

Transposition:

A Project for Cultural Change

Geir Johnson⁺ (Norway)

Abstract

In this text I take the liberty to present Transposition, a large-scale cultural exchange program that was founded in 2006, with the aim of improving the links between the Vietnamese and Norwegian music scenes. Funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the project is today the largest international music project supported by the Norwegian government, and employ or involve several hundred musician and students every year, through teaching, performance, creating or disseminating music in Vietnam and Norway.

Keywords: *Development, Cultural Exchange, Music, Transposition, Vietnam, Norway*

⁺ Geir Johnson, Artistic Director, Transposition, MIC (Music Information Centre), Norway. email: geir@mic.no

Introduction

This article will take you through some of the aspects of the project, who the partners are, why it was formed, what we are doing and where it might take us. Since 2005 I have been involved in a process to build relations between Vietnamese and Norwegian music institutions, called Transposition. The aim of the project has been to develop collaboration links and strategies between seven Norwegian and five Vietnamese music institutions, and it is now moving into its second three-year term of support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway. The original was created while I was in position as Managing and Executive Director of the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival. This position enabled me to have dialogues with a large number of music institutions in many countries, and somewhere along the way the following idea slowly came to me: What if the idea of a festival was turned the other way round? A festival is like a cultural magnet, attracting the attention of a wide number of international partners, who meet in this joint focus for two weeks of performance. But what would happen if one used this focus to create a new basis for collaboration, by initiating links between our partners, institutions, which did not necessarily know each other from before? This said – we set out to try the experiment in turning the information the other way around – instead of receiving, we would use the festival as a source of production of knowledge for presentation elsewhere.

So for three years the offices of Ultima – in addition to presenting its annual festival – also became the node of an international network for collaboration in the so-called “Third world”.

Transposition – the concept is well known among musicians for “taking something and moving into another place” – as for example when you take a piece of music and transpose it to another key, – the name seems appropriate as the project aims to establish a cultural dialogue between Vietnam and Norway by planning and carrying out various initiatives that could perhaps be described by the concept “Reciprocity”, thereby constituting a broadly conceived collaboration over several years between the professional music lives of Vietnam and Norway. In the course of the first three years of continuous activity (2007-2009) we tried to establish the foundation for an intercultural dialogue characterized by something more than sporadic visits; our ambition has all the way been to establish a lasting link between the music lives of the two nations. Presently we are developing the second phase of the project.

In this manuscript I will focus on various aspects of this collaboration, and see how we have tried to change attitudes as well as develop new participation practices from both sides.

Why Vietnam and Norway? Like two parentheses that turn their backs to each other, the geographical positioning of Norway and Vietnam may be said to frame the enormous Eurasian continent from the northwest and from the southeast. One could easily create a lot of metaphors from this kind of position,

metaphors both with and without relevance to what we are going to describe in the following, but the essential matter is there; the cultural sense of equality and inequality at the same time, that has materialized during the first four years of this process with a committed collaboration between music institutions in two highly different societies. They share one common trait, though, the fact that both societies have been considered easy to control by their neighbors for hundreds of years, thereby not offering the peoples of these communities the rights to speak for themselves until relatively late. Norway freed us from being reigned by Danish and Swedish kings only in 1905, leaving only one hundred years to take the country from large poverty into a welfare state with a strong sovereignty and freedom of speech. Vietnam, as you all know, was continuously occupied and attacked until 1975, and has had a mere 35 years to build a sovereign society.

An essential aspect has been the immediate, simultaneous manifestation of similarities and dissimilarities that have presented themselves in the first stages of the process:

Two differently structured societies, two geographical peripheries with long coastlines, long histories of occupation and a strong urge for independence along with strong traditions of popular and folkloristic culture. This project is based first and foremost on the European classical music tradition, and aims to increase the standard and professionalism of Vietnamese music institutions through long-term exchange of expertise between institutions in the two countries.

We have chosen to call the project Transposition, a term that means “to place something in a new context, or to render it in a new language, style or medium”.

Thus, one may point to some obvious resemblances, which may even constitute some kind of identities, such as:

- Two geographical peripheries, both with long coastlines.
- Two different models of societies, both with a slow degree of industrialization and modernization until recently.
- Long histories of occupation or ruling by neighboring countries, but still retain a strong national identity for self-reliance and independence.
- Strong positioning of women’s rights in the societies.
- Strong folkloristic traditions that have survived many different reigns.

The differences, like the economic and political developments in the 20th century, completely different language groups, democracy vs. one-party state, relative freedom of speech compared to relatively strong state control of the opposition, all these elements constitute the differences and reduce the possibility of communication. When it comes to direct links, it is a fact that the Vietnamese community in Norway today is the second largest Asian community, only surpassed by the Pakistanis. The Vietnamese have merged relatively easily into the Norwegian structures, probably because most of them came as boat refugees from the south, and were basically members of the catholic society in South-Vietnam with a

strong link already to European culture. Probably it was the Catholicism which made them merge relatively easy with our culture, because their religious belief is the only aspect that makes them different from other immigrant groups. Partly as a consequence of this immigration, we have seen an incredible development in the interest of Vietnamese life in general, and especially the interest in the Vietnamese society as a potential market for Norwegian products in recent years, though it is also a result of the new industries in Norway which has shaped our society, the oil business and shipping, which is building links with the Vietnamese political and economic elite. The cause for this was that the Vietnamese government tried to find reliable partners for their “new politics” from 1986 – “DOI MOI” I think it was called, and they turned to Norway for some answers on how to run a development outside the control of the most brutal capitalist societies.

Traditional Culture and Contemporary Music

It may not seem self-evident to some that a festival for contemporary European music should be involved in developing pedagogical and practical solutions for the music scene in South-East Asia. To those of you who wonder why, here is a short explanation.

Since the early 1980's I have been interested in, and intrigued by, the possibilities of mixing cultural backgrounds, and what it constitutes regarding new impulses. Although my main background has been working on the European scene, be it as choral director, as artistic director of festivals, or as programmer for ensembles, I have always sought to find the odd impulse to renew the European tradition, to let the classical and contemporary music cultures of the Europeans meet with the classical and traditional non-European cultures. By trying to bring forward the unorthodox or the contradictory, the idea has been that the European cultures need to be challenged in our time, not only from the inside, but from outside.

If you go back thirty or forty years, the only concept of “traditional music” available in our society was Norwegian folk music, which was played on the radio every Sunday afternoon, but which didn't mean anything to many of the Y generation growing up in the suburbs of Oslo, as we were already predominantly electrified by the new sounds coming out from England via nightly transmissions over Radio Luxembourg. I probably learnt more from this radio station than from all the teachers at primary school, including the need to stay up late at night to get a feel of what was going on in the world.

The first major encounter with Asian music was through the assistance of The Beatles, who made Ravi Shankar famous among western youth. Their collaboration opened up a new way to listen to music and to other ideas that proved to be decisive for the rest of my life, and although I was not ready to embrace their relationship, it made the following case clear: that music could change dramatically even with the same musicians, given that the context changed. The life of the Beatles proved that to an astonishing degree.

The political uproar of the early 1970's paved the way for a multitude of music, particularly the music tradition of Latin American subcultures, such as Cuban and Chilean folk music, even opening up for a lot of other ethnic music from these regions, like Bolivian and Peruvian songs and instrumental sounds. Their music was not only new melodies, but provided also new soundscapes, even though the production facilities behind these recordings were simple, the world behind the music was present and fascinating.

During the 1970's the population of Norway started to change. The first group of Pakistani immigrants came to Oslo, and later spread around the country. I met several of these young men, about my own age when we worked together in the municipal transport system of Oslo, and some of them were very well educated already, but with no opportunities for work in their home country, which is why they chose to come all the way to Scandinavia. Looking back at these encounters now, I realize that it still would take me some time to get to know their music, and it was through other meetings with folk music through the professional work with festivals it gained a new meaning for me in 1981, when I was presenting a new festival in Bergen together with a friend, and for the opening we invited Ustad Fateh Ali Khan. Thanks to Professor Kjell Skjellstad, who was then my teacher at the University of Oslo, we had the opportunity to invite this already legendary artist with his ensemble on their first tour to Europe, beginning at our small festival in Bergen. It was an unforgettable experience. First and foremost, the meeting with such a wonderful performer and his fantastic ensemble was in itself a unique experience. It was really hard to believe that this generous person was the enormous idol of his own country that people had told me about. The concert in itself was wonderful, but the audience was also extraordinary: At least one hundred Pakistanis living in the Bergen area had managed to get away from work – the concert took place at 2PM in the afternoon, but also a group of music celebrities attended: Gil Evans – the partner of Miles Davis for about twenty years, was present, as was a group of Nordic jazz legends, including Jan Garbarek, Jon Balke, Niels Henning, Ørsted Pedersen, and of course Kjell Skjellstad. I believe this was the first encounter between Garbarek and Khan, which would later lead to so many fantastic records.

I know that the meeting between Ustad Fateh Ali Khan and the local Pakistanis went on for many hours afterwards, as they had taken care of him and his musicians in the best possible way, with food and a private concert somewhere in town. When the musicians went to Oslo later that week, the same situation happened there. For years, I was warmly greeted by Pakistanis in both Oslo and Bergen for having assisted in bringing Ali Khan to give concerts in Norway.

The years as Managing Director of the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival gave me for the first time a real opportunity to make choices that would make a difference. When entering this position, I was convinced that one way of opening up the contemporary music scene to the general public, was by showing the common source of all kinds of music, from ritual, dance, religious ceremonies. By inviting the Beijing Opera on a Norwegian tour in 2003, by presenting the sufi dervish dance,

as well as by presenting the traditional program "Via Kaboul - Music from the Silk Road" – a presentation of 25 musicians from 12 countries in 2005, I wanted to make the audiences aware of how important the traditional and art music from the Asian parts of the world were to our own aesthetics.

My choices of traditional music met some critique from people who felt that a festival of contemporary music should aim at presenting only that – classical contemporary music from the Western world. To me, that seemed restrictive to the understanding of how music is developed, appreciated and disseminated in society. At least, how music develops historically, is also a question of what kind of impulses music can bring to other cultures. Anyway – it was after having done mixing of traditional and contemporary cultures for many years, that I started to consider the thought of how to take this idea further – by letting our own music scene interact on a more formal plane with another music scene, of which we knew little. The idea of working with Vietnam came almost naturally, as it was suggested to me. Knowing that the Vietnamese population in Norway is the second largest Asian-Norwegian subculture, it seemed like an interesting aspect to research. That there are certain inherent contradictions in this between those leaving Vietnam in the late 1970's, and those who stayed on, would only later be directly evident to me. So after some months of research and discussion, the project was launched in January 2007.

Short Introduction to the Project Itself

The core idea of Transposition is about change. Change in values, in qualities, in understanding your relation to the world in its broadest sense, by letting Asian and European musicians develop a mutual understanding of musicianship and humanity.

Transposition aims to establish a cultural dialogue between Vietnam and Norway by planning and carrying out various initiatives which may be described by the concept "Reciprocity", thereby constituting a broadly conceived collaboration over several years between the professional music lives of Vietnam and Norway. The core of the matter is repetition, as we have started to work with the Vietnamese musicians by asking them what are the main obstacles for the development of their music life and musicianship, and by responding to these needs. In the course of four years' continuous activity we have laid the foundation for an intercultural dialogue characterized by something more than sporadic visits; our ambition is to establish a lasting link between the music lives of the two nations.

The basic ideas behind Transposition are:

- To create a basis for interaction between Norwegian and Vietnamese musicians.
- To transfer expertise at various levels from Norwegian to Vietnamese music institutions.
- To help develop a dynamism within the Vietnamese institutions with regard to the maintenance and care of musical instruments, sheet music and performing rights, as well as knowledge of performance techniques and traditions.

- To introduce Vietnamese music life to Norway in various ways and in various forums.

The task is both complex and extensive, and we are constantly seeking to improve schemes for collaboration and direct contact, seeking to reduce bureaucracy. We have striven to give musicians, teachers and students in Hanoi and HCMC equal treatment. This is important for several reasons: The country's political centre lies in Hanoi, with the natural consequence that the inhabitants and institutions of HCMC to a certain extent feel set aside. This is supported by the fact that the orchestra in Hanoi has more resources and is more active than its counterpart in HCMC. The music scenes in these two cities are, therefore, very different. The music conservatory in HCMC is in fact larger than that in Hanoi, since it also caters for 1000 students in Hue - thus it seems fair to equate the music life of these two cities. But the fact that the government lays down more resources in Hanoi creates a situation of unbalance plus the fact that the embassies constitute a second market for the institutions in Hanoi, thus making a life as a professional musician more possible there. This project represent an attempt to cover the needs that representatives of Vietnam's music life outlined in their meetings with us at the first meetings in the autumn of 2005.

We established links between the following institutions:

- Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival, established in 1990.
- MIC – The Norwegian Music Information Centre, established in 1979.
- Forsvarets Musikk, the State Defense Wind Ensembles, an organization consisting of five professional wind ensembles situated in different Norwegian cities.
- Norsk komponistforening, The Norwegian Association of Composers, organizing all 150 professional composers of classical and contemporary music.
- Baratt Due, The Barratt Due Music Institute, a pedagogical institution primarily focusing on the development of young talents.
- BIT20 Ensemble – an ensemble concerned with the performance of contemporary music, situated in Bergen's western part.
- Bodø Sinfonietta, an ensemble concerned with the performance of contemporary music, situated in Bodø, in the Northern part of the country: This is now part of the Arctic Symphony Orchestra, a new orchestra, which was formed last year.
- Trondheim Soloists, a leading chamber orchestra that travels around the world accompanying some of the leading soloists on the international market, such as Anne Sophie Mutter, but who also runs a talent school for young children in their home town.

In the first phase of Transposition, the Ultima festival acted as its initiator and governing body. For the second phase, this function has moved to the MIC - The Norwegian Music Information Centre that began as of 2010.

From Vietnam the following partners are active:

- VNSO, The Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra, Hanoi
- HBSO, The Ho Chi Minh Ballet, Symphony orchestra and Opera, Saigon
- VNAM, The Vietnam National Academy of Music, Hanoi
- HCMC-C, The Ho Chi Minh Conservatory of Music, Saigon
- VIM, The Vietnam Institute of Musicology, Hanoi

Originally, there were only two projects planned. One project was to be initiated in Hanoi, directed principally at the Vietnam National Symphony Orchestra, involving expertise promoting the development and professional development of the orchestra. Another project was to be initiated in HCMC, principally with the aim of strengthening the city's music education situation with the assistance of Norwegian and Norwegian-financed staff, resources and infrastructure. In addition to these main projects we aimed at initiating smaller-scale projects at the music conservatory in Hanoi and in the orchestra at HCMC. However, all these projects have developed into self-contained and complex structures, whereby each institutional partner has established links with various other partners, resulting from the discussions with the project management when unveiling reasons for cross-collaboration. Although the project originally intended to be an institution-to-institution project, the support is in many ways directed to individual users, and we encourage the individual responsibility of the project within the frame of the institutions.

Building Confidence Across Cultures

How does one go about establishing links with music institutions in a country with which one is not familiar, and where there are no links through language or other natural cultural preconditions? Our methodological approach for creating the confidence between the Vietnamese and Norwegian institutions has been based on the idea of creating a mutual, reciprocal dialogue in a long-term perspective. For this it was vital in the first phase that Norwegian and Vietnamese were treated as equal languages in the project, with English as a common third language. A major aspect of the difficulty of understanding between Asian and European culture lies in the interpretation of non-verbal codes, those that have to do with how one understands acceptance or insecurity - in other words how trust is built in a communicative relationship. Everyone knows, of course, that in the arts field, the core of the matter is to recognize your partner's artistic level. An opera house would only want to work with another opera house, first and foremost on the basis of equality, or by transferring knowledge through collaboration. But it has to be a professional exchange to get it to last more than one simple time. So, if a symphony orchestra wants to work with another orchestra, there has to be some kind of recognition, some levels, strategies or qualities that are recognized. Another problem has been the fact that the Vietnamese have experienced that a number of European institutions have shown interest in coming over to "show themselves off" without really contributing anything. They have come for one visit, for instance to make a festival of their own music in Vietnam, and then left

again. In this perspective it has been important for us to show that our project seeks to realize the promises it has made by being a consistent long-term partner. We have considered it important to have Vietnamese project coordinators both in Vietnam and in Norway in order to ensure that dialogue between the institutions is as equal and fleeting as possible.

At Whom is the Project Aimed?

Why seek to strengthen European music tradition in Vietnam? The answer is actually quite simple: It is what the Vietnamese want themselves. Vietnam has centuries old links with Europe, mainly as a result of a French presence there for over one hundred years; the country's active music scene is influenced by the fact that many musicians have studied abroad. For several decades the Vietnamese had strong links with the Soviet Union, and many of the leading musicians there studied at the Tchaikovsky conservatory in Moscow in the 1970s and 80s. The government administration is aware of this situation and wishes to create favorable conditions for professional music life in western style; currently they maintain a symphony orchestra in each of the two largest cities. Many musicians went from Vietnam and overseas to study, before the WWII mainly to France, then from the 1950's to the Soviet Union, and after the collapse of the East Block, some students have gone to other Asian countries, others have gone to Western Europe (like Sweden), and a few have managed to go to the United States. Although working conditions in Vietnamese orchestras are harsh, and nowhere near the expectations of a professional musician in most other countries, the people seem to be coming back after studying, because they want to make a cultural difference in their own country. But classical musicianship is not held in high esteem, jobs are scarce and badly paid, and more often than not you will hear the same musicians playing in the Hanoi Opera, and in the bars or hotels surrounding the opera house.

Additionally we see that Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city have a functioning music conservatory each with approximately 1500 students. At the conservatory in Ho Chi Minh City there is also a regional training program involving a further 1000 students, so that the total number of students in both cities is somewhere around 4000. So studying music is popular, but not working as a musician.

In the rehearsal hall of the VNSO there is a symbolic painting hanging over the door. It is painted after a photo, so it depicts a true event in the life of the orchestra: The night that the great leader himself, Ho Chi Minh, conducted the orchestra in a concert. I don't know how much he did, was it only a few bars, or perhaps a movement of a symphony? But he is there, pictured in white jacket, with the baton in his hand, with his recognizable beard, turning towards the photographer, and he looks so happy – so incredibly full of sheer happiness, that one understands that this must have been an important event in his life. I think it is worth to remember that the VNSO was formed as late as in 1959. That is before the American war - which is what they call it in Vietnam - even started, and the orchestra has been running all the time, albeit on a very reduced level. But this is in a country that has been at war with intruders for hundreds of years – and still they had the

energy and found the resources to build a symphony orchestra. It was so to speak a symbol of the country wanting to take part in a bigger world and a larger cultural tradition.

Reciprocity

As I stated, the project has as its basis the reciprocity between partners from the two countries. The recipients in Vietnam and Norway have welcomed the initiative, and many of the participants have themselves been pro-active in formulating its contents. This is documented in the minutes of the meetings we have had, and can be further substantiated by emails we have received subsequently. The recipients correspond to administrators in positions of authority in the respective institutions, as well as teachers and artistic personnel.

This perspective was further exemplified and confirmed during our very first meeting at the Ministry of Culture and Information in Hanoi. We have chosen to focus on direct collaboration with the aforementioned institutions, since they are best able to communicate their needs, and to suggest how we can build up an interaction between the music lives of Vietnam and Norway. The Ministry has never produced any obstacles to the project, and we have been granted full freedom to work within the institutions and with our partners.

There is a widespread wish to enable periods of study in Norway for Vietnamese students and musicians, who would further strengthen a mutual understanding of the two countries' different histories. In order to achieve this, we are currently trying to develop the Transposition program.

We believe that this project will lead to increased interest in traditional Vietnamese music in Norway. There is already a widespread interest in 'world music' in Norway; Vietnamese traditions, however, have not had a particularly broad exposure in this context. It will be possible to rectify this situation with visiting performances at various festivals and folk music forums in Norway. Visiting performances such as these will, however, not be part of Transposition to begin with, although contact may be established between interested parties.

We believe that Transposition has the potential to generate a new interest in Vietnamese culture among the Norwegian population, and create an awareness of the present links between Norway and the Vietnamese population in Norway. Indications from the Norwegian-Vietnamese segment suggest that this is a project they would welcome – although it is not a project, which can necessarily speak on their behalf. But very few cultural projects have been aimed at the large contingency of Vietnamese who came to Norway in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and we believe that this project will have a wide audience. The Vietnamese community in Norway has for the main part been very good at integration into the society, while perhaps not so good at communicating their position, nor taking part in the public and political life.

Disposition of the Project

In order to analyze the situation, we tried to divide our work into three areas, of which b constitutes the main focus of the project:

- a. Institution building
- b. Competence building (playing, conducting, and teaching)
- c. Exchange on intellectual property rights

In collaboration with the Music Information Centre Norway (MIC) in Oslo we aim to stimulate increased knowledge and awareness in the field of European classical music performance in Vietnam with the aid of the following initiatives:

- Support for the improvement of the library situation at the relevant collaborating institutions administrative offices.
- Help in establishing links with international music publishers.
- Assistance in developing administrative routines in conjunction with the
- Dissemination of knowledge regarding sheet music and other parts.
- Development of information strategies related to the institutions' public activities

From the autumn of 2007 MIC was able to establish links with leading international partners in the publishing sector, and with music information centers in other countries with a view to formulating concrete initiatives, which could improve the situation for each individual institution. For instance, the project helped build new libraries for each of the symphony orchestras, consisting of scores and parts of about 400 works of the main repertoire of any orchestra, thus making them more or less independent of illegal copying of material, which was the case when we started to work there.

In the autumn of 2007 we also helped organize a national conference in Hanoi on intellectual property rights, where more than 80 persons from the Vietnamese cultural and public sector attended. This was said to be the first conference on the discussion of intellectual property, and it was very necessary, since Vietnam had acknowledged the Berne convention that same year, and obviously needed to improve their work in the field. Since then, a whole new sector is developing in Vietnam, taking care of intellectual rights in all fields, also in cooperation with our partner NORCODE, which is a joint bureau of all Norwegian property rights associations. This link is now working parallel to our initiative.

However, there is still much more to be done in this field, as this work is only in its infancy. In the course of 2010, a strategy will be developed for each of the institutions with the goal of establishing a modern communications service to reach the audience with a more systematic presentation of their activities. We have already done something to update the Internet sites and systems, but need to go beyond that, and train the administration forces, which are the supportive apparatus of each institution.

In the course of 2012 all the institutions should have updated music libraries, better access to international networks of knowledge and development in the arts sector, and thus better functioning information strategies.

Cultural Diversity and Social Change

One of the main aspects of modernization in the world today is the vital aspect of how to maintain cultural diversity under the enormous pressure of multinational media consumer society. I should say that Vietnam is no different from any other country, except for the fact that the government seems to have a bit more active approach to it than in many other countries, and though the country is still quite poor, certain structures exist that make possible some kind of cultural diversity. So how does one go about maintaining cultural diversity in Vietnam? In my opinion, one central aspect in order to understand the Vietnamese communism as opposed to the Eastern European versions of communism in the mid 20th century, one has to see how the Vietnamese government has been willing to maintain cultural diversity over the years, by letting the various ethnic cultures go on with their own lives, more or less. Undoubtedly there has been political persecution here as well over the years, and still there are political prisoners.

When it comes to the field of traditional music, there is a widespread idea that this culture has to be supported in order to survive the fast commercialism that is currently developing. I have not been able to study the topic in detail, but here is what I have understood from meeting and talking to various people over the years. Today each community has its cultural secretary, whose main task is said to be to supervise the practice of ethnic culture in the region. More than 1800 people seem to have this position, as far as I have been told. However, in these years, Vietnam – like the rest of the world - is going through a modernization, which is so fast and widespread that there is a strong fear of seeing a lot of ethnic subcultures disappear if nothing more sustainable is done. And then there is the fear that, since the society was never a capitalist country before, the population is all the more vulnerable to commercialization, since there appears to be very few defense systems against the new impact of the global media and their commercial pressure.

What About the Freedom of Speech?

Many people would probably ask what is our understanding of the freedom of speech in Vietnam. Well, it is definitely a complex issue, which I don't feel qualified to analyze even after having visited the country ten times over the last five years. The truth is, we have ourselves not encountered many problems in meeting or working with anyone we have wanted to work with or meet, during these years. Generally speaking, the government has been very supportive, and never asked for any reports on our work, giving us access to work with whomever we want to. Perhaps the music sector is seen as a potentially unproblematic sector, at least definitely more so than the issues that for instance documentary filmmakers would encounter when trying to work independently in Vietnam. Yet, the fact that almost one hundred international musicians, teachers and conductors meet and

work with the Vietnamese students and professional musicians every year, the fact that several Vietnamese musicians are being offered the possibility to travel to visit conferences, concerts, teaching institutions in the Western world, provide for strong personal links with “open” societies. And yet we know there are problems; from persons and organizations directly involved in the human rights issues. We are informed that the situation is changing, not necessarily to the better in these years. There is obviously a tension in the society about the distribution of power and the freedom of access to the media. But what can we do? Perhaps the best example is what is currently happening between the music teachers of Barratt Due and the students in Hanoi, where one teacher stated that in order to get the Vietnamese students to play better, he had to convince the students that it was not dangerous to look him in the eyes. Perhaps it was a cultural factor that kept the young girl from looking at the mature man while he was playing, but he made her look at him, so that she was able to discover what went on in his mind while he played. In a sense, he managed to create a freedom of expression in her mind. That was perhaps the core of the matter, at least when it comes to music.

The Objective of Transposition

In order to ensure a professional and unbiased evaluation of Transposition the project was evaluated in 2009, meeting with all the participating parties for interviews and discussions, with the aim of writing a report presenting the predominant views and opinions. The report was very positive, and stated that the cooperation practices established in Transposition no doubt created a new understanding of how to build links between international institutions, and could be said to renew the Norwegian strategies for support of institutions in the third world. We believe that this report paved the way for a new period of the project, which we are now about to begin, with renewed effort and strength.

During this period we will continue to develop forms of more in-depth collaborations, letting Vietnamese young talents meet young talents of other countries. We also aim towards training the teachers of the conservatories in music pedagogy. Can there be such a goal as a final goal in the field of music? I don't think so, but if there is one, then it is related to the continuous understanding of how a talent can be nurtured and realized under ever better conditions.

But first and foremost: We are never doing anything that the Vietnamese part does not want to happen.

Objectives

1. Identifying and exploring social issues and problems in urban environments and the space through the arts.
2. Exploring new art forms and creative initiatives in city environments across the spectrum of artistic expressions (music, dance, visual arts, photography, design etc.).

3. Identifying areas for future work and capacity building in urban culture studies.

Our project in Vietnam is not necessarily an experimental project, since it does not pose new questions about where culture may be going. It does not identify new problems or social issues within the society itself. Rather, it may be seen as a modest attempt at supporting what is already there, by helping to solve some of the daily problems of the existing institutions, by providing resources to ensure continuous better training as well as better international networking, by improving the standards of performance on many levels, from the administrative person to the soloist, from the youngest talent to the mature musician. Through this way of collaborating, we try to find answers to some direct needs among the leading musicians of today's Vietnam. Through this work we are slowly reaching towards problem no 3, "Identifying areas for future work and capacity building in urban culture". We know a lot more about the situation in Vietnamese music than we did five years ago, and I am quite sure they also know a lot more themselves, after these first three years. What I have experienced during these years is a growing pride in the music scene in Vietnam, with higher ambitions. In HCMC, the city where politicians now want to build a new opera. In Hanoi, the orchestra is continuously trying to improve their level by inviting leading conductors and soloists, by spending much time training to be better in concerts.

But there are a number of challenges to build on for the future:

- How to improve the links between the music institutions and the general public? Certainly we have only scratched the surface of this field, as the Vietnamese music institutions are very young, and do yet have a long way to go in order to build a history of development of a real arts sector.
- How can one create a closer collaboration between composers and musicians? This aspect has not yet been touched upon, and I believe there is a lot of pedagogical and strategic work to be undertaken before one can establish a closer collaboration and understanding between these groups.
- What is needed in order to be able to speak of the classical music sector in Vietnam as a dynamic sector? This is a vast issue in itself, because it means transforming the present situation from a state of representation to a state of cultivation, meaning that there must be social, cultural and economic incentives in the society that can provide for an increased importance of the state of the performing artist.

Conclusion

So – one may ask – what is really the objectives of Transposition and the development of art? In the written invitation presenting the topic of the 9th Forum on Urban Culture Research, the following problem was presented, and I quote: "How do we design the relations of the arts and a new urban future?"