

DEMANDS ON MODERN EDUCATION

Introduction

Music theater is one of the most complex and diverse art forms. It is based on the joint work of different artistic fields and addresses an audience that is interested in music, dance, theater, visual arts, digital technologies and their interfaces. Artistic degree courses that train students for a career in musical theater (composition, directing, dramaturgy, costume and stage design, singing and much more) impart an enormous range of skills, experience and knowledge. What's more, many students have potential that goes far beyond their intended field of work; nevertheless, many of them encounter obstacles and problems during their training that stand in the way of their artistic development.

Depending on their university orientation, they lack role models for diverse artistic practices and life paths. They may only encounter topics such as "interdisciplinarity" or "working in the independent scene" in passing during their studies - even though the independent scene will become the most important working environment for the majority of graduates, whether they choose it or not. Other students, on the other hand, suffer from performance and competitive thinking, the stress of success and perfectionism, as well as self-exploitation that is hazardous to their health. They are welded into narrow job profiles that may be outdated.

These experiences are symptomatic of established structures and ideas in the music theater business that require critical revision. In the following, we have summarized some wishes, demands and theses that should serve as suggestions for a contemporary renewal of the artistic education system.

Demands

- I. Questioning dominant power structures
- II. Providing spaces for new ways of working
- III. Teaching aesthetic strategies in diversity
- IV. Responding to the diversity of the working roles

I. Questioning dominant power structures

Reflection on discrimination in admission processes

- Continuous reflection and improvement of the openness of institutions towards people with different educational backgrounds, biographies, cultural backgrounds, social classes, neurodivergences and other disabilities.
- Consistent and concrete efforts towards inclusion, accessibility, equal opportunities and an awareness of intersectional discrimination in educational institutions.
- Develop a comprehensive understanding of how assumptions about art, music and theater exclude people (e.g. because it is assumed that certain skills are required for training from the outset). Potential that deviates from the norm is just as worthy of support!

Cult of the master, genius and prodigy, concepts of quality and excellence

- Actively revise role models and theater folklore of job descriptions (the screaming director, the costume designer as an emotional dumping ground, the exploited assistant, the lonely management staff)
- Dismantling the cult of genius around directors, composers and conductors.
- Confront the paradigm of the lonely, lone, suffering individual artist with concepts of effective collaboration. Students of dramaturgy should not be trained to be busy directing assistants, students of composition and conducting should not be trained to be the sole determinants.
- In artistic learning processes, allow the risk of failure, techniques of "professional dilettantism", qualities beyond mastery. Making the creative potential of unlearning tangible.

Decentralization of artistic teaching responsibility

- Teachers (especially in the main subject) should be aware of their great responsibility for the artistic development, personal development and well-being of their students. Shifting this responsibility from individuals to management networks and low-hierarchy departmental structures would counteract abuse of power, bullying and the cult of the professor.

Appointment of teachers

- Unconditional and well-organized inclusion of students in appointment processes.
- More important than success and fame are: social and pedagogical skills, availability and presence for students, diversity of artistic and professional experience and networks.

Contact and communication structures: feedback and contact points

- Easy access to clear contact structures and contact persons for all disciplines.
- Increased use and expansion of contact and communication structures between the university and students as well as expansion of existing structures (AStA or similar)
- Listen to students' opinions, wishes and needs, seek solutions in discussions and establish a present feedback culture at various levels and areas of education.
- Availability, anchoring and nationwide awareness of neutral, professional advice centers in the event of assaults, violent acts and conflicts. Destigmatization of professional support and mediation of conflict resolution processes at all levels.



Care and community

- Raising awareness of the absolute necessity of various care tasks and dependency relationships in artistic processes.
- Respecting the basic needs of the body and clear working hours and breaks.
- Consistently counteract competitive thinking, the stress of success and health-threatening self-exploitation.
- Strengthened communities should replace individual artists in a hyper-individualistic competitive struggle, and the de-individualization of processes should be normalized.

II. Providing spaces for new ways of working

Collective artistic work in everyday student life

- Testing, questioning and reflecting on democratic and process- and discussion-oriented forms of work in everyday student life.
- Create spaces to focus on non-hierarchical working methods, to experiment with different group-based modes of creation and to learn-by-doing practices of collective work.

Creative creation for all study programs

- Contrast the traditional separation between "creators" and "performers" in the creative process at least once per semester through study opportunities and supplementary exercises (interpreters/performers should stage themselves, composers/directors should play/perform themselves, etc.).
- Developing their own artistic positions, dealing with freedoms in various work structures and trying out how to deal with artistic freedom of choice.

Open-ended processes

- Experience with open-ended processes for students of all artistic subjects.
- Testing communication skills within creative processes, formulating one's own wishes and limits and relinquishing control (especially in leading positions).
- Enabling value-free spaces that allow for joint experimentation, playing, improvising, jamming as well as the desire to fail and to cross boundaries, dilettantism and the "unskilled".

Spaces for interdisciplinary work

- New and newly strengthened spatial and temporal frameworks for interdisciplinary work (e.g. institutional locations, degree programs, departments, etc.).
- More networking and exchange between departments within the universities, joint projects and courses. Always use internal university resources first for interdisciplinary projects - in terms of collaborative and logistical sustainability!
- Process support in interdisciplinary projects by people who are experienced in interdisciplinary and process-oriented working methods through their own artistic practice.



Interdisciplinary competencies

- In terms of a functioning and low-conflict interdisciplinary practice: impart a basic understanding of the different languages, methods and processes of the other arts in all artistic disciplines! Allow sufficient time for the development of a shared vocabulary in interdisciplinary projects.
- Establish reflection/feedback sessions and respectful discussions about how to work together and what to learn from each other as integral components of interdisciplinary processes as early as possible in the course!
- Focus on the transfer of knowledge and working methods in reflection formats and strengthen them through playful and workshop-like formats.

III. Teaching diverse aesthetic strategies

Interest in the world

- How can interesting art be created if it only remains in its own world? Actively break open and leave institutional and aesthetic "bubbles"!
- Actively confront the plurality of lifeworlds, counteract the virulent tendency towards "specialist idiocy".
- Active exchange, contact with people and organizations outside of academic art; engagement with things outside of one's own specialist discourse.
- Not just training for a continuous "reoccupation" of existing and possibly outdated job profiles.
- Critically examine the relevance and sustainability of your own actions again and again ("relevance" can be formulated from many different points of view).

Definition of work

- Opening up traditional, (partly) rigid understandings of the artwork as something completed/perfect/unchangeable to the artwork, which allows possibilities for the unfinished, the fragmentary, that which has been created/is created outside of traditional authorship.

Aesthetic strategies beyond the interpretation of works

- Discuss and test methods of critical examination, editing, updating, overwriting, recontextualizing and remixing.
- In an intensive, unbiased dialog with existing repertoire, new, unconventional ways of dealing with it will be made possible, reducing inhibitions and avoiding the reproduction of outdated, clichéd or irrelevant readings.

Expanded formats

- Theoretical and practical examination of artistic forms beyond traditional genres (installations, performances, durationals, happenings, improvisations; interactive, documentary, pop-culture/media-inspired formats; anti-art, trash, etc.).
- Identify, name and break with conventions of the art formats experienced and discussed during the course.
- End the devaluation of non-elitist and non-academic cultures.

Course contents

- Expansion and diversification of courses on non-academic and pop-cultural forms of expression, on the history of theater, music and art of the 20th/21st century.
- Teaching a basic understanding of all the arts and their developments across all disciplines.



IV. Responding to the diversity of the working roles

Openness

- Recognize the study period as a phase of professional development.
- Enable independent, critical educational paths.

Individualization of the training path

- Flexibility and adaptability of the study structure in terms of time and content.
- Expansion of elective areas in relation to the compulsory curriculum.
- Facilitate the attendance and recognition of non-subject-specific courses through clear communication and anchoring in the curriculum.

Promoting and recognizing student initiative

- Generous and regular release of time for extracurricular creative projects.
- Simplify the recognition of own extracurricular projects as academic achievement in the form of credit points.
- Valuing and promoting self-creation and collective projects as a central place of growth, learning and networking.

Cooperation with other universities

- More inter-university projects!
- Artistic-scientific interdisciplinary exchange, also with the humanities and natural sciences, as a breeding ground for artistic research and the opening up of (perhaps not yet established) career prospects.

Diversification of career perspectives

- The primary position of a - supposedly predetermined but often unfulfillable - career path (e.g. solo career, orchestral position, municipal theatre career, composer as "career path").
- Eliminate the primary position of a - supposedly predetermined, but often unfulfillable - career path (e.g. solo career, orchestral position, municipal theatre career, composer as a "one-person business", etc.).
- Present non-straightforward or "hybrid" careers away from the big "breakthrough".

Informing about and preparing for the career options in the independent scene

- Impart knowledge of the history, working methods, aesthetics, organizational and production forms in independent music theater.
- Impart knowledge of funding systems, fields of work, network structures, legal and insurance matters.
- Teach basic self-management and soft skills (e.g. text work from the application to the announcement text, communication strategies, time management, professional self-presentation).



Concluding remarks

The NFM Working Group on Young Talent & Education is aware that this paper is aimed at educational institutions in which very different structural starting points, efforts and movements exist - so that it is hardly possible to make generally valid demands. The constant updating of teaching and learning processes is a challenge for all educational institutions. We know that many arts education institutions and departments are already taking steps to establish and implement newer educational ideals. We expressly hope that the others will join this movement - based on their respective circumstances and characteristics.

The **Netzwerk Freies Musiktheater**

Our Netzwerk Freies Musiktheater (NFM) was founded in 2022 on the joint initiative of regional independent music theater interest groups. This was based on the shared experience that music theater, as a special branch of the independent performing arts, is confronted with similar structural problems in all regions of Germany, which can only be tackled if the existing independent music theatre scene organizes itself on a supra-regional level. As the NFM, we are therefore committed to representing the interests of those involved in independent music theater in Germany nationwide. Together, we want to offer a forum for exchange on crucial topics such as funding programs, sustainability, training and inclusion. Our network works on these topics within various working groups. Since its foundation, we have held three conferences (Berlin, Hamburg and Cologne) and further meetings (Dresden and Bremen). The regional associations and initiatives Zeitgenössisches Musiktheater Berlin (ZMB e.V.), Kölner Initiative Musiktheater (KIM) and Stimme X Zeitgenössisches Musiktheater Norddeutschland invited us to these meetings.

The aim of our network is to exchange information about the artistic and cultural policy specifics at the individual locations. We want to explore the possibilities of both intensified collaboration with each other and cooperation with established institutions. We are working together to create a national and international network and develop common cultural policy goals in order to do better justice to the diverse and dynamic activities of independent music theater.

The **AG Nachwuchs**

This position paper was written by the WG Young Talent & Education, one of currently four working groups of the NFM. Our working group brings together students, practitioners, researchers and teachers from the fields of composition, directing, dramaturgy, singing and inter-/transdisciplinary practice. Based on our different but often comparable problems and questions for established training and production facilities, we develop new ideas for training in music theater-related courses of study as a multi-perspective think tank. As a working group, we are united above all by the assumption that all these training programs should cooperate much more closely on a shared communicative and methodological basis in order to enable free and creative inter-/transdisciplinary practice. With the following paper, which was formulated in intensive discussion in summer/autumn 2023, we would like to provide people with management responsibility for universities, institutes and degree programs in particular with some ideas and suggestions for a future-oriented orientation of educational programs. At the same time, we would like to show students the possibilities and perspectives of collaborative, process-oriented, inter-/transdisciplinary forms of work and encourage them to break new ground with courage and initiative.

The NFM is very open to further exchanges of any kind. You can reach us at:

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