



# Let's Have Fun in The Philharmonic!

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Kwartludium succeeded in keeping the concentrated attention of 110 children for a whole hour with new music. Key to their success was the close contact between musicians and children and a lot of playful activities.

Evaluation by Malgorzata Zamorska

## **Background**

The energy between musicians and audience is central to the Polish ensemble Kwartludium, a small contemporary ensemble consisting of violin, clarinet, percussion and piano. Formed in 2002 and constantly commuting between the cities of Warsaw and Gdansk, the ensemble works with improvisations, graphic illustrations of the music and good old fashioned talking-with-the-audience as ways of securing the energy and understanding between the musicians and the audience.

## **Concept**

Within the New Music: New Audiences Project Kwartludium created three concerts dedicated to a new audience – children from 4 to 12 years old. The first two concerts took place at Warsaw Autumn – International Festival of Contemporary Music 2013. The third concert was presented in the Swietokrzyska Philharmonic in Kielce.

The idea for the concert comes from a very strong belief that new music should be available for young audiences, the audience that is the most open minded. Young people are free of prejudice and experience music in a free, boundless way. Basing on children's openness and curiosity the ensemble wants to be a tutor, partner and translator of contemporary music.

„Kwartludium in Wonderland” is a concert and a playground at the same time. Using the language of fairy-tales, Kwartludium invited children on a journey into the wonderful new music land. In a very skillful way this music event combined the concert of contemporary music with all activities that children love. They were invited to watch a movie, play instruments, draw pictures, move around, play in a group or just sit by themselves. It made children play music and play with music, listen to and experience new music and last but not least LIKE contemporary music.

## **The concert**

“Kwartludium in Wonderland – part II“ was the continuation of the idea of the ensemble's two first concerts, mixing the concert with workshops, but under completely different circumstances. The ensemble had chosen the Main Hall of the Swietokrzyska Philharmonic in Kielce – they had to play for a different audience in a very formal venue and context. From a child's perspective, the

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Swietokrzyska Philharmonic is a very serious music institution, a “temple” of music. Its Main Concert Hall with 500 seats inspires a feeling of respect towards the music and musicians more than a feeling of fun or relaxation. Under these circumstances Kwartludium still thought that it would be possible to cross the borders of stereotypes and maintain informal contact with the public, even in such an “official and formal” situation.

During the preparations for the concert the ensemble thought that it might be a challenge to build a close dialogue with children seated far away from the stage in an “audience closed area”. Also, they assumed that this time the audience might be less open to novelty, as the concert would be a part of the venue's established “Family Concert Series”. The audience might be rather accustomed to a classical repertoire.

As a result, the project had to be prepared differently. Kwartludium cooperated with the same people as before, but rebuilt the workshops of the event. They decided to use the space outside the hall, as well as the doors, chairs and corridors. A very important part of the concert was the time after the actual concert when they continued to perform music for the children in the grand foyer of the Philharmonic. At the same time, the parents took part in a focus group for the evaluation of the concert.

The concert aimed to:

- ▲ make new music approachable for the youngest audience
- ▲ make children like the concert and the music
- ▲ encourage children to come for similar concerts in future
- ▲ create a close relation with a the audience in an official concert hall

The concert was divided into 14 parts, with 7 short concert pieces of contemporary music and 7 activities in between the music pieces that the children were invited to participate in.

Kwartludium, consisting of Dagna Sadkowska (violin), Michał Górczyński (clarinet, bass clarinet), Piotr Nowicki (piano) and Paweł Nowicki (percussion), performed on the stage. The ensemble played the contemporary compositions and ran all workshop activities during the concert.

## **EVALUATION**

The evaluation is based on: the data from the box office, observation of 6 children and observation of the whole audience during the concert, the evaluation game for kids, the focus group with parents interviewed just after the concert and additional information from the parents about their children's reactions after the concert.

### **General information:**

110 children participated in the concert

70 parents participated in the concert

As far as number of audience is concerned the concert was a great success. In the beginning, the concert was planned in the Chamber Hall, but when all the tickets had been sold out it was decided to move the concert to the Main Concert Hall. It proved that there is an audience for such concerts dedicated to children.

## **OBSERVATION**

During the concert 6 children from 4 to 8 years old were observed. Also, the whole group was

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observed.

### **Concert part**

All 6 children that were observed during the concert were involved in the event.

They listened carefully to the music – their behaviour might be described as follows:

- they gazed at the musicians without looking away during the entire concert part (2-4 minutes)
- they did not move around when music was played
- they did not talk to each other when music was played
- their faces showed interest and curiosity
- they showed their emotions (screaming etc)

Only at the very end of the concert (last 10 minutes) 2 out of 6 observed children became distracted, their behaviour might be described as follows:

- they moved around in the chair
- their faces showed that they were bored (looking around, yawning)
- they talked to their parents or other children
- they walked around the hall and showed their lack of interest

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that such behaviour took place at the end of the concert.

### **Activities**

All 6 children eagerly participated in activities and games:

- they ran towards the stage
- they listened to the musicians telling them what to do
- they wanted to be chosen for the activities
- they made their best to follow the instructions and fully participate

When observed children were standing far away from the musician who ran the game and far away from “the centre of the game”, they were losing their concentration. Also, when the instructions were not clear to them (especially for younger children) or they did not pay attention to it, then they were somehow “outside” the activity. Such situations happened 5 times, the children's behaviour might be described as follows:

- they talked to another child
- they walked around
- they looked around
- they came back to their parents and their seat

Also, during the “Magic of drawings” game, two children did not like drawing and they were walking around during the game.

All 6 observed children expressed their interest in the event, they listened to the concert parts and participated eagerly in activities.

It is worth mentioning that it was very hard to observe 6 children in such a big venue, especially when they joined the play group (approx. 100 children) it was difficult to see them and their faces and take notes.

### **Whole group**

As for the whole group it must be noted that although the group was extremely big for the workshop (110 kids) the ensemble succeeded and engaged most of the group in the games and

activities. From the very beginning the children very eagerly approached the stage to participate in the first game. Also, the whole group was quiet and concentrated during the concert. The children remained in their seats and listened with curiosity.

Because the play group was big, when the children were standing far away from the musician who ran the game and were far away from “the centre of the game”, they were losing their concentration. Also, when the instructions were not clear to them (especially for younger children) or they did not pay attention to it, then they were somehow “outside” of the activity. Sometimes a few children (10 – 20 %) would come back to their seats. During two activities a few of them (20 – 40 %) felt uncomfortable with screaming or dancing, they reluctantly tried to do it or just stood there doing nothing.

**The general conclusion from the observation** was that the children felt relaxed in the Main Concert Hall of the Swietokrzyska Philharmonic and were eager to fully participate in all proposed activities. Just one word from the musicians was enough to make them run towards the stage to participate in a game or a task.

Also, the children were so interested in the concert that they remained concentrated during the whole event.

## **EVALUTAION GAME**

After the show, the children were asked to participate in an evaluation game. There were three pieces of paper hanging on the wall in the entrance hall. Each of them had a statement written on it:

I liked the music

I liked the games

I will come again

The task was: „Please put a sticker under the statement you agree with” and the children were given stickers. They were informed that they didn't have to put up stickers at all. Also, they could take additional stickers home. So there was no pressure on them.

The results from the evaluation game:

62 children that participated in the evaluation game liked the music

61 children that participated in the evaluation game liked the activities

66 children that participated in the evaluation game would like to attend a similar concert in the future.

It is worth noticing that it was extremely difficult to coordinate such a game with 200 people in the entrance hall and the results from this evaluation game might be influenced by other factors such as lack of stickers, parents who wanted to leave the venue sooner etc.

For the future, in the case of the Philharmonic, it should be arranged with more people to assist during the evaluation game, as in such a crowd it was hard to inform kids what to do with the stickers and coordinate the game. Also, more stickers should have been prepared. 350 stickers had been prepared, but with 110 children playing, they ran out quickly. Also there were children who did not get stickers, as they were too late for the game.

## **FOCUS GROUP WITH PARENTS**

Thanks to the cooperation with the Philharmonic, we invited 12 parents to participate in a focus

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group interview just after the concert. We gathered the parents in a quiet room next to the concert hall and served them coffee and cakes. While the parents participated in the focus group evaluation, their children participated in an additional workshop led by Dagna Sadkowska and Michal Gorczynski – they walked around the Philharmonic and played instruments with the musicians.

It must be noted that only 7 people out of 12 participated in the discussion. Only 3-4 parents answered the questions from the very beginning, some joined the discussion at the very end. The interviewer did their best to encourage parents to fully participate, but for the most questions they only received 1 or 2 replies. It also should be noted that it must have been difficult for the parents to express their feelings and opinions in public.

They talked about the concert itself and generally about participation of each family in concerts of classical and contemporary music.

Generally, the parents enjoyed the concert and what they liked most was the very good contact that the musicians had with the children. The parents were impressed that their children remained concentrated during the whole concert for over an hour.

### **What did they like most, what part might be best perceived by their children?**

The parents liked the following parts:

“Magic of Instrument, Ethnic Instrument” - a play based on Denis Pousseur's composition run by Michal Gorczynski. The parents called it “Journey around the world”. During this part Michal Gorczynski played music in a way characteristic to specific countries or continents (e.g. in African style) and the children had to guess what country it was. The parents also liked the “Kwartludium in Space” video with Aleksandra Gryka's piece *Ambeoidal*, which was called “Rocket” by kids and parents. It was stressed that this film helped them better perceive the music.

All parents emphasized that what they liked most, and what they thought was most valuable for their kids, was their participation in games and activities. They liked the parts when children could make noises with their mouths or play instruments.

At the same time they noticed that during some activities not all the children could participate at the same level. For example in the “Berlin tubes” game (inspired by Eduardo Mogueillansky's *B for Berliner Rohrpost*) there was a tunnel made by all kids, in which two kids walked with an instrument (with a musical message). Some parents mentioned that their kids were disappointed that they could not walk into the tunnel. Unfortunately, in a group of over 100 kids it was impossible that all of them would participate at the same level.

The parents also liked “Run after Alice” - a theatrical illustration to Denis Bosse's *Lettres aux sons du monde* and a part called „Magic of Play” with the „Ropes” game inspired by Sławomir Wojciechowski's *The rope of sands*, run by Pawel Nowicki.

Also the parents liked the idea of presenting the composers' photos from their childhood. They said that – unlike a photo of a serious old man from an encyclopedia – a picture of a young boy helped build a positive attitude towards a composer.

### **The parents' dislikes**

When the parents were asked what parts of the concert they did not like or what their kids might not like, or what part might be wearisome for children, they replied that contemporary music is difficult

not only for young audiences but also for them as adults. At the same time it was emphasized that it was both the positive attitude of the members of Kwartludium and the activities proposed by them that helped familiarize with those difficult and different sounds.

Generally, for the question “what did you not like about this concert” the parents kept replying that they liked the concert and everything was great and fun. There were some remarks and requests but they were of a technical or organizational nature. This enables us to draw the conclusion that the general reception of the concert was very good and the parents liked the idea of the concert and the way the Kwartludium ensemble worked with their children.

### **Recommendations from the parents**

They suggested that Kwartludium would play longer to better present themselves.

They suggested that the concert would start with a presentation of instruments, so the kids could learn more about them.

The parents proposed that after each part of the concert a musician would ask the kids about this piece and what they understood from it. Also, there was a suggestion to tell more about each piece after it had been played.

During the “Magic of drawing” play, the children firstly drew a picture and then the ensemble played it. The way the one picture out of 100 was chosen was unclear to the children and parents and also the parents proposed that this picture should be shown on the screen, so that the whole audience could see what was played at the moment.

### **Parents' motivation**

Another important topic of this discussion was the motivation of the parents. What made them and their kids come to such a concert. Most of the parents regularly attends the “Family Concert Series” and they did not pay attention to what kind of music was on the programme. The parents choose concerts in the Philharmonic because they find it a valuable free time activity. It was strongly stressed that concerts for children should take place more often in the Swietokrzyska Philharmonic.

The parents were asked: “Would your child like to participate in a contemporary music concert in the future?” They replied that their children were too young to remember this expression and understand what contemporary music is and why it is different from other kinds of music. Also, it was noticed that those differences were not discussed during the concert and the expression “contemporary music” was said only twice. One parent suggested that maybe it would be good to show an example of those differences between classical and contemporary music.

### **Reactions after the concert**

The interviewer also tried to get additional information from parents about their children's reaction after the concert.

Two mothers from the focus group agreed to ask their children about the concert at home. Unfortunately, only one mother replied to the request and sent an email with a short description of her children's reactions. Her sons (aged 4-6) said that the concert was “different” and “strange”. Both of them liked the part of the concert with the “Kwartludium in Space” video with music composed by Aleksandra Gryka. One son liked drawing, the other did not like this activity. Both boys would definitely come to such a concert in the future. When their mother asked them “would you like that somebody explained more about the music” they agreed with this statement.

As this is only one report about the children's reactions after the concert it is difficult to draw any conclusions from it.

## **GENERAL CONCLUSIONS**

Definitely both the children and their parents liked the concert and would like to participate in a similar event in future.

The concert was an important step in presenting new music to a young audience. 110 children participated in the event. 9 music pieces of 9 different contemporary composers were presented. The children listened to new music with interest and remained concentrated during the whole event. They were eager to participate in all proposed games and activities.

Although some children were too young to understand and remember the difference between contemporary music and other kinds of music, surely the event has built a positive attitude towards music and concerts in the Philharmonic. Hopefully in the future, if those children participate in concerts of contemporary music they will be more open to it, not least thanks to the positive memories about the Kwartludium ensemble musicians, which was emphasized by one of the parents.

The challenge for the ensemble was the venue and the attempt to build close contact with the audience in the Main Concert Hall of the Swietokrzyska Philharmonic. It is a concert hall with 500 seats and a stage located at a distance from the audience. It all creates quite a formal atmosphere. But thanks to various activities proposed by Kwartludium, and the children's natural ability and willingness to play, this distance was immediately shortened. The contact with the audience was very good for two reasons. Firstly, Kwartludium has a lot of experience in working in different spaces and venues. Secondly, some children regularly attend the "Family Concert Series" during which they have much more freedom to express themselves than their parents usually do at concerts in the Philharmonic.

To conclude: The idea and the scenario of the contemporary music concert for children, where short music pieces are divided by activities, was received with great enthusiasm by the children and their parents. This kind of presentation of contemporary music should be promoted among musical institutions. The young audience will surely come again for an event in which one can take active part and have fun.

## **Facts**

Ensemble: Kwartludium, 4 musicians involved

Date and time: 18<sup>th</sup> of May 2014, 11 am

Venue: Chamber Hall of Swietokrzyska Philharmonic, Kielce, Poland

Works performed:

Louis Andriessen: *Langzame Verjaaddag*

Denis Bosse: *Lettres aux son du monde*

Denis Pousseur: *Le silence du futur*

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Sławomir Wojcichowski  
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Attenders: 110 children + 70 parents