

HaagsPianoHuis performance – first self-reflection (28/11/24)

Generally – satisfaction. I felt it had an impact, it resonated, there was relative cooperation and openness, along with the justified hesitation and suspense.

I felt I was in the zone in relative control but also not too much – I went off plan and was surprised and taken off a bit by the audience and by myself too.

Sitting down

I wasn't sure if it was good some were sitting so close to me that I think they could see my hands (I previously got feedback that it was nice that they couldn't – that it was more equal, surprising, and focused on me and on the music that way), but I didn't want to have two rows or to make the circle wider – these felt too far, and less personal.

The distance needs to give the feeling of interpersonal conversation communication, not public communication.

There were too many chairs and some gaps where no one was sitting. Why do I think it's better if there are no gaps? How can I make that happen – perhaps people bringing their chairs to the room? Or maybe gaps are ok and more natural?

I think I felt that I want everyone to be close, to force closeness, but maybe that feels too forced actually. It's also not very practical to try to have no gaps. But I do think it'd be more equal that way.

My personal story

Actually before that, I started with some general questions about the role of art and musical performance and my social goal of creating connections. I don't think people specifically responded to that in their feedback, maybe it didn't resonate, but maybe it did help achieve a feeling of a clear and safe environment, relatively.

Starting with my story – I had kind of a script, but at first I even had a small blackout. But I just continued playing and took my time and I think it wasn't noticed. This part went well, I think. I told the story well, I didn't make a lot of effort to speak loudly (as I had planned), but I think everyone understood what I said – I was careful to quiet down the remaining piano sound when talking.

Playing the piece went pretty well, but I did feel a bit blank during it – I was making eye-contact and played ok, but perhaps forgot to *feel* the musical emotions more, and I didn't express a lot with my face or body, not specifically by choice.

Most people looked back and made relatively long eye contact with me, without looking away except one (Michele) who had his eyes closed and seemed to be in his own world.

When I finished playing, people were not sure whether to clap or not, but not so much – generally the performance "kept going", even though I took some time, maybe too long, and they didn't applaud and I resumed talking and playing and the show flowed away.

Stories and words

Several very interesting awkward moments occurred.

-There was one person in the audience who was not fluent in English.

I was worried, I didn't know what to do or how to handle it if she (Silvia's aunt) couldn't answer for my one-word request. I didn't want to exclude her, or for her to feel excluded (the whole thing is about inclusivity in a way).

Luckily, she understood everything I said and Silvia was next to her and helped her find the right words. But I'm not sure how I would handle it otherwise.

Perhaps I should say, "if you can't find a word, a sound or gesture will also do..."?

- one person (Joost) didn't open his eyes – didn't find a word (?). But I felt it was getting too long and everyone else had opened their eyes. I wondered if my instruction wasn't clear enough ("take a minute"), or

he didn't hear well or forgot the part about opening the eyes back. Eventually I continued and he "got the message", but it was also a bit inconsiderate of me in a way. I had to keep the flow.

The part where I expressed/depicted in my playing the words they said wasn't really planned. When I did it with names in the tryouts I used the rhythmical qualities of the names but I intentionally didn't want to make it too obvious, and I remember some people thought it was based on my general impression of them – but I think mostly it sounded relatively random then.

I expected it to be similar here, but apparently, because these words are much more descriptive, or adjective-y, or vivid – it was immediately clear the music was influenced by them, and I intuitively chose to flow with it, and not counter it, and I think I felt also almost immediately that the audience enjoyed it and appreciated it.

More story

I wasn't sure how I'm gonna connect to the next part. I wanted to see what would be appropriate in the moment – choosing one person myself to focus on their story, asking the audience some guiding questions to be able to approach it more generally, or even having some "conversation" about it.

I forgot I wanted to comment during that part – first to thank them being good listeners and for sharing intimate things, then to make an observation about what's common in their words, what's shared.

- One person (Sophie) told me after the performance, that after telling my own story the energy shifted and I covered my vulnerability. Maybe I should comment live on the awkward moments – person not opening their eyes or not understanding me. But that might create a different atmosphere.

Eventually I did an unexpected thing, most vulnerable in my perspective, and I just left it hanging – I asked an open question for everyone, "who would like to speak/continue/participate/volunteer – in a way that leaves a lot of space, maybe too much. I was afraid after some time (too much?) that no one is gonna respond. I tried making it easier. What else could I do? I didn't want them to feel it's not working – too vulnerable, too afraid, maybe I should have tried checking it deeper.

Eventually I caught Michele's eyes and he answered. I felt like I pressured him perhaps, but from how he spoke about it later I think he didn't feel like that.

This improvisation went ok – I was pretty moderate I think, I didn't go too far or test any boundaries/limits. Maybe, again, to not break the flow – which was part because of the style of the music, even the key/tonalities/harmonies, and dreamy sustained mostly, calm feeling. Jazzy – not too stable but not too surprising.

- I don't think anyone was particularly looking at Michele, but he was also with his eyes closed, like in the beginning. So maybe not the best test for that.

After this I went really off script and gave up on the next section I planned – Improvising on three themes from the audience and having them make eye-contact with each other.

- I caught Silvia looking at her watch and I was worried/afraid it was a sign time is getting short.

I also felt myself, maybe because of all the suspenseful waiting moments, that maybe this has gone for longer than I thought and I was sensing the people were starting to get a bit exhausted.

So instead I jumped to the feedback round, which went well as well I think, but maybe it was a bit weird because the previous round was not that long before.

- I forgot to give them my own impression!

After rewatching the feedback – another significance of eye contact for me – (as one audience member observed) – trying to switch the roles a bit, making the audience the performers, and "using them" – taking

from them into the music.

I also like the unexpectedness about it, the tension and expectation. Perhaps this unexpectedness is also an excuse for imperfections.

- *Maybe I should finish in a clearer way?*