

DENIS PATKOVIC

Resilience in music – viewpoints of artists’ abilities to deal with crises in life).

Lectio praecursoria

The public examination of Denis Patkovic on 1 December 2018 in the Organo Hall of Helsinki Music Centre. Thesis: Resilienz in der Musik – Erörterungen zu den Fähigkeiten von Künstlern, mit Krisen im Leben umzugehen (Resilience in Music – viewpoints of artists’ abilities to deal with crises in life). Artistic project: The concert series displayed different aspects of literature for concert accordion. Custos: Professor PhD Anne Kauppala. Statement on the demonstration of proficiency DMus Helka Kymäläinen. Statements of the thesis Professor: Dr. Mirjam Boggasch and Docent D.Med.Sc. Jari Sinkkonen.

Music performance

Adriana Hölzsky (b. 1953)

High Way for One (2000)

Denis Patkovic, accordion

In this presentation I will first talk about the background of my project, then discuss the concert series and finally my research.

Background

At the beginning of my studies I had an important experience when I studied the contemporary piece *Aufschwung* (1977) by Jukka Tiensuu. When I saw the piece the first time, I did not have any idea how to approach it. The piece has no bar lines, but the rhythm is precisely notated. Also, some passages are written in graphic notation.

Even after I performed the piece for the first time, I still wasn’t able to understand its true sense. I asked Jukka Tiensuu if he could teach me this piece, as I had the feeling that I wasn’t getting anywhere on my own. He gave me many tips and helpful hints to interpret different passages, how could I perform them and also what kind of things I could imagine while playing. All these suggestions extended my imagination of the piece and my view of contemporary music. It was also my first experience of collaborating with a composer.

What particularly fascinated me about this collaboration was that for the first time I had the feeling that I was able to understand contemporary music. Since this experience I have been very enthusiastic about playing this kind of music.

Concerts

The central aim of my concert series was to display different aspects of masterpieces of contemporary accordion literature. The doctoral concert sequence was comprised of four recitals and a CD recording. Each of the concerts had a specific theme. A second fundamental intention was to present a diversity in expression: as a soloist and combined with an orchestra. You can see the program of all of the concerts in today's program book.

The first concert, *Goldmine Variations*, featured the *Goldberg Variations* of J.S. Bach (1741) and Jukka Tiensuu's cycle for accordion *Erz* (2005). Several years ago, I studied the *Goldberg Variations* quite intensively. I was enthusiastic about the work, and I couldn't get the idea out of my head that this baroque piece could also be played on the accordion. When I finally tried it out, it worked quite well – and without having to change a note of the music! At some point I wanted to record this amazing masterpiece. However, since there are already a large number of recordings, and for various instruments, I had a new idea in mind – to find a composer who would compose a counterpart to the *Goldberg Variations*, a piece that would meet the Variations halfway and at the same time be a sort of commentary.

I met Jukka Tiensuu again at a workshop in Stuttgart. He seemed to be particularly well suited to this project because he was not only a modern composer, but also an excellent harpsichordist and a specialist in early music. He has also written a great number of compositions for accordion and possesses detailed knowledge of the instrument's possibilities. At the workshop, we worked together on the *Goldberg Variations*. I told him about my idea and was able to get him excited about this project, too.

In the end, *Erz* was composed as a complementary cycle to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*. *Erz* consists of a total of fourteen pieces and they can also be performed without Bach's Variations. The sequence of the *Erz* pieces between the Variations is precisely determined. It is simply ingenious how these little pieces by Jukka Tiensuu demonstrate many different sounds that an accordion can play: virtuoso as well as polyphonic playing, different musical techniques such as glissando or vibrato, different musical characters and performance techniques which are only possible to play on the accordion, such as the different bellows techniques. The movements of both works are entwined in performance, contrasting or complementing each other; thus, the combination of Bach's work with *Erz* has become an exciting new work of its own.

The second concert consisted of Finnish contemporary music, most idiomatically written for the accordion. Jukka Tiensuu's works framed the program. In particular, Tiensuu's early *Aufschwung*, which I mentioned at the beginning, was a pathbreaker

for classical accordion in Finland. The piece *Zolo* (2002) was written 25 years after *Aufschwung*. It shows a completely new perspective for the accordion. Special bellow techniques and changes between extreme dynamics are the main characteristics of *Zolo*. Tomi Räsänen's work *Peilisali* (2002) and Tapio Nevanlinna's *Hug* (2002) are a complete contrast to Tiensuu's pieces. *Hug* can be seen as a study of sound. The dynamic range is mostly in pianissimo, with very small and delicate details. *Fantango* (1984) was an exception in the program, as it was originally written for any keyboard instrument – preferably with two manuals. The accordion has proved to be the most suitable for *Fantango* because of its two manuals with different sound colours and the possibility of producing a stereophonic sound.

The third concert, *Melodia*, featured a standard repertoire for the classical accordion, showing the variety and different styles of composing during the last 30–40 years. At the University of Fine Arts and Music in Tokyo, I had the opportunity to study the traditional Japanese instrument Sho, which is also called Sheng in Chinese and is regarded as the mother instrument of the accordion. The work *Melodia* (1979) by Toshio Hosokawa was inspired by the Japanese traditional instrument Sho. The intention of *Melodia* was to find new sound dimensions. The title *Melodia* is not to be understood in the European sense of the choral line, however, but rather as a never-ending stream of sounds.

In contrast, Adriana Holszky's *High Way for One* (2000), shows a totally different style of composing. Fast chord tremolandi, siren-like tone glissandi, and staccatissimo scale passages make a dense, wild, almost chaotic atmosphere not unlike that of a real highway during rush hour.

Other pieces in this concert included works by Sofia Gubaidulina, Keiko Harada and Yu Kuwabara. They all are large-scale solo accordion compositions that show different sides of the instrument.

The fourth concert, *Balkan Beat*, focused on working and collaborating with composers. As my roots are from different parts of former Yugoslavia, I listened to folk music from the Balkans as a child, and always wanted to play this music.

I collected all kinds of typical Balkan (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia) elements and parameters, and then I gave these different rhythms, trills, and special melodic characters to five different composers who had already written fantastic pieces for the classical accordion. The idea was that the composers would pick some elements and parameters from this collection and use them in their compositions in any way they chose, as every composer has his/her own way of writing music. After two and a half years, the project was done. Throughout this time, we engaged in a wonderful and creative process, Skype rehearsals, and revised versions of the pieces. I would have never believed that the individual compositions would be so different, but it was thrilling to see how uniquely each of them chose and used the material. Some were focused on trills, some on rhythms, and some pieces were barely recognizable as Balkan music.

The concert included five first Finnish performances and was an important step for the accordion repertoire in the Balkan area, as almost nothing had been written for the classical accordion with Balkan elements until then.

The last project, a CD recording after the doctoral concert series began with Bach, had come full circle with a CD recording of three of Bach's Keyboard Concertos.

One of the Keyboard Concertos (BWV 1055) was actually composed for the oboe d'amore; Bach later adapted it for the harpsichord. The individual tone on an accordion is not plucked, as on a harpsichord, but is instead generated by freely vibrating metal reeds mounted on a tuning plate as with a wind instrument. As the accordion has two manuals, it is possible to combine the worlds of these two instruments. On the one hand, it is possible to influence and shape the sound while playing, like a wind or string instrument. On the other hand, I played the original part without changing a note, and the accordion blends so well with the strings, organ and bassoon that at first hearing the instrument is not in the foreground at all. Then it emerges from the background and gradually sets off.

In the Baroque period, harpsichordists as a rule made use of the *jeux inégal* – which means that the bass voice kept exactly to the meter while slightly delaying the melody. By adapting this method of playing to the accordion, with its many different ways of shaping tones and its sound possibilities, it was a new way to interpret the Keyboard Concertos in the Baroque style on a modern instrument.

The project was unique as it presented the Keyboard Concertos by J.S. Bach as a first recording in combination with accordion and orchestra.

After several years of intense work, I am grateful that I was able to make this extraordinary journey and projects. I recorded two CDs, played the project *Goldmine Variations* over 35 times in 20 different countries, had six world premieres and developed not only my own artistic way of playing, but also helped to create new works for the next generations.

Doctoral research

My doctoral research bears the title: *Resilience in Music – viewpoints of artists' abilities to deal with crises in life*. Why did I choose this topic?

Background

I remember like it was yesterday, it was the 18th of March 2009 in Würzburg. I felt a little nervous, had tingling in my stomach, which I always have before concerts. I had peaked through the stage entrance and saw people waiting for me, for the *Goldberg Variations* of Bach, for music and for the emotion the music awakens in them.

I entered the stage, took a bow, sat on my concert chair, played the first note and during that very moment, I noticed that something was different, something was wrong. I kept on playing, but everything seemed to be distorted, heavy, not as clear as usual and I noticed that the invisible bond which I normally have with the audience was not there. I played almost desperately, everything in my head moved twice as fast, my hands started to block, and that bond... I could not feel it, I was not able to connect with the audience. At the end I got a friendly applause, went home, and felt like all of those years, all of those hours of training were for nothing.

In that very moment, one of the hardest moments of my life, I remembered something: I am not the only musician in the world. Could it be possible that other musicians, much bigger, more gifted musicians than me, even the greatest geniuses in the history of music could have had such moments?

The question was: how did they deal with it? What did they do to keep going? Maybe they had a way, some knowledge, a trick, some approach, a capability, a method I didn't know about.

Then I started doing research. It quickly became clear to me that what we need in order to get through such moments is commonly called resilience in literature. So, I continued examining papers and works about resilience. I devoured them because I thought I would find something there that would help me get out of my crisis. I realized that these papers contained stories of crises, defeats, even the death of loved ones – in other words, all kinds of hardships and failures. I found hundreds of titles on the subject of resilience, but not a single one about what I needed – resilience in music.

That is the reason that I have decided to fill this gap with analytical work. I was thinking that if I could succeed in connecting the concept of resilience with music, I could hope to help at least one musician get over that feeling of failure and hardship.

What does the term resilience mean from a scientific perspective? The term resilience means struggle, resistance and elasticity. Resilience refers to the human ability to get back on one's feet after problems or traumas have arisen in life.

Traditionally, the concept of resilience, which has been under investigation by psychologists and researchers for the last few decades, has focused mainly on children and youth, in various stages of their development. These studies indicate that some personal characteristics like optimism, self-esteem, acceptance of the negative events, humour, creativity, recreation could help young people to overcome the most stressful periods in their life.

Those personal characteristics were named *resilience factors*. Now the question was whether it was also possible to develop those same characteristics in adults.

This was the point where my own preoccupation clicked in, to cope better with my creative crises and help other musicians to do the same, by using the concept of resilience.

Over the period of three years, I identified the three most important resilience factors for us musicians: optimism, self-esteem and personal support provided by trusted persons.

The first factor is optimism:

Resilient humans tend to be generally optimistic about life. They emphasize the positive aspects of each event and tend to see everything that happens to them, good or bad, from the perspective of useful experience. Every situation in which they find themselves has its meaning. Optimistic people never ever lose the faith that they will be able to achieve their life goals, no matter how ambitious and demanding these life goals might be. They demonstrate the ability to look at everything from a broader perspective and to see existing difficulties as opportunities. Optimistic people might feel overwhelmed by the task ahead, but never for a long time, because deep down in their hearts, they can solve every problem that life poses to them.

The second resilience factor is self-esteem:

Self-esteem causes a person to focus on their own strengths and qualities. It encourages them to reduce sharp criticism and to use constructive criticism instead, when it comes to our own self-dialog. The greatest threat to a musician is not the expectations of others but their own. Self-esteem is the capability to see clearly the difference between the musician we are today and the musician we could be in the future, without feeling disappointment and despair, knowing that our hard work will help us to become the best possible persons we can be. If a person is able to influence his own emotions and behaviour and to calm or appease himself, he will most likely gain positive attention from others.

The third resilience factor is personal support provided by trusted persons:

Our relationships with others are an important factor in the development of resilience. Solid relationships, provided by family members and longtime friends, are important for developing a sense of security and trust in ourselves and others. Whenever we have a relationship of mutual acceptance and understanding, we will know how to ask for help and accept it at the right time in the right way. If our friends have social skills such as active listening and empathy, they will be better able to help us. Healthy adaptation to stress depends not only on the individual but also on their family and friends, and also on those organizations and communities that we all are a part of. Through the support of our family and our friends, we all get more strength to deal with the hardships and failures of life.

Which one of these three resilience factors, optimism, self-esteem and personal support, is the most important for musicians?

To find an answer to this last question in my research, I compared three historical artists (Ludwig van Beethoven, Vladimir Horowitz, Glenn Gould), with three contemporary ones, who are at the same time friends of mine (Stefan Hussong, Wolfgang Dimetrik and Ioanna Avraam).

Result

The result that I found is that every single one of these six unique artists had a trustworthy person or mentor in their own life who stood by them and gave them the support they needed in difficult times. That is why I believe that the most important coping technique for us musicians is precisely the support provided by family and friends.

My recommendations and outlook on the future

I think we should do better on the three dimensions of the education of musicians. First of all, we should encourage networking among musicians, at schools and universities. Friendships offer a support system that can promote emotional, social and educational resilience.

My second recommendation is to make resilience a subject of study, integrated into instrumental teaching. The universities in Germany do exactly this. There are courses on musician health, mental training, stress management and self-management. This is a step in the right direction, but we should also organize workshops where all students can come together to share their positive and negative experiences.

We should prepare students for the problems that will arise in the course of their lives by stabilizing their personality and developing self-confidence and optimism. This will help them to make progress even when they face difficult moments.

Which leads me to my third and last recommendation. Every musician should have a personal mentor and get positive mentoring. We should talk less about mistakes and shortcomings and instead praise and encourage the students more often. Every teacher that works individually with a student influences his or her development, independence, curiosity, positive social orientation and self-control. That is a big responsibility as well as a big chance. Whenever we do teach, or even better, mentor someone, we become an important experience for that person. A good teacher should prepare his student for hardship and failure, but most importantly give options and methods to overcome them.

The aim as a teacher should be to shape musicians with strong personalities who will find their own way and be able to make their contribution and pass on their values to the next generations.

Music performance

J.S. Bach (1685–1750) /
Jukka Tiensuu (b. 1948)

Goldberg Variations (1741) /Erz (2005)
Aria, Variation 1–3 (Bach), Trick (Tiensuu),
Variation 4–5 (Bach), Heat (Tiensuu),
Variation 6–8, Aria (Bach)