

3. QUO VADIS THE CONTEMPORARY MUSIC CRITICISM? (THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP OF JOURNALISM IN KALV, SWEDEN. REFLECTION, ORIENTATION, PERSUASION)

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Abstract: *Annually, in Kalv is organized one of Sweden's most innovative festivals for Contemporary Music. For the first time, on 8-11 August 2019 took place a workshop in Music Journalism field. In this study we intend to show working methods used in Western Journalism and the impact of current music on the cultural level Kalv's rural population. Together with the mentor Andreas Engström from Berlin, we attended concerts, seminars, we interviewed more artists and musicians across the globe, also we wrote different texts, essays and chronicles for publication. To conclude, organising a Musical Journalism Workshop during a festival of contemporary music is a commendable initiative which plays a major role in getting acquainted and gaining a better understanding of the compositional intentions of present-day creators. We will be happy to come back here, in a world at once picturesque and post-modern owing to these unforgettable musical encounters.*

Key words: *journalism, contemporary music, workshop, critical writing*

1. Introduction

On the 8th to 11th of August 2019, the picturesque small village of Kalv, in a remote area in south west Sweden, hosted the 16th edition of a Festival for Contemporary Music. The Kalv Festival is among the oldest and probably the most important festival of its kind in the country. For the first time, this edition also included a workshop in musical journalism. (Fig. no.1, 2, 3)



This was coordinated by the musicologist Andreas Engström, born in Sweden but a resident in Berlin where he is editor of the German journal *Positionen* based on contemporary music. Andreas Engström is writing his doctoral thesis on experimental music theatre in Sweden in the 1960s and he edited a book series in four volumes on *Nordic Avant Garde in the 20th Century*. During these four days, a group made up of seven musicologists, some of them

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also active music journalists, from Sweden and România, formed an editorial group around Andreas Engström. The aim was to produce articles which reflected on and analysed the festival, the music and the context in which it was situated.

(Fig. no. 4, 5)



2. Discussions

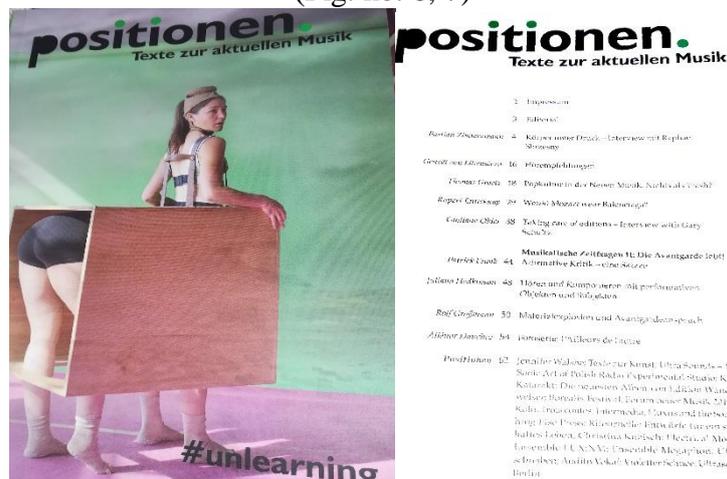
A rhetorical question that was posed at the initial meeting stayed with us during the course: “Is Musical Criticism needed?” In an interview in the local newspaper *Borås Tidning* (9th of August 2019), Andreas Engström gave an answer to this question: “I believe that, regardless of the work in question, be it of music, fine arts, or literature, there is a constant need for reflection! The critic has the duty to read, reflect, and formulate the thoughts stirred by a creation”. That a local newspaper publishes a separate interview with a leader for a workshop in new music criticism is maybe a bit unusual. Nevertheless, it maybe says something about the importance that is attributed to the practice in a time when music criticism and new music in general is marginalised in the public sphere: perhaps one could see it as an aspiration to give it more public attention.

Some interesting topics relating to the importance of musical criticism were also debated during the public lecture Engström held as part of the festival. The provoking title “What would music be without words?” underlined the importance of a specialised criticism in the analysis and discussion of new musical phenomena and discussed how to reach out to various types of audiences: from professionals to amateurs, from highly specialised experts (composers, interpreters, conductors, musicologists) to ordinary music lovers. A specialist eye, which through knowledge and objectivity pierce into the core of an artistic performance or product, has always been necessary. All the more so in the last decades, when contemporary music increasingly needs reflection in order to be properly received and understood. In brief, reflection implies personal or collective reflection and, implicitly, a “critical sense”. In this context, musical journalism is called upon to play an important part in the way contemporary composition is approached, with its post-modern orientation and penchant for eclecticism and heterogeneity. Music criticism, through its process of “reception and reflection” has the role of an aesthetic (and, why not, even ethical) barometer.

Taking this into account, contemporary musical journalism has a multiple functionality of reflection, trendsetting, persuasion, and, above all, a constant modelling and developing of a critical sense. Music criticism has the potential of being able to permeate very different fields, such as education, culture, management, tourism, etc., and thereby reaching, in a pragmatic way, social aspects as well. For example, one could reflect on and analyse the preference for atypical performance settings in places such as abandoned industrial buildings, former student cafeterias or dormitories, underground parking sites, malls, supermarkets, etc. and the displacement of workshops and festivals to cities, towns and rural areas far away from the great cultural centres – such as the events recently in Kalv. Music criticism has the potential to truly change the attitudes towards contemporary music at all levels: production, reception and dissemination.

As for the activities carried out at this workshop, the general idea was that the participant together with the leader would form an editorial group and put together a dossier of texts that would reflect the festival: some tendencies, the relation between the local community and new music and the role the experimental music has in a small society, like this little village Kalv. Our writing was based upon ongoing interaction and collaboration within the group, with constant exchange of ideas and impressions, everything under the guidance of Andreas Engström, who proved to have excellent skills as a group leader, guiding us in the writing of our reports. The themes for the articles were developed together, but were finished by each one individually. We wrote essays, reviews, and feature articles with different topics, and the texts were carefully read within the group, during and after the workshop. They were subsequently published, mainly in Swedish and in English in the online magazine *Critical Point*, and in German in *Positionen (Texte zur aktuellen Musik)*. Each one of us had something to learn from the musicological and journalistic experience of the other colleagues.

(Fig. no. 6, 7)



The articles focused on the events that took place during the four days of the festival in Kalv, which included many concerts and meetings with both established and young composers. There were also seminars and presentations of

compositional views and a musical evening with a local cover band organised by the residents of Kalv. The main features of the works performed during the festival were different aspects of improvisation or indeterminacy, timbral effects, and the use of prepared instruments, with various sound emission modes. Well-known composers, such as **Klaus Lang** (Vienna) or **Malin Bång** (Stockholm) held workshops and also had some of their own works performed. Many young composers, from various countries, had the opportunity to listen to their own works being performed by remarkable instrumental ensembles such as *Airborne* extended from Austria and *Mimitabu* from Sweden, both specialising in contemporary music. (Fig. no. 8, 9)



3. Conclusions

To conclude, organising a music journalism workshop during a festival of contemporary music is a commendable initiative. It is important for getting acquainted with and gaining a better understanding of the compositional intentions of present-day creators and it is a concept that should be adopted to similar events in other countries. It would be great to be able to come back to Kalv, in this picturesque, as well as post-modern, setting for unforgettable musical and creative encounters.

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