

Everyone a composer: A successful collaboration in Arts and Education

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Abstract In 2014, the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp and Art Campus deSingel initiated a creative youth project, 'Iedereen Componist'. The main focus is to encourage children between 4 and 12 to start composing in an open and creative environment. Kids, with and without musical backgrounds, are invited to send a video recording of themselves playing their own compositions, and sending this to the website: www.iedereencomponist.be. All participants are invited to a free "Do-day" in deSingel, surrounded by teachers and students of the Conservatoire. Creativity is one of the main focuses of the Composition program and the Teacher Training Program, which results in this unique concept of combining three different levels of experience: lecturers, students and children. Each year the "Do-day" proves to be an inspiring, art-focused festive day with workshops and performances. A smaller number of young contestants, selected for their creations and their enthusiasm, follow a more intense series of coaching sessions by professional composers and students. During a few weeks, they learn to work with their own material, receiving a wide range of age dependent tips and tricks into composing and improvising. The focus is not just the final musical result, but the motivation to be free in improvising, without imposing heavy instruction or structures. This results into a staged concert, with the children performing their own pieces in a newly created story inspired by their music and acted out by drama students. This appreciation of their own musical creation invokes an enormous enthusiasm with all children, their families and 'fans'. Each year the appeal of the project spreads further, both geographically and socially: also some easily forgotten minority groups find their way to the project. With this open mindset, we hope 'our' children will never forget that creativity, personality and music are open for everyone to enjoy.

Keywords creativity, composing, improvising, inclusion

Introduction

Three years ago, the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp and the deSingel Arts Campus initiated a unique creative project for the young, called 'Iedereen Componist / Everyone a Composer'. The main focus is to encourage and engage young children between the ages of 4 and 12, with or without previous musical experience, to start making music in an open and creative environment and in the broadest sense of the word: playing music, composing, improvising, performing and so on.

All this takes place in a doubly professional setting: on the one hand there is the inspiring infrastructure of an international arts biotope with professional-standard concert halls,

technical installations, communication etc., and on the other there is the educational-instructional guidance and support from the Antwerp Conservatoire. 'Everyone a Composer' has therefore been integrated into two courses at the Royal Conservatoire: both the Composition and the Teacher Training courses. Creativity and its stimulation is one of the main focuses in both courses, which results in this unique concept of combining three different levels of experience: lecturers, students and children.

Everyone a Composer, an arts campus project

The work carried on at the campus provides a unique and perfect foundation for this interactive project. deSingel is an unparalleled international arts campus where the arts are not only shown, but are also learnt and created. It is a site on a large scale, with halls for performances and rooms for production in the performing arts and music, an exhibition area, a reading room, a ticket shop, offices for the various occupant-institutions, a spacious café-restaurant and numerous rooms for the Conservatoire.

The occupants of the site are: deSingel npo, a state institution that programmes, presents and produces works from the international canon and adventurous new works in the disciplines of music, theatre, dance and architecture, the Antwerp Royal Conservatoire, part of AP Hogeschool, that includes the music, dance and drama courses, as well as the associated teacher-training courses, Flanders Architecture Institute, Eastman, Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui's company, I Solisti del Vento, ChampdAction *et al.*

The various stages at deSingel are used to host performing artists associated with the international canon. When they are present, we try to bring them into contact with the students of the Conservatoire as much as is possible. They often give workshops or master-classes to the students of music and dance, and sometimes the students are part of one of the professional productions. This makes the arts campus an extremely aspirational place, with the result that students from all over the world are attracted to it.

It is a unique place where artists, makers and doers, thinkers, students and audiences meet and engage in exchanges.

For the 'Everyone a Composer' project, deSingel (programming and communication) and the Conservatoire (education, artistic experience and knowhow) combine their expertise. It is a successful example of collaboration across the boundaries of the institutions.

The reason and history of the project

'Everyone a Composer' arose out of an urgent need that both parties experienced: the necessity to constantly work on a new and solid audience base, especially for classical music. The quest, as a brand and/or organisation, to appeal to a new and young audience, both in the halls and the classrooms, at the same time signifies an investment in tomorrow's audiences and students. What is more, 'Everyone a Composer' is a project that activates children and in this way also involves their parents. This approach opens up possibilities in terms of communication and public outreach.

Everyone a Composer first came into being in 2014, initially as a project run by three partners: deSingel, the Conservatoire and Youth & Music. Each partner contributed their own expertise. deSingel provided project coordination and communication throughout, the Conservatoire supervised the winners' intensive workshops and Youth & Music helped

contact the target group and organised the family day with workshops and presentations. As a result of a change in the subsidy policy in Belgium, Youth & Music has, since last season, no longer received a grant. So on the last occasion it was organised exclusively by the partners on the arts campus, deSingel and the Conservatoire. From now on, every aspect of the project is developed and implemented by these two partners.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjuLXEhWbDQ>

Campaign & target group

When the project was launched in 2014, it was decided to engage a 'godmother', a face with which the campaign could communicate with the media. Isolde Lasoen, a well-known drummer who appeals to both parents and their children, was for three years the ambassador of 'Everyone a Composer'. The project is now mature enough to continue without a well-known face: the participants and the students themselves are after all its most enthusiastic ambassadors.

External objectives of the project are increasing the overall awareness of the pleasure of playing and composing music, stirring children's enthusiasm for doing it themselves, actively involving parents in the project by organising presentations and building up long-term relations with the parents and children by inviting them to family concerts and other child-oriented projects at deSingel.

Internal objectives focus on the formation of the students from both the composition and the music teacher training program: teaching them to take an active, problem-solving approach to communicating with young children in the language of music in an educational setting: this is often the field in which they will later be working.

'Everyone a Composer' has its own website, with its own look and feel. As part of the media approach by deSingel we are investing in a radio spot on national radio (with parents and grandparents as the target group), launching a trailer inviting specific target groups via the social media, mobilising the press (broad communication coverage, national and regional), and entering into active partnerships with the Flemish children's broadcaster Ketnet, and there is also a printed paper campaign, with a flyer handed to children in primary education and part-time arts education.

Diversity is a fundamental principle. By involving schools, the entries mirror society. The target group is thus very broad: all children between 4 and 12 years old, with or without previous musical experience. 'Everyone is welcome'. Last season this project even attracted the attention of our Queen Mathilde and she visited the young composers:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qvdG5InC0Pc> .

Everyone a Composer: stage 1: "Do-Day"

As from the first 'Everyone a Composer', a large number of enthusiastic participants reacted to the campaign call to make and play their very own music: from 4-year-olds, using pots and pans, to more musically trained youngsters, forming duos, trios and other combinations, even up to entire class groups. All these participants, and aspiring participants, are invited to the first stage of the project: a free, interactive Do-Day in deSingel. They will be taken under the wing of lecturers and students of the Conservatoire, more specifically from the Music Teacher-Training Department: they will see to the content and the organisational and artistic supervision of the children.

Together with the lecturers in musical initiation and group music-making, the general coordinator and the press and audience development manager of 'Everyone a Composer' will select a theme that will provide the basis for the various workshops on Do-Day. This theme will then be developed in smaller groups of 2 or 3 students to create a complete workshop or 'laboratory' lasting between one and one and a half hours, which they will carry out on Do-Day with a group of child participants. The preparation of these workshops will as a whole be supervised as part of the Teacher-Training course itself. This preparatory stage has two advantages: not only is the artistic and educational quality of the workshops and labs on Do-Day itself kept high, but the experiences that the students – future teachers – gain in practice and in a professional artistic context have an enthusing, inspiring and educational effect.

The starting point for each of these 'laboratories' is an impression: a material, an episode from the history of music, a utility object (or a whole range of them), a character, an inspiring image (still or moving), a special instrument, an odd, non-existent word, etc. In this way, the children will be taken along on an adventurous journey. The intention is to generate a piece of music, a soundscape, a sound setting, a percussion game, a sound installation or anything of this sort. The work is to be approached cooperatively – the supervisor and the children work together to shape the 'composition' – paying particular attention to creating a broad sensory experience and atmosphere. The students introduce specific musical parameters in order to raise the musical level of the 'inventions'.

Music will often be played to stimulate the imagination and the children learn something about the composer, the performers, or the time or place when or where the music was written; ears will be pricked up to hear what instruments are being played and if feasible the students impress and inspire the children with their musical talent 'from close-up'. In many cases, movement will be used to experience the music in a physical way, and of course the children's voices will be employed to generate musical phrases and to enjoy making music together. Depending on the work process and the speed of the group's reactions, work will be done on visualising and performing the composition.

The production, organisation and content of the actual pattern of the Do-Day is reviewed and updated each year, always with a number of goals in mind: to reach a larger and the most varied possible audience, to be able to keep on offering a varied and activating range of activities, and to become a regular fixture in the calendar of the families participating. In addition, we want to stimulate the children's own creativity so that those who have not yet submitted an entry now still feel spurred on and inspired to make a piece of music at home, either alone or with siblings or friends, and send it in before the deadline several days / weeks later, and thereby qualify for the second stage of 'Everyone a Composer': the composition and improvisation workshops.

Everyone a Composer: stage 2: Composition and improvisation workshops

Part of the campaign call to children to make their own music consists of making a video recording of themselves playing their own compositions and sending it to the website: www.iedereencomponist.be. From these entries the lecturers in composition at the Conservatoire select a smaller number for a more intensive training period. Musical and

instrumental knowhow is not the main selection criterion: in this project, creativity, enthusiasm, originality and passion are more important.

For a period of several months, each child or group is invited to the Conservatoire, where they are linked to their 'own' student-composers and their respective lecturers. The most important objective at this stage too is to stimulate the creativity of very young musicians and give them tools to help them in this creative process. They are clearly not necessarily aiming to become real composers. However it is essential that they do not simply reproduce previously composed pieces and that they make their own musical material.

In the workshops the children learn to work with their own material: it is very important that the children's concept is preserved. The first step is to familiarise the students with the children and their pieces of music. What inspired them, how did they give shape to it, which aspect did they find easy, and where would they most like to have help?

The children are then given short, relevant suggestions to improve or add to certain passages or difficulties. The students try, step-by-step, to broaden their musical horizons in terms of style, form (e.g. A B A, repetitions, etc.), the development of the melody (e.g. question and answer, variations, etc.), harmony (e.g. a new or expanded chord scheme), dynamics (build-up, contrasts etc.), rhythmic variation and/or notation (graphic or refined score, etc.). All this contributes to a broader sense of style and takes the children into a realm of infinite possibility.

Instrumentation will also be considered: the students will when necessary or desired play an extra part to support or complement the children and may also propose an unfamiliar or unusual range of instruments. In this way, the children are offered a framework in which they learn to develop and note down short, not too difficult pieces more purposefully, making use of their gut feeling and intuition, supplemented by creativity and focused quests.

Between coaching sessions, the children are encouraged to work with these materials to make more elaborate versions of their initial pieces, new creations and new collaboration. The focus is not only on the final musical result, but to encourage the creativity, the openness, and the motivation to feel free in their improvisation, without imposing ponderous instructions or structures on them. The final result of this phase is a staged performance involving music and theatre: inspired by the children's music, a new story will be written and directed by a professional director and acted out by drama students at the Conservatoire. The children themselves play their own music, with or without the music students, in front of their families, friends and supporters in the White Hall at deSingel. This appreciation of their musical creation stirs up enormous enthusiasm among all children, and also among their families and 'fans', and is an incentive to keep on creating.

The future

Each year the appeal of the project spreads further, both geographically and socially: it is not only middle-class children that find their way to the project, but also some easily forgotten minority groups. With the open mindset of 'Everyone a Composer', we know we have added to the confidence and happiness of a lot of children, who we hope will never forget that creativity, personality and music are open for everyone to enjoy.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-mxhdCV2X0>

www.iedereencomponist.be

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