

Kurs: CA1004 Examensarbete, master, klassisk music, 30.0 hp  
2017

**Konstnärlig masterexamen i musik, 120 hp**

Institutionen för Klassisk Musik

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# Music and Meaning

**What is meaningfulness in practice and in  
performance?**

Skriftlig reflektion inom självständigt, konstnärligt arbete

Det självständiga, konstnärliga arbetet finns dokumenterat på inspelning: Les Voix Humaines, inspelat i Svarta Lådan på Kungl. Musikhögskolan den 30 januari 2017.

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## **Abstract**

What are analyzed in this paper is how a musician can practice in a way that creates meaningfulness for her and how the musician can transmit and communicate that meaning to the audience. An artist should create a concert where the audience feels motivated, braver and spirited to be in their life, to flourish and to create with the means they have.

In Helsinki I conducted an interview with Maria Kalaniemi in which we discussed the meaning of her art, why she plays and why it is important to her. I presented my questions halfway through the interview.

With the interview and four theories on the meaning of life and the meaning of art, I analyze how, if at all, the meaningful practice and the transmitting of meaningfulness from the artist to the audience in a concert are possible to create, and if that or something else is the purpose of art.

What I discover is that there are many confounding factors to the belief that an artist can practice in a certain way and thus control the meaningful outcome for the audience in a concert. The individual concertgoer can be in any emotional state and that needs to be taken into account. An artist can prepare herself artistically, musically, and technically, be in the presence and then hope that the audience is in an emotional state where they can be moved.

The overall reason for concerts and art are the flourishing in individuals. By connecting people to their emotions, music and art can make people flourish which enables yet again other people's flourishing.

## **Keywords**

Meaning, meaningfulness, practice, concert, audience, transmitting, communicating, arranging, art, flow, feeling, emotion, culture, life, dialogue, meeting, performance, creating, flourishing,

## Introduction

The reason for playing music or becoming a musician differs a great deal from person to person. Some people want to have fun, some want to change the world, some cannot think of anything else they like as much, etc. Though I believe that one thing everyone who studies, plays or just enjoys music has in common is the feeling that music has touched us. Touched something fundamentally in the human soul. But what is it that touches people in art?

As a musician, one spends many hours alone with one's instrument. That time can be stimulating, fun, inspiring or, ever so rarely, pure agony. Of course, every musician wants to make that time alone with the instrument giving, effective, gratifying and inspiring—in other words, meaningful. But how does one do that?

If a musician manages to make his or her own practice meaningful, that meaningfulness should hopefully transmit to the audience in a concert. We go to concerts to be moved, to experience the full spectrum of emotions in us. But more often than not this does not happen, and I wonder why. The musicians may well be technically proficient, but something is missing. In addition to having had a great experience and be connected to your feelings, I at least—and I believe, many artists and musicians along with me—want my audience to have a sensation of being motivated, spirited, and ready to go out in the world and create with the means they have. I want to research how a musician can consciously work towards this feeling of meaningfulness for herself and her audience.

I find that, sadly, a great many musicians—both students and professionals—have never articulated these thoughts on why they play music or what and whom they want to reach with the music they are creating. And even though it is an abstract matter, I find it increasingly important in our society.

We have a discourse<sup>1</sup> in society that degrades and minimizes everything, including art that does not have an immediate effect or any useful object as an outcome. Even though in art and music, we often have an immediate emotional response, the effect of that response is normally not seen directly. Thus, a society without much art is for many people (politicians also) not too great a loss. The common attitude towards arts is that it must not be expensive. Few people know how few artistic and cultural events there would be left if all the state-supported arts disappeared and so they gladly accept cutting down government

<sup>1</sup> Kulturfolk: Danskerne mangler viden om, hvad pengene går til. Politiken, November 4th, 2015.

subsidies for the arts. But can there be a society without art? Is society somehow built on a notion of art?

## Research Problem

The three questions I want to analyze and answer in this paper are: 1: How does a musician create meaningfulness in practicing, and 2: If at all possible, how does the musician transmit and communicate that meaning to the audience? And 3: What is the meaningful concert and why do we need it?

At the end of this paper my definition of a meaningful concert will be presented when I discuss the answer for question number 3. The meaningful concert is a concert where the audience experience feelings of flourishing—they feel motivated, braver and spirited to be in their life and to create with the means they have.

## The Structure of the Paper

In the course of the next twenty pages, I will reflect and comment on my own practicing of a particular piece and explain how those reflections will be used in my master exam concert.

I will present three theories on the meaning in life, which will help me in the analysis of the meaning of concerts and music experiences, one theory on the meaning of art, and one theory on what art is. This will aid me in analyzing and discussing the three questions in this paper.

Subsequently, I present and analyze my interview with Maria Kalaniemi, make a historical glance at feelings in art and performance, and try to come closer to an understanding of what art and music is and why we need it.

## Method

In this project I used different sources of data, mainly my own practice and an interview. Based on various readings and my own experience as a member of an audience and as a musician I proposed three questions.

One data source involved the researching and analyzing of my own practice. In my practice on Marin Marais' *Les Voix Humaines* I studied how I could create the best space for my practicing, in which it became motivating and challenging. There were many different factors involved in creating that space and

focus, such as time of day, distractions, my current life situation, and other deadlines.

I interviewed accordion player Maria Kalaniemi, whom I think often creates meaningful concerts and experiences for her audience. I wanted to hear her thoughts on this topic and my ideas of meaning in practice and in performance. I was ready to be thrown in a whole other direction as she might have very different ideas of the definition of meaning and its relation to music.

My interview with her took place on 14<sup>th</sup> of March 2016 in Helsinki. In the first part of the interview I asked her questions on her life as a musician, how she started playing, why she chose the accordion and why she plays the music she does. This is rather easy questions and something every musician has answered many times. In starting with that we established a safe atmosphere for dialogue and discussion, and I could continue naturally to more demanding questions on what music means for her, if she could live without it, and how she understands and feels music. Halfway through the interview I presented my thoughts on meaningfulness and music and asked her the questions I analyze in this paper. As I will approach in the discussion section, she made me realize a crucial part of the answer to the second question in this paper, namely the importance of the emotional state of the individual concertgoer.

Furthermore, I have read about meaning in art and life through various epochs and countries and analyzed differences and similarities. There have been several divergent understandings of the meaning and reason for music from it being a mathematical order to a divine order to an individual urge.

## **My Own Process in Practicing**

The first question in this paper is how a musician can create a meaningful practice. I have analyzed my own practice and have been focusing on one piece: a movement called *Les Voix Humaines* from Marin Marais's suite no. 3 for viola da gamba and basso continuo in D major from *Pièces de viole*, Livre II.

I heard the piece in the fall of 2016 and it moved me. The harmony and melody struck me as serene and beautiful, but still with a depth and reality of life's struggles. I am a recorder player and not a viola da gamba player, and for a couple of days that bothered me. However, one's instrument should not be limiting, so I decided to arrange the piece for solo recorder. In the spirit of the renaissance and baroque musicians this was not so radical, as arranging, borrowing and transcribing music for the instrument at hand was common practice then.

I began my work by analyzing what the special viola da gamba features in the piece were, and they turned out to be broad chords, a slow and spacious melody, and quite many openings and breaks for the viola da gamba to resonate long and beautifully. As the viola da gamba and the recorder are miles apart in the workings of the instrument and how their idiomatic music looks and sounds, it was no surprise that these features were a bit difficult for a recorder to make.

I contemplated long how I could do this music without trying to sound like a viola da gamba. I analyzed the chords of the viola da gamba and the basso continuo part and my first thought was to limit the notes in the chord, but after playing it for my teacher and considering with him, it was clear that it would be a much better piece if I had all the notes in the chords.

The difficulty of getting the melody across presented itself when I had so many notes to deal with in every chord. The solution was to place the melodic notes on the beat (any beat in the bar) since the ear perceives notes on the beat as the important ones. It took a lot of practice to manage to play the chord before the beat in a still slow and beautiful manner.

I play most of the chords from the bas-note and up, but for variation I sometimes make a wave-figure from one chord to another. The more important the chord, the more notes I add to it, and I leave less important chords (less important for instance because of the structure of the chords, or because it is a repetition of a chord) with less notes. I have added small French ornaments to the piece, as is customary in music from this period.

It is easy to play a piece like this too slow since you want to dwell on the beautiful chords. But if that is the case, which it was for me for many weeks, you lose the direction and it easily becomes just a blur of lovely, yet formless notes and figures. It is easier for viola da gamba players to take a slower tempo (which they do more often than not) since they have so much resonance in their instruments. For recorder players the case is different; we have no resonance and are dependent on a good room to get resonance, or another technique. The technique one can use is to play longer notes than you maybe want and make a diminuendo on them to simulate a note that sounds long and slowly disappears.

It has been important for me to adjust the piece to the room I play in; not too many pauses in really dry rooms, and allowing more space and breaks between the chords in a room with good acoustics since it resonates for me.

This is more or less how I came to play the piece I later recorded and is attached to this paper. *Les Voix Humaines* is also part of my final exam program. During the practice, which took place over four months I simultaneously analyzed how I could make my practice meaningful for me and how this can affect my performances. In order to make the practice meaningful for me there were many factors to take account of. The time of day was important for me—the hours before noon is definitely best for me, say from 8 AM to 12 AM. I feel totally immersed in what I do, which is one of Csikszentmihalyi's conditions for

flow. The day's many experiences do not concern me, and I am at peace with life and have "great inner clarity", again one of Csikszentmihalyi's criterias.

It should be obvious that distractions such as telephones and visitors are not good for any focus or workspace. But what also seemed impossible not to regard, was my current situation in life. How was I feeling, did I have problems with anything or anyone, did I have a proper place to live and did the people I care about do well.

What also showed important was how calm I could be in the practicing. If I had other soon coming deadlines that had nothing to do with this piece, I had a harder time focusing on it even though I had made a plan, and put time aside to work on this piece, and therefore actually were in control of my time and how much I had to spare.

When what I had to practice on was challenging on the right level, it became giving and motivating, and meaningful to me. When I felt that I was fully engaged in my practice, I sensed that my methods were working, and that I was getting somewhere in regard to what I wanted to improve, be it technique, interpretation, etc., it was developing on many levels.

My second question was whether I could transmit the meaningfulness gained in practice to my audience so they would experience a concert where they felt empowered by the artistic experience and felt connected to their feelings. However, that proved much harder to analyze since interviewing one's own audience is practically impossible and one would probably never get any honest answers. However, there is no question about the fact that if I have had an overall meaningful time with a practice of a piece I perform, I know it better and understand how the feelings of the piece are and how I can feel them as well and thus transmit those feelings in the concert.

## Theory

In this chapter I wish to present three definitions on the meaning of life since that, in my view, is necessary in understanding why music and art are as important as it seems they are, and one theory on what art is, which services to clarify the one definition I present on the meaning of art for individuals and for society. At the end I present an account of one musician's particular way of thinking about music in concerts and of moving the audience. All of this will aid me in my analysis of the three questions, which will follow in the discussion section.

## Theories on Art and Meaning

According to professor and literary theorist, Terry Eagleton,<sup>2</sup> the meaning of life is not a thing or a mythical or mystical revelation or anything built-in in man. The meaning of life lies in the Greek word *agape*, which means love, though not just any kind of love. It has nothing to do with erotic, intimate love; it is impersonal love, the loving of the stranger. He continues his argument and writes that *love* resembles *happiness* in its simplest forms—it is an end in itself. Happiness is a “condition of well-being which springs from the free flourishing of one’s powers and capacities.”<sup>3</sup> Love is the same though in relational terms: “the state in which the flourishing of one individual comes about through the flourishing of others.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, “love means creating for another the space in which he might flourish, at the same time as he does this for you.”<sup>5</sup> That rules out murder, torture, exploitation and the like since that is ruining one’s own fulfillment. As true reciprocity is only possible between equals, this rules out oppression and inequality as well.

Thus, Eagleton’s greatest and most beautiful point is that the meaning of life is the interaction between your own flourishing and others flourishing, both made possible through the other.

The psychiatrist Viktor E. Frankl is famous for his book *Man’s Search for Meaning*<sup>6</sup>, in which he describes his years in the Nazi concentration camps, and his experiences of hope in the most horrible of situations. After the war he wrote about logotherapy; a type of psychotherapy he developed. In this form of therapy and in the book he states three ways in which one can discover meaning in one’s life. One of the ways in which meaning is achieved is when one has created or is creating a work or a deed.<sup>7</sup>

He further contemplates the question of the meaning in life, and concludes that what is actually important is not the meaning of life *per se*, “but the specific meaning of a person’s life in a given moment.”<sup>8</sup> One of Frankl’s main points in logotherapy (and in this book) is that human beings have a “will to meaning”, which is the primary motivational force in man.<sup>9</sup>

It would be difficult to write and research meaning without the ancient phenomenon of flow, which the Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly

<sup>2</sup> Eagleton, 2007: *The Meaning of Life*, p. 57-58.

<sup>3</sup> Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Eagleton, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> Frankl, 2004: *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

<sup>7</sup> Frankl, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

<sup>8</sup> Frankl, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

<sup>9</sup> Frankl, *op.cit.*, p. 104.

Csikszentmihalyi<sup>10</sup> has defined and developed in modern psychology. He has analyzed what makes people happy in their lives and what makes life meaningful and thus worth living, and it can be boiled down to the feeling of flow. With his colleagues he interviewed thousands of people and defined the feeling of flow. Flow is when you enter a state of ecstasy, which “is essentially a step into an alternative reality”<sup>11</sup>

In flow one is challenged at the right level in doing something one likes, which makes it impossible to think of anything else. One’s hunger, back pain, etc., is not felt and one’s identity disappears from one’s consciousness—that is, the “existence [is] temporarily suspended”.<sup>12</sup>

As can be seen from the illustration on the next page, when your challenges are high and your skills are high in the activity you do, you will experience flow. If you are challenged more than you can master, you feel a sense of arousal and that can eventually lead to flow. In the same way, if your challenge does not exactly meet your level of skill, you experience a feeling of control, which is also rewarding, and which can also easily lead to a sense of flow. If neither your skills nor challenges are met you have a sense of apathy, Csikszentmihalyi describes it as watching a boring television show.

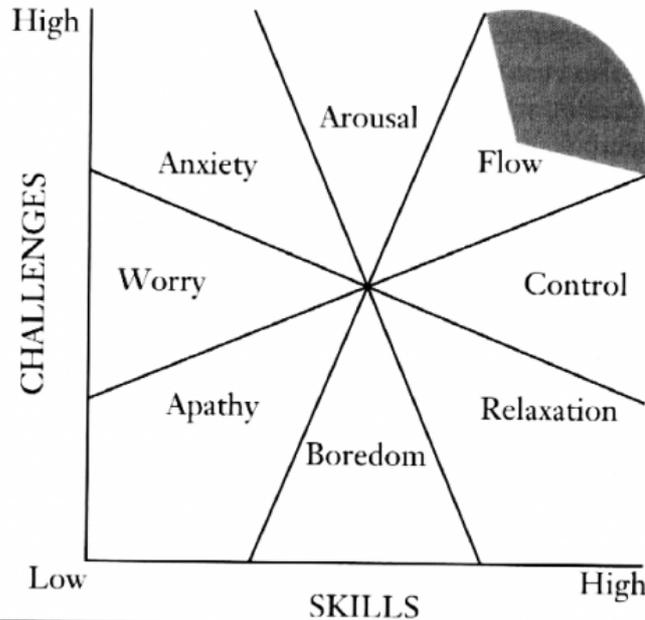
<sup>10</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, 1997: Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life. Page 30-32.

<sup>11</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, TED-talk at 6.16.

<sup>12</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, TED-talk at 9.31

**Figure 1**

The quality of experience as a function of the relationship between challenges and skills. Optimal experience, or flow, occurs when both variables are high.



Sources: Adapted from Massimini & Carli 1988; Csikszentmihalyi 1990.

He defines seven characteristics for flow:

- \* Completely involved in what we are doing—focused, concentrated.
- \* A sense of ecstasy—of being outside everyday reality.
- \* Great inner clarity—knowing what needs to be done, and how well we are doing.
- \* Knowing that the activity is doable—that our skills are adequate to the task.
- \* A sense of serenity—no worries about oneself, and a feeling of growing beyond the boundaries of the ego.
- \* Timelessness—thoroughly focused on the present, hours seem to pass by in minutes.
- \* Intrinsic motivation—whatever produces flow becomes its own reward.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. TED-talk at 17

Having presented three definitions on how to find meaning one's life—Eagleton's, Frankl's, and Csikszentmihalyi's—I now move on to a theory of what art is, what the meaning of art is, and an account from a musician on how to move people with you music. Starting with Susanne Langer's thoughts on what art is made of, I will move on Alain de Botton's definition on art, both of which I will later use in my discussion of the possible transmitting of feelings.

The American writer and philosopher, Susanne Langer, has written extensively on the subject of art and the mind. In her book *Problems of Art*<sup>14</sup> she presents and discusses her theory of feelings in art: A piece of art (in this case a dance) is laden with feeling but it is not necessarily the feelings of the creators (the dancers in this case) in the moment of creation or performance since that is impossible to prescribe or predict. The feelings belong to the dance itself.<sup>15</sup> She clarifies: “Every art image is a purified and simplified aspect of the outer world, composed by the laws of the inner world to express its nature.”<sup>16</sup>

When the artist creates art he expresses not his own feelings, but what he knows about human feeling.<sup>17</sup> As Langer writes; being in personal despair and violent upheaval while writing a tragedy does not necessarily help the creation; it is very difficult to work in such a state of mind.<sup>18</sup>

That means also that it is actually possible for an artist to express something he himself has never personally experienced. That for instance is very easy to see in literature: many authors have written prose and poetry unfolding emotions and events they have never themselves faced and done remarkably well in moving other people.

Langer writes how every artist would describe his or her art as having “life”, “vitality”, and “spirit”, and how the audience would attach those same adjectives to art one finds good. It refers to the spirit and life of the artwork itself, not the spirit in which it was conceived (a metaphor rarely noticed, but that an artwork is *conceived* refers to the idea that it has life—as human beings conceive a child) or the spirit of the artist. This also implies that the artwork is organic, which is something often mentioned when working with art and talking about art. As all organisms are in constant change—the cell is being broken down and rebuilt and replaced at the same time all the time—all living creatures are in a constant flux. This continuous dynamic pattern is analogous with what we experience in art we feel has life.<sup>19</sup>

Langer distinguishes between the *material* of music which is pitch, loudness, overtone mixture, metronomic length, etc., and the *elements* of music,

<sup>14</sup> Langer, 1957: *The Problems of Art*

<sup>15</sup> Langer, op. cit., p. 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Langer, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Langer, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>18</sup> Langer, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Langer, op. cit., p. 44-47 and 50-53.

which is sonorous moving forms, as she writes. Some of the elements might be motion, tensions and resolutions, resting tones, unity, volume, emptiness, beginnings and ends. What the audience ought to hear is not really the material, but the elements—a flow of life, feeling and moving forms.<sup>20</sup>

Music is movement, Langer writes. Physically it is vibration of membranes, strings, tubes, etc., but that is nothing you hear as music *per se*. What you hear in music is movement from one thing to another, flowing, marching passages—though nothing has been displaced. She argues that musical movement is thus illusory. Music presents an auditory apparition of time.<sup>21</sup>

According to the Swiss philosopher and writer, Alain de Botton, secular society has one huge problem when it comes to art. It is believed that you are supposed to understand it—where it comes from, what it is made of, the background of the artist, the important dates of this and that, and so forth. But when that is done to art, art tends to lose its significance. In de Botton's book *Religion for Atheists*<sup>22</sup> he analyses all the aspects of religion that we can actually very much use in our secular society and which are often, if not always, forgotten. As de Botton writes, Christianity never left out reasons for art: it is the medium to remind us what matters in life. What to be grateful for, what to stay away from, what to worship in order to be good and balanced souls.<sup>23</sup>

Everybody forgets, and often we forget the most important ideas of life; love, compassion, forgiveness, etc. The meaning of art is to remind us of what we cherish the most. When we see a painting or listen to a piece of music, it reminds us why we are here and what is of importance in life. Alain de Botton writes: “Good art is the sensuous presentation of those ideas which matter most to the proper functioning of our souls.”<sup>24</sup>

One suggestion on how to move others with your art comes from the jazz bass player, Chris Minh Doky,<sup>25</sup> who has articulated his ideas on how to play a good concert. He writes about how you let the music flow through you on stage so that the audience gets the ultimate experience of presence. He describes it as music being a great river—it contains all the music in the world; all that has ever been and will be. He cannot step into the river without being prepared since he would be pushed over and drown:

My job must be to become so skilled that I can step into the river and not fall, but stand firmly and at the same time be so transparent so that the river can run

<sup>20</sup> Langer, 1957: *The Problems of Art*. Page 39-41.

<sup>21</sup> Langer, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> de Botton, 2012: *Religion for Atheists*.

<sup>23</sup> de Botton, *op. cit.*, p. 213-217.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Doky, 2016: *Nærvær*.

through me and next to me without me generating too much resistance.<sup>26</sup> (My translation)

Of course, he writes, he is not supposed to be totally transparent for as the music runs through him he colors the music with his memories, feelings and his life. But the point of being transparent is important because if he tries to make the music something it is not in the moment, starts judging it, or tries to force a special feeling into the music, the music will not be as good as it can, there will be no real presence and thus the music will not move him or the audience.

In order to be transparent and ready, first of all his technique and mastery of his instrument must be at top level because if you don't have the full control of your instrument there will always be things you cannot say with it. It is exactly the same as the spoken language, the better you know it, the better and more precise you can articulate what you want. Secondly, he emphasizes the importance of knowing the music, its structure, chords, theory, etc. When the first two things are superior there is no hesitation between what Chris Minh Doky's imagination of the next sound is and the actual creation of the next sound. The last and most important thing is to be open and present. He writes:

In the river I have to open my heart and all my senses so everything can pass through me without me judging it.<sup>27</sup> (My translation)

## **Analysis of the Interview**

To sum up, the three questions in this paper are:

- \* How does a musician achieve meaningfulness in practicing?
- \* How, if at all, does the musician transmit to the audience the meaningfulness gained in practice?
- \* What is the meaningful concert and why do we need it?

<sup>26</sup> Doky, 2016: Nærvær. Page 92.

<sup>27</sup> Doky, op. cit., p. 93.

## Emotions and Meaning in Music

In Helsinki I interviewed the accordion player Maria Kalaniemi in March of 2016. Maria Kalaniemi explained; for a musician many factors play a role in obtaining the feeling of presence, flow, and meaningfulness for the musician and for the audience:

It is the whole attitude to life. It is connected to everything one has seen and heard and what one has gone through. And then one has to dare to put all that into the music and to open oneself to the audience, to oneself and to all the feelings.<sup>28</sup> (My translation)

If you can do this, you can meet the audience on a deeper level. It is not only the mere music that can create the feeling of meaningfulness and happiness; it is a connection between the music, the audience and the instrument (and musician).

The base for doing all this is to have practiced with you instrument and without (that is, to practice in your mind, which could be thinking about musical aspects such as phrasing, dynamics, emotions in the music, thinking it through in order to be able to play it by heart, etc.), and to know your instrument and your music. The meaningfulness has nothing directly to do with your technical ability, but the better you are technically, the easier you can say what you want. The creation of meaningfulness starts of course with who you are in life and what you do in the practicing room. Maria Kalaniemi explained the feeling she has when after a long day she picks up her instrument, not necessarily to practice something she needs to learn, but just to play because she wants to. She describes the feeling she gets as “Yes, we are together”<sup>29</sup>, the instrument and her.

This feeling must play, I believe, a great part in the creation of music. I know it myself, but from a slightly different perspective: the day before I play a concert I always really want to play. But actually I cannot practice whatever I have to play for the concert, because I cannot really improve anything. Still, I want to play. What I am longing for is not the practicing, but the confirmation of the fact that the instrument and I are together, that we still have each other and that we can still be one.

On the question of whether Kalaniemi’s time with her instrument is meaningful for her, it was difficult for her to answer in complete sentences. It became very clear that the mere thought of not being able to play made her miserable and was almost unbearable to talk about. She ended these thoughts and half-uttered sentences by saying that “Yes, *of course* it is meaningful to me!”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Interview recording with Maria Kalaniemi, at 20:15

<sup>29</sup> Interview, at 12:16

<sup>30</sup> Interview, at 14:15

Maria Kalaniemi has one way of more actively touching the audience, which she believes works quite well:

It is an optimal situation if you see somebody in the audience who has their eyes closed and is receptive. Then I decide that he or she looks like a person who just enjoys and I play for that person. Then what happens is that the rest of the audience will receive, too.<sup>31</sup> (My translation)

By receive, Kalaniemi means, receive whatever the musician is transmitting of her own feelings and the feelings in the music.

Kalaniemi searches for the direct communication with the individual and finds it then easy to open herself and her music. She believes that the magical moment, the communication, the meaningfulness will transmit not just to the one person, but to the entire audience.

Kalaniemi had one perspective on why music can touch as it really can. For many people, it can be difficult to accept all the feelings they have, and many shut down the emotions they cannot handle. Feelings sometimes arise in people and they cannot articulate them. With her music a musician can create smaller or larger spaces where these feelings can have room and that can be relieving and life-giving, but also very demanding. The musician is not at all supposed to be a therapist, but as artists, we have to be aware of the major impact music can have on people emotionally, she said.

When it comes to meaningfulness from the audience's point of view, Maria Kalaniemi said that she had been to many concerts that were not meaningful for her. Concerts where the musicians are good and the concert is beautiful, but it is not moving her. She says: "and then you wonder ... I am feeling nothing!?"<sup>32</sup>

She described the different types of feeling when going to concerts and I have grouped them in three: 1: the concerts that do not touch you at all, 2: the concerts where you are thinking about a lot of other things, but then suddenly one note or one phrase catches you and you have this meaningful experience. She explained it as if something, some note, is coming from deep down and the magical moment arises, if only for a short time, 3: The concert that has this magical feeling all the way through.

Of course, the concert to aim for is the third kind, but as Maria Kalaniemi also indicates, first of all is it really seldom that that happens and actually, if the musician creates the meaningful experience for only a couple of minutes the audience have still had the feeling and often that is enough for people to go from there and feel uplifted and spirited. This may be true, but I think that musicians

<sup>31</sup> Interview, at 31.40

<sup>32</sup> Interview at 54.12

should aim higher than that and try to achieve the third kind of concerts. If it does not work, the second kind can suffice, as Kalaniemi says.

One thing I have not mentioned in this paper yet is the difference between playing music that lies close to your heart and music you play not because you love it, but because of great colleagues or a needed paycheck. Obviously, it seems easier to make the music you love meaningful, but you still want to create the same feeling for the audience when playing the music that is more remote to your heart. My own thought is that the meaningfulness you experience when you practice—and have accumulated over the years of playing and practicing—transforms and follows you into every kind of music you play. Kalaniemi deepened my understanding of this when she said that she believes that the meaningful and deep relationship she has with her instrument means that all the music she plays can be meaningful for a potential audience.

Sometimes it happens that you play a concert and you feel that you did not give all you had, you did not reach the audience and you could not find the communication you wanted and you were tired and felt empty. That is clearly not satisfactory, but it can still happen then that somebody from the audience comes to you afterwards and tells you that they were touched and that they say—although not in so many words—that they had a meaningful experience.

I asked Kalaniemi about this paradox and she answered that, yes, every musician knows this from experience. It is not just the music that makes a concert meaningful—all the other things you do on stage, what you say and how you act, how you smile and look and what kind of energy you send is just as important. And one must not forget the significant role the audience plays in this equation; their mood and their connection with the music you play. There are two worlds of feelings, the artist's and the audience's. "They either meet, don't meet or something in between happens"<sup>33</sup>.

## Discussion

In what follows, I will discuss the theorists, my own analysis of my practice and the interview with Maria Kalaniemi and attempt to answer the three questions presented in this paper.

<sup>33</sup> Interview, at 1:05:49

## Question 1 - How does a musician create meaningfulness in practicing?

The meaningful practice experience is achieved if when practicing and working the musician achieves the feeling of flow as Csikszentmihalyi defines it. It is achieved if the musician's methods are working, she has an intrinsic motivation, she is challenged on the right level, and she feels that she is getting somewhere in regard to what she wants to achieve—improving her artistic expression, improving her technique, interpreting the music, etc. The meaningful practice is when the musician's ambitions match her competences, so that she is able with the right amount of work to reach her goals.

This was what I experienced during my own practice as well. When I had no visitors, could immerse myself completely in the activity (practice), and when I had an intrinsic motivation, my practice was at its best.

## Question 2 - How does the musician transmit to the audience the meaningfulness gained in practice?

The fact that a musician can achieve flow and thus fulfillment and flourishing in her practice makes me believe that she can create the same feelings in her audience—the feelings of a flow of life where one forgets one's identity and is completely involved.

In the question of what kind of emotions a musician should attempt to have on stage is implied the question of what kind of emotions and what kind of practicing a musician should aim for in the preparation before going on stage. Following are two different views, before moving on to what I learned during the interview with Maria Kalaniemi.

There are several accounts from the 18<sup>th</sup> century with definitions of the purpose of art; when it comes to music a good example is the writings of the flutist, Johann Joachim Quantz (1697-1773). In his book *Versuch einer Anweisung die Flöte Traversiere zu spielen*<sup>34</sup> from 1752, he writes that the musician's task is to make the audience feel, and in order to be able to do so the musician has to feel the emotions himself. In the music the different figures and phrases signify a certain emotion and the musician must detect that emotion, feel it himself and then the audience will experience that emotion, too. Quantz writes:

<sup>34</sup> Quantz, 1966: On Playing the Flute.

For if [the musician] is not himself moved by what he plays, he cannot hope for any profit from his efforts, and he will never move others through his playing, which should be his real aim.<sup>35</sup>

When that was the case in a concert the feelings were experienced more or less collectively, which, according to Quantz, was the goal.

The main reason for moving others with art in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was that it for the audience was a part of an emotional, sensitive, empathic and moral development. This I would argue, together with Susanne Langer, is still the case. Musical and artistic education is emotional education “and a society that neglects it gives itself up to formless emotion”.<sup>36</sup> Many tend to think that emotions are an animalistic, formless and entirely organic excitement in human beings, and that emotions therefore cannot be educated. However, feelings can be developed and understood.<sup>37</sup> Music doesn’t *help* to do this; it is what music *does*.

Quantz believes that you cannot touch your audience if you play the music—even though flawlessly—without really being in it. If you think about other things while playing, the meaningfulness or magical emotional moment that could arise will probably not happen; neither for you nor the audience.

Susanne Langer does not agree with Quantz. She writes that an artist shows feelings in her art, may it be a piece of music, a sculpture, a painting, etc., however it is not necessarily her own feelings but the complex structure of emotions felt by human beings. Both in a creation and in a performance the artist need not express her own feelings, but instead all that she knows about human emotions—emotions that are much more varied and rich than language can represent. We have only words for the most distinct of the human feelings, like joy, anger, fear, etc.<sup>38</sup>

I don’t believe that Langer means that an artist should put aside her own feelings when creating and performing. Would that be the case, I believe many an artist would stop creating and become doctors or plumbers, in which you are either asked to show very few of your own feelings or where feelings have no impact, whatsoever.

Though I see the point of Langer’s argument; the emotions in a musical piece for instance can be felt so much by the artist that the actual performance will be impossible to go through since in order to make a performance you need a special focus, control over you body and a certain resoluteness. And if you are in total despair, as the music may symbolize, you tend to lose focus. Somehow, as an artist you need to find a middle way between being in the emotional state of the art and yet not let your feelings collide too much with the performance.

<sup>35</sup> Quantz, op. cit., p. 117.

<sup>36</sup> Langer, 1957: The Problems of Art. Page 74.

<sup>37</sup> Langer, op.cit., p. 72.

<sup>38</sup> Langer, 1957: The Problems of Art. Page 22.

When on stage, the question is whether these feelings, the flow and the meaningfulness the artist has accumulated and practiced can it be transmitted?

“They either meet, don’t meet or something in between happens”<sup>39</sup> was Maria Kalaniemi’s comment to the worlds of feelings she believes exist. The artist has an emotional state, whether it is in line with the music she plays or not, and every individual concertgoer enters the concert hall in an emotional state.

That all concertgoers present the artist with different emotional and responsive states are made clear by Kalaniemi in one of her comments on how to find one person in the audience and play for him or her in order to have the feeling of communicating the music. Since, in her understanding, it is sometimes difficult for the artist to communicate with every one of the concertgoers. But as you communicate with one you find responsive, the rest of the audience will then also have a feeling of being communicated with.

The fact that it is a communication between artist and listener/viewer is evident in this account from a member of an audience, who himself is an artist. In his autobiography, *Winter Journal*,<sup>40</sup> the American writer, Paul Auster, describes a particular art experience, which made him write again after a long period where he was not able write, and that made him in his own words “come back to life”.<sup>41</sup> The art experience was a dance performance repeatedly intersected by the choreographer explaining the dance, which the audience had just seen. The dance performance moved him profoundly. He had come to the dance performance anxious about life and in particular about his writer’s block, but something in him opened up during the performance, and he found himself on another path on which he could create again.

“The beauty you had just seen”<sup>42</sup> (Auster’s autobiography is written in the second person singular) touched him deeply. It is clear from this account that the emotional state Paul Auster was in when he came to the dance performance was significant for the outcome of the whole experience for him.

Could it be that the musician is also receiving while playing, and that creating a meaningful experience for both herself and her audience depends not just on her, but on her audience as well? Without doubt, as a musician you sense the energy that comes from the audience. Playing a concert for a dull audience that you somehow cannot reach is very difficult and not particularly enjoyable. Even though one has the best intentions, plays well, is energetic and open; one may fail. On the other hand, playing for an audience that evidently enjoys the music or you, is open to what comes next, is alert or in deep contemplation, can be highly rewarding as an artist and a human being.

<sup>39</sup> Interview, at 1:05:49

<sup>40</sup> Auster, 2012: *Winter Journal*.

<sup>41</sup> Auster, op. cit., p. 224.

<sup>42</sup> Auster, op. cit., p. 223.

One cannot disregard the audience and their emotional states in the discussion of meaningfulness in a concert. The meeting between the musician and the audience is very important. As a member of an audience you will always be in some kind of emotional state when you enter the gallery, concert hall, church, etc. There are indefinite possibilities of life situations and they all interact with the music and the artist. Of course, the artist must still be well prepared technically and musically for the performance so she is able to let the music and feelings run through her as Chris Minh Doky writes.

A concert is thus a giving and receiving situation, but it goes both to and from the artist and the audience to a great degree. The audience plays a significant role, and I have come to believe that creating a meaningful concert is a dialogue and a meeting. Of course the major responsibility lies with the musician, but believing that we as artists have the means to control the emotional and meaningful outcome of a concert is too simple. It is a communication of feelings and as much as the musician can be prepared on what she wants to express, she might not succeed, and the audience might not at all be receptive in the particular moment. As Maria Kalaniemi declared, there are two worlds of feelings (the artist's and the audience's) and they either meet, they don't meet or something in between happens. The musician's responsibility (and thereby also control) that was implied in my second question is not possible to have.

### Question 3 - What is the meaningful concert and why do we need it?

I would now like to advance my idea of the meaningful concert: The individual concertgoer is in flow during the concert and when the concertgoer leaves the concert afterwards, the musician or musicians have succeeded in transmitting their own feelings of flow and meaningfulness they have achieved in their practice to the audience, and so the individual concertgoer feels braver, she feels that some hidden feelings have opened in her, she feels better about herself, she sees a meaning with otherwise problematic aspects of her life, but most importantly, she is looking forward to go into her life and out in the world and create with whatever means she has. By creating I mean not necessarily art or music, but everything that reaches out to other human beings and creates kind feelings towards others, understanding and hope in the world.

The account from Paul Auster above exemplifies the answer my third question. The meaningful concert (or art experience) enables the audience to connect with their full spectrum of emotions and to go out in the world with whatever means they have and create; either art or kind feelings towards other or a space where they can flourish and so facilitate other people's flourishing.

Before attempting to answer why we need the meaningful concert and the meaningful art experience, I would like to discuss what art is. "Good art is the

sensuous presentation of those ideas which matter most to the proper functioning of our souls.”<sup>43</sup> That is Alain de Botton’s definition. Susanne Langer writes: “Works of art are projections of “felt life,” as Henry James called it, into spatial, temporal, and poetic structures.”<sup>44</sup> And she explains later that “music presents an auditory apparition of time.”<sup>45</sup>

Langer’s definition takes into account the feelings incorporated in the work, but she does not focus so much on the feelings on the receiving end, the audience. Alain de Botton on the other hand gives that more focus in his definition. “Those ideas which matter the most to the proper functioning of our souls” observe the audience’s (and also the artist’s) souls and feelings.

A quick historical glance will show us that in the Middle Ages, music was for the divine service and served a divine purpose. Before any notational system was invented, music was only an activity—something you did, or something others did while you did something else.<sup>46</sup> Later in the middle ages, around the 14<sup>th</sup> century, music became a mathematical order—music was written on the organization of mathematical components.<sup>47</sup>

Viktor Frankl presented a theory in psychotherapy in which he described the *will to meaning*. Human beings search for a meaning in their life and that is the primal motivation force for living.

Every person is responsible for his or her own life; his or her own meaning. Frankl states that one of the causes for feeling that one has a meaning in life, is doing a deed or creating a work, which could for instance be art in any form (Frankl’s two other ways for finding meaning in life—which are very significant, though not so central in this paper—needs to be stated here as well: by experiencing something or encountering someone, and by the attitude we take toward unavoidable suffering).<sup>48</sup>

Susanne Langer writes: “the arts, which many people regard as a cultural frill, are actually never a late addition to civilized life, an ornament gracing society”, but are “born during the rise and the primitive phases of cultures”<sup>49</sup>.

When we take Frankl’s thought that every human being has a will to meaning and that by creating art that can be fulfilled, it is not so strange a thought that art is the foundation for culture and culture the foundation for society. In the search for meaning and will to meaning man creates (art, encounters, etc.) and a culture arises and on that one can slowly build a society.

<sup>43</sup> de Botton, 2012: Religion for Atheists. Page 217.

<sup>44</sup> Langer, 1957: The Problems of Art. Page 25.

<sup>45</sup> Langer, op. cit., p. 37.

<sup>46</sup> Taruskin, 2010: Music from the Earliest Notation to the Sixteenth Century. Page 65.

<sup>47</sup> Taruskin, op. cit., p. 249.

<sup>48</sup> Frankl, 2004: Man’s Search for Meaning. Page 114-115.

<sup>49</sup> Langer, 1957: The Problems of Art. Page 73.

What I think is one of the greatest reasons for art—besides making us remember and feel the most important ideas and emotions in life, as de Botton states—is that it should empower us and connect us to the full spectrum of our feelings. Art should inspire us and make us feel brave, touched, and motivated. That then enables us to create, too, with whatever means we have. By *create* I don't mean that everybody starts making art, I mean that besides creating art one can create countless emotions, everything that reaches out to other human beings and creates kind feelings towards other, understanding and hope in the world.

This could sound like I believe every kind of art should be “happy”, but that is not at all my intention, of course not. But what I believe is that even sorrowful, tragic, or furious art can inspire to the abovementioned ambitions and reasons for art, since that kind of art also connects us to our feelings. I believe that art should set feelings free. And any emotion in an artwork can set any emotion free in the audience.

That is the highest goal, and for Auster this was exactly what happened. I believe that both Alain de Botton and Susanne Langer are right, when they say that the purpose of art is to remind us of what is important in life and to help us connect with our emotions. I believe that people furthermore have an urge to develop, change, and grow and through the experience of art that is possible. Terry Eagleton defines the meaning of life as love and happiness, which is achieved through the flourishing of one's capacities and powers, which comes about through the flourishing of others.

In line with Eagleton, I believe that the meaning of music and art is to create this feeling of love, happiness and meaning so the listeners are able to flourish themselves, and so enabling other people to flourish.

## Conclusion

In this paper I proposed three questions: How does a musician achieve meaningfulness in practicing? And how, if at all, does the musician transmit to the audience the meaningfulness gained in practice? And what is the meaningful concert and why do we need it?

When you experience flow as Csikszentmihalyi defines it in your practicing, you are achieving a meaningful practice. For this to happen there are several criteria that need to be fulfilled, for instance that you are challenged at the right level, when you feel completely immerse in the activity and when you are able to free your powers and capacities.

In analyzing the second question, I came to the conclusion that the communication of meaning goes both to and from the artist and the audience and thus the audience's feelings has to be taken into account. Every individual concertgoer can be in any possible emotional state, and that influences the way they receive the music, the meaning, and the whole situation. The musician should be prepared as well as she can technically and musically, but the musician cannot control the emotional outcome of a concert.

The third question considers the meaningful concert, what it does to people and the purpose of it. I believe that the audience is in flow during the meaningful concert and afterwards feel spirited, braver, more motivated and fulfilled. With those emotions, they can go into their life and into the world and flourish. As Eagleton writes about love: "it is the state in which the flourishing of one individual comes about through the flourishing of others."<sup>50</sup> I believe that this flourishing can be induced by a concert and I believe that the flourishing of the individual concertgoer can facilitate, yet again, other people's flourishing.

## **Afterthought**

If I were to apply a critical view on this paper, I would begin by saying that the scope of it is too wide. It would have benefited from a larger focus on fewer questions. Furthermore, it was unsatisfactory to not be able to interview an audience for the answering of question number 2. Should I do it again, I would not express question number 2 in a way so the interviews of the audience would be in any way central.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

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