

Danish Yearbook of Musicology

45 • 2022-24

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*Danish Yearbook of Musicology* · Volume 45 · 2022-24

Dansk Årbog for Musikforskning

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Each volume of *Danish Yearbook of Musicology* is published continuously in sections:

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ISBN 978-87-88328-36-3 (volume 45); ISSN 2245-4969 (online edition)

*Danish Yearbook of Musicology* is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Danish Musicological Society on <http://www.dym.dk/>

# Music Exhibitions in Local Settings – Sites of Cultural Memory?

Andreas Meyer

Cultural history museums impart knowledge and also often act as venues for sensory experience. In both cases, they may support individual and collective remembrance. They can be assigned to what Sharon MacDonald has called the ‘memory complex’, an ‘assemblage of practices, affects and physical things, which includes such parts as memorial services, nostalgia and historical artefacts’, and are linked to notions of heritage and identity.<sup>1</sup> This article builds on these considerations and deals with historically oriented museum displays that focus on musical topics in local areas. In line with Timothy Rice, I use the term ‘local’ according to the context for various ‘social and cultural units’ such as villages, cities, counties, and countries or societies.<sup>2</sup> The investigations, therefore, refer to exhibitions whose themes include regional and/or national aspects. Based on concepts of memory and heritage studies, I discuss the extent to which music exhibitions can be understood as agencies of cultural memory. In so doing, I will refer to a research project entitled ‘Music on Display. Studies on the Presentation and Reception of Musical Topics in Museums,’ which was affiliated with the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen and funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation).<sup>3</sup>

## *Memory and Heritage Studies*

The term ‘cultural memory’ is associated with various meanings and ideas. In what follows, I refer to the concept as it was introduced by Aleida and Jan Assmann. According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory ‘is a form of collective memory, in the sense that it is shared by a number of people and that it conveys to these people a collective, that is, cultural identity.’<sup>4</sup> Jan Assmann distinguishes between cultural memory and communicative memory. The latter denotes ‘collective knowledge’ that is based on everyday

1 Sharon MacDonald, *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today* (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2013), 5–6; see also Laurajane Smith, *Emotional Heritage: Visitor Engagement at Museums and Heritage Sites* (Abington and New York: Routledge, 2021), 48.

2 Timothy Rice, ‘Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography’, *Ethnomusicology*, 47/2 (2003), 151–79, at 162.

3 Cf. <https://ausgestellte-musik.de/> (accessed 22 Oct. 2023).

4 Jan Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural Memory’, *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 109–18, at 110.

communication and refers to a rather recent past.<sup>5</sup> The term largely corresponds to the concept of ‘collective memory’ as introduced by Maurice Halbwachs.<sup>6</sup> Everyday communication, Assmann notes, is disorganized and thematically instable, although there are occasions ‘that more or less predetermine such communications.’<sup>7</sup> Cultural memory, on the other hand, is characterized by ‘cultural formation,’<sup>8</sup> taking account of issues that happened far back. Cultural memory always relies on the know-how of experts, such as priests, teachers, artists, and scholars.<sup>9</sup> It is fostered by sites or agencies, which include archives, heritage festivals, monuments, memorials, commemorative rallies and, last but not least, museums. These agencies form an important part of the ‘*lieux de mémoire*’ or ‘embodiments of a memorial consciousness,’ as they were prominently described by Pierre Nora.<sup>10</sup> Aleida Assmann identifies ‘two modes of cultural memory,’ which she calls ‘cultural working memory’ (characterized by representation) and ‘cultural reference memory’ (characterized by storage).<sup>11</sup> Exhibitions can be assigned to working memory, museum repositories to reference memory. Jan Assmann makes a corresponding distinction between ‘modes of actuality’ and ‘modes of potentiality.’<sup>12</sup>

The idea of cultural memory is linked to considerations and concepts of heritage studies, which are focused primarily on preservation activities. ‘Heritage is created through a process of exhibitions,’ Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, ‘as knowledge, as performance, [and] as museum display.’<sup>13</sup> Laurajane Smith describes ‘heritage management and museum curation’ as ‘performances in which certain values and identities are continually rehearsed and thus preserved.’<sup>14</sup> These processes are, as Smith points out, mostly determined by ‘a hegemonic ‘authorized heritage discourse,’ which is reliant on the power/knowledge claims of technical and aesthetic experts, and institutionalized in state cultural agencies and amenity societies.’<sup>15</sup> The ‘authorized heritage discourse,’ she adds, ‘organizes social relations and identities around nation, culture and ethnicity’. Heritage is, thus, ‘something visitors are led to, are instructed about, but are then not

5 Jan Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, *New German Critique*, 65 (1995), 125–33, at 126. See also Jan Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural Memory’, 117.

6 Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

7 Jan Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, 127.

8 *Ibid.*, 129.

9 Jan Assmann, ‘Communicative and Cultural Memory’, 110–111 and 114.

10 Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations* 26’, *Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory* (1989), 7–24.

11 Aleida Assmann, ‘Canon and Archive’, *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 97–107.

12 Jan Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, 130.

13 Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Theorizing Heritage’, *Ethnomusicology*, 39/3 (1995), 367–80, at 369.

14 Laurajane Smith, *Uses of Heritage* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 68.

15 *Ibid.* 11.

invited to engage with more actively.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Iain J. M. Robertson describes a concept of ‘heritage from below’, which is characterized by activities at the grassroots level that provide ‘both an opportunity for the expression of other heritages and identities, and a possibility for the assertion of a structure of feeling that runs counter to the hegemonic.’<sup>17</sup>

An important role in processes of collective remembering is played by emotions.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, heritage activities are often directed towards emotive impact. Emotion, notes Laurajane Smith, ‘invigorates the legitimacy of the meanings of the past for the present that individuals and groups construct.’<sup>19</sup> This applies especially when it comes to identity formation through memory. Accordingly, feelings, such as a sense of honour and pride, are often mobilized in order to construct group identity.<sup>20</sup> Feelings of nostalgia also play a role and can take different forms, with Svetlana Boym’s distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia being useful. Restorative nostalgia is characterized by a desire to return the past that ‘is not supposed to reveal any signs of decay’. Reflective nostalgia is more about ‘sensual delight in the texture of time’, with the past being considered irrevocable. While restorative nostalgia is taken very seriously, reflective nostalgia can be ironic and humorous.<sup>21</sup>

Although there is an unquestioned link between memory, heritage, and group cohesion, older studies that have examined sites of heritage primarily from the aspect of national identity – such as Pierre Nora’s work on ‘*lieux de mémoire*’ – are sometimes considered outdated. These studies have been criticized, for example, for presenting social groups as homogeneous communities.<sup>22</sup> Societies, the objection goes, are characterized by multifarious transcultural processes and produce hybrid identities that are connected with – as Michael Rothberg writes (following Paul Gilroy<sup>23</sup>) – ‘knotted intersections’ of history and memory that cut across categories of national and ethnic identity, institutions

16 Ibid. 31.

17 Iain J. M. Robertson, ‘Introduction: Heritage from Below’, *Heritage from Below*, ed. Iain J. M. Robertson (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2012) 1–27, at 11.

18 Sharon MacDonald, *Memorylands*, 79.

19 Laurajane Smith, *Emotional Heritage*, 59.

20 Cf. Aleida Assmann, ‘Erinnerung, Identität, Emotionen: Die Nation neu denken’, *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 20/3 (2020), 73–86, at 78.

21 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49–50. For reflective nostalgia and other types of nostalgia in pop music exhibitions see Christian Hviid Mortensen and Jacob Westergaard Madsen, ‘The Sound of Yesteryear on Display: A Rethinking of Nostalgia as a Strategy for Exhibiting Pop/Rock Heritage’, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 21/3 (2015), 250–63.

22 Astrid Erll, ‘Travelling Memory’, *Transcultural Memory*, ed. Rick Crownshaw (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 9–23, at 12. First published in *Parallax*, 17/4 (2011), 4–18.

23 Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

of knowledge production, nation states, and many embattled communities.<sup>24</sup> Astrid Erll adds that '[d]ifferent social classes, generations, ethnicities, religious communities, and subcultures all generate their own [...] frameworks of memory'.<sup>25</sup> Hence, if the intention is to convey identity, social difference would have to be duly included. Ethical elements come into play here, and, from an ethical view point, it is also important to ask whether not only achievements made by the group but also ruptures in the group's history, or heritage that is associated with negative events play a role in constructing cultural memory. Indeed, Heidemarie Uhl has pointed out that the creation of cultural memory should be considered a 'seismograph for the moral-ethical constitution of a society'.<sup>26</sup>

### *Questions and Methods*

Drawing on these concepts and considerations, I examine in the following sections how local historical references are conveyed in music exhibitions and the extent to which these references actually aim at group identity. I also ask: what importance is attached to the emotional in this context? And to what extent display elements alone or in constellation with others discernibly address sensuality and feelings? Furthermore, I explore to which extent social differences and historical ruptures of the group whose music is presented play a role in the exhibitions. For the presentation of older collections, I ask whether and to what extent the museum's own history is taken into account. Finally, I examine the composition of the audience and the ways in which the museum displays are actually received by the visitors in terms of shared memory.

As noted above, the findings presented here are largely based on a research project affiliated with the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen (Germany). In the course of the project, seventeen museums with music exhibitions of various orientations were visited in several West and Central European countries between 2015 and 2019. The research consisted of interpretative exhibition analyses, interviews with curators, and observations of audience receptions and interviews with forty to sixty visitors per display. In this way, comprehensive documentation was created for each exhibition.<sup>27</sup> Various publications have been published regarding the project, to which I will refer several times in this article. First, four case studies are presented which I believe illustrate a number of important aspects. They include two exhibitions on popular music and two dealing with European art music:

24 Michael Rothberg, 'Introduction: Between Memory and Memory. From Lieux de mémoire to Noeuds de mémoire', *Yale French Studies* 188/119 (2010), 3–12, at 8.

25 Astrid Erll, 'Travelling Memory', 13.

26 Heidemarie Uhl, 'Warum Gesellschaften sich erinnern', *Forum politische Bildung, Informationen zur politischen Bildung*, 32 (2010), 5–14, at 10. German quotations and statements from interviews have been translated by the present author.

27 Empirical data were collected by María del Mar Alonso Amat, Elisabeth Magesacher, and Andreas Meyer .

1. 'Rock and Pop in the Pot – 60 Years of Music in the Ruhr District.' Temporary exhibition at the Ruhrmuseum, Essen (Germany).
2. RAGNAROCK Museum in Roskilde (Denmark). Permanent Exhibition.
3. Musical Instrument Museum of the University of Leipzig (Germany). Permanent Exhibition.
4. Mozarthouse Vienna in Vienna (Austria). Permanent Exhibition.

The case studies are followed by comparative analyses, which sporadically include other exhibitions that support or put into perspective the findings and considerations of the case studies.

### *Case Studies*

#### 1. 'Rock and Pop in the Pot – 60 Years of Music in the Ruhr District'

The temporary exhibition 'Rock and Pop in the Pot' at the Ruhr Museum was open from October 2016 to February 2017 and dealt with the region's pop music history from the post-war period to the present. Conveying 'collective memory' was designated as the primary concern in the audio guide to the exhibition. One member of the curatorial team, Holger Krüssmann, accordingly spoke of a 'memory exhibition'.<sup>28</sup> In his greeting notes for the exhibition, Thomas Kufen, Mayor of the city of Essen, listed a series of pop events that had taken place in the Ruhr area since the 1960s and had 'become deeply etched into the cultural memory of the district'.<sup>29</sup> The exhibition focused on the presentation of local cultural achievements. A gallery in the entrance area displayed photos and descriptions of nationally renowned pop musicians from the region. The path along this gallery led to a 'sound room' where an audio-visual presentation was also devoted to some of these pop stars. The exhibition was largely arranged chronologically, with selected topics representing certain periods, such as 'The Beat Goes On – Beat Bands in the German Industrial District' (for the early 1960s) or 'No Love Parade – Techno in the Ruhr District' (for the early 2000s). The topics were presented through the interplay of objects, documents, photos, audio and video recordings, and text panels. The audio guide described aspects of the various themes in more detail.

The exhibition aimed at feelings by focusing on achievements. The intention was obviously for local people to look at their home region with pride. Musical sound supported the affective involvement. The sound room in the entrance area with the audio-visual presentation of well-known singers aimed, as scenographer Hannes Bierkämper writes, at an 'emotional entry'. The aim was to make it possible to 'sensually experience

<sup>28</sup> Interview, 15 January 2017.

<sup>29</sup> Thomas Kufen, 'Grußwort', *Rock & Pop im Pott: 60 Jahre Musik im Ruhrgebiet*, ed. Heinrich Theodor Grüttner (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2016), no page numbers.

the lively and diverse music scene of the Ruhr district.<sup>30</sup> Well-known songs from the region were also played from main loudspeakers in the stairwell and could be heard throughout the exhibition. Numerous objects were displayed in relation to their auratic effect, especially musical instruments and other objects of famous musicians. Moreover, exhibition elements that were designed to personally involve the visitors were apparently directed at emotions. Photos and descriptions of music clubs, for instance, were shown under the title ‘Venues and Concert Halls’ in one of the display areas. The photos themselves did not appear remarkable as exhibits; instead, the aim was for visitors to walk through the gallery in search of clubs which they might have danced in themselves. Nostalgic feelings were obviously to be evoked.

Cultural difference and historical ruptures played a role at certain points in the exhibition. One section entitled ‘Music of the Immigrant Society’ dealt primarily with the music of Turkish immigrants who had come to the Ruhr area beginning in the 1960s mainly to work in the coal mines and large industrial plants. Various panel texts referenced hostilities and pressures that the immigrants had faced. Some artefacts indicated xenophobia, including a poster for a play entitled ‘Kanaken’ (a pejorative term for ‘non-Germans’). Nevertheless, the poster also referred cultural reactions to xenophobia, and this reference continued with a constellation of artefacts that were dedicated to a multi-ethnic festival at Kemnade Castle (near the city of Bochum). A cabinet contained posters, an admission ticket, photos from the festival and an LP with recordings of the festival, among other things. The cabinet label said that, over the years, the festival had become a ‘stage for immigrant music’ under the motto ‘We are humans, are you human, too?’ A newspaper article from 1974, also displayed in the cabinet, bore the title ‘Bochumers Danced into the Night with Guest Workers’. Members of the Turkish community were not involved in the conception of the display, and it would be interesting to compare how they would have curated the theme of ‘Music of the Immigrant Society’ and whether they would have emphasized the movement against xenophobia. Another section was dedicated to ‘Living, Fighting, Showing Solidarity: Music and Politics’, the politicization of young people since the 1960s and the importance of music in this context. Political songs and related events were addressed, as were topics such as the Vietnam War, solidarity with the underprivileged and the (lack of) critical engagement with National Socialism in Germany. The pioneering role of the Ruhr district was emphasized on several occasions, for example with reference to the ‘International Essen Song Days’, which had already begun in the 1960s with many protagonists from the left-wing political music scene. The basic concept of presenting achievements of the region was thus also maintained in this part of the exhibition.

30 Hannes Bierkämper, ‘Learning from Pop oder der dekorierte Schuppen: Zum Gestaltungskonzept der Ausstellung Rock und Pop im Pott’, *Rock & Pop im Pop: 60 Jahre Musik im Ruhrgebiet*, ed. Heinrich Theodor Grütter (Essen: Klartext-Verlag, 2016), 19–24, at 23.



Apart from the school classes that visited the exhibition every day, mostly in the morning, the visitors were mainly local, middle-aged and older people from different social backgrounds. Several visitors, both in conversation and in the guest book, emphasized that the visit to the museum was often associated with personal memories, which in many ways corresponded with our observations. The room on ‘Venues and Concert Halls,’ which was mainly about recognition, was constantly visited. One morning we noticed two teachers lingering there for more than twenty minutes, obviously looking for familiar clubs, while their students walked through the exhibition rather listlessly. Some presentations were reinterpreted according to personal experiences. In the section ‘Music of the Immigrant Society,’ for example, an electric guitar with additional frets for the intervals of Turkish scales was on display. We observed one visitor who saw the instrument and said to his younger companion that he used to own exactly such an instrument, whereupon he spoke about his musical activities at that time. He was obviously not referring to the frets, but to the type and brand of instrument.

## 2. RAGNAROCK Museum

The RAGNAROCK Museum in Roskilde is dedicated to Danish pop music and Danish youth cultures in particular. In the entrance area, a text panel entitled ‘Intro’ reads: ‘A kaleidoscopic tale of Danish youth culture told through the sound, images and symbols of rock and pop music.’ According to the curator, Rasmus Rosenørn, the museum sees itself as a cultural-historical institution rather than a place of remembrance, although he notes that older people who find visiting the museum a ‘nostalgic experience’ are indeed welcome.<sup>31</sup> A chronological order has been deliberately avoided, as visitors would otherwise spend most of their time where the music of their youth is presented.<sup>32</sup> The exhibition uses a similar mix of heterogeneous artefacts to those in the pop exhibition in Essen, complemented by a range of interactive stations. Instead of a chronology of events, a number of different topics are presented, such as ‘Dance Fever’ (rock’n’roll dance, break dance, rave), ‘Fracture’ (music and socio-political issues), or ‘Fans: Boys and Girls’. Only one display entitled ‘Musical Currents’ follows a strict chronological order. Along a wall, video and audio recordings (via monitors and headphones) of Danish pop hits are played, accompanied by photos and ranking lists.

Similar to the exhibition in Essen, the RAGNAROCK Museum relies on an atmospheric introduction: loud rock music in the lift leading into the exhibition sets the mood. From the lift, one initially enters an impressive hall of mirrors in which the visitors and numerous light sources are reflected. The following section is dedicated to the significance of lighting in the context of pop music. Colourful light shows are presented and can be created by the visitors. A text panel, titled ‘Let There Be Light’, reads ‘Colours

<sup>31</sup> Interview, 23 March 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

ripple and flow: a journey of the senses'. Rosenørn notes that the aim is to get visitors into the mood for the exhibition by expressing themselves.<sup>33</sup>

Cultural achievements play a subordinate role in the exhibition, and are presented in a restrained manner. Exhibits on internationally successful Danish musicians are displayed in a corridor, including the cover of the single CD 'Saturday Night' by Whigfield. The object's caption reads: 'In an unprecedented breakthrough Whigfield's Saturday Night made history by becoming the first ever debut single to enter the UK singles at no. 1. This signalled the start of a period of Danish dominance within the genre of Eurodance.' Rosenørn points out that the intention was to avoid a 'Hall of Fame'. In many cases, objects owned by famous musicians are exhibited to tell stories. For instance, punk rock singer Camilla Høiby has a T-shirt on display with the words 'Some people think little girls should be seen and not heard' (a quote from a song by the British punk rock band X-Ray Specs), which she sewed on herself. The T-shirt can convey a certain aura for fans and, moreover, refers to the 'Do it Yourself' attitude of the punk scene. The lettering can also be interpreted as a political statement. Another example can be found in the section 'Fracture', a strand of hair from the musician Lars Stryg. The object label is titled 'Cut Your Hair and Get a Job' and describes the problems in everyday life that male youths in the 1960s faced when they let their hair grow. The section 'Fracture' also presents topics about social difference. A wall showcase displays photos, posters, and record covers documenting the gay and lesbian movement in Denmark. A text entitled 'Story of Sex' reads: 'What is male, what is female? Time-hardened expectations are challenged. On the musical stage, you can choose to play against stereotypical perceptions of gender, body, sexuality, and sex, or play along with them.' Video clips of musicians talking about the subject are presented on a screen.

The majority of the guests to whom we talked, families and individuals of different ages, came from various regions of Denmark and had different musical knowledge. Although the museum does not see itself primarily as a place of remembrance, personal memories play an important role for members of the older generations. 'It's funny when you have been part of it', remarked one of our interviewees. The only chronologically structured section, 'Musical Currents', with Danish hits from various periods, was often described as a highlight, with recognition being of central importance. 'People automatically find the period when they were young and they go and listen to the music of their own youth', noted Rosenørn based on his experience.<sup>34</sup> Many younger and middle-aged visitors said that they had learned a lot from the museum visit. The majority referred to music from periods with which they were unfamiliar. In addition, many visitors said that they felt entertained by the exhibition, often referring to the opportunity to become interactive. It was noticeable that the section on music and politics was little visited or quickly passed through during our stay, which may have something to do with the fact

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

that there were little interactive content. Similar to the rock and pop exhibition in Essen, the visit was mostly marked by communication and collective experience.

### 3. Musical Instrument Museum of the University of Leipzig (Germany).

The current permanent exhibition of the Museum of Musical Instruments at the University of Leipzig was opened in 2006 and is mainly dedicated to European art music from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. The Leipzig and Saxon contexts are included in a variety of ways, and the city of Leipzig is presented as an important centre for music. A large number of the artefacts exhibited were made by Leipzig instrument makers, and local issues are conveyed by means of panel texts (while there is little information on the instruments as such). The connection between local instrument makers and famous musicians is highlighted at various points, with Johann Sebastian Bach, who lived and worked in Leipzig for a long time, playing a special role. The curator and former museum director, Eszter Fontana, who conceived most of the exhibition, explained that the local reference had been primarily designed not as a way to reach a local audience but rather as a way to give the exhibition a unique profile.<sup>35</sup>

An important aspect of Eszter Fontana's concept is the sensual perception of the exhibits. 'History and beauty' are to be conveyed.<sup>36</sup> A flyer with 'treasures' is available for visitors who would rather look at the instruments from an aesthetic point of view. It is an invitation to visitors to get active and look for the instruments described in the exhibition. There is also a room in which the chronology of the exhibition is interrupted and instruments are displayed according to aesthetic aspects. The exhibition occasionally offers the opportunity to make personal references, for instance, in a section dedicated to the legendary 'Viola Pomposa'. A text panel informs us that, according to contemporary witnesses, the instrument was built by instrument maker Johann Christian Hoffmann to Johann Sebastian Bach's specifications. A large map of historical Leipzig is displayed on the floor showing the location of Johann Christian Hoffmann's workshop. Locals can identify the location and are thus able to link the presentation to their own social environment. Furthermore, there is an illustration of the imposing building of the Ludwig Hupfeld AG company in another section devoted to the industrial manufacture of mechanical musical instruments. A text panel points out that the company once was 'Europe's largest plant for self-playing pianos and orchestrions'. The building is standing to this day and locals are likely to recognize it.<sup>37</sup>

Social differences and historical ruptures are given hardly any recognizable consideration in the exhibition. At the end of the exhibition, a cinema-like room is set up

35 María del Mar Alonso Amat, Elisabeth Magesacher, and Andreas Meyer, *Musik ausstellen: Vermittlung und Rezeption musikalischer Themen im Museum* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021), 85–86.

36 Ibid.

37 The Viola Pomposa section and the display of mechanical instruments were only established in 2015 under the supervision of the new director, Josef Focht.

in which texts and images on the history of the collection can be seen on a screen in a continuous loop. Important collectors are introduced and visitors are given insights into the exhibitions of the 1920s and during the German Democratic Republic times. The reconstruction of parts of the museum after the reunification of Germany is also discussed. The period of the Third Reich is not included apart from a photo of the destroyed building from 1945.

Visitors to the museum come from many (mostly German) regions.<sup>38</sup> All generations are represented, with many visitors having a comparatively strong musical education and often being academically trained. The Leipzig context was scarcely mentioned when visitors were asked about their impressions. Only when we asked directly about local references were single local aspects described, such as Bach's work in Leipzig or the importance of the music automaton industry. General impressions mainly concerned individual instruments and instrument groups. The aesthetic approach played an important role. The beauty of the instruments and their craftsmanship were often emphasized. Criticism of the exhibition was only voiced when we asked about it directly. It mainly concerned the lack of information regarding technical details and playing techniques of the instruments. Although there are some media stations that are frequently visited, a lack of musical sound was sometimes criticized.<sup>39</sup> In many cases, the collective visit to the museum was accompanied by lively communication. The audio guide was hardly ever used.

#### 4. Mozarthaus Vienna

The 'Mozarthaus Vienna' in Vienna is housed on three floors of a building in which Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart lived with his family between 1784 and 1787. Each of the three floors is dedicated to a theme: 'Vienna in Mozart's Time', 'Mozart's Musical World', and 'The Mozart Flat'. The museum was designed by two different teams of curators. The sections 'Vienna in Mozart's Time' and 'Mozart's Musical World' are aimed at an international tourist audience that does not necessarily need to know much about Mozart, as curator Joachim Riedl noted.<sup>40</sup> The exhibition in the Mozart flat is less clearly aimed at a target audience. One of the curators, Werner Hanak-Lettner, said that they did not try to build a tourist attraction.<sup>41</sup> However, as it is privately run, high visitor numbers including tourists are generally essential for the museum. Most of the museum's narratives are connected to the city of Vienna, and the topic of 'Mozart's Musical World' focuses on works that Mozart composed in the city. According to the managing director, Gerhard Vitek, the emphasis on the local environment is, as in Leipzig, partly a result of

<sup>38</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. 90–91.

<sup>40</sup> María del Mar Alonso Amat, Elisabeth Magesacher, and Andreas Meyer, 'Lesarten und Konzepte: Untersuchungen zur musealen Erzählung in Musikausstellungen', *Musikausstellungen: Intention, Realisierung, Interpretation. Ein interdisziplinäres Symposium*, ed. Andreas Meyer (Hildesheim: Olms, 2018), 33–54, at 43.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. 44.

the museum's effort to develop its own profile, with a focus on Mozart's years in Vienna so as not to compete with the Salzburg Mozart museums.<sup>42</sup> The museum does not have its own coherent collection. Apart from text panels, mainly facsimiles are exhibited, reproductions of pictures and documents, as well as objects of the time.

The sections 'Vienna in Mozart's Time' and 'Mozart's Musical World' are provided with text panels that convey only essential data, for instance, information about the origin and age of artefacts, titles of documents, names of people depicted. Extensive information is conveyed by the audio guide, whose texts tell a variety of stories, some of which are only indirectly related to the exhibits. The texts are often accompanied by background music to support the affective reception. This is particularly poignant when the circumstances of Mozart's death are described in connection with the composition of the Requiem. Other curatorial ideas aimed at emotions are found in the Mozart flat, where the flat itself is presented as an 'exhibit'. In the audio guide, reference is made to the 'authenticity' of the rooms, combined with the request that visitors use the individual objects on display to imagine how Mozart and his family lived in these rooms. This may increase the awareness that one is standing where Mozart lived and worked.<sup>43</sup> The surroundings of the house are also incorporated into this concept; a text panel refers to a window view that has changed little since Mozart's time. The visitors, so the message goes, look at the world as Mozart once saw it through this window.

The section devoted to 'Vienna in Mozart's time' is particularly concerned with the people with whom Mozart primarily interacted: members of the aristocracy and the upper middle classes. A few examples point to the diversity of the Viennese population. A multimedia station shows a well-known Viennese square (Graben) where men and women meet (projected by beamer). A women's corset hangs from a railing and, in the immediate vicinity, there is a peep-box with erotic pictures from the eighteenth century. According to curator Joachim Riedl, the installation is intended to refer to the prevalence of prostitution in Vienna at that time.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, portraits of noblemen and other Viennese personalities are exhibited in a small room, including a print of an engraving with the portrait of Angelo Soliman. The text of the audio guide describes his fate and especially the macabre circumstances surrounding his death. Soliman arrived to Austria as a West African slave, but managed to achieve considerable respectability. After his death, his body was displayed in the 'Imperial Natural History Cabinet'.

The vast majority of visitors are international tourists, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of the museum staff communicate predominantly in English. We spoke with individuals, couples, and groups from twenty-four different nations during our visits. Conclusions based on the display were drawn depending on the great variety of

42 María del Mar Alonso Amat et al., *Musik ausstellen*, 36.

43 Cf. Ulrike Spring, 'Exhibiting Mozart – Rethinking Biography', *Nordisk Museologi*, 2 (2010), 58–74, at 65.

44 María del Mar Alonso Amat et al., *Musik ausstellen*, 29–30.

knowledge and interests. They often concerned Mozart's unsteady life. The Viennese context barely played a role when listing particular impressions. Media stations set up at various points in the exhibition were mentioned as the main highlights. Some visitors were taken by the aura of the place, combined with the feeling of being where Mozart lived. Correspondingly, the music pedagogue Edith Wregg, who wrote an article about the exhibition, refers to the staff as saying that some visitors even began to cry, overwhelmed by walking through Mozart's flat.<sup>45</sup> However, expectations about auratic feelings are often disappointed as our interviews show. Above all, the lack of 'authentic' objects is lamented, and the exhibition was described as 'empty'.<sup>46</sup> Almost all the visitors used the audio guide which meant that communication took place only to a very limited extent.

### *Exhibitions in comparison*

#### 1. Topics and Intentions

Apart from the pop music exhibition in Essen, the conveying of a communal memory was never mentioned as a goal for curators in the museums we visited in the context of the 'Music on Display' project. There are, however, a few examples of local themes being used to promote local identity. A special exhibition at the Museum of Music History in Budapest was dedicated to the life and work of Zoltán Kodály under the title 'A Hungarian Master on the Road of Modernity and Tradition'. A number of topics were conveyed through the interplay of extensive text panels illustrated by vitrines displaying heterogeneous artefacts related to Kodály (including autographs, original letters and newspaper articles). The first lines of an introductory text on a banner read as follows: 'Commitment to modernity and respect for tradition is the intertwining clew running along the life and work of Zoltán Kodály. Both are directly related to his fight for the cultural emancipation of the Hungarian nation. This cultural emancipation – from the vantage point of Kodály – was the only [...] condition for the elevation of the nation, for its coming to age [...]'. This text also appears at the beginning of the introduction to the exhibition catalogue written by the curator Anna Dalos.<sup>47</sup> Thus, a central message of the exhibition is described in a linear and unambiguous way. It is about the impact of the musician on the development of the nation and corresponds with contemporary national discourses and politics in Hungary.<sup>48</sup>

45 Edith Wregg, 'Komponisten im Museum: Impulse aus der Musikvermittlung', *Musikvermittlung im Museum: Reflexionen, Konzepte und Impulse*, ed. Johannes Hoyer and Constanze Wimmer (Innsbruck: Helbling, 2016), 45–105, at 62.

46 Alonso Amat et al., *Musik ausstellen*, 42.

47 Anna Dalos: 'Introduction', *A Hungarian Master on the Road of Modernity and Tradition, Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967): An Exhibition Catalogue* (Budapest: Museum of Music History of the Institute for Musicology RCH HAS, 2018), 5–8, at 5.

48 Cf. Michael Toomey, 'History, Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary'', *New Perspectives*, 26/1 (2018), 87–108.

A temporary exhibition at the Händel-Haus in Halle (Germany) in 2016 entitled ‘Handel with Heart – the Composer and the Children of the London Foundling Hospital’, was evidently aimed at the sense of togetherness of local population. It was dedicated to Handel’s social commitment in London. However, a reference was made in many places to Handel’s youth in Halle, the city of his birth. His engagement in England was linked to the early death of his father and a possible connection was constructed. A model of the building of the *Frankesche Stiftungen*, a social institution in Halle that was founded by the theologian Herrmann Francke at the end of the seventeenth century and still exists today, was presented in the centre of one of the exhibition rooms. An information board stated: ‘Francke’s charitable deeds for the orphans in Halle may have inspired Handel to later become so involved with the Foundling Hospital in London.’ Furthermore, a conducting score of the composition ‘Foundling Hospital Anthem’ which Handel composed especially for the orphanage in London was presented; Handel had used a chorale by Martin Luther for a first version of the composition. The score on display was a second version in which the chorale had been omitted. Nevertheless, the chorale could be heard via a media station, and a detailed description concluded with the sentence: ‘This is an impressive example of how closely Handel felt connected to his musical roots in the heart of Germany.’ The Handel House in Halle aims primarily to appeal to a local audience with its temporary exhibitions.<sup>49</sup> The constructed correlations were obviously intended to support the idea of Handel as a composer of the region, as ‘one of us’.

The idea of presenting local achievements can be found in various music exhibitions. However, there are also counter-examples. A comprehensive section at the Musikmuseum Basel, which presents mainly European musical instruments, is devoted to the topic of ‘Music in Basel’. The presentation is rather matter-of-fact, and Veronika Guthmann, who as the former director is responsible for the content of the permanent exhibition, explicitly pointed out in conversation that musical life in a Protestant city with a bourgeois culture was not comparable to that at some European princely courts.<sup>50</sup> The Musical Instrument Museum in Brussels offers another example. Instruments by Belgian makers are exhibited at places and blend in imperceptibly with the overall presentation without specifically emphasizing a local connection.

## 2. Evoking Emotions

Feelings are frequently stimulated in music exhibitions by presenting local achievements and giving the opportunity of recognition. The latter can aim at nostalgic feelings, such as in the pop exhibition in Essen, although the example of Roskilde shows that curators sometimes deliberately try not to convey such feelings primarily. Similar attitudes are described by Leonard and Knifton in their study of British pop music exhibitions.

49 María del Mar Alonso Amat et al., *Musik ausstellen*, 161.

50 Ibid. 162.

‘Some curators’, they write, ‘expressed a wariness of encouraging this emotive engagement, fearing that sentimentality might override critical engagement with the materials on display.’<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the importance of nostalgia in curatorial concepts is also evident from this study. Curators often follow a ‘nostalgic impulse in helping to identify the materials with which people find emotional, cultural and social connection.’<sup>52</sup> This corresponds to considerations by Thomas Mania, curator at the rock’n’pop museum in the small German town of Gronau, which is dedicated to the history of pop music with a focus on Germany. In an interview, he talked about ‘starting points’ offered to the audience in order to attract interest, events that may relate to the socialization of visitors.<sup>53</sup>

The case studies show that sound and light effects – sometimes in connection with interactive offers – can aim at sensual perception and, in many cases, objects or object constellations are exhibited under aesthetic aspects. The auratic effect of both artefacts and museum rooms and buildings is also important for emotive approaches. Further curatorial ideas for supporting emotional perception can be detected in some other museums. Music sound is sometimes not used solely to support the atmospheric, as in some of the case studies, but as a partial element of museum narratives. A particularly poignant example was found in the (now rebuilt) permanent exhibition at the Beethoven-Haus in Bonn. A glass cabinet was devoted to Beethoven’s ear disease, with various artefacts including letters and handwritten notes by Beethoven which provide information about the course of the disease, as well as original ear trumpets. Excerpts from recordings of the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies were played in the audio guide as they sounded in the original and as Beethoven would have heard them at the times of their premieres. Furthermore, in some displays, interactive installations were integrated into the museum narratives to provoke personal concern. An example of this was the ‘Handel with Heart’ exhibition which, as mentioned, focused on Handel’s commitment to the London Foundling Hospital. A banner referred to the insufficient capacity of the orphanage and explained the lottery system that was introduced as a result: ‘Here, the colour of a ball, which the mother took at random from a container, decided the further fate of the child.’ There was a wooden box in the reception area bearing the inscription: ‘Dear visitors, to empathize with the desperate situation of a mother who wants to give up her child at the Foundling Hospital, please draw a ball.’ A black ball signified that a child had been rejected.<sup>54</sup>

51 Marion Leonard and Robert Knifton, ‘Engaging Nostalgia: Popular Music and Memory in Museums’, *Sites of Popular Music Heritage: Memories, Histories, Places*, ed. Sara Cohen et al. (New York and Milton Park: Routledge, 2015), 160–73, at 169.

52 Ibid. 171.

53 Interview, 24 March 2016.

54 María del Mar Alonso Amat, *Georg Friedrich Händel im Museum. Orte der Erinnerung in Halle (Saale) und London* (Berlin and Münster: LIT Verlag, 2022), 145–46.



### 3. Social Differences and Ruptures

Social differences and historical ruptures almost always play a role in pop music exhibitions, according to our experiences, often, as seen in the examples in Essen and Roskilde, dealing with gender issues and/or the politicization of youth or discrimination against nonconformist young people. On the other hand, in their work on ‘Curating Pop’ which relates mainly to US and Australian museums, Sarah Baker et al. stress that the contribution of women to pop music is hardly acknowledged in exhibitions.<sup>55</sup> In Germany, popular music of the Third Reich era is critically addressed in various pop music displays. In 2014, the rock’n’pop museum in Gronau, for instance, presented a special exhibition entitled ‘100 Years of German Schlager’, with an extensive section on ‘The Schlager of the Nazi Era’. The display focused on the way in which Schlager music was used as a means of propaganda and musicians who were successful in the 1920s and forced into exile after the Nazis seized power. Until 2018, the museum’s permanent exhibition featured a section on ‘National Socialism’, which similarly dealt with music as propaganda. Going beyond the actual topic, it also dealt with the persecution of Jewish fellow citizens in general. For this purpose, a gallery of photographic portraits of persecuted and murdered Jewish artists, actors, musicians and scientists was displayed in a central location. References to social differences and historical ruptures are only sporadically found in exhibitions on European art music. Temporary exhibitions are sometimes devoted to these issues, as in the example of the exhibition ‘Handel with Heart’ in Halle.

The museum’s own history is hardly ever taken into account in music displays. One exception is the Munich City Museum, which houses a large collection of instruments. In their (meanwhile closed) music exhibition, reference was made at various points to the problematic nature of the collection and the fact that it was often no longer possible to identify the previous owners of the instruments. This applied predominantly to African, Asian and Oceanic instruments presented in the museum. From 2018 to 2019, the Munich City Museum showed a temporary exhibition on acquisitions made by the museum during the National Socialist era. An introductory text stated that the museum wanted to provide glimpses into their provenance research and in this way address its responsibility. The exhibition included musical instruments owned by the Jewish art dealer Ludwig Bernheimer which had been under unclear circumstances after the Bernheimer family had to leave Germany.<sup>56</sup> A temporary exhibition at the Beethoven-Haus Bonn in 2017 also dealt critically with its own history during the Nazi era, taking into account not only the exhibition area, but also concert events and research activities. Based on

55 Sarah Baker, Luran Istvandity, and Raphaël Nowak, *Curating Pop: Exhibiting Popular Music in the Museum* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 73.

56 Vanessa Maria Voigt and Henning Rader, ‘Die “Arisierung” der L. Bernheimer KG 1939. Erwerbungen der städtischen Musikinstrumentensammlung 1940’, *Ehem. jüdischer Besitz: Erwerbungen des Münchner Stadtmuseums im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Vanessa Maria Voigt and Henning Rader (Munich: Hirmer, 2018) 179–93, at 180.

a research project, the display illustrated, as museum director Malte Boecker writes, a number of ‘new and sometimes uncomfortable insights.’<sup>57</sup>

#### 4. Visitors

In terms of audience composition and modes of reception, there are clear differences between exhibitions on pop music and European art music. Visitors to pop exhibitions turn out to be rather heterogeneous in terms of social background and previous musical knowledge. This can be seen in the case studies in Essen and Roskilde and also applies to the rock’n’pop museum in Gronau. The majority of visitors to composer museums and exhibitions on European musical instruments are musically educated (though the Mozarthaus Vienna, with its predominantly tourist audience, proved to be an exception). The result is often a detailed examination of the presentations. The Handel House Museum in London is a typical case. During our visit printed music was read, in-depth discussions ensued, and people repeatedly asked whether they were allowed to play the instruments on display.<sup>58</sup> Aesthetic intentions are often understood by the general public visiting art music museums. Our research at the museum in Leipzig and at the Musikmuseum Basel shows this particularly clearly. Words such as ‘beautiful’, ‘a beautiful house’, ‘the atmosphere is beautiful’ or, referring to the instruments, ‘beautifully made’ came up repeatedly throughout our interviews with visitors.<sup>59</sup>

When asked about general impressions, hardly any reference was made to local issues in art music exhibitions, even where the support of group identity seemed to be curatorially intended (such as in the exhibition ‘Handel with Heart’ in Halle). In pop music exhibitions, the museum visit is often characterized by personal memories. As in the case of the Rock and Pop exhibition in Essen, this may be associated with local events and places. More importantly, however, the displays seem to trigger memories of specific times in people’s lives. Accordingly, modes of reception arise that go beyond curatorial intentions. This became apparent in the example of the Rock and Pop exhibition in Essen and was even more evident during our stay in the temporary exhibition ‘100 Years of German Schlager’ in Gronau. A compilation of artefacts in the section on Nazi-era pop music was dedicated to lyricist Bruno Balz and composer Michael Jary, who together composed some of the most famous Schlager during the ‘Third Reich’ period. Artefacts from the Nazi era and also from the post-war period were on display. The presentation was intended to convey the fact that the artists had been successful even after the Second World War. During our stay, we observed a small Dutch tour group, whose members obviously enjoyed the exhibition. This joy was especially great

57 Malte Boecker, ‘Grußwort’, *Das Bonner Beethoven-Haus in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus. Begleitpublikation zur Sonderausstellung im Beethoven-Haus Bonn 10. Mai – 7. Oktober 2017* by Maria Rößner-Richarz (Bonn: Beethoven-Haus, 2017), 1.

58 María del Mar Alonso Amat et al., *Musik ausstellen*, 176.

59 Ibid. 90–91 and 180.

when someone in the group recognized a song or an interpreter, which led to a lively exchange and sometimes even to the songs being sung. Two of the visitors lingered a little longer in front of the display of Balz and Jary because they had discovered a portrait of Heidi Brühl and the vinyl record of her song ‘Wir wollen niemals auseinandergehen’ (‘We never want to part’), which had been composed by Balz and Jary in the 1960s. The two visitors were a bit older, and the hit song might have meant something to them in their youth and they began to sing the song loudly and with fervour. Seemingly, the fact that they were in the room dedicated to the subject of ‘Schlager of the Nazi Era’ did not matter to them in the slightest.

### *Summary notes and concluding thoughts*

Efforts to promote a sense of community can be discerned in some music exhibitions. However, although local themes are often linked to achievements of the local group, the latter is often not the primary target group and different intentions can be detected. Moreover, there are examples where the local is not presented as something outstanding. Emotive concepts also often arise independently of efforts to promote community and auratic aspects are generally found in music exhibitions. Regarding visitor reactions, significant differences emerge between presentations devoted to European art music (musical instrument or composer exhibitions) and displays of pop music themes. In art music exhibitions, local references and events from the history of a local group are of minor importance as features that make the museum visit a special experience. In pop exhibitions, the museum narratives presented often evoke nostalgic feelings. This is especially the case for members of the middle and older generations. The irretrievability of youth seems to play an important role here, although longing is often combined with the feeling of being entertained. A tendency towards ‘restorative nostalgia’ is not discernible. According to recent social psychological studies, nostalgia serves to promote optimism as a ‘pathway through which the past bolsters the present, which then brightens the future.’<sup>60</sup> This initially concerns the individual episodic memory. Nevertheless, the studies show that nostalgic feelings can promote ‘social connectedness’<sup>61</sup>, which in turn corresponds to our experience of pop music exhibitions as highly communicative places, where visitors, inspired by the museum narratives, describe and share experiences. Nostalgia and communication presumably strengthen the sense of community. Yet, this does not belong to the level of cultural memory but communicative memory. Local historical narratives obviously promote communicative memory in pop music exhibitions. As already mentioned, cultural memory in Jan Assmann’s sense encompasses a more distant past that is not linked to personal memories. Based on curatorial

60 Weing-Yee Cheung et al., ‘Back to the Future: Nostalgia Increases Optimism’, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39/11 (2013), 1484–96, at 1492.

61 *Ibid.* 1490

intentions and the way visitors receive museum narratives, one could conclude from our research that music exhibitions are rather insignificant as agencies of cultural memory. This implies the notion that when museum narratives serve as ‘building blocks’ of cultural memory, they directly and consciously spark feelings of belonging among visitors. The interrelationships, though, are presumably more intricate. According to Assmann, cultural memory is based on the knowledge and activities of experts. The same applies to the museum presentations studied, all of which were designed by professional curators. Curating music exhibitions is apparently a matter for representatives of the ‘authorized heritage discourse’. For exhibitions on the history of local groups, the recognised experts select individual historical events, facts, and artefacts that they believe are relevant for the group (frequently drawing on the holdings of heritage sites, such as museum repositories and archives). Therefore, historically oriented music exhibitions can be understood as agencies of cultural memory, at least in the sense that they offer the possibility to become aware of aspects considered important for the history of one’s own group – regardless of curatorial intentions and the way in which the majority of visitors experience the exhibitions. Furthermore, one might ask whether the establishment of historically oriented local museums as such does not already support cultural remembering, quite independent of the topics presented. Museums can be understood as monuments. Accordingly, the buildings in which museum collections are housed and presented often have a special significance, be it in historical or architectural terms. Monuments, Marija Kulišić and Miroslav Tuđmann argue, ‘transmit messages through space’, but are also ‘themselves a message in the space’.<sup>62</sup>

The question of how to deal with the ethical component is relevant to all music exhibitions, regardless of their target audiences and intentions, and thus regardless of the extent to which they seek to promote a common identity. In this respect, there are again clear differences between exhibitions on pop music and European art music. While social difference is rarely taken into account in museums dealing with European art music, pop music displays often adopt approaches in which difference and diversity play a role. Negative events in the group’s history are also taken into account in pop music displays, whereas they are hardly considered in presentations dedicated to European art music. The museum’s own history is occasionally addressed in music exhibitions; however, the provenance of the objects on display is only very rarely discussed, which is surprising given that the provenance has recently been the subject of much public debate, accompanied by extensive internal and external museum studies.

62 Marija Kulišić and Miroslav Tuđmann, ‘Monument as a Form of Collective Memory and Public Knowledge’, *The Future of Information Sciences: INfuture 2009. – Digital Resources and Knowledge Sharing*, ed. Hrvoje Stančić et al. (Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 2009), 125–33, at 130.

## Abstract

This paper deals with historically oriented museum displays in various West and Central European countries that focus on musical themes in local regions. Drawing on concepts and considerations of memory and heritage studies, I examine how local historical references are conveyed in these exhibitions and to what extent the latter can be seen as institutions promoting group identity. Jan Assmann's distinction between communicative and cultural memory, according to which communicative memory is based on everyday communication and refers to a rather recent past, while cultural memory focuses on events that happened further back in time, proves useful in this context. It turns out that there are many different ways of dealing with the past in the exhibitions and different forms of access, depending on the interests and prior knowledge of the visitors. Exhibitions on pop music themes support communicative memory in that the museum narratives encourage communication and thus promote cohesion. Regarding curatorial concepts and modes of reception, the formation of group identity seems to play a rather minor role in exhibitions on European art music. These exhibitions can still be regarded as sites of cultural memory, as they usually offer at least the opportunity to explore aspects of the (distant) history of one's own group.

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