



crescendo

SMALL GROUPS

„REAL LIFE“

WELCOME

Welcome to the discussion group on the topic of “real life”!

A painter who is working intensively on his picture repeatedly takes a couple of steps back, puts his head at an angle, screws up his eyes and looks at the developing art work in detail before continuing to apply the brush.

This is exactly what we are doing here. In the small group meetings, we are withdrawing to a distance from everyday life and look at what we are really doing from a distance. And we ask questions for which we otherwise hardly have time:

“How does our life as a musician and artist actually look?”

“How do we deal with success and failure, with opportunities and difficulties, with joys and problems?”

“What (or who) helps us to deal well with the challenges and to achieve a good and successful life as an artist?”

“And do we see any ‘meaning’ at all in what we are doing?”

There are 1000 further questions. Perhaps this booklet does not contain precisely the question which is leaving you restless. Or perhaps it does not have the answer, a tip, which you can pass on to others. For you really must open your mouth! The one principle is that heated discussions are extremely welcome! And perhaps you can write to us at info@crescendo.org if something is especially important to you!

The "Crescendo Summer Institute" 2014 also provides workshops, lectures and TUNE IN events in which various aspects of “real life” are discussed.

Finally, an important tip: do everything you can to avoid missing any of these events. “Real life” will come back soon enough...

Contributions: Beat Rink, Marcel Zwitter

Translation: Bill Buchanan, Szidonia Majoros

Loneliness and community

We begin with some questions:

- * How much time do you spend alone in daily life? And how much time together with others?
- * When do you feel well alone and when not?
- * When do you feel well in community – and when not?

Please also take a few minutes to think over this and make some notes. > SHARING.

Creative loneliness?!

A fundamental element of artistic creative work is a certain degree of quietness, concentration and being alone.



But just wait a moment! There were (and to an extent there still are today) artists' cafés in some towns, where authors sit at a table to write their works – amid the bustle of café business, which is apparently stimulating. (The picture shows the famous Café Central / Centrál Kávéház in Budapest). And Johann Sebastian Bach composed surrounded by the noise of his children. And artists in

earlier times used to work in workshops and not necessarily alone in a lonely studio.

But, nevertheless – even amid external noise, inner concentration and quietness is possible. For an artist, concentration and “inner quiet” are indispensable. For musicians practising, external isolation is of course also important.

How do we withstand this isolation? Do we find it easy or difficult? Everyone will have different answers here – perhaps we have already noticed this in the round of sharing. Not everyone finds it similarly easy or difficult to be alone for hours. And not everyone needs the same level of community.

On top of that, there are cultural differences!

An anecdote from the land of Jean Sibelius: Finnish settlers chose to settle at a deserted spot on a river. But, after some weeks, tree trunks came down the river. Alarmed, they got up and left, for they

noticed that other people lived up river. That was definitely too close! On the other hand, there are cultures in which an extremely value is placed on community.

How strongly has your family or cultural origin shaped your ability or inability to be alone – and the need for being alone and for community?

We need community!

On the other hand, we see in some artists the tendency to isolate themselves from the external world – not only in phases.

This isolation can be part of a personality deficit or it can be a conscious choice, as with the playwright Samuel Beckett, who deliberately withdrew from other people in the later years of his life in order to avoid being distracted from his writing. So: the relationship with others is for Beckett not an inspiration, but a distraction. Isolation belongs to the life concept of some artists.



Carl Spitzweg (1808-1885). The poor poet

Finding the balance

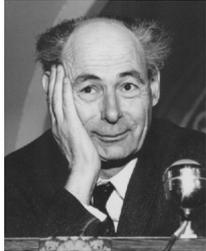
The goal is to find a healthy balance between “phases of isolation” and “community”.

What can help you if you find the time alone in a room difficult? Are there “tips and tricks”?

It can be helpful to analyse your own background and to ask yourself: “How easy or how difficult does my culture make it for me to

be alone? When I am alone, do I experience feelings of loneliness, of being abandoned? Or of meaninglessness (see the text below)?

What might be a step towards “healing”?



Do you way of offsetting it? Do you have friends?

Paul Tournier (1908-1986), Swiss psychiatrist, who became famous fo his approach of the “medicine of the person”

"My childhood took place in an unparalleled loneliness in which I had the feeling of not meaning anything to anyone. Since then, I have met many people who knew this same feeling of not existing, or only acting as if they existed. When I was sixteen, a teacher must apparently have felt that this shy youngster needed a little help, and he did something quite unusual: he invited me to his house. That was my first meeting with another. I entered his study full of embarrassment and shyness (...) and did not know what to say. Later, I thought to myself that my teacher probably did not know what he should say. But he did something very fundamental for me: he gave me the feeling that I existed. I was no longer simply a pupil in front of his teacher, but rather there were two persons standing facing each other." (The psychiatrist Paul Tournier)

2

Sensitive inner world – tough external world

When we speak about REAL LIFE, we must bear in mind that there is an “inner world” and an “external world”.

We all have an inner world in which we think, feel, have fantasies (also unconsciously in nightly dreams). In it we do of course concern ourselves very intensely with the external world and process it.

Nor does the inner world remain internal, but constantly opens up paths to the exterior.

The artistic person expresses his inner world in a special way: by being creative and producing a work – or by interpreting a work in a special way. His task, with which he is faced time and again, consists of listening to his inner life and expressing it –in an art work, of course, which then usually develops in a prolonged, burdensome process.

Why does it need art?

There are many answers to this. One is that “we all need a little more inner world!”

A nice illustration of this is provided by the children’s book “Frederick”.

Winter is near and all the field mice are busy preparing and gathering food for the cold months ahead - all except for Frederick. Always the daydreamer, Frederick is preparing in his inner life a small surprise that will warm the hearts and feed the spirits of his fellow mice when they need it most. He will tell then in the cold winter days, when there is no more food around, about the sun-beams, the colours of the summer and he quotes poems.



What does this story say about the inner life as an artist? Do you experience it in a similar way? How do other “mice” react to your art?

Sensitivity

Many artists are very sensitive. Already in childhood it is obvious.

- There is a rich “inner life”, a “dream world” filled with fantasy and creativity
- This inner life and feelings are hidden; they need to be protected from being hurt.
- There is often a feeling of inferiority, because others (brothers and sisters, colleagues, etc.) are so extrovert and more “successful”.
- The “sensitive artist” is good in watching and analyzing others – especially their weaknesses. Therefore he/she can become cynical.
- There is an inner voice: “Nobody loves me! Even God doesn’t love me!”
- Each artistic failure is a catastrophe.

Which other characteristics are typical for “sensitive artists”? Does this sound familiar to you? Please share about your experiences.

Relationship to the external world

In the story of the day-dreamer Frederick, the other mice are complaining about him, asking: “Why don’t you help us with storing food? You are just sitting around doing nothing.”

Conversely, sensitive people can experience as alien or even hostile. They do not understand it, they cannot find their place in it, they cannot think in the same utilitarian manner, act in a profit-oriented way etc.

Are we familiar with this?
How do we deal with it?

Today in some countries there is a discussion going on as to whether “sensitivity” should be treated as a psychological problem and how it can be “healed”, maybe even with medicine. Yet, sensitivity is not a sickness!

Sensitivity can be very important – but also a danger – for the arts, for relationships, etc. Share about this.
How can an artist deal with his sensitivity?

In the book of **Isaiah 42:1** there is a word to Israel:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. 2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze."

In the gospel of **Mark 16:18** Jesus gives to his disciples a promise: Mark 16:18 “They will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well."

And in the gospel of **Matthew 11:28** we read: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my

yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” – a passage we know from Handel’s “Messiah”.

Could these be promises for sensitive people? (Snakes and poison could be also understood as malicious words, being hurt by others...).

3 Uniqueness

Unmistakably individual – and valuable!

An artist knows that each work of art is unique and cannot be compared with others. At the beginning of the story of creation in the Bible we read that “God made each according to its kind” – i.e. unique. And then it continues: “It was good.”

A mother and father know that each child is unique. And no child should be compared with the others; each is equally worthy of love. A teacher, too, knows the same concerning his pupils.

Or a musical instrument maker knows this is true of his and other instruments.



Take the violin-maker Martin Schleske as an example. In his book “Der Klang” [“The Sound”] he writes that “I experienced the room-filling beauty of a Stradivarius for the first time when heard the “Schreiber” Stradivarius of 1712 for the first time in my workshop. (There is an outstanding recording with Pinchas Zukerman, Jacqueline du Pré and Daniel Barenboim). A violinist played Johann Sebastian Bach’s Chaconne (Ciccona) in my workshop. Even with the first chord, the room was filled with warmth, breath, volume and splendour which are hard to describe in words. (...) We have

something very different when we consider the instruments by Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù (1698-1744). Here I would sooner see a unity between violin and work in the Violin Concerto by Johannes Brahms. On this violin, one feels how the tones allow themselves to be “moulded and formed” under the bow. (...) The tones on a good G-string have a sound like this: dense, dark and compressible. These violins have a red sound in the low range and a silvery brilliance on the E-string. They can become almost archaic, wild, hissing and big in sound. It is a passionate and intoxicating sound. – The violins by Antonio Stradivari (1646-1737) are completely different. One should on no account battle with them. That would be inappropriate and coarse.”

There are of course standards which one can apply: every violin must sound good. But each violin is simply different. And a good violin-maker can make use of even an imperfect piece of wood. He tells us that Guarneri himself made a good violin from a piece of wood with a knotholes in it.

Construction or art?

In his book “Der Klang”, Martin Schleske often draws a comparison between instrument and life. He writes, for example, that the violin-maker must take the wood into consideration, precisely because each piece of wood is different. Thus, individually distinguishable violins come into being.

“If the grain of the wood consisted of mathematically defined lines, it would then be possible to construct the arch of the body. But the course of the grain is not perfect. The development of arch of the violin is therefore not a construction. It is an act of creation. – What is the difference between these two? A construction is plan which the material has to fulfil. The act of creating a violin is something else. The only thing that counts is the question of what possibilities have already been put into the wood. One pays attention to WHAT HAS DEVELOPED – what has it led to? One sees WHAT IS DEVELOPING – what can this yet become?”



Do we understand this? And what we heard this morning from Christian Studler?

EXERCISE - perceiving, respecting and valuing of each other in his or her uniqueness!

“The grain of life”

Martin Schleske writes that “the real grain in our existence is taken into account (by God) and made into a source of sound. That is wisdom. It is an act of love, which accepts the imperfect and recognises its value...”

In showing me about God, the Bible reveals much more the heart of an artist than the heart of a relentless design engineer. There is an intrinsic fascination in the idea of seeing oneself, along with all people and creatures, as works of art (...). Works of art can be beautiful and occasionally even really strange. We are works of art. Certainly not constructions.”

How do we read and understand these sentences?

4

Perfectionism or Excellence?

What is your real motivation in making music or in being otherwise (creatively) active?

What role is played here by the wish for perfection or perfectionism?

Perfectionism versus excellence

We are no doubt all of the same opinion: perfectionism kills creativity. But, nevertheless, it is present everywhere in musical culture and perhaps even in our own lives.

Let us take a first look at the problem by listening to the Swedish conductor **Herbert Blomstedt**, who gave an interview for the Crescendo Magazine on this subject.

The conductor Herbert Blomstedt said in an interview, published in a Crescendo magazine,

(Downloads on www.crescendo.org):

“When you study conducting, you learn to cover your own mistakes. For it is certainly dramatic when one makes mistakes, isn’t it!? But everyone makes mistakes. If you hear a mistake during a performance, it is only one of many. If a musician’s aim is to perform as far as possible without mistakes, he is going to experience a lot of stress. Playing without mistakes cannot be an aim, it can at best be a direction we move in. There are good performances that are almost without blemish, but do not express anything. Perfectionism cramps an artist. This problem for artists corresponds to the tension between Jesus and the Pharisees, who strive for perfection...

A musician should be able to give himself to others. He does not have to be the best, but to want to give his best. Every respectable person wants to improve himself, certainly. Yet, despite mistakes one can be a joyful person. Whoever succeeds in this is in an enviable position. I make notes, for example, after a performance, of things that could be improved, but I do not let this weigh me down. On the other hand, one can take one’s mistakes too lightly - or bury oneself in them. But this is just as wrong as perfectionism. This is where the biblical message has to play its part: Jesus forgives our wrong attitudes.

Which statements in this text speak to you especially strongly?

Root of perfectionism

Perfectionism ultimately seeks a perfection which does not exist here on Earth. Not only in art, but also in other areas of society, there is, in the worst case, a threat of a “perfectionism” craze. The wish is for the “perfect human being”, (the superman), the perfect state (ultimately leading to dictatorship), the “perfect child”, the perfect “individual happiness”, the “perfect citizen”, the “perfect church” etc.

What are the reasons for this?

Key-words: obsessive-compulsivity – ambition (on the part of the authorities) –striving for recognition (on the part of the “victim”)...

What thoughts and experiences come into our minds when we think of these key-words? And what other key-words?

Behind these psychological factors there lies, inter alia, a certain concept of man – and a certain philosophy or theology.

The Christian view

The snake then spoke: “You will be like God and know what is good and what is evil (= and know everything)” These verses stand at the beginning of the Bible in Genesis 3;4. What do they mean? Man was infected with the idea of being equal to God.

But God had not created man as an “underdog”, but, as we read, God spoke, “Let us make man in our image”.

So man is God-like (as is also suggested in Psalm 8: “Lord, our Ruler, how majestic is your name throughout the earth [= beginning of the St. John Passion] ... For You have made man only a little lower than God, and crown him with glory and honour.”

Ein Mensch will das Schlechte aus der Welt ausreissen:
unmöglich!(vergleiche dazu Matthäus 13,24),

Man, who has rebelled against God since the Fall or does not need God (= all people are referred to here), is separated from God and thus imperfect.

Becoming perfect or creating something perfect is a “mission impossible”.

The philosopher **Karl Popper (1902-1994)** said, “The hubris which causes us to attempt to create heaven on earth invariably produces hell.”

A good comparison is the building of the Tower of Babel. Man wanted to build a tower in order to reach heaven. But God sees that it will bring only unhappiness and confuses the communication amongst the people, who from now on speak different languages. (Genesis 11).

The solution to Babel is Christmas (Luke 2): Man does not need to (and cannot) climb to heaven and become perfect. Instead, heaven comes to us. It brings us forgiveness and freedom from the pressure to be perfect – and simultaneously gives a piece (but not yet the whole) of “heaven on earth”.





Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1563



Rembrandt (1616-1669)

To what extent is “forgiveness” and “grace” a way out of perfectionism?

To what extent do they open the way to excellence? To what extent can they also be wrongly understood – as hindrances for excellence?

5 Embracing truth

Joseph Haydn – Franz Schubert

Only 30 years after **Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)** celebrated the world in his oratorio *Die Schöpfung* (The Creation; 1797) as heaven on earth, **Franz Schubert (1797-1828)** was no longer able to see the world in this way. In Schubert’s work, the world may look idyllic – as in *Die schöne Müllerin* (1823) – but life in it for sure is not. The *Winterreise* (1827) depicts the world as cold and numb, in which all sense of direction is lost – actually: as hell on earth.

Basically, the program of 19th century Romanticism consisted in trying to escape from the roughness and the meaninglessness of daily life. More and more, music was seen as a powerful means to escape from sad and, above all, boring reality. We find this clearly articulated in one of Schubert’s most famous songs, *An die Musik* (‘To Music’; 1817) – dating from a time in which life was much more difficult than the lives of the most of us today, let us not forget this:

Franz Schubert



<p>Du holde Kunst, in wieviel grauen Stunden, Wo mich des Lebens wilder Kreis umstrickt, Hast du mein Herz zu warmer Lieb entzunden, [hast mich] in eine bessre Welt entrückt!</p>	<p>O blessed art, how often in dark hours, When the savage ring of life tightens round me, You have kindled warm love in my heart, Have transported me to a better world.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

<p>Oft hat ein Seufzer, deiner Harf entflossen, ein süsßer, heiliger Akkord von dir den Himmel bessrer Zeiten mir erschlossen, du holde Kunst, ich danke dir dafür! <i>Franz von Schober</i></p>	<p>Often a sigh has escaped from your harp, A sweet, sacred harmony of yours has opened up the heavens of better times for me. O blessed art, I thank you for that!</p>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

„Real Life“ – according to Romanticism

In fact, 19th century Romanticism understood REAL LIFE in two different ways:

1. First, they understood it as trivial reality. It is the daily routine that is as painful as it is dull. It is the life of necessity, of making money, of making ends meet. This is the life that they tried to escape from.

2. The very reason they wanted to escape from it is that they presumed the existence of another life that was happier, richer and more full of meaning. But entrance to this better life was hindered by the requirements of the daily, trivial life. It only could be entered by giving free reign to the fantasy – and in the view of the Romantics, this fantasy was best stimulated by music, preferably by music *without words*, because words still remind one of the normal daily existence.

Are you inclined to distinguish between these 'two realities', in the same way as Romanticism did? Why (not)?

Escape from Reality

In stronger, darker terms than in Schubert's song, music could function as a kind of drug. It is not surprising that **Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique* (1830)** is about an artist who, according to Berlioz' program for the piece, balances between life and death, due of having taken an overdose of opium. Many artists were experimenting with opium in those years (Berlioz himself too) to flee from normal reality as far as possible and to experience hallucinations, that could inspire them to art works that were beyond normal life.

Have you met people who somehow used their artistic gifts to escape from reality? Could you hear this attitude in their music making – or see it in their art works?

From here, it is just a small step to develop an unrealistic view of oneself. After the Romantic Era started to venerate the geniuses of the past, young musicians, growing up in such a climate, had the appearance of looking at themselves as geniuses and claimed to be worthy of the same veneration as the composers of the past. The most extreme example is probably the Russian composer **Aleksandr Skrjabin (1872-1915)**, who declared himself to be God, who dreamed of building a temple in India with pillars of incense as a venue for performances of his works and who believed that the world would enter a stage of universal and eternal bliss after the performance of his *magnum opus* (that remained incomplete due to his untimely death at the age of 43).

Have you met artists with a larger-than-human view of themselves? Or do you know composers or musicians from the past that had an attitude like this?



How will it affect someone's playing if someone looks at himself or herself as larger-than-human?

Once again; Genesis

Haydn's oratorio *Die Schöpfung* retells the very first chapter of the Bible. The first chapter of Genesis indeed presents the world as God's creation as a blissful dwelling place for mankind. Due to the optimism of the 18th century Enlightenment, however, Haydn's oratorio only tells the first half of the story. What Haydn left out was the third chapter of Genesis, which speaks about man falling into sin – that according to the Bible caused all the problems that the Romantics tried all means to escape from.

What made mankind sin, according to Genesis 3, was the desire 'to be like God':

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will surely not die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. (Genesis 3: 4-7).

According to the New Testament of the Bible, though, we are not left only with fantasy. Although sin distorted the world, the original order is still present *and can be re-entered*. The good news of the Bible is, although we cannot escape from the results of sin completely, we at

least have the possibility of staying away from sin by deliberate choice, as much as we can, in order to reduce its harmful effects on us. The Bible teaches us that the more we do this, the more we re-enter the blissful reality of Genesis 1. And this is, what the Bible regards as REAL LIFE.

Where Romanticism only could offer a dream world to escape from triviality, the Bible offers a real possibility of entering a fuller quality of life by seeking to stay away actively from everything that is sinful and destructive.

Do you agree with this statement or not? Why (not)?

Do you think the Biblical interpretation of REAL LIFE is possible for humans anyway?

Do you think it is possible for you?

In the Bible, the distinction between truth and falsehood goes back to the same dichotomy. All truth is related to the world, as God intended and created it; all falsehood goes back to the distortion of that world by sin.

In Biblical language, 'to sin' literally means: 'to miss the goal' – that is to say, the *originally intended goal*, intended by God in Genesis 1. This implies, that 'to sin' does not mean 'doing wrong things' (as it is defined so often), but *not doing the right things*. It is not enough to avoid bad things, we will only experience REAL LIFE when we actively do the right things.

Therefore, from a Biblical perspective, REAL LIFE is a matter of embracing the truth: truth about God, about the world, about yourself, about music, etc.

6 Failure – success

What is success – what is failure? What is the measuring rod by which we can measure both? Was van Gogh a successful artist? No! – Was Horowitz a successful pianist? Yes!

But let us listen to **Franz Mohr**, former chief concert technician with Steinway & Sons and personal piano tuner to Horowitz, who recounted the following episode at a Crescendo event:

“Wanda Toscanini-Horowitz, Vladimir’s wife, once said to me in the artist’s changing room as the thunder of the foot-stamping audience carried to our ears, “If this is all that life has to offer – I would rather not have it!””



There are doubtless different markings on the scale “success-failure”.

Scale “artistic success – failure”

On this scale we find the following markings (perhaps we can read the points in silence – each for himself – or out loud in turn)

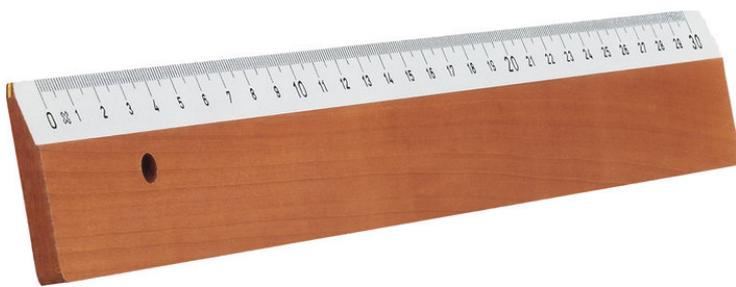
1. **Audience success 1:** The audience is enthusiastic.
2. **Praise from experts:** Experts (teachers, for example) praise me. The examination pass was good. The audition went well.
3. **One’s own satisfaction:** I myself am satisfied with the result – possibly independently of 1 and 2
4. **Learning process:** I am not satisfied, but it was a “success” for me to have attempted it and to have gone e.g. to the competition: I am on the right path. The learning process goes further – also thanks to negative feedback.
5. **Audience success 2:** I did not offer any great art, but I made the audience happy. Perhaps my audience was not an expert audience, but children and people in an old-age home, but I gave them joy.
6. **Crisis = opportunity:** I failed. But this is not only a failure. For I ask myself what the solution is.

7. **Break-through out of the crisis:** I come out of the crisis; I receive help, I make an effort myself by e.g. working hard and reaching a new level.
8. **New orientation:** I recognise that I am not achieving success – and have to find a new orientation. Perhaps I should change the instrument. Perhaps the teacher. Perhaps the goal of my studies.
9. **Giving up the goal:** I have failed with my goal. I cannot make it. The feedback is not good. (1-8) lie behind me... What now?

Are you familiar with this? At which of these points have you been at some time?

The bigger measuring rod

If we only know the measuring rod “**artistic success – failure**”, there is a problem in our life. Perhaps we then reach a point where we say, “If this is all, I don’t want to have it...” – Or: “I have only this. Otherwise I have nothing!” – Like that pianist who completely overestimated herself, bought a Steinway, looked for the best teacher – and still did not make it. She stayed in her “dream world”, causing even her marriage to break up. So we must have another, a much larger measuring rod which has something to do with “real life”.



Measuring rod “Real Life”



An important attitude in life for an artist is to recognise that there is something even more important than art: life! Art is part of life. Art is not life, nor is life part of art.

(A manager, a sportsman, a scientist etc. should be able to say the same)



What values are there for you on the larger measuring rod?

.....
.....

Thesis: Getting to know the larger measuring rod also means maturing as a personality and as an artist. Is this true?



Even the hairs on our heads are counted...

There is an astonishing word in Matthew's Gospel 10;20: "But even the hairs on your head are all numbered." The linguistic form is a "divine passive" (Jesus uses it around 100 times!). Translated, this means, "God knows exactly how many hairs are on your head." – or better (for the bald-headed too): "God knows you precisely and knows what you need."

That means that God knows what we need (as musicians as well). And he would like to help us because he loves us! – But, on the other hand, it also means that God knows what is best for us. And success is not always the best. There are other, more important things that God would like to give us: growth of the personality, development of the ability to love, supporting the gifts of others etc. There is an interesting verse in the letter to the Romans 8;28: "All things work together for good for those who love God." But there is another interesting context: If we only live egocentric lives and seek success, we will not experience God's blessing. But if we do not live egocentrically we will receive gifts. "Whoever wishes to keep his life will lose it. But whoever loses it for my sake will find it." (Matthew 10;39) and "Seek first of all the

Kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and everything else will be given to you as well. Take no thought for tomorrow..." (Matthew 6:33)

Have we perhaps already had the experience that God helps, that he wants the best for us and that prayers are heard?

7

Life with meaning

Real life = meaningful life

Who does not want to have a "meaningful" life?! A fulfilled, happy life?!

Depending on personality, origin, family influence, gifts, training, interests etc., people give different answers to the question, "What constitutes for you a fulfilled life?".

Or let us simply ask, "What do we want to see or to be able to say about ourselves when we are old?"

A says: "I want to see a whole crowd of children and grandchildren."

B says: "I want to be able to say that I have given my best – as an artist, too."

C says: „I want to be able to tell about my wonderful memories."

D says: „I want to join in discussions on all possible topics, to draw on deep knowledge and also to be able to give wise advice."

E says: „I want to be able to say that I have done a lot for others and did not only look after myself."

F says:

G says:

Do certain people occur to you spontaneously who are to an extent role models because they have realised the things mentioned by A,B,C... in their lives?

What additional statements can you imagine?

What statements are closest to your wishes?

These statements are all good. Anyone who can make these statements has had a fulfilled life.

There are other yardsticks for “fulfilled life”. Not what one has (children, memories, achievements etc.) but what one is.

Character

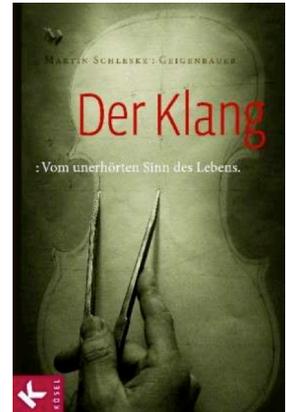
“Real life” has something to do with growing in personality and character. There is no recipe for it; rather, it is a path and a daily task. The question that can be asked in this context is therefore: “I want people to be able to say the following about me: he/she is

What role models do you have in your life? What can you say about them?

Think about the following (perhaps later), possibly writing it down: “What should people be able to say about you?”

Rules for life

Once again a quotation from the book “The Sound” by the violin-maker Martin Schleske. Here he speaks of “rules for life” which he formulated himself. Some of the points:



- Do not be slow to do what has become clear to you.
- Do not consider yourself wise, but allow the wisdom of God to surprise you.
- Keep all bitterness away from yourself. Admire, but do not be jealous. Keep your soul by continual prayer in quietness.
- Do not allow your tongue to injure others by gossip, lies, hatefulness and sharp words. Do not pass on the evil you have heard, but commit it to God.
- Always be merciful towards the person and the weaknesses of your neighbour.
- Let go of anything that you are trying to reach by force. By force you can achieve only self-centred things; but you should receive the essential things.
- Take care that your life remains in the worship of God.

What are the principles that you live by? Perhaps you would like to mention some points by which you live.
It can be very helpful to write down such rules of life and to try to realise them.

Inner fulfilment

Martin Schleske writes: “My wife experienced the last years in the life of a woman of over ninety who, despite her advanced age, had become a counsellor. In all her frailty (and, towards the end, in all her pain), there was always a freshness, a hope based on faith and a strength in her which is hard to describe in words – a young gleam in her eyes and a youthfulness in her voice. (There are attractive, shining and beautiful persons in every age group, even if the beauty increasingly has another source). When my wife told her about problems during the early years of my workshop, Ilse had the right words: restoring and strengthening and clear words. Her words often turned – as if on their own – into prayer. (...) We experienced how doctors and nurses – often several of them at one time – forget themselves and spent time at her bedside. Not because it was at all necessary medically, but because they seemed to detect through the frailty of this woman something that was very rare. To the very last, she retained a huge inner strength. Psalm 92 applied to her: “The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree ... they will still bear fruit, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming “The Lord is upright.”

What message does this text give us?

In this context, how do we understand a verse such as “I have life so that they may have life in fullness.” (Jesus in John’s Gospel 10;10)

How can we believe this and experience it?