

Antwerp, August 31th 2020

To all right-minded musicians and music lovers (3)

Distinguished Maestros, Honorable Presidents of Universities and Deans of Schools of Music, Directors of Orchestras, Operas and Festivals, Dear colleagues and everyone who understands the importance of Music in human life,

Following the two previous open letters (June 12th 2020 and July 25th 2020) I hope that you will allow me to send a 3rd and certainly last one, because I think that most of the points are sufficiently made clear.

To both open letters I got interesting and supportive reactions. For the second letter even an important professional organization totally agreed and told that they would send on the letter to their members. My reason for writing these letters, also this no 3, is not to receive approval. But it is good to know that many colleagues share the concern for the future of music and music education.

I have hesitated to write this 3rd open letter. But I finally felt the need because I think that there is one issue, which I see becoming endangered more and more. It will need very much and close attention, at least if we are seriously concerned about the future of our profession and passion. I am referring to **music education**, a component which is –at least in my opinion– the most vulnerable in the current situation. And from personal experience, not for the least during my 12 years as President of the *International Kodály Society*, I know that music education is often (consciously or unconsciously) seen as the *little brother (or sister)* of the whole **music industry**, although, in the long term, it will be ‘the’ *determining component* for the quality of all other components.

On purpose I have used the term **music industry** because most branches of the ‘professional music world’ are strongly **business** related and mutually intertwined. In the **performing world**, with orchestras, opera companies, ballet companies, impresarios, festivals, etc... In the **creating world**, with commissions, publishing houses, composers rights organizations, book publications, research projects... There is the multi-million **recording business** (in particular for the pop culture) and the **production and selling of instruments**... There is no doubt that all these branches of the music world are suffering from the current world situation, the effect of the lockdowns and questionable ongoing restrictions. But there are a number of possible *escape paths*, some more ‘creative’ than others...

Quite quickly there were initiatives. Orchestras divided up in ‘chamber music groups’ doing online concerts... A few high class performers did *online* recitals... etc. You all know it. There seem to be trends like *restarting only with the strings* (seated with social distancing?) although there is a Dutch researcher who claims that wind instruments are not a bigger risk because their air is filtered in the instrument... All good initiatives without any doubt. All better than *nothing*.

But, let us be honest. All these solutions are *poor surrogates* for the ‘real’ thing ... Namely that ***a FULL Orchestra should LIVE perform the beautiful orchestra literature...*** in a hall where a ***big (appreciative) audience, in the most normal and comfortable circumstances, can enjoy the beautiful performance...*** The same for Opera Companies, etc... I think that the point is clear.

Music education, however, has another nature. I am aware that there is a kind of business element attached to it, in particular in countries where instrumental education is mainly done in ‘private studios’ instead of in music schools. But it is much less substantial and much less intertwined with the business side of the other branches. That counts in particular for the ***basic music education***: the one that should be an inherent component of the education of ALL children. That should not be elitist but fully democratic.

The music education sector is very vulnerable and I remain seriously concerned that current trends, together with all the ‘creative solutions’, like *online teaching*, *hybrid teaching* or other ‘best’ solutions, may marginalize the sector even more than it was already the case before... Let us be very careful and make sure that our ‘adaptation willingness’ does not turn ‘against’ us in the future...

If you wonder why I am believing that it could turn against us, then, please, allow me a short ‘in between’. In 1970, when I became the Director of the *State Music Academy of Antwerp*, the rule for instrument teaching was: ‘2 students per hour’. In 1979, because of the big oil crisis and recession, the budget for music education was strongly diminished. The Government imposed an ‘***expansion stop***’. The result was long ‘waiting lists’ in the Music Schools and Academies. (In the *State Music Academy of Antwerp* more than 800 children went on ‘waiting lists’). Some colleagues decided to ***temporarily*** change from 2 students per hour to 3 or even 4 or...even 6... in order to accommodate everyone. A very ‘creative’ solution and –as you probably can imagine– much ‘appreciated’ by political decisionmakers... Together with a number of colleagues I kept fighting against it, opposing the budget cuts of the Government. But the reactions of the policymakers and, unfortunately, also of a number of fellow musicians, was: “***of course it is not the ideal, but it ‘works’ and it is only TEMPORARILY***”... The ‘temporarily’ is now, by law, the rule, and the once so high level of Belgian music education is nowhere near to its previous status.

‘Music education’, please think of the whole spectrum, not only the ME Departments in Universities, but the total picture from Kindergarten to Primary and Secondary education up to the University, has never been high on the priority list of decisionmakers. The main reason is that it is the ***most expensive form of any kind of teaching***, because a big part of it is (necessarily) ‘one to one’ teaching... Even Ministers ‘responsible’ for Education who were supposed to ‘defend’ our case, questioned the necessity of ‘individual teaching’ and made it almost impossible...

Compared with the other branches of the Music Industry, the future of quality music education is much more threatened. Just think of the example that I wrote in letter (2) about the decision of the Australian Government: ***They haven't allowed concerts to resume and now they have doubled the fees for people who would like to study any of the Arts...***

It shows how vulnerable the music education sector is, and all right-minded musicians should join in to defend its future. Because, at the end of the day, master performers, master composers, music publishers, instrument builders and sellers, even the recording industry, will benefit from musically educated masses... And that is not to mention Zoltán Kodály's conviction that good music education, integrated in the daily education of all, would lead to living in a better world...

It is very important for all of us to go back to 'normal'... However, we will 'only' go back to that point when we (mankind) ***WANT to go back to it*** and will no longer accept the ***undemocratic decision of continuous restrictions of which the effectiveness has never been 'scientifically' proven***. Even not after more than 6 months.

However, what is 'undeniably proven', is the destructive, devastating effect of the restrictions on people's personal and professional lives, resulting in numerous dramatic situations, socially, economically, familial and, not for the least, that there is an increase of 600% in suicides.

Long time ago, when the cold war was at its height, I read the interesting sentence: ***"this crippled world does not need nuclear power engineers but artists..."*** Today we could adapt it to: ***"this crippled world does not need doom preachers but artists..."*** My late father told me often how much need there was for the healing power and beauty of music after the war... I think that he would repeat it again now.

Of course, all this is 'my' opinion and everyone has the full right to disagree with it. But I trust that you can believe in the honest attempt to raise attention for the problems.

As said, I think that after this 3rd open letter the points are sufficiently made clear. I wish all of you excellent health and the continuation of a life that you can 'enjoy' in the fullest meaning of the word, with all yours, without fear and without any burdening of your personal freedom and professional activities.

Sincerely yours,

Gilbert De Greeve

Pianist

Honorary Director State Music Academy of Antwerp, Belgium

Honorary Professor Royal Conservatory of Music, Antwerp, Belgium

Past President International Kodály Society