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Feeling and Perceiving Music with All Your Senses

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Feeling and Perceiving Music with All Your Senses

Doris Valtiner-Pühringer

Based on the experiences of my concert activities as director of the "Mittendrin-Konzerte" in Salzburg at the International Mozarteum Foundation since 2011, I report in this article on some special features in relation to feeling and perceiving music with all the senses.

The "Mittendrin" concerts are for children 0-3 years and their parents, grandparents or other accompanying adults. I develop the ideas and the format of these concerts, presenting and performing together with a group of three to five musicians. "Mittendrin" means "right in the middle". Forty children and their parents sit on colourful cushions while the musicians move around between the audience.



Violin: Moises Irajá dos Santos, Cello: Anne Keckeis,
Double bass: Justus Böhm. Eva Trifft ©

Over the years, the concert dates have been extended to include toddler groups as well as inclusive, sometimes severely impaired, age-extended groups. Precisely because the concept is strongly focussed on involving all the senses, the concerts and their music are accessible to children with special needs.

The following part of this article deals with selected aspects of perception training as the basis of embodiment. This should begin at a very early age - with the first lullabies and the caressing of newborn babies. The concerts for very small children pick up on these insights and represent a very special and, one could say, "multisensory" form of musical experience.

Suggestions from the field

Directional hearing

- From which direction does a noise or sound come? Is it always the same place or can the direction change in the concert hall or classroom? What possibilities are there? As soon as the music sounds from a different "corner", children and adults react, move their heads and are very attentive.

- Can the sound source move? If, for example, a musician moves around the room while she is playing, the direction from which the music is sounding changes constantly. This increases attention as also the volume is always changing for all listeners.

My own voice

How does my perception change - even as an adult - when I hear a song sung by an ensemble or when I sing along as part of the whole? In my opinion, there should always be room for both aspects in a concert.

Music example: *Pûpû hinuhinu* (Lullaby from Hawaii by N. Beamer)

First the audience listens and then joins in - first humming and then singing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zqgQPuFd5HY> (Accessed on 15 September 2024)

Auditory and tactile perception

Here I ask myself whether there is an instrument that can be made with little effort, can be played to live music, is not too loud and still develops the haptics with the music. This translates the impression I hear into fine motor skills and I can participate in the music myself. Of course, these considerations depend largely on the age and level of development of the audience or the respective group.

Example from a concert for older children (4-6 years).

The instruments were made before the concert.

Music example:

Danit Treubig - Cuatro Vientos (Live), (Accessed on 15 September 2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfFtHb0csUs>

Ocean-Drum:

[@MusivanaAt](#), (Accessed on 15 September 2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/qLLpz8Ov77o>

Visual perception

The important question here is which visual design, which scenic moment can support the music without overwhelming it.

Which material do I use for a visualisation, which material, which surface, shape, size, texture reflects the character of a certain music? In most cases: less is more!

Sense of smell

Can I support the experience of the music with a smell? What possibilities do I have?

Example from the concert where the children could smell sea salt in a bowl while listening.

The Seal Lullaby

(E. Whitacre, text: J. R. Kipling), (Accessed on 15 September 2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltxiHNcGfZM>

Tactile perception

While the music sounds, am I allowed to touch something or am I being touched by something?

This contact can significantly intensify a musical experience. However, it is again a matter of thinking in advance: which material, what surface do I offer, or in the case of babies, what do I touch them with to create a pleasant feeling.

In addition, there is the beautiful possibility of "wind", which the audience can feel - for example generated by a large fan or fabric - without being touched.

Movement and kinaesthetics

There are different options here, which can be adapted to the age of a group or the respective audience.

- All move freely to the music. When prompted, for example, a larger audience group can move freely around the room.
- With babies, the parents carry their children during movement phases, so the children are moved to the music. This is an important aspect that should occur as often as possible in a concert.
- Young audiences usually „comment“ on music with their bodies of their own accord. This natural reaction is wonderful and should not be restricted as long as it is not exaggerated or disruptive for others.
- The audience could also move to a fixed, not too complex circular dance form to the music.

This example from a concert offers possibilities for all the forms of movement mentioned. Music example:

Tarantella Tortorella (Italia) - Djingalla (Ensemble Rossi) (Accessed on 15 September 2024)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tw4k6AwG3yw>

Taste perception

I have not yet been able to include this in a concert as it is particularly problematic with very young children. However, a get-together once a year after a concert with drinks and a small snack is always met with great approval.

Conclusion

Perhaps, and in the best-case scenario, this article could provide a few impulses for the multi-sensory realisation of music reception and music communication. The importance of embodiment is now clear to both parents and concert organisers. Aware of this speciality and the holistic experience, the concert format is allowed to grow so that more and more people can enjoy a musical experience. The parents enjoy these 50-minute concerts just as much as the young listeners and, above all, they experience them together. The bonds that develop in the course of these experiences are something very special every time, and unique for me and the musicians to observe and feel.



Doris Valtiner-Pühringer graduated in 'Elemental Music and Dance Pedagogy' at the Orff Institute, Mozarteum Salzburg. During her studies abroad in England she was able to deepen her knowledge in the field of choreography and other subjects at the Dartington College of Arts. Since 2008 Doris Valtiner-Pühringer has been a Senior Lecturer at the Orff Institute in the areas of 'Dance', 'Didactics' and 'Music and Dance in Inclusion and Diversity'. She was also a member of the Orff Institute's performance group "Das Collectif" in 2007–2012. In 2013, Doris took over the Mittendrinn Concert Series at the International Mozarteum Foundation. Since then, she is responsible for the conception and presentation of the concerts.