



## **The Socially Distanced Community Music Workshop 2**

### An Update & Reflection

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Two months after lockdown has been implemented, we managed to restart our Community Music programme here at KONZERTHAUS DORTMUND. On the 14<sup>th</sup> May 2020 we ran our first “Socially Distanced Corona” Workshop. It was somewhat successful – it was certainly better than nothing at all. It was a welcome moment of joy, community, and relief. A moment to finally make some music together and to connect with people once again.

We wrote a little case study about it ([available here](#)). In which we talked about all the things we had to do to make it happen and our thoughts along the way. We talked about that first workshop from our viewpoint as Community Musicians. How it felt to lead a workshop from a stage - a very long way away from your participants. We asked a lot of questions about worth.

Would it be worth it?

Since the middle of May until now (the start of our Summer Break at KONZERTHAUS DORTMUND – the end of June/beginning of July 2020), we’ve run around two workshops per week. They’ve all been different in many, many ways as we’ve had to adapt and change almost everything along the way.

Throughout it all we’ve had to constantly change everything. To not only adapt to constantly changing rules but to actually deliver something that might feel like a Community Music workshop. On the way it’s taken some serious evaluation on some fundamentals of Community Music/Workshop Leading practice as we relearn everything.

How do you lead a workshop ‘at a distance’?

How do you ensure engagement ‘at a distance’?

How do you ‘read the room’?

How do you even connect with people even on a basic level?

How do you develop trust in the group?

How do you make it safe?

Is it worth it?

It's been a strange time.

In May we started our first workshop with a small group of singers spread out at over 6 meters distancing. Although it was somewhat joyous it was also somewhat disheartening as you somehow felt even more separated and alone as you sang into a great, almost empty space.

Our last workshop last week was with a class of 5-year olds in a Kindergarten – dancing, playing, bumping into each other, stealing instruments from out of our hands, singing silly songs about animals – in all respects a 'normal' or 'pre-Corona' early years workshop. This was a one-off for the moment though, a lovely moment of sharp relief compared to everything else.

Here then is a little update on this strange time and a reflection on all those questions we had when we started in May.

### **What would it look like?**

Mostly, to the untrained eye, not too dissimilar. We're all in a circle. We're all singing or playing together. But it's like someone's got the scale wrong on a diagram. Everything just seems further away than normal. It also doesn't look too different when you're in it (especially once the distancing had come down to less than 4 meters).

It felt completely different though. You feel disconnected. As a leader you can't see, even the majority of the group, at the same time. It's almost impossible to 'read the room'. You miss all the little things. You can't really look at someone in the eye. You can't hear a whisper or that little intake of breath people do when they are confused or concerned. You can't share a little joke with the person next to you. You rely completely on people telling you explicitly about everything. Should we move on? Is everyone ok? Can we hear everything? Is this good?

### **How would you do it? / What would you do?**

At first, we tried lots and lots of stuff in an attempt to find out what would work. Singing generally worked well but anything with instruments was generally a nightmare. Not because of the participant group in any way, you just couldn't hear everything, or you couldn't tell if we were together. If you've ever tried to play along to something happening

in the room next door - that's exactly what it was like. But happening for real, right there. Argh! How do you fix this when you have no reference point? We still don't have an answer.

Over time we refined our approach and got a nice little suite of activities that both relied on, and developed a sense of collective pulse, time, and ensemble whilst also enhancing the sense of a 'gathering' or community in some way.

Beats passed around with songs over the top.

Name games and body percussion.

Rounds and Hockets.

Super hard at a distance though, especially when playing together, in any meaningful way, is super challenging.

### **How would you even start? / How would you be allowed? / How would you make it safe?**

Once you've done the boring rules bit, stop talking, just do it and play and allow people to find their way. Everyone, you included, need to get used to whatever space/dynamic is happening today and this will take four times longer than you are used to. So let it breathe. Get as used as you can be to the massive space and gaps and air.

There will be lots of other approaches. But for us – it's what worked best.

Being allowed to get to this point is another story.

Basically: paperwork – and lots of it! It got easier but always changing. Our respective Home Offices / Kitchen Tables are now littered with almost countless Corona Workshop Hygiene Plans. You can't rely on 'just turning up', you can't work it out when you're in the room. A week in advance: How many chairs? Where exactly will they be? Who will be there? What kind of instrument are they playing? How do people arrive? How do they go to the toilet? How do they leave? How do you give them any bits of paper? How do you make any music stands safe to touch again? Etc etc etc etc.... Get it all approved by the relevant authorities and coordinated with the wider Konzerthaus Team. Inevitably there are some small changes to be made. Update the paperwork. Then new regulations are published. Does it affect us? If so how? Get advice, update the paperwork again, get approval again. And repeat... and repeat...

### **Would it all be worth it?**

"I just can't make music like that" – participant.

A perfectly valid response to what haven been difficult workshops. And not just for us as Community Musicians but for the participants as well. These are not Community Music workshops as you know them. They are tough, they are draining, and they are difficult to measure by usual Community Music measures. Normally, success is measured not by musical outcome but by how the participants feel (to misremember a quote from somewhere). But where the workshop is so different, where it feels so different by design and necessity, there is very little chance of us meeting that level of success.

But something else happened. These then are not workshops of empowerment, or inspiration, or learning. That proved almost impossible. But they were of community. We came together and made music regardless, despite the obstacles, the frustrations, and a somewhat sense of failure each time (and not just from us as Community Musicians, but I know from some participants as well). But we did it and we came back again and again to try once more. Despite the distancing, despite us losing contact with half of our community due to lockdown, despite the workshop challenges, it felt like we became closer. Maybe, just maybe, we achieved that higher aim of Community.

For now though, it's the summer.

We rest, we regroup, we spread the word, we keep working, we hopefully have a massive community picnic.

As a Community we'll make the next thing happen, aiming to restart fully in September.

Come and join us!

Stay safe and stay in touch!

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