



A ndreas Sønning - Keys to Concert Productions and Creative Entrepreneurship

Crina Leon

“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, E-mail: crina_laurentiu@yahoo.no

Abstract

Andreas Sønning is a Norwegian flute soloist, an Associate Professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music and at the same time the owner and artistic director of Sønning Music Performance in Oslo, a company yearly producing more than 100 performances both in Norway and abroad. The company established in 1994 has had partnerships with for instance Telenor, Nordea and Total E&P Exploration Norway but has also prepared various productions for Norwegian authorities. Andreas Sønning has been a visiting professor to the Norwegian universities of Oslo and Agder and to universities, conservatories and cultural institutions in the other Northern countries, in Germany, England, Ireland, the Netherlands and USA. He has lectured extensively on creative and cultural entrepreneurship. In February 2020 he was invited to take part in the first edition of the Classix Festival in Iași, a festival whose artistic director is Dragoș Andrei Cantea, a former student of Andreas Sønning. The present interview was taken on April 22, 2020.

Rezumat

Andreas Sønning este un flautist norvegian, conferențiar la Academia Norvegiană de Muzică și, în același timp, proprietar și director artistic al companiei Sønning Music Performance din Oslo, care produce anual peste 100 de spectacole atât în Norvegia, cât și în străinătate. Compania înființată în 1994 a avut, de pildă, parteneriate cu Telenor, Nordea și Total E&P Exploration Norway, dar a pregătit, de asemenea, diverse producții pentru autoritățile norvegiene. Andreas Sønning a fost profesor invitat la universitățile norvegiene din Oslo și Agder și la universități, conservatoare și instituții culturale din celelalte țări nordice, din Germania, Anglia, Irlanda, Olanda și SUA. A ținut un număr semnificativ de prelegeri despre antreprenoriatul creativ și cultural. În februarie 2020 a fost invitat să participe la prima ediție a Festivalului Classix de la Iași, festival al cărui director artistic este Dragoș Andrei Cantea, fost student al lui Andreas Sønning. Prezentul interviu a fost realizat pe 22 aprilie 2020.

Keywords: Andreas Sønning; concert productions; creative entrepreneurship; value systems

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Photo 1. Andreas Sønning

Photo credit: Andrei Popa (The Phope), Classix Festival, Iași, 2020

1. You have spent more than 27 years in the service of culture. Can you please share from your own experience some of the ways of cooperation between culture, authorities and businesses?

Firstly, professionals, in general, need realistic self-recognition. This requisite applies especially to performing and creative artists, including people with ambitions of being artistic directors. Candidates from performing arts education are not guaranteed a job after graduation.

We must describe what our competence and features are, what we want to do, and how we can present our skills and experiences as

something particular partners, clients or audiences should want or need. We can then be providers of cultural 'products and services' by entering into Value Systems, which contain:

Value Chains - those who work together to create products and services;

Value Workshops - cooperation between us who offer products and services and those who need our expertise;

Value Networks - those who provide arenas and funding.

Value Systems include paying people in different markets and this is the overall term for potential cooperation frameworks.

There are several ways of cooperation. A huge number of artists organize themselves as sole proprietorships. They are called livelihood companies, only enough to put bread and milk on the table. We see huge benefits from establishing in supplementary competence teams as we have described with chains in value systems.

We are always stronger when we can present teams of both artistic and administrative contributors. The first piece of advice is to organize these teams in productions companies and provide cultural offers via intermediaries or directly to clients.

The second solution can be the Integrated model, where an institution, authorities or a business company hires an artistic director to lead a particular process within their internal value chain. Being an integral part of the information and marketing strategy, we can achieve that the partner provides the funding, and the artistic director can concentrate on the creative work.

2. "What we do is important, but it can also be part of something bigger," you confessed in an interview taken in Iași, in February 2020. When and how did you discover the real value of this saying?

When I grew up in Kristiansand, a small town south in Norway, I often played the flute in the church. There it was apparent to be part of a

larger setting where music had a defined purpose in the religious ceremonies.

With the integrated model, we can share live performances as tools for dissemination of values. For me, respectful communication and cooperation across social and cultural divides has been one significant value set. The Telenor company has included this as part of its value base, mirroring their technical competence as a provider of technology for mobile phones in more than 15 countries. Providing music and performing during the Nobel ceremony in Oslo 2002 was also being a small part in a bigger picture. Doing stage performances with cultural exchange, seeing many and quite different cultures melt together in a kind of harmony can also be mentioned under 'bigger picture' of values.

However, I must mention that playing the flute for people with special needs, like autistic persons gathered in institutions has been of the most meaningful. Seeing them focus their eyes, start moving their bodies and show emotions gives a feeling of being part of something bigger, something even more important than what can be perceived as more glamorous for artists.

3. Classix Festival (16-22 February 2020) was an extremely successful event in Iași from its first edition. What was your contribution in making this festival happen?

Dragoș Cantea is the successful artistic director for Classix. In 2017-18 he was my student at the Norwegian Academy of Music in the course Concert production, which also includes creative entrepreneurship for performing arts. I challenged him to do a task on building a bilateral festival between Romania and Norway. This project should be anchored with partners across sectors of society in both countries. I provided him with models and experienced cases regarding value networks and value chains. NOROCC, the Norwegian-Romanian chamber of commerce, became a key partner in this chain, where I happened to know some people. I just did what a professor should do by mentoring.

He deserves all the credit as a building master for the whole project. He has realized that the integrated model works and that he, as a brilliant

pianist, also can achieve to build something strong and sustainable in a supplementary competence team. I am proud of him. When the Classix Festival is invited to Timișoara, the Cultural City of Europe in 2021, he will have the chance to enlarge his position in a bigger picture.

4. Have you already made any future plans of cooperation with Romanian artists or institutions?

Marilen Gabriel Pirtea, principal of West University of Timișoara (WUT), initiated partnerships regarding the Cultural City of Europe in 2021, Timișoara. WUT and I are now developing a plan for a Norwegian – Romanian music festival, in the week 17-23 May 2021.

The list of performers includes: Eli Kristin Hanssveen, soprano; Håvard Gimse, pianist/professor; Per Kr. Skaland, conductor/violinist; Bjarne Magnus Jensen, violinist; Dragoș Cantea, pianist; Andreas Sønning, flutist/artistic director; Andreas Ljones, fiddler, composer, arranger; Andreas Bratlie, percussion, vocal; Silje Onstad Hålien, dancer choreographer; Ådne R. Geicke Kolbjørnshus, dancer/choreographer; Daniel Lazăr, violinist; Almir Meskovic, accordionist; Klaus Kottmann, projection design, multimedia; Kjell Habbestad, composer/professor; Lars Erik Gudim, musical arrangements/ conductor popular repertoire

We also plan for a EU Educators' seminar entitled 'Implementing innovation and entrepreneurship for performing arts in higher education', 1st edition, Timișoara European Capital of Culture, 2021. I shall lead this seminar supported by experts within the EU network European Creative Futures. I have been a founding partner and member since 2000. We have participants from CIT, Cork Ireland, Utrecht University of Applied Science, Solent University Southampton, University of Agder and the Norwegian Academy of Music, Norway.

NOROCC, represented by President Ionuț Eriksen (Norway) and Man. Dir. Andreea Mitan (Bucharest) are also partners for Sønning Music Performance in both these projects.

The Classix festival shall also be planned to be present in Timișoara. Dragoș Cantea is still the artistic director, and I serve as the Norwegian partner.

WUT developed the applications for EEA grants for these cultural exchange projects.

5. What is your working strategy for a new event? What are the steps that you follow when you have to prepare a production especially in a country you don't know very well?

Here you can see an excerpt from my book manuscript: Andreas Sønning, *Concert production and creative entrepreneurship. About concert dramaturgy and project development for cultural programs across genres, artistic expressions and cultural borders*:

A Model for an Overview

“Prior to the implementation of a specific program, it is wise to carry out an overall analysis that can be displayed as a project model with feedback functions. A model such as this will be relevant both for a musician’s independent activities as a whole and for the various projects in which he or she is considering taking part. The project model shown in Figure 1 is based on a long experience with a variety of planning and feedback tools and enables the user to assess key tasks, challenges, capacity considerations and the potential need for different analyses and processes. Reading the figure from left to right, it shows that the first step before coming up with a project is a form of marketing or sales pitch that leads to a specific assignment. This, in turn, forms the basis for defining the vision or aim of the assignment, and for identifying the target group, i.e. determining the special considerations that must be taken into account depending on who will be in the audience or taking part in another way. Here it is essential to think about the types of concrete challenges mentioned previously: Does the task involve a purely artistic effort, or is it communicating specific values, possibly across cultural boundaries? The aims and challenges form the foundation for decisions relating to content – what is needed in terms of musical content and stage effects (dance, drama, multimedia tools). Consideration must also be given to the resources available. Is there adequate access to the competence and resources needed to carry out the project, or are new resources required? Thus far, these are

only preliminary analyses and assessments. The next steps involve initiating the relevant production processes, if possible, based on dynamic interaction in a team or network and designing new analyses and plans that can be realised as a storyboard. The final phase is the implementation of the assignment itself, followed by evaluation of the various steps in the model. It may of course be necessary to go back and adjust some of the steps during the process. Maybe the cast needs to be larger, or a specialist is needed to strengthen the team. The project model (Figure 1) is intended to provide a framework for dynamic interaction and development and is not to be construed as a finished plan for the job.”¹

The feedback process indicated in the model is designed for the assessment of individual projects or programs, but the model can also be used more generally to assess implementation capacity. It can serve as a strategic tool for targeting, and perhaps customising activities in relation to tasks and target groups, and for developing competencies and capabilities that are particularly suited to a given type of job. It can also be applied to quality assure teamwork and processes, the relevance of various types of analytical tools, and the suitability of specific institutional forms.

¹ Andreas Sønnig, *Concert production and creative entrepreneurship. About concert dramaturgy and project development for cultural programs across genres, artistic expressions and cultural borders*, unpublished manuscript, 23-24.

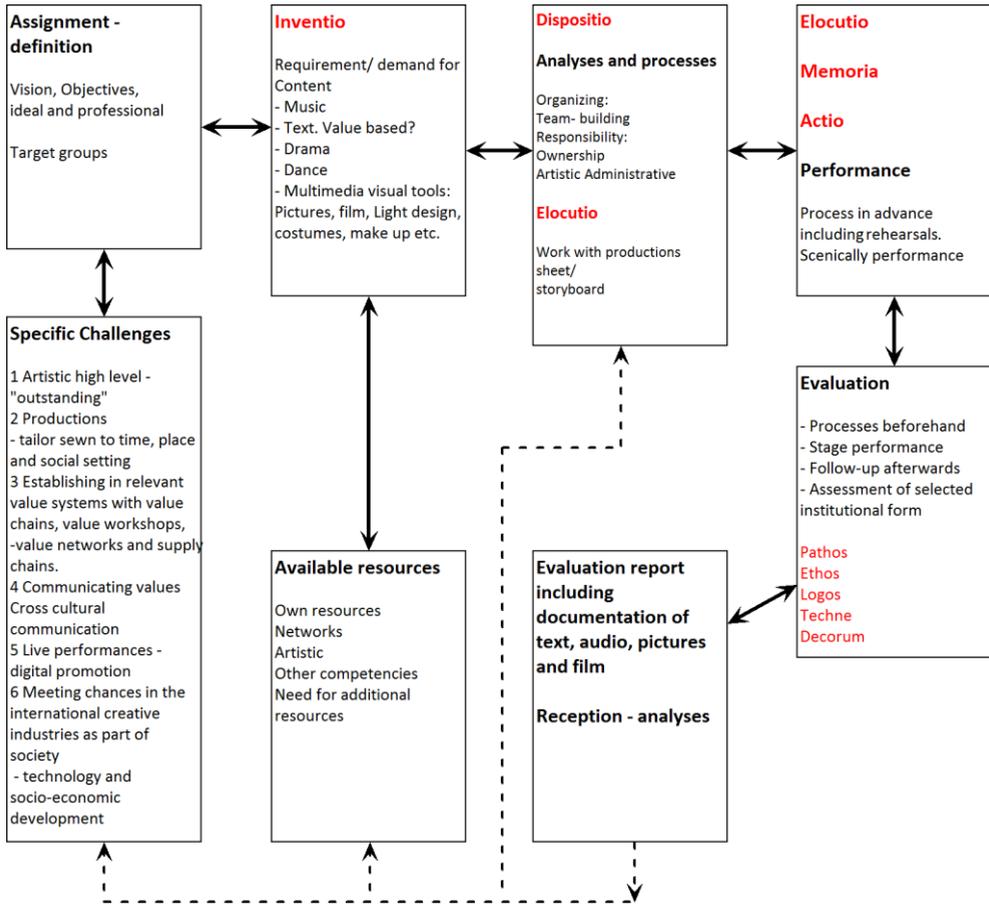


Figure 1. The Project Model

The point is to assess the individual prerequisites, opportunities, concrete challenges that in principle, accompany most productions, goals, value-based content, organisation and thus the potential related to ensembles and specific projects. This is an exercise in self-discipline that should be carried out regularly as part of working with different processes in different projects.

6. You also teach at the Norwegian Academy of Music. How do you see the teachers' role in universities and after the students have graduated? To which extent should teachers support their (former) students?

Many of the students in my special courses in Concert production have become my colleagues. We should ideally follow up with alumni students regarding special post graduate courses.

The students must, however, find their professional ways themselves. We cannot be their agents. We have to give them a relevant input while they study, to help them establish professional value chains. AEC, the European umbrella organization for higher music education, stated in 2014 that the higher education institutions for music had not responded adequately to the entrepreneurship issue.

7. What challenges do educational institutions for music and arts have to deal with in Norway?

To help the students transfer their high performing skills to “products and services”. This statement might be seen as a very commercial approach, but we must communicate that it is possible to maintain the integrity and still be commercial in a positive sense. Here we include social entrepreneurship, being of help and relevance for people needs also outside the prestigious institutions.

8. How important is entrepreneurship education in the Norwegian curricula?

It should be important. Today it does not have enough space. We teach about and for, but not through practical projects.

9. What are the competences that musical entrepreneurs should prove in order to be successful? How would you define success?

Basically they should have a high level and communication skills on stage. They should also be able to socialize and convince others to be into the ideas. And they should have the general feature of innovators, be creative, think out of the box, find new opportunities, be willing to take risks, establish value chains, be organized. Success can be realizing your value set regarding ideal, artistic and commercial goals.

For most artists, I would claim that it is not the commercial measurement that comes first. Artistic credibility and values score high.

10. You have been artistic director for Sønning Music Performance since 1994 and have had productions in 26 countries. Which of these productions do you remember as closest to your heart and why?

Generally speaking, my answer is the productions with a clear value base of respectful cooperation across cultural divides visualized in music, drama, dance and projected scenography for a culturally mixed audience who comprehend the concept as a whole.

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