

STILHED
PAUSE
EFTERKLANG

SILENCE

INTERMISSION

RESONANCE

THE LAB STATION

FORSØGSSTATIONEN
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BIKUBENFONDEN



It is a beautiful and crazy, wacky composition addressing audience identity and it has shown – for reasons unknown to me – to be really liberating to the people involved to make something this insane. And we believe it surely will also be liberating for the people who experience it as an audience. It is CRAZY AND WEIRD AND... it is hard to explain why, but it is VERY, VERY important to make something this crazy. It makes us think in new ways.

Lotte Faarup, Artistic Director the Lab Station

Summary

SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANS is an experiment which has provided new knowledge and development within artistic, social, pedagogical and human realms – as we have seen already with its predecessors. The Lab Station has been working in the field of basic artistic research for more than 10 years – with the courage of taking wild and uncertain paths to artistic development. The role of the theatre audience – as a co-creator and companion has been one of the two main focus points in the research experiments by The Lab Station over the years. The other is the basic research on principles and techniques in theatrical artistic work from idea to performance – without having a finished presentable piece as the end goal. The core idea is that we invite research participants into a room of exploration where failing is just another way of learning and where we let ourselves let go of what we think is possible. A main method here is obstruction and deconstruction.

The **VOICE OF THE AUDIENCE** was an experiment where its outcome was highly uncertain. Would it be possible to marry artistic ambition and rigour with a very diverse group of local people in the creation and performance of a nonsensical piece of music? **SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANS** is the next step down this road, now with the knowledge of how it is possible to collectively create from this premise. This time with the aim to dig a bit deeper – by both increasing the complexity of the piece and its execution, as well as taking on yet another aspect of audience identity and agency **AROUND THE THEATRE** – is it feasible? What does it do?

It turned out both possible and inspirational. The project was successfully finalised with public concerts, and the chosen ‘obstructions’ and the common efforts by all made a new learning experience possible and the work has taught new lessons of how we are relating to each other across disciplines and lives.

An important learning from this work is how the ‘right’ content – one that dissolves a professional - amateur separation – gives way for a collective experience of artistic investigation and emergence. We have experienced how it is possible, with the appropriate material and ‘object’ of investigation, a strong leadership team and clear framing, to open very a diverse group of people to a process with great cross fertilisation, and potential for strong artistic development and human connection.

We were fortunate to be able to realise the project, in spite of the uncertainties caused by the restrictions and lock downs due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus. We became part of what turned out to be a short-lived opening in August 2020 which allowed for the safe execution of the project as per the recommendations and regulations of the authorities.

Introduction

In June of 2019, four people met to discuss what later became the project “Silence, Intermission, Resonance” – an artistic and social experiment. They met in the context of the Lab Station, a laboratory for professionals in the Performing Arts.

The Lab Station was at the time preparing to celebrate its 10th anniversary – and this new project would be a culmination of more than 5 years of research,



Lotte Faarup, Peter Bruun, Øyvind Kirchhoff and Erik Jakobsson
at planning meeting in June 2019 – Photo: R. Rod

experimentations and reflection on how it is possible to create new and inspiring dialogues between the artists and their audiences. Between professionals and amateurs. This is one of the main strands of the research at the Lab

Station initiated and driven by the artistic leadership, Lotte Faarup and Øyvind Kirchhoff. Their main collaborators through the last 5 years of this research have been conductor Erik Jakobsson and composer Peter Bruun.

The project was set to begin in February 2020 and be presented at the theatre festival COPENHAGEN STAGE 2020, as a string of concerts. Due to Covid-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown, the choir only had one rehearsal before it became impossible to continue. In August 2021 a reopening made it possible to resume and complete the project with concerts for a limited audience.

This report will take the reader through the different stages and elements, challenges and insights, that adds up to 360 degrees view of **SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANCE**.

Documentation report written by Rikke J Rod with contributions from the participants, Erik Jakobson, Peter Bruun, Helle Lyshøj (video, interviews), Øyvind Kirchhoff (photography, editing) and Lotte Faarup (editing).

Copenhagen March 2021

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Background

The project is the latest of a series of artistic research experiments by The Lab Station under the leadership of Lotte Faarup and Øyvind Kirchhoff, originating from an idea of exploration of the roles and interplay between performers and audiences and named “the collective power”. It is both a project of audience development, artistic exploration and community engagement.

Its artistic idea is inspired by the thoughts and methods of the Russian theatre director Meyerholdt and is thus far the third in a series of variations of this exploration.

The first variation born out of this was “The Voice of the Audience” (VOA) from 2016. VOA was made possible by its initiation within the larger EU project “Caravan Next” led by the University of Turin, Italy with Odin Theatre as one of the main partners. In this project, Odin Theatre invited the Lab Station to take part in an artistic exploration of social inclusion and cultural identity in a European context. The overall aim was to create a common ground for very diverse groups of residents in local communities through artistic activities in order to stimulate the development of a sense of belonging, connection and identity. VOA was shown at the theatre festival COPENHAGEN STAGE 2017 – with performances at the Danish Royal Theatre and at the Lab Station. The project became a strong manifestation of how it is possible to both be ambitious artistically and socially. Not only did the very diverse group of people experience a sense of mastery and connection through the project, but the project also turned out to be highly relevant artistically as well.

The project was made publicly available in a short documentary by director Lotte Faarup and videographer Helle Lyshøj and presented at conferences disseminating the overall results of the Caravan Next project. This resulted in broad international interest due to its unique combination of artistic level and social impact - and the project was shortlisted for the Bürgerbühne festival 2018 in Dresden and was invited to perform at a conference in Turin in October of 2018 as part of Caravan Next.

This resulted in the second variation of the series, namely an adaptation to an Italian audience, and therefore performed by local Italian volunteers. “Voice of the Audience – Turin” became a reality. Again, a documentary was made, and both films have been shown at several events at the Lab Station to attract people to join the next projects.

The current project, i.e., Silence, Intermission, Resonance, is thus the third variation and is supported by the Bikuben Foundation, Vesterbro Local Council, Lasso Andersens foundation and the Danish Arts Foundation.

The Piece



As was the case with VOA, the score itself is a piece of magic. It was apparent both in Copenhagen in 2017 and in Turin in 2018 that the musical score itself was highly liberating for the participants – in part due to the extreme outbursts (cathartic) of joy and anger or sorrow but also the social connection it created – once you had had a ‘staged’ to-the-point-of-screaming-loud argument with somebody in the piece, you couldn’t help but laughing together about it afterwards in the break. It had a certain cathartic aspect to it. In Italy a participant told her story of sorrow and how crying heavily on ‘cue’ had released her tears in a way that had stopped them flowing when she woke up in the morning and made her find joy again.



I pass a period in my life that isn't that easy. Sometimes I get melancholic. When I get up in the morning sometimes a tear drop. But after this experience where I had to weep by force, really pretending to weep and cry, it didn't happen anymore! It is like that, I pretend weeping and then I don't need to weep for real! (Lucia, participant Turin, interview)

In Silence, Intermission, Resonance the craziness continues in a more subdued way perhaps, since the object of investigation has shifted – and therefore the spectrum of expressions and utterances are different. Thus, this piece gave us another experience of magical transformative craziness.

Gathering material

The research and ideation phase began in the Fall of 2018 after the necessary funding was secured. Kirchhoff and Faarup began the collection of material - ie. audience sounds, actions and utterances, from theatres across Denmark. They embarked on an empirical hunt with notebook and pen, collecting whatever they saw, heard or sensed during intermissions, before and after curtain call. Sounds and utterances from people in line for the restrooms, bits and pieces of music or glasses being filled with

sparkling wine. Private needs met. Social interactions. Small talk. Exchange of views on the actors or piece.

The material was collected at very diverse audience settings; the Royal Theatre, at Odin Theatre, and small theatres across Denmark over the course of 6 months.

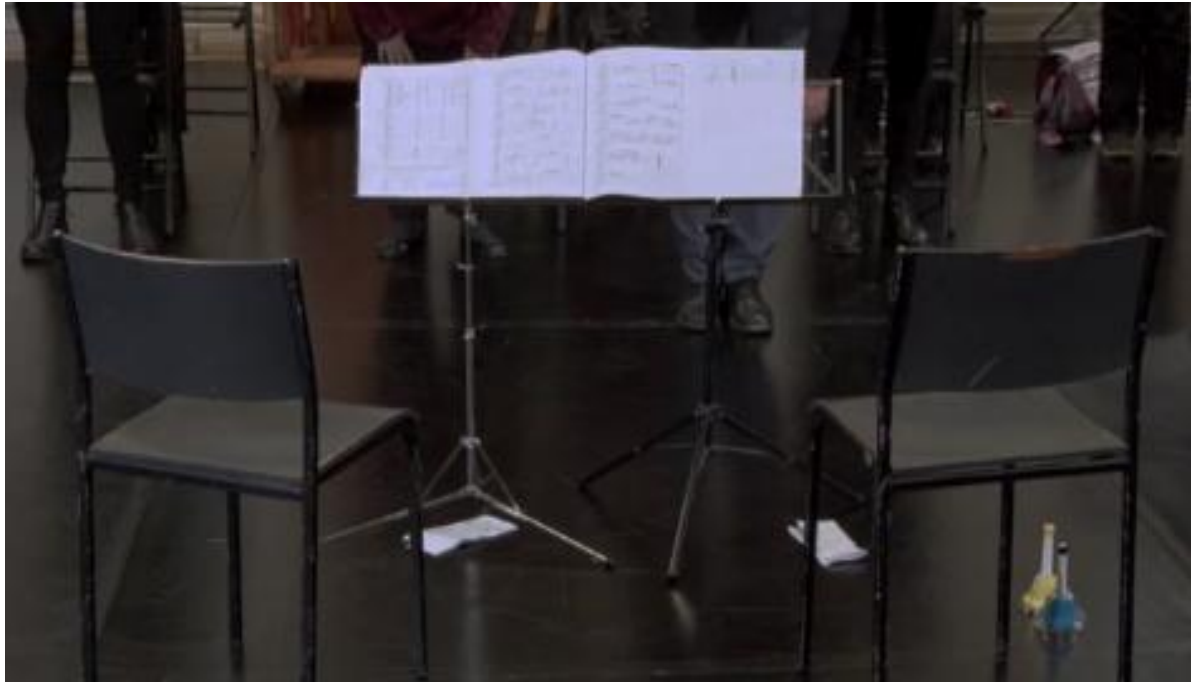
All the collected material was handed over to composer Peter Bruun, who was then to create a three-act piece of music based on this material.

Composing - Creating the musical score

Peter Bruun composed the music with an ambition of it being something to retain and integrate bodily:

*There has to be a rhythmical and physical logic to it, so that one can remember it, so that it is retained in the body. This is a very important factor. The piece is very text based – there are many words or lines said, but it still has to leave a bodily mark. Of the many things Lotte had given me to work with was ‘clattering door’ – and I seem to remember thinking that these doors could be really neat to use as a rhythmical element or pulse throughout the piece. The ”gong!, gong!, gong!” gave it this imperative feeling which drives the piece onward.
(PB, interview)*

He thus chose the doors to create a rhythmical structure to underpin the work and give it a pulse and direction. And he was very deliberate to make use of strong physical resonance in his creative process – of making the piece bodily manifest in some way. The three acts were titled SILENCE, INTERMISSION and RESONANCE – INTERMISSION was the most ‘set’ of the three, leaving the others with a more open frame to co-create from. When he was done composing, he handed in the score – as he would in any commission – as sheet music.



Yes, the musical score was indeed written down. A fact that some of the choir participants found quite amusing – given the nature of the musical ‘nodes’ – slamming of doors, sighing, pointing, sleeping, random utterances, words, glances:

... I know it is written down as a musical score, but I find it extremely funny that this can be put into ‘notes’. The fact that it says what we do seems quite absurd ‘how can this be written in a musical format?’

(Participant, interview)

Since part of the score was set to be developed with the choir – leaving some space for improvised dynamic – the piece itself was inviting to a collective musical communication as Bruun explains:

In terms of the compositional work, the foundation for it obviously, is an investigative praxis, it is always an investigation. In this particular project however, the exciting thing is that a large part of the investigation is moved out, outside of me as the composer. A whole lot of the investigative work you do as a composer takes place within and on your own. In essence, it is an exploration of one's self.

Now the piece was ready to take on its own life – when the participants were gathered.

Recruiting the choir

The current project ties back to VOA in several ways. Both have a strong focus on creating a social community through the arts. In VOA it was possible to recruit a more diverse group from many walks of life and many life phases. This time the group was more homogenous in age and demographic, but the social aspect was still very present.

The Lab Station has continuously been in contact with and arranging meet ups with the original crew of volunteers and local community – named ‘the core group’. Therefore, when this new project was announced, there was a significant interest from this core group and their network. The choir was somehow already a ‘family’ from the experience – and several wanted to re-join us in another exploration. These volunteers became our ambassadors and their role in the recruitment cannot be understated. We had not anticipated this to happen but were pleased and grateful it did. It is a rather significant investment of time and energy to be part of this kind of project.

It became clear to us that the special dedication required for volunteer projects, may play a role in one strategy we tested that turned out unsuccessful. We approached already established amateur choir groups in Copenhagen and presented them for the idea and invited them to participate. It did not generate interest except in one choir which had some of our ‘core group’ on its member list already. Our project became a space for some of them to invite their significant others to take part. That was not possible in their all-women’s choir. We realized that it was a mistake or faux-pas to think it was unproblematic to offer an already established group a ‘competing’ project – the time they spend in their group may be all the time they have to engage in a project of their heart. Each and every project with people who offer their time and engagement become their own ‘family’ or entity.

We also used the celebration of the 10-year anniversary to draw attention to the project by making a short happening at the reception in December 2019. Composer Peter Bruun made a short demonstration of the new choir work, with the assistance of members of our ‘core group’, guiding and directing the party participants in a small section of the ‘music’.

Furthermore, we announced the first rehearsal as an open and unbinding rehearsal. This was done to attract people who were either just curious about the project or ‘on the fence’ about joining the project.

Through these efforts we were able to recruit a group of +30 for the first rehearsal, mainly through our dedicated ‘ambassadors’ both in our artistic and local community.

Rehearsing – collective creation of performance



Photo: Øyvind Kirchhoff – Peter Bruun (left) and Erik Jakobsson (right) during rehearsal.

At the first rehearsal 34 people showed up. About half of them were from the ‘core’ group and the other half were new people. After the first rehearsal, the lockdown happened, and we had to temporarily close the project. When the project could resume, we had a smaller group initially and after some additional friends of participants joined in, we closed the choir for new members.

Paraphrasing Peter Bruun on the collectivity of the work, the rehearsals were very much a collective and creative process of musical communication – in the sense that

once the music was on the table, the rest became a collective effort of curious investigation of what is possible.

The sounds, acts and text bites have no prescribed ‘right’ way nor do they require any artistic or otherwise professional training to perform within the frame of the project. This element made the everybody able to bring themselves into play regardless of their level of expertise as performers or artists – and this dynamic will be unfolded in the later sections.

Presenting



SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANS was performed for an audience four times plus a pre-show and a dress rehearsal. Due to the low audience capacity allowed due to the pandemic, we had not been advertising the event as much as we would under normal circumstances, and it was thus mostly the network of the participants and the closest of the Lab Station affiliates that came out to see the piece. In comparison, VOA had the same amount of shows and was watched by more than 400 people in all. Had the circumstances allowed for it, we estimate that this piece would have attracted a similar audience.

The performance has a duration of about 30 minutes without intermission.

It opens with a choir seated apparently asleep on their chairs as the audience enter and find a chair in a setup mirroring the choir.

The piece's final is that of the choir leaving – one half leaving through a door down a flight of stairs, the other half staying behind while everybody is apparently discussing what they saw or otherwise talking to each other. We witness the soundscape of the after-performance release and shift of energy.

Perspectives on the project

The participants were asked to phrase some of their own experience with the project, and many did provide written feedback on their thoughts regarding the process and different aspects related to this. Also, some of the participants were interviewed and their responses used in the analysis.

Below we have cited and compiled their responses together with those of the professional team – composer Peter Bruun (PB), conductor Erik Jakobsson (EJ), artistic leaders Lotte Faarup (LF) and Øyvind Kirchhoff (ØK).

Reflections on conventional distinctions

Throughout this report we are addressing the professional – amateur in relation to what each bring to the collective. The choir members are for the most part not musicians or performers by profession and as such the term would be appropriate. In this context, however, it is important also to emphasise that the people taking part as the conventional 'amateurs' as opposed to the 'professionals' cannot be placed in this category since their roles are to be themselves as audience members – here the distinctions lose their meaning.

Therefore, we ask the reader to bear with us in the use of this distinction – the term 'amateur' can have derogatory or negative associations in a professional artistic setting but in this type of project the main aim has been for us to level the playing field through the setup and art work itself - so that all participants can experience their contribution as unique and valuable to the collective and that what they bring to the 'floor' is of value in itself.

Artistic ambition

All the research projects made at the Lab station has a stronger emphasis on process than on product – it is by exploring new dimensions of our craft and art that we learn new things about the world and ourselves and how we can contribute in meaningful ways as artists. This is also very true for this project, where the process again has a very strong part to play. The challenge set up for the whole team is driven by an artistic curiosity to learn more about what audience identity is and how it is shaped and reshaped.



A matter of framing?

Artistic courage and challenge of boundaries are aspects often in play when working with professional crews on a production. In this project the crew was very diverse in terms of skills and experience with professional work in the realm of theatre or musical concerts. The balance of expectations, ambition, tasks and skills in this setup - with a professional artistic production team and an 'orchestra' of ordinary people - demands a certain set of ground rules for direction and pedagogical leadership. The Voice of the Audience was the culmination of years of study of working with audience development and volunteer work. As mentioned already, SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANCE is pushing the boundaries further in this direction and challenging what we know. In order to deliver on the artistic ambition, the conductor Erik Jakobsson had to ask for assistance in the rehearsal and performance

of the piece – and therefore the composer was thrust into this role too. They had worked together before on the former project and with other groups so there was already a great deal of trust, shared experience, and common understanding.

Between the two of them, they were to bring the piece together – to take the written score and make it into music.

Courage

To have the courage to stay professional – means to understand that it is THIS which is needed to reach the visioned outcome, without falling into a trap of treating the amateurs as amateurs.(...) Yes I have a master plan and some experiences I want to share, but I do not set expectations of “they can’t do this or that” – again the trust is at play – making the leap of faith and bringing your whole professional knowledge into play. (EJ, interview)

Respect

As a conductor – who inevitably is engaged with people, it is crucial to never lose sight of the fact that there are real people ‘behind’ every instrument in an orchestra. If you put down your clarinet, it is silent – so the basic premise is to connect with the person behind the instrument. So, it is a balancing act “would it be possible to play it more like this?” – to always strive to motivate the person behind. And in this piece, we motivate with humour as well – it is so liberating - and then shift quickly into the job at hand. It is possible to be dead serious about your goals and at the same time be joking and giving humour a lot of space. With the ‘tightness’ of the rehearsals, the specificity of the musical score, the realisation of this work of sound with this group of people, it has to be motivating continuously to give them the feeling of being in the sand box – playing and having a lot of fun! (EJ interview)

The human factor – social connection and meaning

One of the unique things about this work has been its social or human properties - of creating a space of collective ownership and empowerment – and this also gave room

for initiatives such as participants organising a nourishing meal between the two performances on premiere night. Or bringing a home baked cake for rehearsal.



This is invited and encouraged by the leadership but also has a life of its own. It somehow also grows out of the setup. Bruun talks of the project being a unique experience of musical communication, an inherently social act. The participants are also articulating this aspect in their responses.

It's been like being with people you've never met, but that you still think you've known for a very long time. We've only had about 10 rehearsals and it's nothing, yet it feels so natural to be together in the same room. (...) you come every single time and you don't get any money for it, you get a little applause and a little praise, but you also get – how should I explain this – it's not really a real community – maybe it's a community around the play, a unity. It's a unity about a project and I think it's important that you can participate in that today – and a kind of spiritual, a conversation without words, you might say. (participant, interview)

When we address framing of the project, it is also important to give special attention to staying humble and respectful to what everybody brings into the space. Below are listed some small actions or elements that have proven to be very helpful for all to stay open and alive to this ‘creation of community’.

The arrival – every rehearsal has an extended ‘arrival time’ where one can refocus and reconnect – share a story or a laugh. Coffee & tea is ready and available.



Wall of photos – we made a physical manifestation of the group. Photos of everybody and other information – visible for all who pass through the house.



Respectful of time – we all have given this time to work on the project – we balance the need for sharing and having fun with our artistic ambition. Every time we go home feeling that we have reached a new point and have progressed in the project.



The dress code – there are no ‘costumes’ for this, but the participants are asked to wear what they would wear to go to the theatre. This gives everybody the freedom to express themselves and choosing what to wear also has a subject of social interaction and connection



An interesting side note is that our format and the way it created connection in and of itself was noted by a project leader in the Social Community Theatre Center at the University of Turin. Their usual progression when initiating a project with locals involves conventional team building or ‘getting to know each other’ activities. The surprise was genuine when Community Theatre Programme associate, Maurizio Bertolini spoke of what he saw taking place in the short format version we made there:

You started by rehearsing the piece, the people were on their chairs just repeating and training on that, and I couldn’t understand how but after

two days, we had a group of people knowing each other and having fun together, even if you didn't start with the group building. (Maurizio Bertolini, interview).

This also highlights how this project has shown to differ from many other projects of this type – as we compared with the many other projects in CARAVAN NEXT. Our challenge and vision throughout have been how to make this type of community project and NOT sacrifice the artistic level. This was one of the things that was emphasized as we shared our work – a surprise over the artistic level we were able to present.

It is a special type of collaboration when you work with people who volunteer their time and we found that it is very important how we are present with each other. Therefore, the framing was a very deliberate way of helping the whole crew to find their place and space to act and interact. The leadership team were very aware and respectful of the time and challenges of life and circumstance of the participants, and it was always met in a positive spirit when someone in the group was not able to make a rehearsal or a performance. At the same time there was no doubt that Erik – who had the responsibility of the rehearsal and pedagogical progression – was ambitious and demanded focus and commitment during rehearsals. The experience of the leader team made the constant balancing act of these different elements and potential challenges a dance of the possible that stayed light and solution focused. One participant speaks to the successful framing in this way:

My experience is that I have been co-creator of the piece/performance, with a defined frame and I think that plays a big part in the fine result. I work with user engagement/co creation myself, and therefore it has been very rewarding to see how important it is that a clear frame is stated and maintained in order for creativity and joy to unfold. So I salute this style of leadership which has shown an ability to listen to, incorporate and be curious about the ideas and comments from the choir, and try things out and make changes, BUT always within the set frame... (Participant, written account)

Methods

The project has been successful in all aspects and we would like to take the reader through some of the elements or building blocks we have found to work really well in this type of project. Apart from the nature of the project – of the absurd and challenging framing and the somehow magical score, the methods of artistic and professional creation mastered by the professional team are stress tested and developed further in this special type of collaboration.

Deconstruction

In order to go even deeper than the last project, the object of investigation – so to speak - changed. In VOA the focus was on the audience *during* the performance. In SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANCE we are looking at other dimensions and other temporal parts of the audience role. As before we are working with a method of deconstruction and reconstruction of the phenomena – of Silence, Intermission and Resonance. This is a way of becoming open to new ways of seeing things we think we know well, by making them strangely unfamiliar through the process. As Faarup puts it:

What is the point of a piece like this? It is to see something recognisable, but to see it in a new way, which demands that it be split into atoms. In Silence, Intermission, Resonance we are not setting up recognisable versions of the acts and sounds of the audience in the theatre. Rather, we tear apart the known material and connect it in new ways – and by doing so, we gain new insights into what it is we do during intermission. How can we make sense of the emerging private spaces?
(LF, interview)

Obstruction

Bruun and Jakobsson talks about an inherent tension – by working professionally with an untrained group of people, who are participating ‘just because they want to’ – marrying the artistic and professional ambition and focus, with an openness to exploring ‘what is there’ – how we can create something together that is meaningful enough for all, to keep it growing and evolving into something we then can present.

Kirchhoff talks about this tension by the concept of obstruction – of how the setup of this project is presenting a very creatively stimulating obstruction.

Cross-fertilisation

The Lab Station often work interdisciplinary and highly value the cross-fertilisation that takes place when collaboration between artistic practises and modes of working. In both VOICE OF THE AUDIENCE and SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANCE, this has been central and ground for immense learning and exchange.

The cross-fertilisation has specifically been facilitated by assigning Peter Bruun to be The Composer (musician, composer, scholar, teacher) and Erik Jakobsson to be The Conductor (musician, pedagogue, conductor of professional and amateur orchestras, teacher of music instruments). Lotte Faarup is The Director (playwright, director, artistic & organisational leadership, actress) and Øyvind Kirchhoff The Manager (artistic & organisational leadership, mime, actor, teacher of theatre & mime) – and together Lotte and Øyvind are the artistic leaders of the Lab Station. The broad set of skills and professional subfields covered by this leadership constellation gives way to deep learning as the crew stays open and curious to each other, also when it comes to the meeting and merging of the different ‘worlds’ of the participants and the professionals

...in the process you see some blind spots of yourself and in your work. And for the amateur – it's a completely different place, but hopefully they get the professional's way of looking and listening to and creating. That they move from different places, but each person gets something out of it. (ØK, interview)



It thus becomes a process of becoming confident with the unknown, of letting go of the usual expectations from an entirely professional crew and trusting that the professional foundation and experience will find an equal meeting and growth point in this mixed group of professionals and amateurs. Erik speaks to this unique tension of it being both an investigation, which often is reserved to the work with professionals, *and* a pedagogical challenge which is usually more prevalent in his work with amateurs and children:

...while here it is just as explorative (as with the professional) and the pedagogical is just as big a part of the investigation and this is where you can be pleasantly surprised because things emerge that you would never have imagined. That is also quite wonderful.

This dynamic and special cross-fertilisation was already experienced by this particular leadership constellation in VOICE OF THE AUDIENCE and therefore there is already from the beginning a steppingstone or two. In VOA it was 'a really first time' and this is shown by Eric's reflection of his doubt about whether his strategies would work.

At the first four to five rehearsals, I was in constant doubt over what would happen in this – because I insisted from the beginning that they

had to learn it all by heart, like I normally teach Swedish folk music, where it is also amateurs (...) to trust that they could learn it all by heart, even if it was a rather thick score. They get nothing to bring home to practice with. There I was in doubt.

The process back then, eventually resulted in Bruun and Jakobsson simplifying the score quite a bit for it to work. Now reflecting back on that stage in the former project, they both agree that the necessary adjustment became successful because of their mutual respect and dedication to the aims of the project. Erik was nervous at first to suggest radical changes and simplifications to Peter's composition, but Peter turned out to be not so 'attached' to his composition that he would resist this adjustment.

This time they knew that it was feasible and were also able to take another leap together by being a co-conductor team.



Reflecting on the performance and the complexity of the piece, Peter summarises what has been part of the successful execution:

I've put a lot of elements together that's quite complex in some places and I think I also thought 'ok, this is optimistic' and 'we may have to reduce this in some way' but then it actually succeeded – amazingly – I would say and that was partly because Erik and I had found this unorthodox way of directing where we are actually two conducting. This made it feasible. What also made it come together is that it has this rhythmic bodily element and the fact that the choir is quite sharp on learning it and remembering it. The premiere here went excellent - super tight! - it was really tight and there was a lot of dynamism in it. (PB, interview)

This speaks to the inherent nature of the work – of a group of very different professional and personal identities and experiences coming together and finding a common language and expression. Below we unfold some of the elements we consider important in this type of work.

Process as product?

As mentioned already there is a lot of emphasis on process and staying open and curious together – the director Lotte Faarup addresses the power of that in this manner:

We really want to share it, but the process itself – especially it being a project with volunteering, 'ordinary' people - who may not be that focused on theatre performance – is very meaningful in and of itself, and it is an ongoing flow between the participants, Peter as the composer-co-conductor, Erik as the conductor, and Øyvind and myself as the artistic leadership. We are in constant exchange and investigation – and this investigation is very valuable. (LF, interview)

Trust – surrender to the process



The musicality we develop together has a lot to do with trust. A trust that arises when the people who are in the project realise that THEIR contribution and reason to take part is as valid as any others', professional or otherwise motivated.

There is a form of trust that emerges in the fact that we have to be present here together and let the process run its course. There is a form of communication, of leading – by you (EJ) with the pedagogical responsibility and I, who (in a way) has set a frame, within which it can play out. (PB, interview)

Leaning into the collective



One of the main teachings that has been used is the power of the collective, of how the individual experiences the collective energy as something to lean into – and this creates trust and connection among the group.

Let the group experience that it is not that important to always be 'nailing' the cues or remember everything for yourself – but that the group, that the synergy of the group lifts you – adding the individual efforts up to more than its whole. This lift comes when trust is entering the room – blockages release when the trust in what is possible, kicks in. And then you see this amazing development as we are seeing now... (EJ, interview)

To be using oneself for this theatre - it is delightful to say things in rhythm, to find one's own form and in collaboration with Lotte, Erik and Peter figuring out how it all should be performed. The way we all slowly get ownership of the project is splendid. (Participant, written account)

Becoming one organism



Several participants describe the choir as an organism of its own – and Jakobsson also describes as shown above how the collective space is created to lift the individual members in a special way. One of the participants describe it in a very tactile way of being one organism:

And when you sit on your chair with the rest of the choir surrounding you, you need to use yourself in another way, with a different kind of bodily presence. You listen ‘into’ the collective, you find a common rhythm and pulse, you sharpen your hearing and listen for the others’ breath patterns and micro movements. It is an intense experience and - when it succeeds - deeply moving.

On the night of the premiere we had two shows. In the pause between the two something magical happened. We laughed together. Laughed and laughed and laughed; the laughter was moving from one ‘end’ of the choir to the other and then it exploded into a collective laughter. We became in an even deeper way - one body – and the second performance was a tad better for it. (participant, written account)

Non-hierarchical approach

One of the pedagogical premises of this project is the non-hierarchical foundation which is managed by both the conducting team in the way they interact with the choir and also in the way the 'invitation' itself is delivered. In terms of the rehearsals Øyvind expresses this premise in the following way:

There is also this thing about that those who show up - it is something I believe - I do not know if it is true - that those who show up they experience Peter and Erik - the management team - saying "we are in the process of an odd experiment, and we also walk on the 'floor' on equal footing with you" evidently we have a knowledge but there is not this extreme "you better fulfil this need to ..." that we explore together, we walk jointly onto the floor, that everybody are responsible and not just those 'performing' or the music or the management.

You are not expected to be a good singer, you can just be yourself and behave in your usual way. Obviously, you are put into a setting or common universe, but that is it. "How to be a 'perfect' audience?" – we all are perfect audiences! (ØK, interview)

Meaning making



A good reason to show up every Friday?

Working with people who volunteer their time and effort requires other types of motivation or ground rules for the leadership. This is very important and has shown to be one area where the project has shown great strength.

this kind of choir performance it is not quite ordinary so therefore it is odd. But it goes from being total chaos to being a structured chaos and what comes out of it in the end that is a finished product that we had never envisioned it could be. It may well be that the composer and the director had envisioned it, but we probably did not have the prerequisites to see what it ended up with - but it ended well. My role is absolutely eminently wonderful ... because I help to beat the rhythm and that I think is very important in this piece... (participant, interview)

Fun



When an audience then is added and they see the choir expressing joy and having fun, the audience also think it's fun. We talked about whether they would 'think anything of what it was they experienced?' but the most important element of the performance at the Royal Theatre for example was the apparent joy in the presentation (we were having fun). The same happens when you see a small ensemble playing a concert – it translates to you when you see that they play as much for their own sake as for us the audience. (EJ, interview)

The conductors and directors have demonstrated great professionalism and musicality, and this has created a safe frame for me to take part as an amateur. At the same time, we have experienced an inclusive community, where we have had many fun experiences together during the course of the project, with an openness and room for experimentation and imagination. (Participant, written account)

Musical communication



a society of rich cultural life is so by not only having high quality professional artistic and cultural work but in equal measure to have a broad section of its members immersing in the acts of ‘doing’ on all levels and in all ages. A project as this offers an opportunity for people to become familiar with ‘ways of doing’ that are normally not available for everybody and through their experiences and presenting this work in front of yet other people who are now exposed to this possibility. (EJ, interview)

Serendipity

The way the work was framed gave space for the small and large accidental obstructions or challenges – and already from the first rehearsals Eric realized that he would not be able to manage the role as conductor of this complex piece of music. Luck had it that Peter also is comfortable in that role (which he also had in the Torino project) – and was up for the challenge:

Peter obviously knew the music since he wrote it, and then we met at rehearsals on Friday and worked out how to do this. Together with the choir that it, because it has evolved like that; already at the first

rehearsal we realised that it would be possible to realise the piece EXACTLY as it was written, if we were two conductors. So, we asked Lotte and she thought it was a great idea. (EJ, interview)

Another non-planned adjustment was needed at the final rehearsals – the whole setup had to be pivoted 90 degrees. It turned out that the sound of the doors clacketing (opening out into the courtyard) was very annoying for a neighbour across the small courtyard. Thus, we suddenly had a very angry person on the other side of this door. It was then decided that we should use the inner doors instead, which required the pivot. The incident was handled and discussed in the group and did not become an issue for the performance even though it happened at the very last rehearsal before the premiere. By this time in the process, the group was able to handle this abrupt disturbance very well.

Corona

The project has been a sort of ‘mission impossible’ in a time of crisis. Like many theatre and music projects we were forced to close all activities in March 2020, but we had the good fortune to be able to complete the project and the final concert in what became a short break in the corona lockdown. Shortly after our concerts the virus gained momentum again, which resulted in new restrictions of social gatherings. One participant explains this by way of comparison to the first project where the group was sitting close together, whereas in this project social distancing was required. She experienced that the distance requirement was managed and compensated by the project leadership as well as transgressed through the practice each week:

Because of the restrictions due to the Corona-pandemic, we were sitting at a bigger distance from each other during rehearsals than we did before. This distance made ‘listening’ to the breath and movements of the others more challenging compared to the rehearsals in “Voice of the Audience”. I had to adjust to that. In the beginning I felt more alone and somewhat exposed, but every Friday that passed, I became better at sensing the others. I didn’t reach the feeling of being completely embedded/immersed in the collective as in “Voice of the Audience”. This time I felt more guided by the conductors though, and that was a lovely

experience. They compensated for the added distance and were more attentive to our wellbeing I think - I haven't asked them if that was the case... (participant Kirsten, written account)

Perspectives and implications



This project is part of the research on community and audience engagement that The Lab Station has been working on for many years and will continue to work on. The next project in this series entitled **THE SHAPE OF THE AUDIENCE** is set to begin in the spring of 2021 and will again pose questions around the role of the audience. This time the physical identity – the choreography if you will - of the audience. This time we have teamed up with a choreographer and a professional dancer to make another leap into the unknown space of finding out what is possible.

Returning to the current project, the lived experience and engagement of the professionals and amateurs involved have undoubtedly enriched the work and our understanding of what the different elements of this specific practice can do. We are developing and refining our tools in the process of jointly addressing these quests. Kirchhoff described what this type of project can do – as a tool in many different areas of life:

So what it's really about how you get creative yourself, 'how do I engage my creativity?' and you do that by daring to meet others, daring to meet what you don't know, daring to meet someone where you're not comfortable, that you both balance something that's safe, something that gives a sense of community and then something where you're pushed to areas you can't control- and that's exactly what they're doing. Areas, I think, which gives them new experiences, new connections and a new way of seeing the world.

This also speaks to a very current and pressing matter – how we are all struggling to remain connected in a time of isolation.

Healing the wounds of social distancing and fear

In Denmark we have now entered into the second year of the Corona outbreak. It has been a year with social isolation and uncertainty. Where physical interaction became problematic and unsafe. How will we cope with the situation once we again are allowed to physically interact with each other?

How will we heal the anxiety and fear of physical proximity and interaction? And how do we help each other and ourselves to manage the uncertainty of this new world?

A concept as the one outlined here for SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANCE, and which also was shown with VOICE OF THE AUDIENCE, can be adjusted and put to work in all kinds of settings where people need to reengage with other people in person. It can create this special kind of space, where connection through musical communication can take place. With no need for any previous singing, choir or other performance experience. It is without a doubt a challenge of unknown scale and consequence we are facing now under isolation and lock down, and also when we can enter the world again – even now it can create a physical reaction when you see people shake hands or hug with strangers. How long will we be using masks and being at a distance? Maybe this will become a new normal? How will we manage this as human beings?

The highly uncertain, insecure and ever-changing conditions of this new pandemic era call for means of connection and healing as well as ways of managing uncertainty – and here we believe that the arts can again play a significant role.

New approaches to cultural explorations

SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANCE is a merging of community engagement and audience 'education' and development by means of the artistic practice and performance of a sound piece. The participants are offered a hands-on experience of artistic practice, by being part of the process and presentation of a professional piece of art. In a very real way, they thereby contribute - by action and sharing with their peers and communities - to the cultural enrichment of society.

An important learning from this work is how the 'right' content – one that dissolves a professional - amateur separation – gives way for a collective experience of artistic investigation and emergence. We have experienced how it is possible, with the appropriate material and 'object' of investigation, a strong leadership team and clear framing, to open very a diverse group of people to a process with great cross fertilisation, and potential for strong artistic development and human connection.

A letter from a participant

The participants were asked to share their experience of being part of the project in writing as well as through interviews, and several have been quoted in the analysis. They all gave versions of a narrative that this piece is something special and different than what they have encountered elsewhere. And how the mix of ambition and courage and respect for the unique contribution of everyone has made its mark.

One of the 'new' participants - wrote a letter that summed it up and spoke to the paradoxical nature of art and what it may reveal. The letter will be the postscript of this presentation of SILENCE, INTERMISSION, RESONANCE.

There was an acquaintance of mine who once told her that the reason she had fallen for her boyfriend was because he had built a machine that filled several cubic meters and had an ingenious technical system and could not be used for anything. It was this total lack of utility that had won her heart.

Now, of course, you can say that both the boyfriend's machine and the project 'Silence – Intermission – Resonance' have plenty of utility. As far as the latter is concerned, one can point to the possibility of reflection, which lies in turning the gaze and not least the ear away

from the stage that is usually at the centre, and towards the usually unnoticed audience and their sounds and actions – thus making the subject an object and illuminating how we are all co-creators of that space and context we step into and watch. Or you can point to the universes of sound and fragments of speech that, by being put together in new, surprising and sometimes humorous ways, open the world to a new attention to everyday sounds and musicality for those of us who participate and for the audience that attends the performance.

It is useful, one might say: to reflect on our being in the world and to open up to new sounds and thus expand the world. Surely it must be useful in the same way that the usefulness of art becomes apparent if one tries to imagine that it did not exist.

And yes, it is true, I think – just as there can probably be many other arguments for the usefulness of spending time researching, writing, rehearsing and performing a work such as 'Silence – Intermission – Resonance'. Nevertheless, it is the story of my acquaintance that pops up in my mind when I ask myself the question: What is it that is great about being part of 'Silence – Intermission – Resonance'? It is the professionalism, commitment and love put into the creation of a work like this, where all these people spend all this time getting to a point where you can invite 25 people to spend half an hour of their lives watching the play and wonder and then go home again and have been there knowing that this exists.

That surely is beautiful.

Regards

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Ressources

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Documentary on Voice of the Audience, Torino Version (2019) [URL](#)

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Registrations of performances available only through application.