

Matthias Theodor Vogt 30.10.2023

<https://www.pizzicato.lu/welthauptstadt-der-neuen-musik-donaueschingen-2023-ein-wunder-in-der-tiefsten-provinz/>

<https://www.giornaledellamusica.it/recensioni/capitale-mondiale-della-nuova-musica-donaueschingen-2023>

## **World Capital of New Music Donaueschingen 2023: A miracle in the deepest province**

Every year on the third weekend in October, a small southern German provincial town of 22,000 inhabitants is transformed into a world capital of new music. Each of the orchestral concerts of the Donaueschinger Musiktage attracts over a thousand visitors. (Converted to the size of Berlin or Milan, this would be an unimaginable hundred thousand visitors for a premiere in the field of non-popular Serious Music). In 2023, from 19-22 October, 6,500 people from 33 countries gathered, taking up a total of 7,800 seats in 17 events; not counting the many installations, guided tours and discussions that were open to the public free of charge. How is this miracle possible in the deepest province?

### **An incomparable tradition**

On the one hand, there is the incomparable tradition. In 1921, an art-loving prince and his music director, Heinrich Burkard, founded the “Donaueschingen Chamber Music Performances for the Promotion of Contemporary Musical Art”. They soon attracted the international press, with premieres of works by Hindemith, Stravinsky, Schönberg, Berg, Webern and many others. In 1924, the New York Times wrote: “The Donaueschingen music festival is like none other in the world”. In Thomas Mann's characteristic language, *Doktor Faustus* (1947) recalls a “new spiritual attitude” in the “Baden festival venue” and “the sumptuous and musically perfect production” that met with an “artistic 'republican' minded audience” there. The idea of departure in the arts, parallel to the idea of departure in political Germany, which had finally become a republic, found a forum in Donaueschingen in 1921-26. In 1927, the festival moved to Baden-Baden, while the NSDAP hijacked Donaueschingen for its own purposes from 1933. It was only under the French occupation, which successfully sought a fundamental cultural-political renewal of the German southwest, that Donaueschingen was able to resume its republican tradition in 1946. So, 2023 was by no means the 103rd edition, as occasionally claimed, but rather the 84th edition in 103 years.

### **Südwestrundfunk as a strong partner**

On the other hand, there is an exceptionally strong partner who makes this miracle possible in the deepest province. In 1949, the “Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde [Society of the Friends of Music]” found a stable partnership with the Südwestfunk, today's Südwestrundfunk. For three quarters of a century, the Südwestrundfunk symphony orchestra has specialised in premiering the latest music like hardly any other orchestra in the world, and its members do not shy away from seemingly impossible demands by the composers.

This goes so far that the US-Japanese composer Steven Kazuo Takasugi was able to base his *Concerto for Steingraber Transponder piano, orchestra and electronics* on the Japanese philosophy of “Ma”, negative space. Ingo Metzmacher let the SWR Orchestra freeze into motionlessness after each wiping movement of a few thirty-second notes at the beginning of the bar. And thus made the horror of war even clearer than in Takasugi's AI-generated electronic sound clouds; we could assist a musical turning away from belligerent fantasies of masculinity, a hundred years after Ernst Jünger's *In Stahlgewittern [In storms of steel]* (1920).

In the same final concert, the SWR Orchestra found a new voice in *Frau, warum weinst du? Wen suchest du? [Woman, why are you weeping? Whom seekest thou? John 20:15]* by Youngghi Pagh-Paan. A wonderful sound that

one would have loved to hear for more than six minutes. Pagh-Paen dedicated her work to “the existential consolation through which a person crying in distress regains courage and finds strength to live”.

### Collaboration in German Cultural Federalism

The miracle in the deepest province can also be explained by German cultural federalism. Here, all levels work together dynamically. Until 1806, Donaueschingen, like 300 other small German provincial towns today, was the capital of a sovereign state. Its residential palace and parks lend the town great flair. Today, the Fürstlich Fürstenberg Brewery contributes 3,000 euros (or 0.3 % of the budget of 900,000 euros), much less than the brewery earns from the visitors' thirst. The city of Donaueschingen contributes 13 % of the budget with cash and material subsidies, the state of Baden-Württemberg and the Federal Cultural Foundation just under 30 % each, and the visitors 10 % through ticket sales.



FIG. 1: THE PRINCE AND HIS ARTIST IN WOJTEK BLECHARZ: *SYMPHONY No. 3*. DONAUESCHINGER MUSIC DAYS 21.10.2023. PHOTO: MATTHIAS THEODOR VOGT, GÖRLITZ

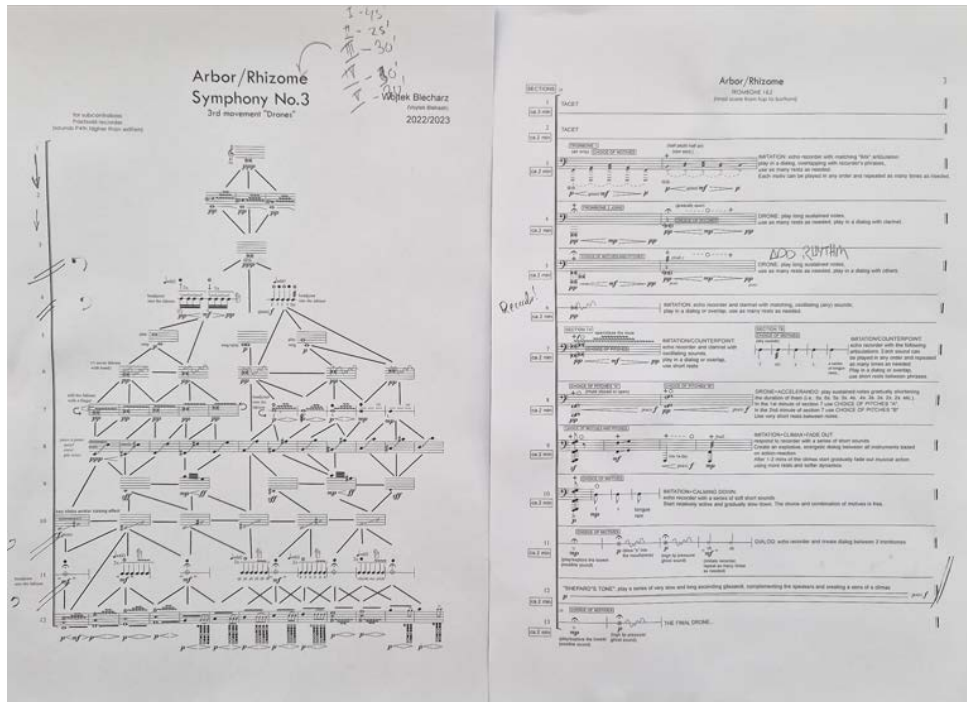


FIG. 2: WOJTEK BLECHARZ: *SYMPHONY No. 3*, 3RD MOVEMENT “DRONES” (2023). PARTS FOR CONTRABASS CLARINET AND SUBCONTRABASS RECORDER (LEFT) AND TROMBONE (RIGHT). PHOTO: SWR

### **Worldwide listening options through SWR audio streaming**

In terms of 240 television minutes and many hours of radio minutes from Donaueschingen, Südwestrundfunk is the big winner in cultural federalism, at least measured in terms of costs of around 10,000 euros per television broadcast minute in Germany's public broadcasting system in relation to SWR's 20 % budget share in the Music Days (175,000 euros in direct costs plus broadcasting expenses for an estimated value of almost 3 million).

To be more precise, however, it is not the broadcaster, but the spectators and listeners far beyond Donaueschingen who profit from the cooperation in the long term. This is where, for example, the beauty of the sound of the Iranian composer Elnaz Seyedi can be heard.

(The orchestra concert 1 from 21.10.2023 can be listened to at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71GbIUnFpvQ>.

Final concert of 22.10.2023 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THMbfHnyyzw>.

Report at <https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/swr-kultur/swr-kultur-vom-15-10-2023/swr/Y3JpZDovL3N3ci5kZS9hZXgvczE5MzkyMzg>, from minute 15:53; available until 15.10.2023).

With the Donaueschingen's "Next Generation" programme, students from European music academies can attend concerts, experience interviews and discussion rounds, and also enter into a dialogue with the composers themselves (<https://www.swr.de/swr2/musik-klassik/donaueschinger-musiktage/next-generation-das-nachwuchsprogramm-der-donaueschingen-musiktage-100.html>).

### **Donaueschingen's vibrant civil society**

What looks like a province from the outside turns out to be an extremely lively civil society on the inside, which is an indispensable element of the Music Days as a driver or caretaker of the installations. The density of associations in the region is one association in the field of music, culture or sports per 75 inhabitants. On average, every inhabitant is involved in two associations, resulting in a tremendously dense network of togetherness. This could be visualised by a network of connections that draws eight lines from each house with four residents to the associations' nodes, and connects everyone with everyone else; the exact opposite of metropolitan anonymity. At the same time, however, it is an accurate counterpart for the achievement of the Donaueschingen Music Festival, which year after year spans a network around the globe between lovers of Neue Musik.

In keeping with this "sense of belonging" in the Donaueschingen province, the economy—with its world market leaders in car supply for Daimler, Porsche, etc.—has survived the Corona pandemic unscathed. There are many young people who have successfully returned to the region after their studies. This, in turn, puts the city and district in the financial position of being able to offer art as an agora for coming together all year round, on the one hand, with a museum of contemporary art, a games museum, with the Fürstlich Fürstenberg collections preserved in their original state from 1868, and, on the other hand, to create a truly urban space with successful renovations and square designs. Curiously, one of the main halls of the Music Days, the Bartok Hall in the Danube Halls, is used once a month for a cattle market—a symbol of the original combination of rural tradition and avant-garde modernity. To facilitate access for residents of the Schwarzwald-Baar district, the new artistic director Lydia Rilling has introduced twelve-euro tickets for them, which has been actively taken up (and has apparently not yet led to problems with the prohibition of positive discrimination by place of residence from Art. 21 EU Charter).



FIG. 3 PRINCELY FÜRSTENBERG COLLECTIONS DONAUESCHINGEN.

THE PICTURE ON THE LEFT SHOWS THE WORLD'S ONLY PRESERVED DREIRÄDRIGE "LAUFMASCHINE"  
[THREE-WHEELED FOOT-PROPELLED VEHICLE] BY KARL VON DRAIS (CA. 1820). PHOTO: MATTHIAS THEODOR VOGT

### Must "serious music" always be serious?

As the name "serious music" (in distinction from entertainment music) suggests, Neue Musik has a serious problem, namely that of seriousness. All the more gratifying is the Donaueschingen tradition of musical installations freely accessible to the city's population and guests.

In the castle's Orangery, provided by the princely family, the Japanese sculptor Rie Nakajima (Yokohama, now London) and the percussionist and composer Pierre Berthet (Liège, Belgium) have developed musical instruments from everyday objects that begin to sound when the visitor sits down on a chair—a cheerful game with one's own body weight that children and adults alike played with enthusiasm.

Fig. 4

Videofile Nakajima-Berthet 20231020\_150303

**Rie Nakajima & Pierre Berthet**

**Dead Plants & Living Objects**

Installation in the Orangerie, Donaueschingen Music Festival 20.10.2023

Video: Matthias Theodor Vogt

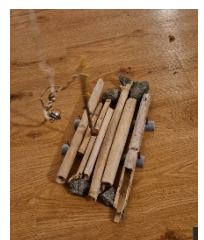


Fig. 5

Videofile Nakajima-Berthet 20231020\_150451

**Rie Nakajima & Pierre Berthet**

**Dead Plants & Living Objects**

Installation in the Orangerie, Donaueschingen Music Festival  
20.10.2023

Video: Matthias Theodor Vogt



Within the framework of the Musiktage, the *Living Objects* were, admittedly, almost the only contribution in which music was only made to sound through the visitors' own activity; basically, apart from walking through the room in Wojtek Blecharz's (Warsaw, Berlin) *Symphony No. 3*, the audience was trapped in the traditional passive forms.

Another exception was the Estonian artist Raul Keller (Tallinn), also in the Orangerie, who had installed large blue balloons in a wonderful symmetry with the rooms and sounded them with constantly softly varying music. The closer the visitor approached the balloons with his ear, the more he heard their resonance, and the spatial sound changed.

Fig. 6

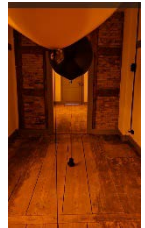
Videofile Raul-Keller\_20231020\_160710.mp4

**Raul Keller**

**Light Orange Intervention**

Installation in the Orangerie, Donaueschingen Music Festival 20.10.2023

Video: Matthias Theodor Vogt



German-Dutch composer Iris ter Schiphorst and German writer Felicitas Hoppe (both from Berlin) have shown that new music does not necessarily have to submerge itself in seriousness, but can also develop into highly lively and artistic play. Their *Was wird hier eigentlich gespielt?* [*What is actually being played here?*] is conceived for singer-performers (magnificently present is not only Salome Kammer, but also her highly musical co-voice Felicitas Hoppe), the equally professional Ensemble Ascolta (who had commissioned the work as part of the *Echoräume* [Echo Chambers] series) and electronics. It unfortunately had a somewhat banal title. In reality, it is a beautiful discourse by the two authors on the equal collaboration between music creator, word creator and sound creator—the key issue of this year's Musiktage. The ladies authors responded with 'Yes, it can be done!', of course. It turned out to be a merry stroll through cultural history from *Oh Du lieber Augustin, Alles ist hin!* [*Oh dear Augustine, everything is in vain!*] to Monteverdi's *Eurydice* to *Three Chinese with a double bass*, which suddenly turned into a rock performance of The Police's *Every breath you take* (1983).



FIG. 7: FELICITAS HOPPE, VOICE; FLORIAN HOELSCHER, PIANO; HUBERT STEINER, ELECTRIC GUITAR, IN THE WORLD PREMIERE OF: IRIS TER SCHIPHORST (COMPOSITION) & FELICITAS HOPPE (TEXT): *WAS WIRD HIER EIGENTLICH GESPIELT?* [*WHAT IS ACTUALLY BEING PLAYED HERE?*] DONAUESCHINGER MUSIKTAGE 21.10.2023. PHOTO: SWR

Even if the former black-on-black uniform of Neue Musik lovers with their black turtle-necks has long since evaporated into comfortable (and rarely sought-after beautiful) clothing; seriousness and brooding spellboundness dominated even in the face of rather sub-artistic performances like Jessie Marino's *Murder Ballads* or the *Zwischenspuren* [*Interstitial Spaces*] by Martin Brandlmayer, this year's winner of the Karl Sczuka Prize (with which SWR awarded an in-house production, disregarding all rules of partiality). Brandlmayer did not manage the artful step of Christian Morgenstern (1905) of a productive appropriation of interstices inside the picket fence („the architect took out the interstice / and built a big house out of it”). The listener longed for Heinrich Böll's *Doktor Murke* (1955), which “builds an altar to silence” (Wolfgang Stolz). All in all, however, the three packed days 20-22, with a preliminary evening on 19 October, were of impressive quality.

### **A laboratory of collaboration or “distributed creativity”.**

This is largely due to the new artistic director of the Musiktage. Lydia Rilling was previously dramaturge of the Luxembourg Philharmonic and on the one hand “inherited” seven commissioned works from her predecessor, and on the other hand was able to dare dedicating the Musiktage 2023 to collaborative working practices in the sense of “distributed creativity”—a farewell to the image of the “artist composing alone in his studio, who only hands over the score in its final form to the interpreters” (Rilling). The programme note commissioned from Tim Rutherford-Johnson (UK) sketches this rather than analysing it in depth: “Yet whether they are explicit about it or not, the collaborators of this year’s Donaueschinger Musiktage are repopulating concert halls with ancient modes of creative interaction similar to the natural processes between plants, fungi, invertebrates and animals that sustain life in the natural world. Regenerative and life-affirming, it’s a kind of musical rewilding (Rutherford-Johnson). Note: At least the translator should have noticed that insects are animals, too. (Taxonomy distinguishes the six kingdoms of prokaryotes, single-celled organisms, bacteria, plants, fungi and animals).

Neither did the panel discussion provide the substance that the topic deserved from an intellectual point of view. It was all the more exciting in the concerts to observe the very different interactions from which the works themselves emerged. This could happen in an equal cooperation as with the Ensemble Ascolta and its soloists, this could emanate quite traditionally from an outstanding personality as with Tyshawn Sorey (New York), this could also lead to the complete renunciation of a score as with *Occam Océan Cinquanta* for orchestra by Éliane Radigue & Carol Robinson. Born in 1932 and thus 91 years old, Éliane Radigue can no longer travel. But instead of providing a score for the orchestra musicians, her co-author Carol Robinson travelled to Stuttgart with acoustic samples and rehearsed first in small groups, then in registers, then in tutti. During the performance, the musicians were forbidden to use their notices. Accordingly, at the premiere they followed Carol Robinson's arm movements with hypergreat concentration, who overstated the classical figure of the hierarchical maestro to infinity.

It is no coincidence that this report mentions almost exclusively the names of female composers and performers - Lydia Rilling is the first female director in the hundred-year history of the Musiktage, 18 out of 23, i.e. 70 % of the composition commissions went to women, likewise the proportion of composers who could be experienced for the first time in Donaueschingen was over 70 percent. One would fall short if one were to try to grasp this merely as catching up on justice in terms of equality between men and women. In fact, the idea of a “laboratory working together (coLABORation)” intends the dissolution of hierarchical-patriarchal structures, i.e. a feminist approach that includes all genders. In the diversity and quality of the works presented, this selection was in any case a gain; not a product of schematic gender proportionality.



FIG. 8: COLLABORATION. POSTER OF THE DONAUESCHINGEN MUSIC DAYS 2023. SWR

### Forecast

This report on the Donaueschinger Musiktage would be incomplete without mentioning the outstanding role played by the city's cultural office in the organisation. Whether the free shuttle between the various performance venues and to the widely scattered overnight accommodation (with ten buses in three shifts each); whether the luggage bus in front of all the concert halls; whether the arrangements with the local restaurants to allow a late supper even after and between the events; the Music Days were organised in an Alemannic-professional manner (except for the intermission coffee tenant who produced queues of thirsty people).

Filled with the thousand and three sounds of the 17 events, the 6,500 guests set off back to their 33 countries; not quite to the wider world, since Neue Musik is a profoundly German invention, but one that has just found lovers worldwide.

Next year, Donaueschingen will be linked to its Japanese twin town Kaminoyama with the ringing of their bells, and the small southern German provincial town will once again be transformed into a world capital of Neue Musik at the 2024 Music Days.

Fig. 9

Iris ter Schiphorst (composition) & Felicitas Hoppe (text)

**Was wird hier eigentlich gespielt? What's going on? Doppelbiographie des 21sten Jahrhunderts [What is actually being played here? What's going on? Double biography of the 21st century]**

for singer-performer, voice, ensemble, 2 thunderbolts/electronics and samples

Boosey & Hawkes 2023

World premiere at the Donaueschinger Musiktage 21.10.2023

Copyright: Südwestrundfunk, Stuttgart

Felicitas Hoppe, voice

Salome Kammer, voice, performance

Ensemble Ascolta:

Markus Schwind, trumpet

Andrew Digby, trombone

Erik Borgir, violoncello

Florian Hoelscher, piano

Hubert Steiner, electric guitar

Boris Müller, drums

Vanessa Porter, percussion

Catherine Larsen-Maguire, direction

Iris Drögekamp, dramaturgy, scenic

arrangement

0. Prolog

Hierbei: Sample-Pads durch Donnerblitzbecken.  
 Singendes Stimme F.H. durch die großen Bassen (siehe Index bei F.H.).  
 alle Instrumente kein verändert. Sample-Pads und Synthes-Pads durch Donnerblitzbecken.  
 Möglichkeit die rhythm. Teil-Schnitte konzentrieren, nur Publikum.  
 Sprechhand ein Übersetzt und ergänzt: What's going on etc. für ein paar Sekunden nicht kann, dann beginnen.  
 Übersetzung: roughly mit Fortgang der Musik.

Bläser: mindestens phasing auf den F. Trumpets allmählich  
 minimal: stetig und wieder zurück

normal: stetig und wieder zurück

Trumpete in C

Trumpete in B

Viola

Elektron-Gitarre

Singende F.H. über  
 Stimme F.H. nur im PROLOG, vom Anfang:  
 Singendes: Singendes Stimme F.H. durch große Bassen (siehe Index bei F.H.).  
 in existieren, das Text immer zu verstehen ist. Hier spricht Felicitas Hoppe

Sample-Pads  
 n. F1\_A2\_Pads mit  
 und durch Keyboard  
 spielen erzeugen

Keyboard  
 Keyboard  
 Keyboard

Hierbei: Instrumental-Samples  
 auf Fender-Rhythmus erstellen, minimal nach unten variieren  
 (weniger als ein Viertel)

Klarinetten

Perk. I

Perk. II

ganz weiche Schlägel wie eine Tim-Pflanze ohne Attacken

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