

Sound Cosmos Worlds Music — Concept

International music cultures in Wuppertal

Since May 2001 a number of extraordinary musical presentations have taken place in Wuppertal. Every month on a Thursday, the series "Sound Cosmos World Music" invites to concerts that focus on various traditional music styles from the rich fund of our world's cultures. The artists come from different parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. Highly interesting musical traditions beyond MTV and your ordinary German folklore!

Workshops and meetings in the neighbourhood, professionally moderated, build bridges to unknown worlds, foreign cultures, diverse concepts of faith and life. The culinary specialties offered after each concert round off the concept of cultural dialogue involving all senses. The concerts take place in the late afternoon, and admission is free.

The project "Sound Cosmos World Music" by this means is intended to contribute to the dialogue among cultures and religions and thus to mutual understanding and acceptance.

The broad range enhancement of cultural dialogue (meetings in schools, workshops, culinary specialties offered after the concerts) enriches the intercultural life in our town and thus opposes the growing right-wing radicalism.

The highly positive public response and the large numbers of visitors, at times even exceeding 500, confirmed that it made sense to initiate this programme and establish for it a regular and clearly defined place. In the course of our events there is a lively interest-driven exchange between foreign residents of the respective neighbourhood, members of the Thomas parish, the performing artists, friends of music, young and old.

In order to address an even broader public and to enable the residents of other parts of the city to benefit from these exceptional artistic encounters, the concerts, which originally took place at the Thomaskirche (Ostersbaum) only, have since January 2003 been rotating between three different venues in various parts of the town. The additional venues are Lutherstift (Nordstadt) and Alte Kirche Wupperfeld (Oberbarmen/Schwarzbach). For each of the summer months (June, July, August), an open air concert is scheduled.

Intercultural meeting and encounter

In each of the three neighbourhoods we offer various forms of meeting and encounter to schools of all kinds, institutions working with children, senior citizens, etc.:

- Practical workshops
music, dance, singing, building and playing of instruments
- meetings and discussions with illustrative material, texts, sound examples about religious and cultural traditions, the history, the political and social situation and other issues in the home countries of the performing groups
- the preparation of a buffet with regional specialties together with fellow citizens who come from the respective home countries of the artists. The food is served after the concerts. This creates a friendly atmosphere which provides room for talking and encourages questions, storytelling and mutual acquaintance.

Each concrete programme is drafted and realized together with the cooperating partners and the residents of the respective neighbourhoods. In this process, the principle of giving and taking is always in the focus. The institutions that take interest in one of the offers are encouraged to think up a "return gift" in the form of either songs, dances or some other little artistic presentation of their own in order to effect a genuine exchange.

Our focus lies not only on the musical performance as such, but rather on its function to open a "window" to foreign cultures and their diverse concepts of faith and life; to take away people's fears and allow them insight into these unknown worlds. Via the medium of music, we wish to appeal to the emotional experience. We want to trigger curiosity, enhance understanding and facilitate dialogue. Whether the guests come from other parts of Europe or from exotic, remote countries, is of little importance in this context. The main aim, as also explained in the following paragraph, is to overcome hostility against strangers and strengthen the contact between German and foreign fellow citizens.

Meeting strangers always involves some kind of border crossing. You have to open up, overcome your prejudices and your fear of contact. To start a conversation although one does not know each other, to ask questions, sing or dance ultimately enhances the understanding of and respect for the other's identity, but also, on the other hand, a critical awareness of one's own culture and attitudes towards life. Instead of uncertainty and suspicious demarcation, a new kind of contact and living with each other is to be initiated. The regularity of the events also creates a kind of "tradition" of meeting, encounter and dialogue between Germans and "foreigners" in the respective neighbourhoods and thus provides a basis for relationships among neighbours who used to live alongside each other in a non-caring or even suspicious way.

We already have a number of practical examples for the sustainability of this concept. To illustrate this point, we can provide on demand excerpts from the press, photos, the transcription of a radio transmission and a video copy of a TV broadcast. The broad basis of exchange - the meetings in schools and other institutions, the workshops, the culinary specialties offered after the concerts - enriches the intercultural life in our town and thus opposes the growing right-wing radicalism.

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