

PROMOTING MUSIC ACCROSS LOWER SAXONY: MUSIKLAND NIEDERSACHSEN.

Sitting in front of Manni, a salmon-coloured trailer used to present the work of Musikland Niedersachsen at the various festivals in the federal state of Lower Saxony, Friederike Ankele, Director of the organization, struggles to summarise her work: "It's everything and nothing," she says, from building networks and qualification activities (especially in times of COVID-19) to music communication. Her biggest challenge is the mere size of the federal state she covers, with huge rural spaces that lack the appropriate infrastructure. "But we try our best to support people wherever we can."

Surprisingly enough, the pandemic had some positive effects on their work, lowering the barriers for approaching Friederike Ankele and her six colleagues – the contacts for venues spanning everything from techno clubs and classical concert houses. "We want to be a kind of catalyst for putting issues on the agenda," she explains. However, her job encompasses a diverse range of other activities, including jury representation and bringing neutrality and expertise to a great variety of committees. She needs to know about any musical events in Lower Saxony and travels constantly to gain in-depth knowledge of all facets of the most heterogenous and decentralized music scenes in Germany.

Born as the youngest of four children in a middle-class family, her parents gave her a lot of freedom. Since every child had to learn an instrument, she had a choice and could try her hand at the violin, cello, trumpet, horn and saxophone instead of picking just one. The freedom she experienced as a child is

deeply rooted in her leadership approach: "I have a good team and I understand that I cannot control everything," Ankele says. "If you have a good staff, you should take advantage of the knowledge they bring. You need to cut loose, trust, stay flexible, and be tolerant. You should not think that everybody has to follow your decisions just because you are the director. My point of view is not always the right one, and I don't want my staff to think so."

It took Ankele several years to develop her unique leadership approach and she is critical of the gaps in the education system: "You don't learn how to lead at university, which is one reason why many things in culture don't work well." To counter this, Musikland Niedersachsen has developed a special leadership mentoring program for women, supporting with honing skills and developing potential. However, gender equality is not the only focus for improvement within the organisation: "The status of music and art education in Germany is zero," Ankele observes. "The German audience is expected to understand art without any background information, which is problematic: tax money should be spent in a way that a maximum of people can benefit from it."

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted further challenges that Musikland Niedersachsen wants to address. "There was a lot to criticize concerning the amount of financial support given to music professionals and how the funds were distributed," Ankele says. "We are in the middle of a cultural change, and we can either wait for things to get worse or start trying to change

9. CITY OF MUSIC-TALK

WITH: Friederike Ankele
Director Musikland
Niedersachsen, Hannover
staatstheater-hannover.de

WEB:

Date: 14 September 2021
Where: KUBI, Hannover



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things.” As a publicly funded body, Musikland Niedersachsen cannot lobby for change, but it has supported the creation of bodies that can – and organized conferences to connect these groups with the big cultural foundations that sponsor them.

However, the pandemic is not the only challenge facing the musical landscape within Lower Saxony. Some players are not prepared for the transformation process that inevitably lies ahead. “The eligibility conditions for cultural funding have changed a lot, but there are still many people who cannot deal with the transformation,” says Ankele. “Of course, it gets more and more difficult to find orientation in an ever-changing world, but you have to accept that this part of the development. I believe that cultural professionals need to be less self-complacent and move towards the public they are working for. I wish some of the people I deal with professionally wouldn't take themselves so seriously.”

Formerly the organizational head of the Morgenland Festival in Osnabrück, Ankele has straightforward advice for music professionals and promoters: “Look at the repertoire, look at the places where you are playing and look at the format with which you want to approach people.” She also questions the predominant male and Eurocentric approach of many promoters. “You can teach children to perceive things in a different way, thus creating enthusiasm in transcultural meetings without dissolving individual identities.” Another way to attract younger generations is the development of a digital culture hub in Lower-Saxony: “I am totally convinced that this can offer an ideal structure for finding a project partner with the help of AI. I would never totally replace the fact-to-face contact but I would always support it with digital solutions.”

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