

Matthias Theodor Vogt

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Lydia Rilling: “At Donaueschingen, we develop practices of togetherness”

**Lydia Rilling, Artistic Director of the Donaueschinger Musiktage,
in conversation with Matthias Theodor Vogt**



LYDIA RILLING, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR OF THE DONAUESCHINGER MUSIKTAGE. PHOTO: SWR 2023

After one hundred years, you are the first female director of the Musiktage. What have you been able to achieve in terms of gender equality?

The task of gender equality is one that falls to my male colleagues just as much as it does to me. The fact that I am a woman does not mean that my task is different from that of the men. This year, for one thing, the presence of women who received a commission for a composition or a commission for a sound installation was outstanding, because 70% of the commissioned artists were women. This is unprecedented in the history of the festival so far. And secondly, the presence of women in the two orchestral concerts was also greater than ever before. In the first orchestra concert, only works by women composers were played. And with Carol Robinson, who coordinated the orchestra, we had a woman on the podium of an orchestra concert for the first time. That was also an innovation.

How many of the programme items were you able to design yourself? How much did you inherit from your predecessor after the Corona difficulties of the last few years were finally overcome?

There are seven works that I inherited. When it was clear in 2021 that I would take over the position, my predecessor Björn Gottstein sent me a list of the works that had to be postponed until 2022 or 2023. Thankfully, I was able to choose which ones I wanted to take over. This gave me the opportunity to develop a coherent programme. Due to various circumstances, however, there were further postponements, so that in the end, as I said, there were seven works. Now that the Music Days are over, I can say that everything actually worked out and these works have all been

performed. Some of them had to wait three years for their first performance. It was important to me that all these works and projects could actually be realised. Some of the already finished works were not changed. Wojtek Blecharz, on the other hand, developed his concert installation *Symphony No. 3* a lot further. He told me that he was simply not the same artist as he was three years ago and that the timing now was much better for the project than it was then. So his patience was rewarded.

Donaueschingen used to be the capital of a sovereign state. Today it is a small town with 22,000 inhabitants, but during the Music Days it is transformed into a kind of world capital of Neue Musik. How do you manage that in the middle of the province the big concerts are attended by more than a thousand people?

On the one hand, a very loyal professional audience from many countries travels to Donaueschingen every year. The Music Days are a fixed date in the calendar for many and still an industry meeting (not only) for the German-speaking contemporary music scenes. In addition, there is our regular audience locally and from the SWR broadcasting area, which is very important for the festival. We are also very happy about the Next Generation programme for 102 students who would otherwise hardly be able to afford travel, accommodation and concert tickets, in collaboration with the Basel University of Music. The free sound installations enjoy very lively interest among the Donaueschinger:innen, which is why we have also introduced three free guided tours of the sound installations this year. For residents of the Schwarzwald-Baar district, I have also introduced preferential tickets for 12 euros for all concerts. On the one hand, this was intended to show how important it is to us that the people of Donaueschingen come to the concerts and, on the other hand, to reduce the inhibition threshold. This offer was well received; we want to continue it in the coming years.

You have chosen “Collaboration” as the theme of the Donaueschingen Musiktage 2023.

The contemporary music scenes owe their diversity and vibrancy very much to the development that collaborative practices, which have long been commonplace in other arts, are playing an increasingly important role. The classical division of labour between composers and performers is becoming increasingly irrelevant. In English there is the term distributed creativity, which describes this well. A particularly interesting project in this respect was *Occam Océan Cinquanta* by Éliane Radigue and Carol Robinson, who completely dispensed with a score in their orchestral work. Carol Robinson developed the work with the orchestra musicians, first in small group rehearsals, then in register rehearsals, and later in tutti rehearsals. We are very happy that a film team has been commissioned by SWR to accompany the entire development process and that we will be able to present the film at the beginning of next year.

Mrs Rilling, you moved from the Philharmonie in Luxembourg to Donaueschingen. How do you look back on Luxembourg?

I enjoyed the time I spent working in Luxembourg immensely. Luxembourg is really a special country. Every day that I worked at the Philharmonie Luxembourg, I was happy to work there. I don't think there are many people who can say that about their professional life. I have come to appreciate Luxembourg very much as a country, especially in its openness and pragmatism—in the best sense—about how people from different backgrounds and languages can live together. This is something that Luxembourgers cannot be proud enough of. You may not even realise how unique this is.

Thank you for the interview!