

"RADICALLY TENDER" - A MUSICAL, WALK-IN SPATIAL STAGING BY THE BLUESCREEN ENSEMBLE OLDENBURG

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ABSTRACT

"Democracy needs inclusion." is this year's motto of Jürgen Dusel, Representative for Matters relating to People with Disabilities of the Federal Government of Germany. [1] Katrin Langensiepen, EU-Representative for social and inclusion policy, is committed to a social and inclusive Europe. "Dealing with people with disabilities has generally become more natural," says the 45-year-old Green politician, who speaks openly about her life with her visible disability. [2] People with and without disabilities now work together in many areas of life. Inclusive projects are successfully implemented at schools, in vocational training and in working life. In the leisure sector, inclusion has become established above all in sport and the practice of art (painting, modeling, making music, dancing). The private German social organization "Aktion Mensch" supports up to 1,000 projects a month through lottery proceeds in order to improve the living conditions of people with and without disabilities. Projects of the "Blauschimmel Atelier" in Oldenburg are also financially supported. [3]

"The Blauschimmel Atelier in Oldenburg/Germany has been a place of active inclusion since 1998. It is an open place for every form of artistic diversity." [4, 2] The BlueScreen Ensemble has been making blue music in the Blauschimmel Atelier for over 20 years. Their agenda includes regular weekly meetings and participation in artistic and socio-cultural projects that take place across the region.

The highlight for the BlueScreen Ensemble in 2022 was the musical, walk-in spatial production "radikal zart", which took place on September 25 as part of a festival for contemporary, experimental improvised music in the Art Gallery in Wilhelmshaven. This event was documented on video. A short collage of the live recording has been compiled by Oldenburg media artist Jörg Scheel. The following text first refers to the collage and then uses the example of the BlueScreen ensemble to highlight key aspects of working with inclusive groups.

Keywords:

Improvisation, sound stations, working conditions, performing art, people with and without disabilities, joy of discovery, creative power, musical instruments, working structures, rules, rituals.

The musical, walk-in spatial production "radikal zart" by the BlueScreen Ensemble

In six minutes of fast motion, the video collage takes the viewer right into the middle of the performative events of the one-hour performance "radikal zart". The bright, narrow and, above all, deep exhibition space of the Wilhelmshaven Kunsthalle offers the twelve members of the BlueScreen ensemble, with their numerous musical instruments, sound objects and installations, ample space to make music together. Musicians dressed in black have taken up their positions in the room, sitting or standing, listen to the initial silence and gradually begin to create music with body movements, bows, mallets, fingers and hands. Playing - pausing - re-entering - setting accents - surrendering to the musical flow. The bustling activity of everyone in and with the community unfolds a delicately woven band of sound that swells and ebbs and is occasionally interrupted by powerful tones, clear bell sounds and noises that get under the skin. The audience uses the chairs provided in the room, alternating with a walk through the performative events. Listening, observing, enjoying. There is much to discover that is worth moving through **space** and approaching, see also Figs. 1 to 6.





Fig. 1 - 6: **Sound stations and musicians of the performance "radikal zart"**. (Source of the following photos: Sophia Waldvogel's video of the BlueScreen Ensemble Performance 2022 in the Art Gallery of Wilhelmshaven/Germany)

Sound stations of different sizes distributed throughout the hall serve the three levels of the room and combine the sonic experience with the visual fascination of an art exhibition. Inflated white balloons that have fallen to the floor resemble oversized snowflakes. White-painted exhibition pedestals serve as locations for smaller sound objects such as metal rods mounted vertically on a square wooden board or three wine glasses filled with water. Metal wheels with spokes placed on pedestals and thick plastic tubes in bright colors invite visitors to experiment with sound through movement. A mobile made of triangles meets a wind chime made of white hemispheres. Subtle lighting effects in blue and pink and the strong, oversized shadows cast by a centrally positioned sound station lend the performance in the exhibition hall with its white-painted concrete walls a surreal, magical quality. The audience thanked the dedicated performers, most of whom had neither learned an instrument nor acquired any knowledge of sheet music, for the artistic delight in the field of new music with enthusiastic applause.

Insights into the rehearsals of the inclusive music group BlueScreen

For a performance like this to succeed, the group needs to rehearse continuously under guidance beforehand. *"The BlueScreen Ensemble of the Blauschimmel Atelier has been making BlueMusic for over twenty years. This type of joint improvisation has evolved from artistic work with musically interested people with and without disabilities - in other words, with people with very different background. In BlauMusik everyone can meet on an equal footing, as there are few hierarchies of knowledge and prerequisites."*[5] What are the key aspects of working with an inclusive music group? As a guest musician, the author had the opportunity to experience numerous rehearsals with the BlueScreen Ensemble. For her as a music teacher, it was

enlightening to observe the guided music-making. In the following, she reports on the approach, characteristics and aims of the inclusive band project.

The aim is to make music together using simple musical means, without any previous knowledge or sheet music. Experimental improvisation in small groups lends itself to this, so that every kind of sound and noise can be perceived by the players, with the opportunity to react to it. The purpose of making music with mostly non-professionals is to have a good time. The development of the participants on a personal, social and musical level, which also takes place in this leisure activity, is recognizable. They are incorporated into the overall event, even if the musical result is not explicitly required. The founder and musical director of the band, Jochen Fried, defines the musical process broadly: "*We make art.*" Accordingly, he encourages the players through encouragement and feedback.[6] [7]

Virginia-based musician, visual artist and author Stephen Nachmanovitch has made improvisation his life's work. He emphasizes the importance of play for human development: "*Improvisation, composition, writing, painting, theater invention - every creative act is a form of play, the starting point of creativity in the human development cycle and one of the great, original functions of life. Without play, learning and evolution are impossible. Play is the root from which real art grows, it is the raw material that the artist channels and organizes with all his technique and all his knowledge.*"[8, 58]

In this context, the German neurobiologist and brain researcher Gerald Hüther focuses on the community and states: "*We are the only living beings who can not only think up something ourselves with enthusiasm, but who also need a community to do so. We would quickly lose the joy of our own discoveries and creations if the others with whom we feel connected, if not in reality, then at least in our own imagination, did not also enjoy them. And the more other people are involved, the grander or crazier what can then be conceived and created by people together becomes.*" [9, 47] "*Only when people have new experiences of self-efficacy, creative power and the joy of discovery in their own bodies and by activating their emotional centers can these experiences be sustainably anchored in their brains in the form of corresponding neuronal circuit patterns.*" [9, 134]

The German educationalist and university lecturer Olav-Axel Burow has studied team creativity in detail. His research has shown the importance of the community for the creativity of individuals: "*When it comes to releasing the untapped talents of the many, it seems to be more promising to create framework conditions that contribute to the emergence of diverse creative fields*".[10, 22] "*In encounters with others, I can release potential that I am not aware of on my own and that I cannot tap into on my own.*" [10, 23]

With its performance "*radikal zart*", the inclusive Ensemble BlueScreen has shown the musical and social qualities that can be achieved with an inclusive amateur ensemble. For many years, the „*Blauschimmel Atelier*“ in Oldenburg has offered the conditions for this to all people with and without disabilities who are interested in making music together:

- regular meetings in a safe space,
- easy-to-use musical instruments that invite experimentation,
- an experienced musical and socio-educational leader,
- the implementation of structured rehearsal work,
- verbal communication in simple language,
- making music together in free experimental improvisation,
- reflecting on what has been played and experienced as a verbal re-experience of the music.

The ensemble / the group:

Around 15 people between the ages of 18 and 70, with and without disabilities, come together once a week for band rehearsals. Some people's disabilities are obvious: three people are in wheelchairs, some people have problems with walking. The topic of disabilities and impairments is of no importance at all in making music together. What is important is the current well-being of all participants, the joy of seeing each other again and the enthusiasm for making music. Everyone is motivated and radiates good humor and warm-heartedness. This puts the whole group in a good mood right from the start. Those who can, come to the rehearsal venue independently. People with severe physical or mental disabilities bring a carer with them. Anyone who needs transportation to the rehearsal venue or home will be provided. Everyone gets the help he/she needs. Everyone is attentive and supports each other.

The management:

The founder and long-standing leader of the ensemble is the musician and theater teacher Jochen Fried. Co-leaders are the percussionist and music and dance teacher Tim Pfortner and the actor, musician, and representative for inclusion and meeting in the Blauschimmel Atelier Chaminda Cordes. The management team takes turns in conducting the weekly rehearsals, planning, and organizing the respective events together.

The rehearsal room:

The band's rehearsal room is located on the 1st floor of a building with barrier-free access, close to Oldenburg's main railway station. The rectangular room is ideal for dividing into audience area and stage. Chairs are arranged in a semi-circle and numerous musical instruments are placed on the stage.

The (musical) instruments:

A large collection of musical instruments and sound generators are stored in the studio. There are string instruments, some of which are electrically amplified, guitars, an accordion, trumpet, trombone, drum set, piano, wooden blocks, glockenspiel, gongs, ocean drum, thunder box, digital sound generators such as octopads and electric pianos, vocal microphones, and tables with various small percussion, the so-called rattling stuff. Moreover there are about ten electronic sound boxes particularly constructed for BlueScreen by Thomas Bisitz, a professional acoustician. For the weekly rehearsal, a selection of easy-to-use instruments and sound materials are placed on stage so that there is something suitable for everyone.

The weekly rehearsal:

- 1) Welcome and short exchange: everyone sits in a semi-circle, guided warm-up, getting in the mood for making music together.
- 2) Making music together takes place in several rounds and is structured as follows:
 - a) dividing the group members into people on stage and people in the audience. Assignment to the instruments is by free choice or at the suggestion of the leader. Those who need help are given it. A short joint introduction to the music. And out of the silence and the first sounds of music appear and from concentrated playing together, attentive listening and watching grows a special kind of music in accordance with that particular moment: "... and out of the silence comes the music". After the piece, applause and bowing by the musicians.
 - b) communication about the shared experience. First the musicians speak in turn. Then the audience tell about their impressions. There is a final applause for the performing group.
 - c) The last piece is often performed in the form of an open stage. In this case, people from the audience can join the musicians during the play and musicians can also go from the stage into the audience. The number of players is not limited.
- 3) Short final round: thanks from the director to all those present and farewell.

Rituals: These are important for a structured process that all those present can follow well. All rituals are guided. There is the joint warm-up, which uses coordination and breathing exercises to direct individual concentration on one's own body. Getting in the mood for making music together and communicating about the experience immediately after playing is also an essential part of making music together. Welcoming and congratulatory rituals, such as the rocket for late arrivals and on occasions the traditional birthday song for group members.

Rules of the game: Being together and playing together does not work in any group without rules. Inclusive work with BlueScreen also needs rules for dealing with each other, for handling the musical instruments, rules for playing, and for the type of music that is created together.

Rules that are known to everyone and that have an unspoken influence on behavior:

- Everyone is welcome.
- Treat other people with care.
- Handle the instruments with care.
- We make art in which every kind of sound and noise is possible.
- We start together and find a common end.

Rules that are stated before each music playing in every rehearsal:

- Listen to each other, play together, don't forget the incidental pause.
- Enjoy yourselves.
- And everyone on stage and in the audience should breathe out deeply and with pleasure.
- The music comes from the silence within you.

Play experiences / learning objectives:

- Performing a set task together with other people.
- Concentrate on your own body and remain within yourself while performing.
- Perform body movements in a controlled manner.
- Experiencing yourself in connection with other people.
- Developing enthusiasm for a common cause.
- Getting to know a wide range of musical instruments by observing, listening and playing.
- Using sound generators in a differentiated way to create with sounds.
- Develop pleasure in music making.

Equal rights and a welcoming culture

The inclusive BlueScreen Ensemble cultivates a welcoming culture where people with and without disabilities meet as equals. "Why do I make music in the BlueScreen Band?"

What does the weekly meeting with the band give me?" Some of the band members say:

Arabella: *"Because I enjoy the music. To meet other people and see different surroundings."*

Barbara: *"In the band, I encounter life in its entire, total spectrum and can experience complete freedom in the music that we create together. With respect for each other and for each other in absolute artistic freedom. Because the music is created by each of us individually, it is always a challenge to grasp the impulses of the others by listening carefully and understanding them, and to come together to create an overall sound that is simultaneously an experience for the listener. Sometimes you reach your limits, at other times the music comes naturally. You lose yourself in the music and go home refreshed and satisfied every time afterwards."*

Margret: *"I've been in the BlueScreen ensemble for about seven years and I really enjoy listening to a sound space together with other players, opening up and spontaneously following impulses from within myself and creating a collective sound. An unimagined freedom opens up for me, which I really, really appreciate and love!"*

Tim: *"I make music with the BlueScreen Ensemble because I can play so freely and unconventionally with sounds and noises in a way that is rarely done otherwise. The weekly meetings are always a musical surprise and I usually go home very inspired. Interpersonally, the ensemble has become a family that is more colorful and diverse than anywhere else."*

Jochen: *"We are an inclusive studio. We make music with everyone, with everyone who comes. People with and without disabilities, it doesn't matter, I'm not interested in that at all. Anyone can come. I'm happy about everyone who comes."*

Ulla: *"I'm fascinated by the creative abilities, the instrumental skills and the courage of the players to create exciting music at any given moment without any previous knowledge or instructions. Making music with the band is a musical and human enrichment for me every time!"*

Summary and outlook

It is important that the valuable and joyful work with inclusive groups also becomes known outside the protected rehearsal room. It is also important to involve citizens, students and pupils. In addition to the public relations work of the Blauschimmel Atelier, art projects are carried out in Oldenburg city center and in public places in the region. The "Open Stage of Blue Music" project is currently running in Oldenburg's city center until November 2024. [11] Once a month, members of the ensemble, guests and interested members gather on the stage and use their collective musical spontaneity to spread the sparks of enthusiasm to the audience. Ensemble director Jochen Fried

explained BlaueMusik at the opening concert on 8.2.24 in Oldenburg's Wilhelm 13 jazz club: "We have developed a kind of music that gets by without all the structures that are so important in normal music. It should be a free space to listen. We try to ensure that the music comes from silence. We try to make music together, listen to each other and have a good time."

References

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