



Digital Dialogues
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Project 5 “**Soundcheck**”

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– Soundcheck –

A description of
music projects with young musicians

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WI-JHW

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1. Background and Content

1.1 Background

Music has an extremely important status as a recreational pursuit for young people. It represents their own independent and dynamic subculture; a place where creativity, emotions, and the process of forming an identity all come together. Young people use music as a means of expression and communication both within their immediate peer group and in relation to the outside world. Youth (sub-)cultures are important sources of guidance. They are defined, for the most part, by a particular type of music or a musical style. They influence an entire way of living and feeling, and become an expression of these.

But in spite of their massive presence, youth cultures lead an underground existence in our society. As a rule they receive very little political, structural, or financial support, and are especially characterized by a lack of social acceptance. Numerous young bands of different types and styles practice in their free time for performances in front of audiences. They all dream of having their band discovered and “making it” in the media world. But for them, it is also important “to do their own thing,” to express their own experience, ideas, attitudes, problems, and feelings. They find confirmation in their own efforts: working creatively and constructively on projects which demand a lot of energy and time, and very often have limited financial resources.

Performances, and in particular those where the media are present, are usually very important to young musicians: Only by presenting themselves and their creative musical productions do they have a chance to receive the positive feedback necessary to find confirmation in their work and motivation to go on with it. For young musicians, however, it is often extremely difficult to present themselves or talk about themselves in public outside of their accustomed circles. For this reason, we have developed youth projects to try to overcome these difficulties and to promote and actively support the young music scene in a way that is directly related to its needs.

At the same time, we are attempting to give educationally disadvantaged youth a chance to articulate their thoughts. The medium of music makes it possible to gain access to young people who are otherwise very difficult to reach. And here we make no distinctions of sex, educational level or social background. Nor does nationality play a role. Music is a shared interest for all young people.

We want to make it possible for young artists to have fun with music, to develop their personalities while working on their own creative music projects and to bring them to a successful conclusion.

1.2 Content

To reach this goal we have developed a number of projects in different areas.

In order for young music groups to be able to take that all-important step from the rehearsal room to public performance, they need representative



recordings of their music that they can distribute to concert organizers and booking agents, and can also send to record companies.

For this purpose we have built a recording studio where young bands can learn how to record their music (see 3.2.1). By means of an internet platform we give young newcomer

bands the opportunity to make their music accessible to a wide public. Here, they have a chance to present themselves using text and pictures, as well as sound (see 3.2.2).

The project has been so conceived that young people will learn how to attain the above-mentioned goals on their own. For this reason, we offer workshops in the areas of audio recording techniques and music group presentation (see 3.2.3).

The intention in all of our workshops and courses in the area of music is that young musicians should be able to take over responsibility for their own work, that they will be able to pass what they have learned to others, and will be able to work together in planning how to approach and carry out other projects. This was the reason that we founded the 'Music Forum' as a place where participating youths would be able to meet and exchange ideas. The Music Forum takes place every two weeks.

And, because young bands need opportunities to perform their music, we have organized – together with them – “live events”. The first “live event” was a newcomer festival that was held on the 23rd of October of this year (see 3.2.4).

2. General Framework

The music projects described above are part of the programme offered by the Scientific Advisory Institute of the Youth Aid Organization of Freiburg, Germany (WI-JHW-Media Centre). We also provide all the necessary facilities required for the music projects, which include two recording studios, a control room, and a group practice room. One recording studio and the control room are located on the first floor of the media centre. These rooms are also used for radio productions and radio plays. The second recording studio is the former hobby room in the cellar. This studio has been specially sound-proofed for loud instruments such as drums.



Our technical facilities includes several PCs, one of which has been especially optimised for use in musical recording and is equipped with an 8-canal soundcard, a mixing desk, various instrumental and vocal microphones, tripods, and cables. The various rooms are connected to one another via multi-core cables and stage

speakers. The software used for our recordings is *cubase VST32*.

These music projects are being supervised at the moment by a teacher working part time for the institute (30%) who has had special pedagogical and technical training in the required areas. He has several trained assistants (student-teachers). The workshops are supervised in part by specialists from outside the centre .

3. Activities

3.1 Development of the music project

The idea for offering projects in the area of music came about in 1999 during the visit of the 'Circus Ethiopia' in Freiburg. The music ensemble of this children's and young people's circus wanted to record a CD for demonstration purposes. Since the Youth Aid Organization had originally invited the circus to Freiburg, they decided to offer them their facilities at the media centre for the recording. Equipment otherwise used for radio productions was available. The recordings proved to be surprisingly good, and so the idea was born to give young bands similar opportunities to record their music.

In spite of a somewhat scanty publicity campaign via flyers and press releases, our offer elicited a resounding response among young people



from all over the region. After the first recordings, however, it quickly became clear that our recording studio at the media centre (due to its lack of sound proofing) could not be used for this purpose. Our neighbours complained about the loud music. After intensive consultations with a sound technician and an acoustics expert, and with the

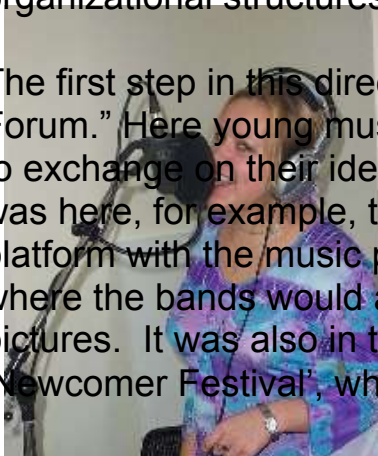
help of the young people who were interested in having their music recorded, we build a new sound-proof recording studio in the basement of the media centre and connected it with the control room on the first floor via a multi-core cable running through the old chimney. In addition, we acquired a PC with an 8-channel soundcard, a set of microphones for drum recording, and a special microphone for voice recording.

In the period that followed, a number of demonstration CDs were recorded with various bands. One problem our offered entailed, however, was that the bands made their recordings more or less in isolation from one another: synergetic effects we had hoped for did not come about.



Through our contact with the young musicians, it became clear that there was an enormous need for organizational infrastructure in the bands. Making the important step from the rehearsal room to public performance was important to them, but it was hardly possible in practical terms. To meet this need, we extended our programme offerings step by step, in order to teach the young musicians how to create their own organizational structures.

The first step in this direction was in the establishment of the "Music Forum." Here young musicians have the opportunity to meet informally, to exchange on their ideas and experience, and to plan joint activities. It was here, for example, that the idea came about of creating an internet platform with the music productions from the WI-JHW Media Centre, where the bands would also be able to present themselves in text and pictures. It was also in the Music Forum that the planning began for a 'Newcomer Festival', which was finally realized in October of 2003.



It was intended that the recording studio would eventually be run by the young musicians themselves. For this purpose we conceived and carried out workshops on recording techniques and – because in addition to good sound recordings, info-text and band pictures are important for publicity – we also conducted workshops on the topic of “band presentation.”

3.2 Materials

The following materials offer some examples of specific activities in our music projects for new bands. They include: a diary of some typical recording sessions (3.2.1), a description of our internet platform (3.2.2), description and course content of a workshop on band presentation (3.2.3), and an account of the ‘Newcomer Festival’ from its planning stage to its realization (3.2.4).

3.2.1 Recording session with the band “Chinese Box” – a diary

1st day, 10 o’clock: The band arrives with their instruments. They are excited and a little unsure of themselves. We introduce ourselves to one another. The recording process and procedures are explained – the band wants to record two pieces – and if possible, make a take of each instrument separately, strictly according to the metronome. I explain to them that I think it would be more effective to do a simultaneous ‘live’ recording and to edit the results. In this way, each band member can still play individually if his track doesn’t work out to his satisfaction. Drums and guitar amplifiers are set up with microphones and all cables connected.

11 o’clock: The set up is complete; ready for the soundcheck. The band wasn’t able to find a sound engineer, so I take over the job. We do a soundcheck – recording levels and monitor volume (headphones) are adjusted; we do some fine adjustments on the percussion sound.

12 o’clock: The band records the first piece, ‘Without her shirt’. They need several takes to get warmed up. The fourth take we let stand. The members of the band come upstairs to the control room to listen to the recordings. They’re not completely satisfied with the percussion; three more versions are recorded.

1 o'clock: We decide to take the instrumentals from one version and to copy the drums from another version into it. But since this could take a lot of time we put it off till the end. Everyone is enthusiastic about the work so far. We decide to take a break.

2 o'clock: We start recording the second piece, 'Oceans apart'. This time we have all the instruments recorded by the third version, and we begin doing the overdubs for 'Without her shirt'. Since the guitar amplifiers only put out proper sound when they are turned way up, we put them in the sound-proof room; this makes another – short – soundcheck necessary.

3 o'clock: The guitarists are still busy with the overdubs; each waiting his turn. The other musicians from the band are in the control room giving the guitarists moral support.



4 o'clock: And while we're at it, we decide to also record the guitar overdubs for 'Oceans apart'.

5 o'clock: On the bass tracks, there are still a few wrinkles to be ironed out, but the bass comes across just fine. The drum tracks are copied in from other takes. We listen to the results of the day's recording work one more time together. The band decides to record one more guitar track, but there's no more time for that today. At 6 o'clock we all go home.

2nd day 10 o'clock: The members of the band arrive one after another. The first thing we do is listen to the recordings from the previous day and discuss how they want to proceed. The last guitar track is recorded.

11 o'clock: We now have double versions of some tracks – several takes of the same instrument, so we decide to clean things up a bit in *cubase arrangement*, in order to keep a clear overview. The various versions are played again, and all but the best ones are deleted. Now we have some free tracks, which we need for the vocals. It's not always easy to decide which version is the best; in some cases, we put together what we like best from different versions.

12 o'clock: Changes are made in the sound-proof studio: the amplifiers are taken out and the microphone for the vocals is installed. After the obligatory soundcheck for recording and monitoring, we begin the vocal recordings. Two members of the band sing, one after another. Although each has a different part, they both sing each part, so that later they can choose the better one.

2 o'clock: We decide to have a break.

2:30: We start again and are making good progress. One of the guitarists takes over some of the duties of the sound engineer after having watched how the job is done for most of the day.



6 o'clock: The recordings are finished. We listen to everything one more time and sort out the vocal tracks. The musicians want a rough cut to take home. We make a few basic adjustments, mix the songs together and burn them onto CDs.

3rd Day 10 o'clock: Today we do the final mixing; because of the limited time we restrict ourselves to doing 'Oceans apart'. All of the musicians are here. First we edit – clicks and background noise are removed. Afterwards we listen through the individual tracks and adjust the respective sounds with an equalizer. In addition we use a distortion filter.

2 o'clock: We begin to adjust the sound levels and panoramic relationships. A automatic mixer is programmed to allow for some changes in the song. The boys are very demanding and very concentrated.

5 o'clock: It's finished! All the adjustments have met with the satisfaction of the musicians, and the song can be loaded into a stereo file. Since time is short, I limit mastering to a minimum – merely optimising the dynamics. We finally burn the results onto a CD and clean up the recording studio. The four musicians are excited about their recording.

3.2.2 The Internet Platform as an Audio-portal

The participants of the 'Music Forum' had already conceived of and partly programmed an internet platform intended to be a regional sound portal for young bands, when a significantly larger project called 'soundnezz' came into existence as a cooperative effort of the Association for Youth Cultural Education in Baden-Württemberg, the media center of the University of Education in Freiburg, the Student Aid Organization in Freiburg, and our Media Centre.

All the cooperating institutions in this project make use of a joint server to publish their materials, project examples, audio files and current information relating to their activities. This platform was intended to give young people the opportunity to present and document their sound productions on the internet. The cooperating partners, after consulting with one another, agreed on details of content and design for the website.

The young musicians decided to integrate their regional music presentation into this larger audio platform, because they would not only have access to a much larger server (with higher storage capacity) but also could expect more 'traffic'.

The 'music project' pages at the internet address 'www.soundnezz.de' are the result of this integration. Here, various groups present themselves with pictures, text and music in mp3-format. The bands have the opportunity to design the content of their own websites and can make changes in their area at any time.

3.2.3 Band Presentations – Content of a Workshop

Materials: a laptop with internet connection, a computer screen projector, CD-player, Flipchart

Opening sequence:

Presentation of trainers and participants, explanation of course content

Topic 1: the band image

Bands ask the following questions: how do we want to present ourselves in public? how should we behave?

what sort of clothes should we wear? what do our pictures and our logo convey? in what style should our info-text appear? in short: what sort of total impression do we want to make?

- Group work with bands; trainers work together with the music groups

Topic 2: band information

Content – What should go into a logo or info-text about music or a band (creating a mood)? How to call attention to specialties? Photos, demonstration CDs, list of band members, discography, concert and CD reviews, contact addresses etc.

Formats for flyers and brochures; copied or printed; black-and-white or colour; advantages and disadvantages of various formats?

- Group work: bands look over their own information materials with the above-mentioned criteria in mind and make suggestions for improvement, results will then be discussed

Topic 3: band pictures

Choosing a motif: does it fit in with the band's image? considering the composition of the band picture: who should be in the foreground?

technical aspects of the picture: light/dark contrasts, printable formats (12 x 18 cm, at least 300 dpi); should the pictures be in black-and-white or in colour; in upright or in oblong format?

Topic 4: homepage

- General considerations: target group and content of the band website (fans, press, organizers), colours, graphics, clear arrangements, links, flash or HTML (advantages/disadvantages), loading time, address, updating, multilingual presentation
- Search machine entry: 'Googling' (free search machine entry)
- Website elements: Texts relating to the band, concert dates, news, guestbook, contact addresses, downloading possibilities, reviews of 'live' and CD performances, press and concert information, eye-catchers
- Picture formats: .jpg or .tif (72 dpi for viewing, 18 x 12 cm and at least 300 dpi for printouts, black/white and colour, upright or oblong downloads
- Band information as .pdf? ghost-script driver, technical rider
- Audio format: Real Audio, mp3
- Browser compatibility (Microsoft, Netscape)
- Web space and traffic limit
- Freeware for setting up: Gimp (picture editing), self-HTML
- Illustrative examples (positive and negative)

Topic 5: posters

Choosing a motif – ‘postering,’ copying or printing, colour or black-and-white (advantages and disadvantages), standard formats, choosing the places where the posters will be hung (examples), content: logo, unprinted area for date-time-place, finding sponsors, internet addresses

Topic 6: demonstration CDs

Using one piece of music as a ‘catcher’, the ‘one-minute rule’, audio or mixed mode? Not too many songs, considering using good ‘live’ recordings; contact addresses; should CDs be burned or pressed?

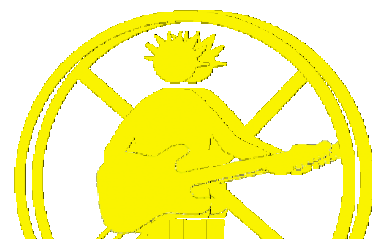
Topic 7: the press / bookings

- Telephoning in general: Calling before sending information, finding a contact person, writing names down, forms of address (formal/informal), behaviour, gestures during conversation, body language
- The press: delivering text and pictures, observing editorial deadlines, writing letters (using proper forms of personal address), required picture formats (ask beforehand), covering all the W-questions: who, what, where, when, how (much)?
- Booking: not sending anything without previous request (not even e-mail attachments), noting dates / making protocols, asking follow-up questions. Telephoning: naming exact times, asking for information about the locale for the event (capacity, types of music played there), clarifying contract conditions, looking for suitable alternative organizers and places nearby
- ‘Telephone practice’ – simulating telephone conversations under various conditions

Summary, questions from the participants, feedback from participants

3.2.4 Newcomer Festival

In October of 2003 we organized a ‘Newcomer Festival’ as a music competition for new music bands based in and around Freiburg. The festival, however, was not only a series of concerts from



new bands in the area but also a multi-medial presentation of the local and regional music scene itself. During the breaks between the performances, video features describing the participating bands were presented and moderated by the young musicians. These features had been previously put together by the music groups themselves working together with a video group, and experts from the media center. The young musicians were also involved in the planning and carrying out of this event. Our intention was to promote a networking effect among the young musicians and strengthen their communicative, organizational and media competence. The festival took place on the 23rd of October at the 'Karma-Club' in Freiburg. The whole event was filmed 'live' by some of the participants and shown on screen in one of the adjacent rooms of the club because the capacity of the main room was limited to 150 persons.

With this festival we wanted to give young musicians the opportunity to present themselves to a broad public. The participating bands also received good publicity, which not only benefited them but also the youth-culture scene in the area as a whole. The winner of the competition had the prospect of an extensive production of their music which also included a video film of their work. In addition the winner could go on to participate in the supra-regional competition where they could qualify for the State-wide competition.

The organization of this event proceeded according to the following schedule:

March to April 2003

- Preparation for an initial publicity campaign to attract participating bands and interested young people to assist in the project (press texts, design, layout and printing of free admission tickets and registration forms, conception, layout and programming of a homepage in the internet).

April to May 2003

- Publicity (distribution of free tickets, uploading of the homepage <www.newcomer-festival.de> press releases and press contacts)
- Formation of a organizational team of young people
- Formation of an editing group for the audio-visual activities

May to August 2003

- Regular meetings of the organizational team; assignment of tasks
- Evaluating the demonstration CDs and information sent by the bands. Preliminary selection of groups. Deadline for registration was the 15th of August. Up to that date, 15 bands had applied that met the

selection criteria (new bands; average age of musicians not above 22 years, no band member older than 25. No professionals, i.e. no member under contract to a record company or previously involved in professional CD productions. No lyrics that are hostile to foreigners, racially discriminating, extremely sexist or anti-democratic. The present members of the band have not played together for more than 2 years.).

- The following bands were finally chosen for the competition:

Sudden care (www.sudden-care.de)

Cornerstone (www.cornerstone-baby.de)

Das X-periment (no domain)

Blue6pack (www.blue6pack.de)

Disadvantage (www.disadvantage.de)

Blunt (www.blunt-music.com)

Jackie Cola (www.jackie-cola.de)



- Choice of a suitable locale for the competition, negotiations with concert organizers and music club owners. The event took place in the 'Karma-Club' in Freiburg, because the club director was very interested in promoting new musical talent. He offered the rooms and facilities of the club under very favorable conditions.
- Clarification of technical questions (technical requirements, catering, food stands, the ticket stand and cashier)
- Planning the timetable for the event
- Regular meetings of the organizational team

and the editing group

- Composition of the jury
- Preparing publicity for the event

September 2003

- Publicity for the event (flyers, press announcements)
- Filming and editing the video features on the participating bands

October 2003

- Planning details and running the event

The event was very well attended and was carried out without any mishaps worthy of mention.

See the timetable for the event on the following page.

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NEWCOMERFESTIVAL!

www.newcomer-festival.de

blue6pack
Blunt
Cornerstone
Das X-periment
Disadvantage
Sudden Care

Die Vorausscheidung für KABA-Rockt!
Eine Show mit Videos, Moderation und
ausgewählter Live-Musik.
Ausser Konkurrenz spielen:

Jackie Cola

23.10.03, Karma Club

 Einlass 19.30 Uhr
Showtime: 20.00 Uhr
Eintritt: 3,00 Euro 

Wissenschaftliches Institut des Jugendhilfswerk Freiburg e.V./ Medienzentrum

Newcomer Festival 2003 – Timetable for the event

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 20.00 – 20.20 | Music from the group 'Konserve' |
| 20.25 – 20.30 | Moderator introduces the event and talks about the work of the media center |
| | Moderator introduces the band 'Sudden Care' |
| 20.30 – 20.50 | Video feature on 'Sudden Care' |
| | 'Sudden Care' – live |



| | |
|---------------|---------------------------------------|
| 20.50 – 21.00 | Moderator thanks 'Sudden Care' |
| | Moderator introduces 'Blunt' |
| | Set up for 'Blunt' |
| | Video feature of 'Blunt' |
| 21.00 – 21.20 | 'Blunt' – live |
| 21.20 – 21.30 | Moderator thanks 'Blunt' |
| | Moderator introduces 'Das X-periment' |
| | Set up for 'Das X-periment' |
| | Video feature on 'Das X-periment' |
| 21.30 – 21.50 | 'Das X-periment' – live |
| 21.50 – 22.00 | Moderator thanks 'Das X-periment' |
| | Moderator presents the jury |
| | Moderator introduces 'Cornerstone' |
| | Set up for 'Cornerstone' |
| | Video feature on 'Cornerstone' |
| 22.00 – 22.20 | 'Cornerstone' – live |
| 22.20 – 22.30 | Moderator thanks 'Cornerstone' |
| | Moderator introduces 'blue6pack' |
| | Set up for 'blue6pack' |
| | Video feature on 'blue6pack' |
| 22.30 – 22.50 | 'blue6pack' – live |

22.50 – 23.00

Moderator thanks 'blue6pack'
Moderator introduces 'Disadvantage'
Set up for 'Disadvantage'

23.00 – 23.20

Video feature on 'Disadvantage'

23.20 – 23.30

'Disadvantage' – live

Moderator thanks 'Disadvantage'
Moderator talks about process of jury decision

Video feature – quick run through

23.30 – 23.45

Moderator introduces 'Jackie Cola'

'Jackie Cola' – live

The jury deliberates



23.45 – 23.50

Moderator expresses thanks to all participants

23.50

Winners are announced
Winners come on stage
After Show Party