



The Socially Distanced Community Music Workshop

A Community Music Guide in Corona Times

The importance of music/culture and community has been underlined to us all over the past weeks and months. Very quickly after Lockdown started we saw:

- Opera singers on balconies
- virtual orchestras
- families and friends reconnecting in new ways or for the first time in ages

Everyone reaching out for connection and new ways of expression.

As good as technology is, that real human connection though is missing. That joy of meeting people in person. That feeling of being in a group. That sense of community. That wonder of making music together. That sense of play.

Over the weeks we worked to keep in contact with the members of our community groups. We did this with varying degrees of success. Whilst making some new resources in Lockdown Week 6, we noticed it was possible to sing clearly to each other from either side of KONZERTHAUS DORTMUND. If this was possible with two people, then it must be possible with more?

In Lockdown Week 9, with a huge amount of new hygiene measures, we were able to produce a first Community Music workshop in these new times supported by WILO Foundation. Here's what happened and how we got there. If you're planning Community Music work in these strange times, we hope it might be a useful insight in some way.

Questions? Feel free to get in touch with us.

Matt Robinson & Swantje Ndiaye

KONZERTHAUS DORTMUND Community Music & Education

Planning and Preparation

If you could, and maybe you can't, but if you could...what would it look like?

How would you do it?

How would you even start?

How would you be allowed?

How would you make it safe?

And then, what would you do?

Would it be worth it?

We set about researching and making a plan that was mostly focussed on health and safety at this point. This was three weeks before the workshop. It focussed on three key questions:

1. How can we get a group of people into a space safely?
2. How can we then make music together?
3. How big a group and how big the distances between?

Being part of an institution really helped. First, we had access to a big and manageable space, the concert hall. But then, we also had the expertise of the wider team for support, despite everyone working from home. We weren't the only ones tackling this problem. Everyone was trying to work out how to get KONZERTHAUS DORTMUND back to fulfilling its role. Additionally, lockdown rules were starting to be relaxed in NRW, or that process was under discussion. Things were starting to change, and we wanted to make sure that we were ready.

Amongst a million things, research was found that could be presented to the Health Department alongside our planning. It said that whereas the usual separation distance of 1.5 – 2m always and obviously applied, it should be:

- 6m for singers
- 12m for wind instruments
- a calculation of room size based on 20m² per person.

OK.

For us: 12m is the depth of the stage at KONZERTHAUS DORTUND.

So, let's make this easy at first and make it singing only.

Impossible to get more than two or three people on the stage in a meaningful way.

So, let's turn it around.

We'll assign participants seats in the hall.

We'll go around with a tape measure and work out exactly where.

We'll make a really really big circle.

In a hall that seats 1550 we could fit 16.

Make a Hygiene Plan and list everything

How do people arrive?

How do they leave?

Where do they sit?

How do you know they are coming?

What do they play?

How do you set it up and pack it down safely?

Send it around the wider team and see what they say.

Send to the officials and see what they say.

They all said yes.

Do it.

Ignoring the actual workshop content for the moment (covered in the next pages). Here's an overview:

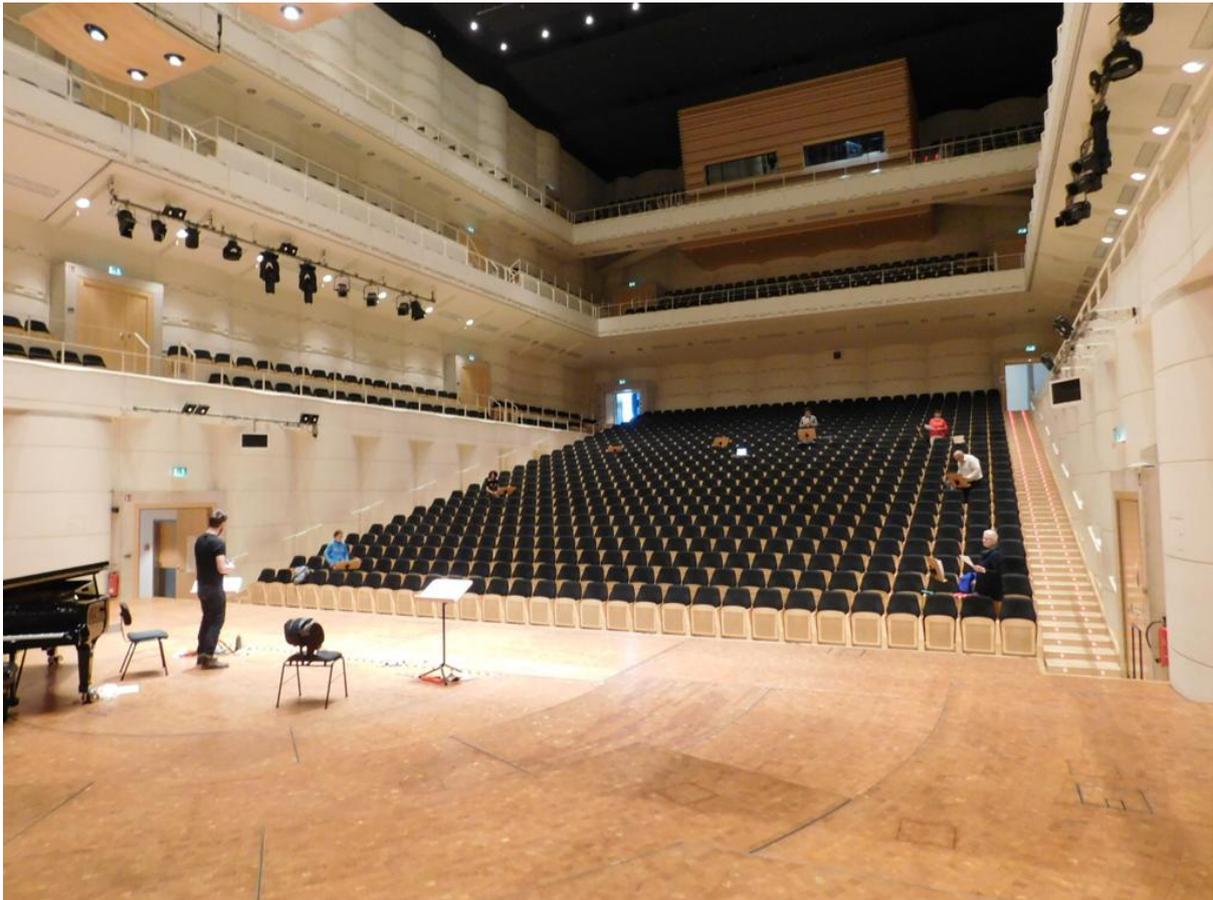
- Everyone registers in advance. (via e-mail or booking platform to make sure that we have all names and contacts)
- Everyone is assigned a seat and an arrival time. This is staggered so that they should never meet another person directly.
- Everyone got the rules and the Hygiene Plan in advance
- A huge one-way system is in place throughout the concert hall that leads people to their seat. All doors left open so that no one has to touch anything.
- Masks on until the workshop starts.
- Workshop starts with an explanation of the Hygiene rules.
- Everyone 1.5m apart at all times. 6m during the workshop itself.
- Everyone has any resources they need already at their seat. These will be disinfected or thrown away at the end by the workshop leaders.
- No staff anywhere other than the workshop leaders.
- 90-minute workshop with no breaks.

- Everyone 'dismissed' with some space between.

Would it work?

Would it all be worth it?

Would everyone enjoy it?



Workshop (14.05.20)

Enough rules. Here's the plan and how it went:

Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To evaluate whether a socially distanced workshop is possible, and to find out what activities work • To reconnect members of our community and to create a feeling of community again • To sing together
-------------	---

Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Hello & Welcome (and the rules!)</u> <p>We've set up for 8 participants who registered. 2 phone saying they can't come. We've been there 2 hours setting up. Matt meets people on the street with a ukulele played with rubber gloves. Strange looks from passers-by noticing a concert hall (and strange musician person) for the first time. Ushering them past the closed signs and onto the one-way system. Swantje is two flights of stairs away finding those that get lost on the way. Making sure find their seat. Everyone happy. Eventually we all get into our spaces. Masks off. And hello! This is all a bit strange isn't it? But how wonderful to see you! Can we hear each other? Yes, thanks to the great acoustic inside the hall. Phew!</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Name Games</u> (simple call & response, and "Pow!"- a variant with some little movements) <p>It works!</p>

	<p>We get used to the big space, including the people over 20m away, and have some fun.</p> <p>Remember the faces, the personalities.</p> <p>Smiles & laughter.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Vocal warmup</u> <p>Fine – it continues from the Name Games.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Hocket</u> (links to some videos we made in the past 6 weeks) <p>Silly, but everyone is of course an individual.</p> <p>So, it's as successful as expected, but we're not aiming for musical excellence here, we're having fun.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Songs</u> <p>All changes.</p> <p>Really difficult.</p> <p>The moment you play an instrument on the stage you can't hear anything from the seats.</p> <p>Can just hear a vague noise in the reverb.</p> <p>Good that we choose songs the most of them already knew.</p> <p>Is everyone ok?</p> <p>Are they singing?</p> <p>With people so far away, you can't really see either.</p> <p>Although they are there you can't see into their eyes.</p> <p>Is it working?</p> <p>Can everyone hear us?</p> <p>We get to the end of a song.</p> <p>Quick check in with everyone.</p> <p>Yes, we're good.</p> <p>Phew!</p>

	<p>We try again and we adjust approaches slightly, try different things. Stop singing ourselves for a moment. Yes, they are there and sounding great, but immediately it slows down massively as people try to adjust to the reverb without a clear lead. We try conducting as well. It's ok.</p> <p>Then the words are printed wrong, argh! And it takes us a beat too long to notice the confusion, and it all grinds to a halt. Quick break and chat. There's a problem to be solved by the group. Let the group lead this. Take a seat. It resets the energy. Takes the pressure off and makes it less of a performance. We have a better group feeling now. We try again. It probably works. Hard to tell. Then a call from the back: "can we do it again?"</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Body Percussion</u> <p>A brand-new thing for this group but here to see what works in the space. It works! We take our time with it and let the mistakes happen. We persevere as a group. You have to be big! This is really an interactive performance from the stage. Very physical. Everything exaggerated.</p>

	<p>Missing some of the instant feedback you get from a participant group during an exercise.</p> <p>Hard to tell how people are feeling.</p> <p>Probably good from the laughter at the end.</p> <p>Is it the same if you're at the back?</p> <p>Try everything lots of different ways to make sure.</p> <p>Words, wordless, big movements, different big movement, numbers, fast, slow, show & tell...and on...</p> <p>Realise now it's been a while since the last workshop... tiring!</p> <p>Fun though and definitely a thing to carry through to the next workshop.</p> <p>Good!</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>New Song / Teaching Theory</u> <p>A pentatonic song by ear.</p> <p>Normally this group likes written things.</p> <p>Can this work?</p> <p>Sort of...</p> <p>Difficult.</p> <p>Try a wordless & physical approach with both of us.</p> <p>Mixed success.</p> <p>We have to be really physical and big.</p> <p>We get there.</p> <p>A different approach is probably the way.</p> <p>We try that opposite approach and explain it.</p> <p>That definitely doesn't work but the first way makes more sense now.</p> <p>We stick with that and everyone seems more comfortable.</p> <p>We try some words.</p> <p>No, it's a moment of performance but not participation.</p> <p>Do we persevere here?</p> <p>Nah. Move on.</p> <p>We've made sure everyone has a Boomwacker.</p> <p>We try that.</p>

	<p>This really works. Suddenly it makes sense! It links to the Hocket from earlier (deliberately). Can we sing as well? Yes!</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Songwriting</u> <p>Planned but we abandon this as time is short. Let's sit and chat and evaluate instead. Good call. Has it been worth it? Yes! It's strange but it's better than nothing. Would be better if we were together. Hopefully next time! Should there be a next time? Yes!</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Sing!</u> <p>We sing some known songs one more time. Matt moves to piano to see if it's any better. It's not, it's even worse, can't hear anything. But we're comfortable now and enjoying it. Vielen Dank und until next time....</p>

<p>Post-</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An hour of music stand disinfection, plus chairs, boomwackers and other touched objects • Disposal of music sheets • Toilet cleaning • Evaluate
---------------------	--

Summary

It works and is worth it!

Although the dynamics are very different.

After months of only digital contact to actually be able to make music with people in the same room is truly brilliant.

It was joyous, draining, truly emotional.

It was very difficult to lead - you are a Community Musician in performance mode, not a facilitator. It is in no way a replacement to a 'normal' Community Music Workshop, whatever that may be. Despite being suddenly part of a group for the first time in a long time you still feel separate. Separated by 6m distance to the nearest person. Others are on the horizon. There are moments where you feel truly isolated as a leader, never mind as a participant, with the gulf of silence and air between you.

This approach is a short-term fix. A better-than-nothing approach that is inherently exclusionary. A nice thing rather than something that brings strength or confidence to individuals and communities. But, having said that, it did manage to highlight the strength of Community. A moment of relief and support and struggle between a group of people that wouldn't have ever met otherwise. A small but diverse mix of people from across Dortmund celebrating each other and making some music together. It still managed the thing that Community Music does, to use music as a tool to make some meaningful other thing happen, something beyond the art itself.

We'll continue.

We'll refine it.

We'll work to find ways of coming closer together and building a community.

Work to be done.

Here's to the next one.