



Systemic Relevance - of Culture and Freelancers in Times of unpredictable global Events: The Corona Crisis

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"Systemic relevance" of culture and freelancers in times of unpredictable global events: The Corona crisis

Because culture is not a luxury that we can afford or abandon at will, but rather the spiritual ground that secures our inner survivability (...)” Richard von Weizsäcker

BY FRANZISKA BUTTGEREIT

Abstract

COVID-19 has brought the world to its knees, but it has brought freelance workers and artists to bankruptcy. Creativity is needed now more than ever to solve the problems of the day.

Since force majeure is fundamentally not insurable, freelancers — and artists in particular — are hit hard by the mandatory closure of cultural institutions. This segment of the population often lives paycheck to paycheck and thus their ability to support themselves is broken. Artists are often hired for a specific length of time, and as such they do not receive any compensation if their contract is canceled. Few, if any, artists are capable of supporting themselves for more than a month or two due to this loss of income. Cancellations of concerts, tours, or other events impact not only the artists, but also the multitudes of people whose work is necessary for one of these events to take place at all. Booking agencies lose out on commission, catering companies and their staff lose their contracts, local event organizers and companies that provide technological assistance are forced to stay home without compensation. Local cafes, bars, and restaurants, even if they somehow were to remain open, would see their patrons staying at home, as there



are no cultural events to attend. Many artists improve their monthly income by working as a freelance music pedagogue, i.e. either giving instrumental lessons at a music school / university or supervising workshops in schools. However, this income is also lost, due to the closing of all educational institutions. Thus, it is plain to see that without any savings to fall back on, many artists are forced to decide whether they are able to continue their careers. A monthly salary to an artist currently stuck in such a dismal financial state is extremely enticing. How can art survive this crisis if there are no artists left to create it?

Many find hope and a potential solution in the digital space: dance lessons are recorded and made available online; instrumental lessons are held via Skype; concerts are streamed online. Now more than ever, when people are forced to stay at home, art is needed to distract the masses from their ever gloomier reality. As wonderful as it may be in the interim, it must remain a stopgap, since the cultural sector lives from the promise of personal encounter, from this great human gesture. There simply is no substitute for the analog, or live performance. Art has always been important to society, because it allows us to understand what we can experience with our senses. It shows us how we react viscerally to what we see, how we experience touch and sound, and how these stimuli relate to our own unique humanity. Someone may listen to a song and feel energized, opening up through music and performance an easier access to his/her inner balance. Another may take this same experience and find themselves thrust into emotional chaos. Thus is the beauty and power of music. "Art is a constant. It is what unites us all," says Jeff Koons, one of the most famous living artists in the world. He has created icons of contemporary art such as the "Balloon Dog" or the portrait of Michael Jackson and his monkey, Bubbles.

Is Mr. Koons right? Is art a constant, an evolutionary feature? Art is conversation. It is in every statement, in every idea. It is knowledge that helps survival, that keeps us alive, that is essential. It is what unites and connects us. Art is in the laboratory. It is in the hearts and minds of those seeking a cure for this novel coronavirus. It is a group of minds coming together to achieve something they could not have done alone. Art is creativity, and without it, the colors become less vibrant, and the sounds become less inspiring.



We must not allow the present circumstances to become the new normal. Art, like many industries, is in crisis. How long can we survive without it?

About the author:



Franziska Buttgerit (mezzo-soprano)

received the 1st Federal Prize in the Early Music category in 2007 as well as the Special Prize of the Manfred Vetter Foundation and the 2nd Prize for Early Music at the Handel Competition in Karlsruhe.

Further competitions and prizes in the singing category followed. These prizes brought Franziska to Lübeck for masterclasses with Prof. Christiane Hampe and Michael Gehrke. 2010 she joined the extra choir of the Theater Freiburg and became the first member of the board of directors of the Theater Freiburg. 2015 she started her singing studies with Prof. Christiane Libor at the Musikhochschule Schloss Gottesaue in Karlsruhe. To this day she has collaborated with the University of Music and the Freiburg City Theatre, which has led to a small role in performances and the DVD production of the same name "Cendrillon" by Jules Massenet. In addition to her performances on the music theatre stage, Franziska Buttgerit is passionately devoted to the oratorio and concert repertoire, with which she regularly performs as a soloist.