

Final Reflections on European Forum on Music Education

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[Presentation starts with playing of the first minute of three YouTube video's:

** Jannes – De hele wereld mag het weten*

** Raaitvinken – Tabé mien laiverd tabé*

** Heidevolk – Gelders Volkslied]*

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

My name is Evert Bisschop Boele. I am professor of 'New Audiences' in the research group Lifelong Learning in Music, connected to the Prince Claus Conservatoire of Groningen. My background and my current research is in music education, but also in ethnomusicology, in the anthropology of music. As an anthropologist, I have been doing a fair share of 'participant observation' these two days. In normal words: yes, I have been spying a little on you.

It is, of course, an honor to be able to speak to you. After two days of speaking and being spoken to, but also of listening to music and even making music, it is time to calculate the balance. Has it been worthwhile? Has it been time well spent? I can not give the answer to those questions – it is for each of you to decide on that individually. I can only say that for me, it *has* been worthwhile. I have refreshed my knowledge of acronyms, for one thing. EMC, EMU, EAS, AEC, JMI, BBC, BPlusC – I knew them all but those days were a welcome rehearsal.

In the little brochure it says: "The European Forum on Music Education sheds light on how educational concepts relate to all areas of musical life and what this implies for music professionals, audiences and political decision makers." This forum has done so by offering keynotes, panel discussions, an idea hub, a world café, and lots of possibilities to meet informally. And because indeed maybe not 'all', but at least many areas of musical life were present here, I witnessed the importance of that informal meeting place this Forum also has been.

Yesterday has been a capturing day. Let me remind you. After a warm welcome by our hosts, we listened to Rolf Witte's keynote. He shared insights with us about the European landscape in transition we are working in. He stressed the importance of the European project, of music education, and of co-operation. But more important: he did that with an unusual realism and modesty. We are not going to solve Europe's problem, he said, but we may contribute to solving it. We should stop convincing mainly ourselves of the worth of culture education, it is time for the next step in advocacy, a step beyond stating the 'good'. We should work on intercultural (not international) cooperation, and on the sustainability of many of the solutions we have worked out in so many pilot projects over the year. And,

something I will come back on later, he said: "Most of what is offered nowadays is still an offer, not an invitation to participate".

We then were treated to a panel discussion where three very different panelists met each other under the heading of "The More, the Merrier". And indeed: Ellara Wakely's story of BBC's "Ten Pieces" seems a *merry* one; Helen Smith from IMPALA stressed the importance of *more* in the sense of the importance of diversity – 80% of new releases come from independent record labels, but the market is dominated by three big labels with 80% of the market share. She thus brought in issues of power, something I will also take up later. And then Merlijn Poolman: he is himself the impersonation of 'more and merry', I would say; and as Merlijn and me work and live in the same city, we immediately agreed upon meeting back home, because we share the same interests: everyday musical life, connecting, widening possibilities.

In the 'Team Up and Act' session, the three co-organizing acronyms were joined by Jeunesses Musicales. Each of them presented themselves and showed that there is a great willingness to 'Team Up'; more so than what I remember from past times so I must congratulate you with that. But it also was acknowledged that, where the 'Team Up' is acknowledged by everyone, the 'Act' is still diffuse. What does 'Act' mean, especially when you are representing sometimes rather abstract organizations? Does it mainly consist of advocacy on a European level, and is that where the importance of cooperation, of teaming up, resides? As Timo Klemettinen said: "It's not about more papers on our desk, it's about what we do with those papers." In a way, he reminded us that the drafting of a European Agenda for Music is a big and important task; but putting such a European agenda to work in our daily lives, in our ways of cooperating internationally, nationally, and especially locally, is probably the bigger and more important task.

This morning, Anja van Keulen from the Concertgebouw Amsterdam showed us another example of the tremendous effort many institutions in the music world are making to make a contribution to music education. This was followed by a showcase of five more initiatives, ranging from Living Scores Learn to Mini Blind Date. Imagine the impressive amount of good practices we are able to assemble if not only Belgium, but all other European countries would also have presented four good practices! In the Share & Learn session, we were acquainted with thoughts coming from ISME, ACEnet, and AEC's Pop and Jazz Platform. Points we may take from that are for example attention to such aspects as Andrea Creech's well-being and ageing, Joan Parr's creativity, and Arling Eksdal's plea for widening horizons to fundamentally different ways of 'musicking', as Christopher Small would call it. In the World Café, finally, we deepened our discussions.

After this short description of the times we have spent together in the wonderful city of Leiden, I would like to share a couple of thoughts with you which spring to my mind after two days of listening and looking; thoughts which you may consider as open invitations to think about the follow-up of our important work.

Ian Smith said in his introductory words that these days, music education is on each and everyone's agenda. The fact that these two days, organizations focusing on music schools,

conservatoires and primary and secondary schools joined forces with all kinds of public and private initiatives underlines precisely this. It is therefore sometimes hard to determine who does what, who is responsible for what. Hence the call for cooperation.

In my thinking, we should consider music education as an eco-system. In order to do that, I invite you just for a moment to leave the focus on education or on teaching. Instead, let us for a moment – in line with a remark from Andrea Creech - focus on learning. Each and every child, and each and every adult, is learning all the time. For music, one might say individuals are constantly learning what it may mean for them, individually, to be musical in this world. As learning is contextual and deeply social, people learn from their surroundings, continuously. This surrounding consists of their family, their friends, the mediascape they live in, the schools they have to visit, the institutions they might visit. Learning is done in connection with all those actors from the context of the individual. Not one of them is primary in that, it is the complete context that delivers the opportunities for learning. In that sense, as my pedagogical guru Peter Alheit states, all learning is intensely biographical.

You are all part of those individual contexts, you are part of the music-educational eco-system offering opportunities to learn to individuals. Opportunities that may be used or refused, dependent on the meaningfulness of the opportunities you offer to individuals. This means two things. One: no-one of you owns music education; no-one of you is responsible for the learning of music, because individuals are. But you are responsible in finding your own place within that eco-system. And a healthy place in an eco-system is a place which is precisely your place.

Reflect on what you have to offer; but don't take over places in the system that are not yours. I say that because these days music professionals tend to be worried about for example the general classroom teachers in primary schools not being music specialists – also in some of the sessions of the past two days this was mentioned. Our job is not to take the responsibility of creating a healthy day-to-day musical environment in their classrooms out of their hands; rather, our job is to empower them, to acknowledge them as the intensely musical individuals they all are, and, especially, to encourage them. We have seen quite some successful examples these two days of how to do precisely that.

The second element I want to stress is this: if it is true that music education is about individuals learning how to be musical in this world in a meaningful way, we should stop thinking in terms of children as a blank slate, as little persons who need to be offered a musical world by us. We don't have to teach others how to be musical. Children, youth, adults, elderly, they all live in a musical world by definition, and from at the latest the age of approximately eight they know exactly who they are as a musical person. If learning is about constantly developing yourself as a musical person, and if education is about offering people options for further development, it is crucial not to ignore the musicality of those we are talking about these two days.

In that sense, it is crucial that we are interested in the 'musical other'. As Rolf Witte reminded us yesterday, "Most of what is offered nowadays is still an offer, not an invitation to participate." One of the challenges of music education is to formulate an offer within that eco-system of possibilities that actually *is* an invitation to participate – an invitation to

become meaningful to the other, by starting with being interested in that musical other, rather than in ourselves.

With that I come to my final consideration. It is connected to policies, to politics, to power relations.

Pierre Bourdieu, the famous French sociologist, once pointed out that reflexivity is one of the key competencies of the social researcher. For him, reflexivity meant not just being aware who you are as a researcher, how your personal biography may influence the observations you make and the work you produce. For him, it meant specifically to be aware of the fact that, as a social researcher, you have a specific place within society – you have economic, social and cultural capital which give you a very distinct, very privileged and very powerful place in society.

I think we need to be just as reflexive as a social scientist. It is good to realize that we, representing all corners of the organized music life, also occupy privileged positions loaded with cultural, social and economic capital, although that last form of capital may be under attack these days. These privileged positions are strongly connected to implicit definitions of, for example, what 'music' is, what 'true musicality' is, what music is all about. These fundamental ideas, most of the time taken for granted, are, however, not general truths but very specific expressions defined by the contexts and the positions from which we come. It is important that we become as reflexive as possible in that respect, that we acknowledge that behind what we are doing may lie preconceptions about music which may stand in the way of playing the all-embracing role we want to play.

As an ethnomusicologist, an anthropologist, one of my deformations is that I listen and look for 'culture', for implicit taken-for-granted definitions, in the talking and doing of others. These two days, the powerful impression of the culture behind many of the stories I heard is that of a culture in which music is connected to artistry, to creativity, to quality, to literacy; that truly musical behavior is the excellent performance of music, the high-level playing and singing, or the attentive listening to others performing excellently. The recurrent theme of 'audience development', for example, is an expression of this; we must be aware that this expression is based in the idea that in music, there is a sharp division between performers and audiences. Ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino calls this the 'presentational paradigm', and reminds us that in many cultures there also exists a 'participatory paradigm'. We must remember that for many people out there, participation is not so much a first didactic step towards the appreciation of a performance as an audience member (the way participatory music activities are now sometimes introduced), but the very essence of what music is.

The pervasive impression of these days is that we feel that music is, indeed, essentially 'humanly organized sounds', as Blackings says. What I would like to point out here is that even that is a very particular definition of music. I, for example, find the stress on 'organized' and on 'sound', and the absence of the word 'meaning', rather worrying. Although we feel that music is essentially that, would it be possible for us to acknowledge that for many other people living a deeply musical life in this world, music is not about that – music is not mainly about sound, but for example about connecting to others? Connecting to their past? Are we willing to become meaningful to the person for whom the meaning of music lies in the emotional investment connected to the collecting of record sleeves of Johnny Cash albums? Are we willing to then not come with an 'offer' from our perspective, but with the honest question how we could become meaningful for that person?

I grant you, this may be a bit unusual – I know I ask us all, often deeply emotionally attached to the most wonderful forms of musical artistry, to step beyond ourselves, to imagine other definitions of our musical reality.

Looking from a distance, this reflected quite clearly in the choice of musics which were represented these two days – and I am connecting here to some of the points Erling Aksdal made. Classical music, and next to that contemporary classical music, have been dominant. I don't blame you for that, and I am in no way in opposition to classical music. But part of the professional reflexivity the world demands of us is to question how it comes about that precisely these genres of music pop up; that electronic dance and Scottish folk music are only mentioned in passing, that just a small snippet of Björk could be heard; why it is that the BBC chooses classical music as the vehicle for their music education programmes, why it is that Concertgebouw Amsterdam offers Janine Jansen and Lang Lang to primary schools in Amsterdam.

You may think that such questions are irrelevant or even slightly impolite. But they are crucial, because they give us an insight into our own predetermined taken for granted but very particular interpretations of the musical world we live in. We know the answers to the question why this happens: because we know and feel how worthwhile it is, which is very true and which I do not contest; but also because traditionally, classical music has been the hegemonic genre in our societies and – although we feel threatened – it certainly still is in the hearts and minds of our decision makers. Seen from the metaphor of the eco-system, one might say that a rather small amount of species in the music education system is taking up a lot of space.

Classical music is of course one of the genres inhabiting the music system, and it is the natural role, even the obligation of actors connected to classical music to also take their place in the music education eco-system. In that respect you are truly doing a great job. But at the same time, we have – as we say in the Netherlands - to jump across our own shadow. Could we imagine, for example, that an equal amount of public and private funding and of personal and institutional effort would in the UK be spent on reaching four million children with an educational programme based on heavy metal music; a programme in which some connections would be made to the classical symphony orchestra but the main stock would be Guns 'n' Roses, Metallica and possibly Finntrol? Are we willing to fundamentally ask questions about the reality we find ourselves in, and what that says about distribution of status, money and power?

If meaningful music education for every person, and not advocacy for traditional power relations, is our true goal – and I do believe that all of us embrace that idea – than we need to become very reflexive about our specific positions in the musical system. And maybe, for democratic purposes, we need to consciously embrace also those parts of the music world that are intensely meaningful for many people out there, but which as yet fulfill a marginal role in the formal music world and in music education. Classical music and mainstream pop and rock readily fill the classrooms, and jazz and professional world music will secure its place; but it is our duty to make sure that the enormous musical diversity in real life is reflected in the classrooms; that subcultural techno-sounds, shanty choirs and German *schlager* are included. And I have now focused on diversity in genres, but we need also to think about diversity in forms of musical behavior, and diversity in the functions of music in everyday life. I tried to redress the genre-imbalance by playing you the three little clips at

the beginning of my reflection; and I invite you to consider each of them as an inspiration for the development of new possible learning opportunities for children and adults.

Looking from that angle, we have a fantastic and inspiring task ahead of us; and in a certain sense, it is not our organizations or the music or music education professionals that should lead the way. It are the pupils, the people out there on the street, doing passionately with music what they feel they must do with music because music is, in millions of ways, so meaningful to everyone. If anything, wouldn't it be great on the next European Forum on Music Education to also have a session in which randomly chosen pupils take us by the hand and lead us into their infinitely varied musical worlds – which, do not worry, will without any doubt also contain stories about the important role of classical music in some of their lives?

I congratulate you on the way you have brought together the perspectives from so many different organizations and actors in the field of music these two days to reflect on music education. I hope we keep up this very important work of thinking about the role we want to play in the fascinating eco-system of music education, each of us apart and, especially, together. I hope we do that in an ever more reflexive way, in order to eventually do what we must do: together cater for possibilities of music learning that give every individual the chance to develop his or her musical life in the direction that is meaningful to him or her, individually.