

Wandering, context and contemporary music - the work of ohrenstrand.net Berlin

Today, I'd like to briefly present the work of the *Berliner Netzwerk zur Vermittlung Neuer Musik* – the Berlin Network for disseminating (communicating) New Music - and outline some of its projects.

In the first part of this presentation. I'm going to focus on our structure, approach and funding. In the second part, I'll be explaining the ideas underlying our network and discussing what we do. In the third and final part, I'll then be looking at some particular projects that I hope will be interesting for you.

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ohrenstrand.net was founded in 2008, in response to the German Federal Cultural Foundation's call to create new networks. Networks across Germany sent in their applications with ideas on how to improve the public platform for New Music. In total, the Foundation received over 80 applications. Fifteen networks across Germany were then selected for funding in a two-tier process lasting over a year.

The Foundation's programme to promote New Music is comparable with *Tanzplan Deutschland*, founded several years previously to support dance in Germany. Ohrenstrand.net's idea was to launch a representative network for Berlin, bringing together actors from the established and fringe cultural scenes, as well as institutions receiving local, regional and federal funding. This mix is characteristic of Berlin and, in fact, is precisely why Berlin is so attractive for all kinds of artists.

ohrenstrand.net is grouped of eight partners under Kulturprojekte Berlin GmbH, a state-owned company that manages major cultural projects. The partners each represent a specific area in the music landscape.

The partners provide 40% of the funding for ohrenstrand.net's work.

The German Federal Cultural Foundation provides a good 40% of our funds and we also receive just under 20 % from the federal state of Berlin. So the partners' own share is relatively high. This has advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, from the perspective of the partners' institutions, they are very interested in the project's success. However, this funding model also has the shortcoming that there is a lack of what you could call "neutral" money to develop joint projects. And naturally, the ohrenstrand.net management is especially interested in such projects.

So how do we work? A partner suggests a project and I then try to network the project with other partners and, if possible, jointly realise it. In this case, ohrenstrand.net gives the partners a financial supplement amounting to 40% of the funds they have deployed. This ratio has always worked perfectly so far: any of the partner institutions investing heavily in ohrenstrand.net projects receive proportionally more funding in return. Consequently, ohrenstrand.net's primary internal partner is not, for example, a federal or *Länder*-level institution but the Contemporary Opera Berlin, which saw a unique chance in the fringe arts to, as it were, double its budget by supporting ohrenstrand.net projects.

Since 2008, over 60 events in Berlin and the *Land* of Brandenburg have been realised, reaching an audience of around 13,000. The projects have been for children, young people and the general public, with concerts, discussions, events and innovative concert formats.

The ohrenstrand.net project officially ends on December 2011, when the four-year funding expires. Naturally, however, I am working on the future of the network and can see possibilities for carrying on in a modified form. In particular, in contrast to festivals, one of our outstanding features is the continuous nature of our work.

Of course, there is still a lot I could say about the structure of the network and how we work, but I think this gives you an overview of the basics and, in the afternoon, we can then discuss our experience with and in networks.

As you can see, ohrenstrand.net, the network for disseminating New Music, has a subtitle – "*Berlins Netzwerk für neugieriges Hören*" – "Berlin's network for inquisitive listening". The aim of this phrase is to highlight our network's idea that listening is not only stimulating or attractive, but can even be an event. Our focus is first and foremost on the listener – on her or his perceptions, and why, where and how she or he listens to something. At the same time, that means that we try to assume the position of the listener.

Of course, that's easier said than done. Nonetheless, I would characterise this approach as the central moment in ohrenstrand.net's work. In theoretical terms, we are not concerned with an artwork's sensory and intellectual preparation for the general public. Such a discourse actually strengthens the antipodal situation between the artwork on the one hand and the recipients on the other, even though it aims at achieving quite the opposite. In our work, we are more interested in creating a framework where the listener, equipped with her or his experiences, habits and interests, can develop an interest and even a passion for New Music.

Let me just deviate briefly from the structure of my presentation to give you a practical example of a project. The Hör.Quartett, a project we first realised in 2009, transforms a very well known TV show to create a live music format. Consequently, we can assume that the audience at the project is also there to compare the two styles of shows. The TV version is a literary talk show, presenting, discussing and reviewing books. Our version, though, offers a forum for current music in a series presenting and discussing both pop music and contemporary music. As you can imagine, this gives the audience broad and varied points of contact to our version of the show, and offers lots of reasons to be there. Moreover, we don't have a musicologist or music critic presenting the evening event, but a high profile TV magazine presenter. Since she isn't an expert, the questions about the music that she puts to the pop and contemporary musicians and the invited guests come from the perspective of a listener, from someone unfamiliar with New Music.

That's all I wanted to say here about the "position of the listener" – and now let's return to my main theme, which is "inquisitive listening".

Not only is the creation of music constantly changing, but along with it, listening habits and the conditions for music's reception are constantly changing too. Nowadays, listening individually is on an equal footing with listening together, music is heard in private and public space, and spread through live channels or the media. Pluralistic, heterogeneous, or democratic listening is a reality in a metropolis such as Berlin and hence the basis for ohrenstrand.net's joint work. This basic idea is at a variance with the narrow position of an art object, or a work of music, being presented to potential recipients in a prepared and mediated way. We deliberately did not want to acknowledge this gap between the artwork and the recipients.

I'm also mentioning this subtitle since it has, in my view, a strategic value. A network needs an idea to give it an identity – and this idea can then be called to mind if the network starts to become unclear or difficult to realise due to strong, individual interests.

Our topic today does not include the psycho-acoustic dimension of listening. However, over the last years numerous New Music events have been linked with scientific congresses, not only locating New Music closer to "basic scientific research" but allowing it to lock onto other social areas. The former probably tends more to serve the politico-social argument to profile the need for funding. The latter, though, which I would generalise under the term "new

contextualisation", plays a decisive role in our work – and probably in yours too.

Without doubt, the connection between New Music and other new – and ideally, surprising - contexts is an important plank in audience engagement. The famous formula "Music and ...", if not simply and exclusively interpreted additively, also means, for example: How do people listen to music and where do they listen. At the same time, the contextualisation of New Music also implies determining its own identity: What does New Music bring into social communication that nothing else can? What can only New Music do?

Naturally, the answers to these questions are also very interesting – but they would take us too far away from our topic today, even though the question of identity is, of course, connected to the issue of spreading New Music.

As you can see, these topics are not exclusively addressing "children and young people". Quite the contrary. Defining the target group, whether young or old, is part of the question about the context. Interestingly, the questions that arise here are directed both to the music sector itself and the marketing sector. Linking both of these aspects is what makes our work so interesting, varied and demanding.

In typically thorough German style, we have developed our own form for our work. When we start a project, we don't only note down the venue, date, artist and so on, but we also have a space where we list the target group: who is the project intended for, who do we want to reach, and what would steps have to be taken to achieve that?

After these few general remarks, I'd now like to move on to some concrete examples of projects run by ohrenstrand.net which can be discussed later. I'd like to categorise them according to the idea of context that I have already mentioned:

1. In the context of other art sectors

- Since New Music will not reach a mass audience, and often doesn't want to – which in my view has its justification -, it makes sense to try and appeal to the actors and audience of neighbouring art sectors. In Berlin, the art scene in particular has developed remarkably over the last years. To link art and New Music, we developed a tour of Berlin's art galleries entitled "Seeing and listening to contemporary art". This gallery tour takes place once a year, each time at a different gallery location. The galleries are chosen by an art curator on the basis on their importance in current art discourse. Two music curators then discuss with KNM

Berlin, the ensemble performing the music, the "appropriate" pieces for the galleries and the art exhibited there. Each gallery has two guides, who are art history and music students, ready to answer visitors' questions. In principle, here we can talk of a dual dissemination strategy. We are reaching an audience that, first and foremost, is interested in art. Nonetheless, when they come into direct contact with New Music, they welcome it enthusiastically. However, since the activity of the guides is prepared in the respective University departments, we are also networking with the universities and individual departments.

- This event is designed as a promenade concert where visitors can spend a Saturday afternoon walking from one gallery to another, and they will find a permanent mini-concert in each gallery. The individual pieces in each gallery are constantly repeated. Naturally, this style of concert is challenge for the ensemble performing and I personally don't know that many ensembles capable of such a marathon.
- The project's success is founded on support from rbb's kulturradio broadcaster, which ultimately finances, promotes and advertises the tour. However, since the galleries can only take so many people, we have to limit the audience to around 800-1000. It may be of interest just to mention here that the broadcaster's funding does not come from the music budget but is provided by the marketing division. For this reason, the gallery tour is held in November directly before radio listenership figures are surveyed.
- That's all I wanted to say here about the gallery tour project. Of course, ohrenstrand.net does not only look for contacts in the art scene. In 2010, we launched a new "sound & language" programme, bringing young poets together with composers. This year we are focusing specifically on performances of works with words and music, but which don't use song as a medium.
- 2. Now, I'd like now to move on to another main area, which I would call the **living space context**.

Recently, a colleague from Singapore asked me what I regarded as the most important way of disseminating contemporary music. Naturally, - and fortunately - this question is not that easy to answer. But if I had to try, then I'd say that music should connect with people's everyday experience.

Ohrenstrand.net has designed and realised a whole series of projects where people's everyday experience, experience with life context, is linked to an aesthetic intervention.

- The HouseMusik project, for example, takes place in private flats, shops, and offices, or service locations such as hairdressers and post offices, to offer a night of New Music. The general public can decide quite freely when they want to visit the event, how long they stay, and how much they listen to.
- The structure is comparable with the gallery promenade concerts. Here, the event format provides a springboard for the dissemination of music. The format encourages people to discover new venues and locations, facilitates a closer contact to the musicians, and of course lives from the tension created by the relationship between private and public space.
- But – and this is an important point – the dissemination as such starts much earlier in the HouseMusik project. It starts with persuading owners or tenants of apartments and shops, to make their homes or businesses available for New Music performances.
- It's also worth nothing that the gallery tour guides are used again in this project too. As a result, the general public can book a guided tour through the entire range of house music on offer. We also provide this service for companies.
- The HouseMusik project has a flexible design. It is not only suitable for city districts, but can even be arranged for an ordinary working environment. The last HouseMusik event took place in 2009 in the Siemens dynamo works in Berlin, a factory producing massive ship's turbines. Not only were the pieces of music performed there, but one piece also involved 20 Siemens employees.

The second "living space context" project is similarly designed for urban space. This project started from the idea of city tour that was not for the eyes, but for the ears. What does the city sound like? We got in touch with visually impaired and blind people and organised the first tour with them. The sighted participants were given eye masks and were unable to see anything at all. That of course raised two questions: firstly, the problem of safety and, secondly the question of orientation - how were the participants to know where they were going? We solved both of these issues by giving each participant their own personal guide to take

them gently and safely through the urban jungle. The tour ended with a discussion and a New Music mini-concert. Since we need to have enough guides ready for these tours, participants have to register by email in advance. The guides have all registered for our Newsletter and are interested in ohrenstrand.net's work. In this way, we also cement our relationship to people interested in ohrenstrand.net. It's also worth mentioning the project's social component: the guide and participant, who have never met before, have to learn to trust each other and cooperate for an hour. That's an experience that often creates friendships. In the meantime, the project exists in various forms. We have changed the routes and even offer an ad hoc version, or we link the tour to other concert events, include live street music, and so on. For us, the important thing is to strengthen the aesthetic experience. We reach people who we never could have interested in coming to a concert of experimental music.

Now, I'd like to move on to an example of an embedded tour. For Easter 2010, we organised the KNM New Music Spa project. The theme was today's spa and wellness culture. We started the project with a music theatre world premiere on this topic at 7pm. At 8.15 later in the evening, after the performance, we opened the programme up for individual treatment. The audience could choose between Laughter yoga, sound massage, sound-light showers, installations and the "heard city" tour. Around 10.15 pm, everyone met back in the concert hall for the closing concert.

The idea of a pluralistic concert offering diverse variations of listening, with different experiences and activating the audience through her/his own choice of programmes, provides a broad approach to what is today a very differentiated audience.

- The third and final "living space context" project that I'd like to present is called "Ankunft Neue Musik" – a festival held at Berlin's main station. This project is supported by Deutsche Bahn, and has now taken place for a second time. The history behind the project is rather interesting, since the festival is actually the by-product of quite another idea. In 2008, Ohrenstrand.net launched an architectural competition for mobile architecture to facilitate contemporary music performances. Since the architecture was mobile, it could move from place to place. In this way, it could present New Music live in museums, schools, cinemas and other

major venues. The award winning design comprised "sound-room" modules – cube-like shapes with different acoustic qualities. The cubes could be combined to create rooms, landscapes and so on. Our work consisted of finding partners and organisations interested in putting up this architecture. After several stopovers in galleries, Siemens AG the Deutsche Bahn has been interested in erecting this architecture in Berlin's main station. We were allowed to construct this New Music venue in a central location, right on Level 0, where all the escalators cross. Performances were held there several times a day for ten days. The huge success of this first edition led us to utilise the project's budget primarily for performances in the main station and largely gave up idea of trying to acquire other venues. Of course, in terms of marketing New Music, Berlin's main station can hardly be bettered as a venue. Everyday of the festival, thousands of people are made aware of something they had never known before. Naturally, the connections created here cannot be profound. Nonetheless, first contacts are established with the chance of more intense contact later on.

Before we are going to see a short video on this festival I'd just like to give a very brief summary of the presentation:

To illustrate the way ohrenstrand.net works. I divided our projects into different contexts. Contextualisation is important in anchoring New Music better in society. This not only offers opportunities within music but also creates the potential for a marketing design. A differentiated society also results in a similar pluralism in listening habits and the range of social situations where music is heard. The types of projects that take that into account can be successful in binding an audience. In the projects described here, movement is a key feature – and movement represents a metaphor for an active, self-determined and discerning audience.

One key method in our work is to take the listener's perspective. This is a method that neither sets out to educate or improve, but instead aims at contributing to New Music's accessibility.