



A new audience for contemporary music?

Malgorzata Zamorska writes about evaluating *Kwartludium in Wonderland* – a contemporary music concert for children

The energy between musicians and audiences is central to the Kwartludium ensemble, a small contemporary ensemble of violin, clarinet, percussion and piano. Formed in Poland in 2002 the ensemble works with improvisations, graphic illustrations of the music and good, old-fashioned talking with the audience as a way of securing energy and understanding between the musicians and the listeners.

To find new ways of presenting music and to develop its relationship with their audience, Kwartludium joined the *New Music New Audiences Project* sponsored by the European Union (EU) Culture Fund (www.newaud.eu/). The goal of NewAud is to test and demonstrate new concert forms of contemporary music in cooperation with music ensembles from 17 European countries. Each ensemble participating in the project was to prepare, present and evaluate concerts dedicated to a new audience – people who rarely or never listen to new music. Kwartludium is the only one participating in the project that prepared a concert dedicated to children. The two concerts (for different age groups) entitled *Kwartludium in Wonderland* took place at the most prestigious festival for contemporary music in Poland – *Warsaw Autumn* in October 2013 (<http://warszawska-jesien.art.pl/en/wj2013/home>). Performers included; Dagna Sadkowska (violin), Michal Górczynski (clarinet, bass clarinet), Piotr Nowicki (piano), Pawel Nowicki (percussion). The musicians created the concert idea, played contemporary compositions, and prepared and ran all the workshop activities during the concert.

A very important part of the event was the evaluation research, which I ran with the cooperation of the

ensemble. The research was devised to learn more about the young audience and was required by the *New Music New Audiences Project*.

The idea for the concert came from a strong belief that new (contemporary) music should be accessible for a young audience. Through this concert Kwartludium wanted to open a door to contemporary music for the most open-minded public – children. Young listeners are free from prejudice and experience music in a free, boundless way. Utilising a child's openness and curiosity the band wanted to be a tutor, partner and translator of contemporary music. *Kwartludium in Wonderland* is both a concert and a playground. Using the language of fairytales Kwartludium invites children on a journey into a wonderful new music land. In a very skilful way this music event combined the contemporary music concert with all the activities that children love. They are invited to watch a movie, play instruments, draw pictures, move around and play in a group or by themselves. It makes children play music and play *with* music, listen and experience new music.

The concert was divided into fourteen parts including seven short concert pieces of contemporary music. Compositions by Eduardo Mogueillansky, Jagoda Szmytka, Aleksandra Gryka, Jean Pierre Deleuze, Sławomir Wojciechowski, Matthias Ockert and Dariusz Przybylski were included in the programme. Between the music sessions there were seven activities in which children were invited to participate. The concert was performed twice: first for children aged 4 to 7 years old (given at 11am on October 28th 2014) and the second for children aged 8 to 12 years old given at 4pm on the same day.



Through evaluation we wanted to check whether both concerts had met their main goal – to make new music accessible for the youngest audience. The evaluation was programmed to gain quantitative and qualitative data through different tools: observation, an evaluation game for children, a short questionnaire for parents and interviews with a small group of parents. There were two tools to gain information from and about children and two tools to gain information from parents.

The main challenge in this research came from working with the children as we could not simply ask them to complete a questionnaire or answer a question. For that reason we applied observation and ‘evaluation games’. During the evaluation we aimed to separate the children from their parents in order to give the youngest audience a chance to make comments on their own.

There were two different evaluation games for each age group. During the first concert, for the youngest children, the listeners were asked to stand on a rope which had a big plus on one end and big minus on the other. In the second group children were asked to put stickers under three statements: ‘I liked the music, I liked the games, I will come again’.

The evaluation proved that the concert was a great success and a huge step into presenting new music to a young audience. 80 children listened to contemporary music and most of them said that they liked it and were willing to come to similar events in the future.

Children listened to the new music with interest and curiosity – we observed that they remained silent and concentrated during the concert parts. Even two year olds listened with opened mouths for over four minutes! They gazed at the musicians with great interest and their faces showed curiosity. They were eager to participate in all proposed games and activities and we were surprised to find that our observations showed that children were even more engaged in listening to the music than in the other activities.

All the children took part in the evaluation game and showed their positive opinions towards the event. Fifty parents participated in the survey and seven parents shared their opinions about the concert during a short interview just after the event. 30 out of the 50 parents

said that their child was at such a concert for the first time and 39 of 50 children (from families that took part in the survey) did not attend music schools or play an instrument. That shows that the concert was presented to a new audience – children who were listening to contemporary music for the first time.

Apart from the conclusions that came from the research we must mention that Kwartludium members had great contact with a young audience and were impressed by the way that children participated in the activities, especially when they played the instruments – they listened to each other and to the musicians.

All in all, the concert proved that children are open to new music and willing to explore it. Moreover, it showed that it is important to build an audience for contemporary music when the listeners are young as there is an openness and curiosity that only children have. This conclusion gave us new energy and motivation to explore for and with children the wonderful world of new music. ■



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