

# THE WINDING PATH TO PROFESSIONAL SELF-REALIZATION

As the managing director of the MusikZentrum Hannover, a socio-cultural centre for people of all social backgrounds and ages, Sabine Busmann is committed to promoting music first and foremost. Her passion for music, however, is not the first thing you might expect from her professional background: born in 1966 in Lingen, a small city in the rural region of Emsland best known for its nuclear power plants and regular protest rallies, she followed a rather winding career path. Despite her teachers not giving her the recommendation for secondary school, she completed her A-levels in 1986 and started an apprenticeship as a biological-technical assistant. "At the time, I was flirting with a career in the police, but my parents did not want me to become a patrol officer. It was hard to find my own way."

All the more reason to be enthusiastic about the vocational training opportunities offered nowadays by the MusikZentrum, including media design for image and sound, media design for digital and print media, event technology, event management and management for audio-visual media. "This is very close to my heart," Busman says. "Young people are given responsibility right from the start, for tasks they wouldn't be entrusted with until the second or third year of their apprenticeship in other companies. And it's great to follow their personal growth over time." The vocational training is not a traditional apprenticeship; it includes a lot of team-building measures, with the older trainees passing their knowledge on to younger colleagues. "They are giving so much back. It's a great feeling."

On her way to the Musikzentrum, Busman took a different path initially, preparing for university studies in Marine Biology. However, a restricted admission policy at that time would have meant a gap year without regular income before starting her studies – a risk she did not want to take, with her mother under financial pressure after her husband's sudden death. She decided not to wait and started studying Geography in Gießen – a good decision, as her professor turned out to be not only an excellent teacher but also a big music lover, sharing his passion with his students. Up to then, Busman's musical taste had been shaped by the music she heard on the radio and her older brother's record collection, consisting mainly of heavy metal.

A study excursion to Kenya intensified her wish to share music with people. With a backpack full of self-made mixtapes, she travelled the country for two months and stayed on for a further two months to visit Tanzania and Zanzibar – always seeking musical exchange with the locals. Her musical taste, however, evolved in a different way. She still listens to a lot of rock and beat music from the 60s and 70s and is fond of Scandinavian music. And her career path also took a different turn: after finishing her thesis on tourism in the third world in 1996, she followed her long-time boyfriend to Hannover. She was unable to find a job in the sector she had studied. To be entitled to unemployment benefit she therefore had to work for one year in a job creation scheme that allowed people to integrate into the labour market. And the MusikZentrum was offering such a position.

## 11. CITY OF MUSIC-TALK

**WITH:** Sabine Busmann  
Managing Director  
MusikZentrum Hannover

**WEB:** [musikzentrum-haannover.de](http://musikzentrum-haannover.de)

**Date:** 17 January 2022

**Where:** Staatsoper Hannover



"I'm committed to lifelong learning. That's part of who I am."  
Sabine Busmann

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“I was really lucky to get the job because I came from another city and had no connection to the music scene in Hannover,” Busman admits. However, there had been a lot of wrangling between the various shareholders of the MusikZentrum; starting with a clean slate meant she could offer the support the management required. She had to learn everything from scratch and soon realised she enjoyed what the MusikZentrum was doing: “Everything was still under construction; we created new things and developed the music culture in Hannover – that’s what interested me,” she says.

“The Hannoverian music scene in the 1990s was somewhat anarchic, wild, and unstructured, and that is also the way the MusikZentrum worked back then. There was a constant struggle for project funds, but everyone was eager to make it happen,” Busman remembers. After working for one year in the job creation scheme she was eligible to retrain in office administration, allowing her to advance professionally: “I’m committed to lifelong learning and recommend it to all my trainees, even in areas that may not interest them as much. That’s part of who I am.” After she had finished retraining, the MusikZentrum coincidentally published a job vacancy in project management and Busman did not hesitate to apply – her first step towards realising own musical projects.

After 15 years of organising big projects with various partners

and sponsors, Busman was finally given the opportunity to become Managing Director of the MusikZentrum in 2019 – another twist in her winding career path: “It was clear that I would take over the responsibility for staff, structure and organization, and withdraw from the projects. That was hard for me because I’m actually a very creative person.” However, her heart is still attached to two projects she can’t give up on. One is the newly established “women\* in music” network fighting for gender equality in the music industry. “We are a prime example in Hannover, with women in leading positions in almost all the musical institutions.” Paradoxically, COVID-19 helped her bring a lot of interested women together in the new initiative. “Public attention might not have been as big under other circumstances,” she acknowledges.

The second project Busman is not ready to abandon is the Fête de la Musique, (co-)organised by the MusikZentrum since 2014. “It fits like a glove to our profile: a non-profit, low-threshold music festival with multiple cooperation partners, connecting musicians and audiences. Every Fête is incredibly exciting,” she says. Since 2019 the MusikZentrum has also co-ordinated the corresponding activities of all German cities organizing a Fête de la Musique. In Hannover, after an online version in 2020 and a slimmed down edition in 2021, Busman hopes for a regular Fête on 21 June 2022. And the next step is already in her mind: making the Fête de la Musique and the Make Music Day an official holiday – to match the celebration it is already.

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