

Outline presentation Music in the Community ('Muziek in de Mienskip') – Sneek, 9-5-2018

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Introduction:

Music is everywhere. Apparently we can't do without it. Music does three things for us: it affirms who we are ('This is me, musically speaking'); it connects us to the world ('Through playing in this brass band, I connect to its other members'; 'Through listening to Frisian language singer Piter Wilkens, I connect to this province'; 'Through singing a psalm, I connect to God'); and it allows us to regulate our lives and that of others ('Listening to Bobby McFerrin makes me happy'; 'Playing Kanye West annoys my parents').

Music exists in thousands of powerful ways; apparently we, human beings, cannot do without it. That in itself is legitimation enough for paying attention to it (e.g. in education). Why? 'Just because.'

Statement 1: Without Mienskip no music

Music is a super-individual phenomenon. I do different things with it than anyone else: I sing in a shanty choir; I listen to Monteverdi madrigals; I play the 5-string banjo. I do all that on the basis of my unique musical biography. I am unique in that respect; different from all others. Everybody has his own idiosyncratic musicality.

Music is also a super-social phenomenon. I sing in a shanty choir with others – without those others, there would be no choir. I listen to Monteverdi Madrigals – to do that I need Monteverdi, I need the inventors and manufacturers of my Denon stereo set and my Sony headphones, I need Guido de Arezzo because he is rumoured to have invented music notation, I need my parents who introduced me to classical music, I need the choir and orchestra members performing the madrigals, I need their parents, et cetera et cetera.

My music, therefore, is the result of the 'Mienskip' (Community) I am part of.

The Mienskip is the place where together we give meaning to life – also through giving meaning to music. Mienskip is the resultant of me living with others; my life is the result of the Mienskip. The Mienskip nowadays is partly local, partly global; partly real life and partly virtual. The world is my Mienskip.

Mienskip also is a moral concept. In the Mienskip you are allowed to be yourself; others are allowed to be themselves; we are allowed to learn. We live together with all those 'others'.

The Mienskip is a dynamic space where dialogue and respect are central. Mienskip is not necessarily a cosy space, it is no heaven, not yesteryear's idyllic community. The Mienskip is an assignment.

Music is pars pro toto for this Mienskip. By musicking we practice Mienskip – by cooperating, by learning from others, by standing on the shoulders of others, by discussing with others, and by reacting against others.

Without Mienskip no music. In music we make the Mienskip come alive, we practice Mienskip.

Statement 2: Schools and music schools exist for music in the Mienskip – they are vital elements of our musical Mienskip

Because we will also sign an agreement about music education this afternoon, it is important to say something about formal (music) education.

Learning is something we do everywhere in the Mienskip. By shaping our musical lives, we learn by definition. We don't need schools to learn. But some of our learning takes place in institutions created for that end: in schools, in music schools, also in some musical ensembles like orchestras.

The goal of learning in institutions is to contribute to musical life outside the institutions. It is directed to contributing to our functioning as musical human beings in the Mienskip. Schools and music schools exist for a reason outside themselves: for life outside schools and music schools. If formalized learning loses that connection, if we have to learn because it is our custom to have to learn, it becomes irrelevant, and people will disconnect.

Therefore, schools and music schools must be as dynamic as the Mienskip itself. Our musical Mienskip changes constantly and schools and music schools have to connect to that – and at the same time they will influence the dynamics of the Mienskip because they are part of it; they prepare people for a world of which they are part. Schools and music schools must be meaningful for the musical Mienskip; and be just as diverse as the Mienskip is.

Statement 3: The musical Mienskip is an ecosystem of which the whole is more than its constituting parts.

The Mienskip is an ecosystem: a system of various elements which influence each other constantly and which seek continuously to a state of equilibrium, of balance (without ever reaching that balance) (cf. complex dynamic systems theory). If one of the elements disappears from a system, the system rearranges itself but that will have consequences for the other elements of the system.

'If a butterfly claps its wings, it will cause rain at the other side of the earth.' In other words: the symphony orchestra is in subtle ways dependent on the punk band, just as the music school is in subtle ways dependent on the existence of 'Teach Yourself Keyboard' YouTube clips.

Therefore we have to celebrate diversity; we have to try to understand our 'others'; we have to take each other seriously (because we all do the same with music: we affirm, connect and regulate ourselves and the world). And most of all: we have to enjoy our similarities as well as our differences.