Presentation of composition students
- Visit to the *Thursday Teaser*

Skapandi Sumarstarf

Based on an interview with Ása Hauksdóttir, manager of Cultural Affairs of *Hitt Húsid*, the Cultural and Information Centre of the City of Reykjavik, and several documents.

The Cultural and Information Centre focuses on young people between the ages of 16 and 25 and was founded in 1992 by the City Council of Reykjavik, department of Youth and Sports.

There are four main focuses:

1. A department for 'drop outs', with as main aim counselling;
2. A special force department aimed at mentally and physically handicapped youngsters;
3. An information centre;
4. The cultural department. In this site visit the focus is on the activities of the cultural department.

The main aim of the activities of the cultural department is to give young people between 17 and 25 support to have access to art, by facilitating them in developing their own ideas.

No courses are given. Several activities take place during the year; some of which are ongoing:

1. Thursday Teaser: weekly rock and pop concerts, which take place mainly in the winter and spring season. The department has a basement with equipment for pop and rock music,

where the concerts take place. The rock scene in Reykjavik among youngsters is quite strong.

The admission is free; neither smoking nor drinking is allowed. Yearly ca. 100 groups play there. A group has to apply to play. During one evening 3 to 5 groups play and they find other groups to play through informal networking. The department provides facilitation for organisation and a sound engineer.

The groups send information and a programme; the department (which is Ms. Hauksdóttir mainly on her own) spreads the news to the press. The young musicians take some responsibilities in management and making their own posters. The venue is very suitable and well equipped.

2. A gallery for those who are engaged in fine art. They can be fine art students or amateurs, the only criterion for being allowed to expose is quality. This is an ongoing practice. The age limit of 25 is not strict for visual artists.

3. Musiktilraunir (Music Experiment): a competition for bands, which takes place yearly in the month of March. A maximum of 50 groups can take part. Those who subscribe first are taken into the competition. Five evenings with 10 bands playing are scheduled. Out of each evening two bands are chosen who will play on the final concert of the competition. The prize that can be won is the recording and production in a professional studio of a CD of the winning band. In some cases winners of this competition have been upcoming bands in the UK and the European continent.

4. The Young Arts Festival, takes place yearly in November, and lasts nine days. It started in 1992 and it is a festival with classical music, dance, design, fine arts and theatre. Every evening a young person, who is engaged in the particular field in the arts that is at the core, is event manager.

5. Street Theatre, nine young theatre makers are employed to work in street theatre contexts. A professional artistic director guides them. In April auditions are held, the street theatre activities take place in June and July. In 2005 there were 100 applicants. Here again the criterion is not whether a young theatre maker is (semi) professional or not, it is the quality that counts. This programme is funded by the City Council every year.

6. Föstudags Flipp, takes place on Fridays in June and July. Between 13:00 and 15:00 there are all kinds of musicians in the city. Each week it is announced and people are taken out from e.g. elderly people's homes or Kindergartens to take part.

7. Skapandi Sumarstörf ('creative summer work'), started in 1994. Young people are given the opportunity to put forward an application for a creative project and develop this for a period of 8 weeks during the summer. Over those two months they receive a salary. The creative ideas must be appealing to a wide variety of audiences. Many of the applicants are students of the Iceland Academy of Arts.

The applicants need to hand in a project plan, with details, aims, timescale, proposals for financing and management etc. A jury of five persons, consisting of, among others, artists and cultural managers gives a judgement according to transparent criteria. The criteria are: innovativeness, the project having a social dimension, management possibilities and financial realism. In addition it is determined whether every category in arts is covered, whether there is a balance in gender and last but not least the general quality of the application is taken into consideration. Ca. 70 to 80 young artists, with an average age of 22 are employed for the two summer months. Their salaries are paid, but all other costs that need to be made, e.g. the rent of a hall or the costs of costumes, need to be covered by funding and sponsoring, which the young artists themselves have to generate. For this they can get help and advice of Hitt Húsid. The projects are accordingly low budget projects.

The projects start on the first of July. The first two weeks of July are intended mainly for preparation and the very first outburst of public creativity is on July 17, which is a national Icelandic bank holiday. During the preparation period Ms. Hauksdóttir meets weekly with the young artists in order to give them support and facilitation. At the end of the project the young artists have to write a final evaluative report.

Funding: the funding of the programme is not fixed and that causes a problem. The amount of money given by the city council to this project differs per year and the final decision about the height of the support is often taken at a late stage, which causes delay in the overall organisation. In 2004, 20 million Icelandic crowns were available of which 80 young artists could be employed. In 2005, 12 million crowns were granted, which enabled the support of 18 projects. In 2006, 14 projects can be granted, out of 37 applications.

The decision making about the height of financial support is highly political ("Is Art a Luxury or a Necessity"?) which makes it difficult to make a long term planning for Skapandi Sumarstörf.

Some examples of projects within the framework of Skapandi Sumarstörf from 2005:

Art Ensemble Faraelda Frón: four dance and drama students perform small plays and organise artistic events about Icelanders and their view of themselves, with as a point of departure Icelandic literature history. The performances are improvised, based on certain literary works and take place in the streets and in other theatrical spaces. At the end of the summer all small plays come together in one big stage performance.

Loki String Quartet: introducing well known and lesser known masterpieces for string quartet for a wide range of audiences at different non-concert like locations.

Llama: a quintet that operates as a 'fully operational funk machine' at different venues.

Reykjavik's Snarsveit: a group that designs instruments together with their audience in order to engage in the biggest performance ever, creating thick sound webs.

Reading en Route: A literature student spends the summer writing short stories about the City of Reykjavik and the people living there. The stories are accessible on the web and in August they are put on display on the City buses and on displays at Icelandic swimming pools.

The spin off of Skapandi Sumarstörf is quite encouraging; many Icelandic 'established artists' started with a project in this summer programme. A number of them have been nominated for e.g. a film award, a music award etc.

Ása Hauksdóttir, manager of Cultural Affairs of Hitt Húsid, has a fine arts background, specialized in fashion and studied European cultural management. She still works as a visual artist and is very passionate about the work she develops in Hitt Húsid. She explains that the most important personal aim for her is that teenagers are taken seriously in their undertakings. "We have to listen and notice what young people have to say and it is important that older people see and value what youngsters are doing".

Ms. Hauksdóttir has initiated a number of intercultural projects funded by the European programme 'Youth for Europe'. One example is the *Magreb Nordic Art* project, in which Iceland, Finland, Morocco, and Tunisia were involved. Per country eight students took part in a programme that encompassed drama, dance, fine arts and music. In each country one week was reserved for the project and in each country the students worked with local artists. The aim was for the young artists to broaden their skills and views, leading to new impulses for transcultural arts and thus also building transcultural bridges.

www.hitthusid.is

Vocal ensemble Voces Thules

Based on an interview with Sigurdur Halldórsson, one of the singers of *Voces Thule*, and documentation *Officium S. Thorlaci*, edited by the members of Voces Thule.

Introduction

Iceland was under the reign of Denmark from the twelfth Century until 1918. In the twentieth century the country still had to discover a lot of its heritage. Many Icelanders connected the idea of Icelandic culture mainly to literature. Myth even had it that before the twentieth century there was no music in Iceland.

However, it turned out that the main sources of musical liturgical manuscripts in Scandinavia were in Iceland for many ages, and that during the Middle Ages there had been a very active and prosperous musical life there. Exploring this and making it accessible to audiences in Iceland and abroad is the main aim of the vocal ensemble Voces Thules.

Voces Thules, consisting of six male singers, Eggert Pálsson, Einar Jóhannesson, Eiríkur Hreinn Helgason, Gudlaugur Viktorsson, Sigurdur Halldórsson and Sverrir Gudjónsson, started in 1991 and had as its aim to perform vocal music from the Middle Ages and Renaissance as well as modern music. Sigurdur Halldórsson, cellist and singer, was one of its founders. Two of its members started exploring medieval manuscripts, many of which had been taken out of the country by the Danish and were preserved in the Arnamagnaean Institute in Copenhagen. The two musicians discovered, together with their colleagues new aspects of the Icelandic heritage that had not been valued until that moment.

A highlight was the preparation of the full performance of the Office of St. Thorlak, which commenced towards the end of 1993, for the commemoration of the 800th anniversary of the death of bishop Thorlak Thorhallsson. Members of Voces Thules carried out research with the help of scholars and other experts. The performance practice was based on traditions that are used in other countries, often using the *contrafacta* method: a change of words and melodies. The notation provided very little information about the rhythm. And information about the colour of certain vowels and ornamental effects could not be established either. Thus the final approach of the interpretation was a practical one.

In 1993 the ensemble performed some sections of the Office in Reykjavik. In 1994 the research work commenced, during a study retreat of the ensemble. In 1995 they recorded the Vespers for the Icelandic Radio and one year later the transcription of the St. Thorlak's Office began. In the same year, 1996, Iceland was given back the manuscript by Denmark. Important in this year was a visit of the Voces Thules members to the Abbey of Saint Pierre in Solemnes in France, where there is a lot of know how on medieval manuscripts and Gregorian chant.

Finally Voces Thules sang the entire Office of St. Thorak in the old traditional form at the 1998 Reykjavik Arts Festival. The performance stretched over one and a half days of Pentecost. Following this, in 1999 Voces Thules started on a project to make a recording, using multi track technology, which appeared, together with a DVD in 2005.

Voces Thules' work on the Icelandic musical heritage soon became known abroad and the group was invited to perform internationally. Since then the ensemble has played a major role in the search for 'lost music' in Icelandic manuscripts. They performed a concert called 'Music from Icelandic manuscripts' during the Skáholt Summer Concerts Festival, amongst which were Medieval Icelandic two part songs and music recounted in the Sturlunga Saga.

In 2005 the ensemble Voces Thules was invited to Japan and gave 15 concerts for audiences totalling 30.000 people, making it one of the biggest dissemination activities of Icelandic musical heritage ever organised abroad.

Voces Thules has premiered new pieces, for which the ensemble gave out commissions in order to combine old Icelandic music in their programmes with new music. New music encompasses compositions with percussion and electronics and pieces based on church melodies 'merged' with electronics, organ and voices.

Funding: the work of the ensemble is financed by private funds, sponsors (companies), the Ministry of Culture (a small amount) and the church. The members work on a freelance basis and the decisions of whether or not to take on a project, they make together. They also take care of public relations and marketing of the ensemble themselves. Voces Thules performs two to three times a year in Reykjavik, and also performs abroad quite a lot. The ensemble does not want to perform in Reykjavik too often, hoping that this way they keep the interest of the audience in their Icelandic heritage alive. Funding for the St. Thorlak project was amongst others provided by a fund for archaeological research and Icelandic heritage.

www.credo.is

Skálholt Cathedral Summer Concerts

Based on an interview with Sigurdur Halldórsson, artistic director.

This summer festival, with concerts in the Skálholt Cathedral, was initiated in 1975 by harpsichordist Helga Ingólfssdóttir. Point of departure was a festival for baroque music and from there it expanded with programmes containing modern compositions for baroque instruments.

Nowadays it is a festival for new religious music. The festival takes place five weeks each year, in July and August. All music performed is newly composed through commissions that are given out to (mainly) Icelandic composers. The ideas for the compositions come from several directions, such as work from a scholar on old manuscripts, or arrangements of music from old manuscripts, which need not be vocal, but can also be instrumental. In 2006, for example, a piece for eight celli will be premiered, based on a hymn. The music can also be freely composed. Compositions based on Icelandic music turn out to be very popular with the audience.

Funding: the church pays 50% of the costs of the festival. Funding for commissions is received from the national radio, and the city of Reykjavik and the Composers Union.

In order to get the funding the concerts need to have free admission.

www.sumartonleikar.is

Contemporary Music Ensemble CAPUT

Based on an interview with Sigurdur Halldórsson, cellist and member of the ensemble.

Contemporary music is strongly alive in Iceland, and concerts are well attended. It is worthwhile to notice that there is no difference in attendance whether a concert consists of a string quartet playing historic music or an ensemble playing contemporary music.

There are two major and important festivals for contemporary music: the *Nordic Young Composers Festival*, a festival taking place on a rotating basis in Nordic countries, bi-annually in Iceland, and the *Dark Music Days*, taking place each year in February.

In both festivals the ensemble Caput, founded in 1988, plays a role. It is a *sinfonietta*, consisting of 20 players that performs new chamber music, ranging from pieces for three to five performers to pieces for all 20 members. 50% of the repertoire consists of Icelandic music, 25% of music by Scandinavian composers, and 25% of music by composers from other countries. A lot of attention is paid to music by elderly Icelandic composers, from the sixties and seventies. Many programmes of the ensemble Caput consist of combinations with new media or are cross arts programmes. But the main emphasis of the group is to play brand new music.

Funding: A certain amount of funding comes from the government and the City of Reykjavik. The incoming funding is mainly intended for supporting the international tours. Nobody is paid to do the administration, so there is a lot of voluntary work that is done by the members of the ensemble. The members of the ensemble are paid per number of pieces they play in a concert. The ensemble has made ca. 20 CDs on Swedish and Icelandic labels.

www.musik.is/caput

Icelandic Composers Society

Based on an interview with Kjartan Ólafsson, president of the Icelandic Composers Society and Professor of Composition and the Iceland Academy of the Arts.

The Icelandic Composers Society has ca. 50 members and in 2005 celebrated its 60th anniversary. There is definitely a “young culture” in music in Iceland. The *Dark Music Days*, the festival that takes place in February every year, aims to present what is going on in all kinds of music and the combination of its different styles. There is attention for ‘light’ music, ‘serious’ contemporary music, traditional music and jazz, electronic and experimental music. The idea is that the festival should be as open as possible.

The Icelandic Composers Society tries to avoid selection by artistic directors of the pieces to be performed, because the aim is not to control the music, but to have music performed that reflects the spirit of the time and the cultural life. The only criterion is one of basic quality. Musicians can apply if they want to perform during the festival. Point of departure is that 80 % should be Icelandic music and 20% can be new music coming from abroad. This change of focus started in the eighties.

Other activities of the society are the participation in the International Society of Contemporary Music, maintaining a music information centre, creating a database of scores and matters like protecting performing rights and efforts to improve funding for composing.

The Dark Music Days are funded by the government. Further funding for activities of the Icelandic Composers Society comes from private sources and from the City of Reykjavik.

The attitude towards the arts always has political elements, but is in general quite positive.

<http://www.listir.is/ti/Default.aspx>

Young composers at the Academy of the Arts, department of Music

Based on the interview with Kjartan Ólafsson

There are ca. 15 composition students in the Academy. The current employability of composers in Iceland is satisfactory. Mostly they have portfolio careers in which they take part time jobs as composers, teachers and sometimes researchers. Chances for young composers in the Icelandic society are getting better: there are opportunities in media, theatre and film. Sometimes composers work as producers.

Because of this the composition department of the Academy has chosen certain focuses in the study for composers. After the first general year of the bachelor’s curriculum (the bachelor encompasses a total of three years) the composition student can choose one of the following lines:

1. Line of contemporary music;
2. Film line; also encompassing studio technique;
3. Stage line: Theatre music, encompassing the study of traditional methods, including dance;
4. The line for producers; also encompassing surround technique and new media.

These lines reflect the needs in society. The composition students are active and they are aware of the needs. In the third year the students carry out a final (external) composition project.

Icelandic students tend to go abroad after studies to specialize, and practically all of them return to Iceland after their period abroad. Their own Icelandic identity is of importance to artists in general.

Additional information through Mist Thorkelsdóttir, composer and Dean of the Music Department of the Icelandic Academy of the Arts

Iceland has 300.000 inhabitants. There are 80 music schools and the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra is fairly young and building up. There is much demand for music teachers, performing musicians and church musicians. Thus the employability of Icelandic musicians and current graduates of the academy is high. Music life has been enhanced by the fact that well educated foreigners have come to Iceland and have contributed to the musical life and culture. The last few years quite a few wealthy corporations have established themselves in Iceland, which has increased economic growth. Banks, insurance companies and wealthy individuals are quite supportive of the arts, leading to a boost in possibilities for Icelandic music.

The Department of Music in the Iceland Academy of Arts has been building up since 2001. This is a very important step, considering that before that time talented young Icelandic musicians wanting a Higher Education in Music had to go abroad for their studies. Though a lot of them did settle in Iceland after this period. The first graduates of the Iceland Academy Music Department have now gone abroad for a Master's. Starting 2007, the Academy will provide its own Master's studies. There is a lot of willingness to cooperate and exchange internationally, which adds greatly to the growth of cultural life.

The school is government funded. The funding is given per student, and the school receives 1.650.000 Icelandic crowns per student. The school is independent, run on a contract with the government and every three years this fee must be negotiated again. The yearly tuition fee for the student is 280.000 crowns.

Conclusions

The themes as defined by the Polifonia Working group on the Profession are quite relevant for this site visit. The most important themes are the changing nature of the musician's career and the changing nature of consumers.

Innovative practice, the creation of new audiences, rediscovering and/or establishing national heritage and relationships with societal developments is at the core of this site visit.

The music life, as it has been studied in this site visit, shows a lot of coherence within these different areas. This coherence mirrors the activities of the Music Department of the Icelandic Academy of Arts.

1. Societal Relevance and New Audiences

The striving to make music accessible to diverse audiences is very much alive and shared by different stakeholders. It shows not only in the work on projects for creative young artists, like those of *Hitt Húsid*, but also in activities of 'established' music life, for example in the festival *Dark Music Days*, organised by the Icelandic Composers Union, where there is no 'elitist' approach to the repertoire performed. It also shows in the creating of new audiences through the performances of old Icelandic music. Societal relevance seems a priority for (the employability of) composers, as e.g. in the composition curriculum of the Department of Music of the Academy of the Arts. In short, it is felt strongly that having a vital musical life is an issue for the audience. Creating new audiences is something that is taken very seriously.

2. No exclusion – quality as a criterion

The quality criterion is important, but there is no exclusion of non-professional musicians from the diverse activities.

3. A Music Culture building up

The music culture is felt as 'young'. The pride in the cultural heritage has increased, it is made accessible to the audience and new music is connected to traditional music. Quite a few cross arts events are given shape within the different musical contexts. There is a lot of drive and passion between musicians, organisers and innovators.

4. Competencies

There is serious attention for the competencies required of a musician who functions in a rapidly changing society that is building up its cultural life further. This interest can be found both in the outside world of music and the arts and within the music department of the Academy of Arts. Examples are entrepreneurship, multi faceted musicianship, and the skills needed to connect to audiences. The rediscovery of ancient Icelandic music requires skills that might have been forgotten, but big efforts are made to make this music accessible to today's audience.

May 2006,

Text by Rineke Smilde