

Transcript

**Nikolaus Harnoncourt Centre – Denkwerkstatt IMAGINATION SPACE
ART**

**Florian Boesch in conversation with pianist and cultural manager Markus
Hinterhäuser**

11 July 2026 – St. Georgen im Attergau

Greetings, Markus, please take a seat. I warmly welcome you all on this very beautiful, warm afternoon here in the Nikolaus Harnoncourt Hall of the music school in St. Georgen, to a cultural-philosophical discussion of the Nikolaus Harnoncourt Zentrum — this time, with great pleasure, in good cooperation with the Attergau Cultural Summer. I have the great pleasure of having Markus Hinterhäuser here today as guest for this conversation. A very warm welcome, Markus.

Markus Hinterhäuser — don't worry, I won't say too much, that would be quite unnecessary — is a dazzling personality with a great many talents and gifts, whom we have experienced over the past decades in the most varied roles and on the most varied concert stages of the world. What drives me today is to have him here, at least at the beginning, as a pianist of world renown, because for a long time a subject and a question have preoccupied me, which I would like to illustrate with a moment from a masterclass that I watched on YouTube many, many years ago: Daniel Barenboim was teaching the Beethoven sonatas, and his student was none other than Lang Lang. It was highly interesting to see how the highly motivated Lang Lang grew smaller and smaller next to the great master, while Daniel Barenboim seemed ever more assured and ever more superior. Then came the moment when Barenboim said: "Lang, here, when it goes to the major, you have to play the chord and you have to play crescendo with it." Let me briefly translate: where it now turns to major, there is the chord — play a crescendo on this chord. Lang Lang looked at him, stunned, and said: "Maestro, crescendo on one chord on the piano is impossible." A crescendo on one chord is impossible on the piano. Barenboim looked at him and said: "Lang, you have to believe it." You have to believe it. That was many years ago, and at first it amused me, then interested me, and over the years I've noticed how this subject keeps occupying me — because, even though I work a great deal with the piano, it isn't confined to the piano at all, but is a theme that applies to all of music, to art as a whole: that we must imagine something. As musicians we must imagine something, both in the making and in the reception — as an audience too, we must complete things ourselves. And with that, my preamble is at an end.

Dear Markus, you are a pianist. You strike keys almost every day of your life on this percussive instrument, the piano, and perhaps no longer think about the fact that every note you strike begins to fade the instant you strike it. How do you develop phrases on the piano, which after all cannot grow stronger on a single chord?

It is indeed impossible on the piano to play a chord that crescendos, that gains in intensity. The piano's sound has something ephemeral about it. It arrives, unfolds perhaps, and vanishes, and it will never come again the way one heard it, perceived it, or felt it. But what Daniel Barenboim said to Lang Lang I understand as a musical hint. Music has a great deal to do with the aggregate of tension that lies between two notes — when does the next one come, how does it come, when

is it placed, how does it take shape, how do I strike this key. That is a suggestive hint from Daniel Barenboim: hear this crescendo, then you'll know where the next note is. That is the secret of great music-making — grasping the spaces in between. The notes themselves are clear, but the spaces in between, that is the great secret in music. These spaces in between — staying with the piano, as opposed to string instruments, where you can make a crescendo, as opposed to singing, where it's possible — that is definitely not possible on the piano. That's why this hint from Barenboim is really clever: telling someone, imagine something that is impossible, that is an illusion. But this illusion helps you make the next event — the next note or the next chord — audible, not only to yourself but to others as well. That's important. That's a beautiful hint from Barenboim. I think so too, I remain deeply enthusiastic about it. Do you build up, somewhere inside, the sonic components for a phrase that develops? You just said the piano is a percussive instrument — I feel that too, it's percussive, but it's also a singing instrument, and everything we can experience in music originally comes from singing, everything. If you ask me how lines are built, I can't give you a precise answer, that would be presumptuous, but I can say that I try to sing without singing. It sings within one. And this singing, this shaping of the notes, this finding of the beginning of a note, its growth and its fading — all of that has to do with what you master so wonderfully. It's important, as a pianist too, always to keep that in mind. Earlier we were sitting at the Attergauhof, and I played him on my phone the most beautiful Mozart-playing in the world: Friedrich Gulda playing the rose aria from *The Marriage of Figaro*. That is pure singing at the piano. There, truly every note is right, every nanosecond of the touch. That's what I try to do too, and hopefully what most pianists try to do — but I don't sit at the piano, except when I'm accompanying songs, and then sometimes I have to sing along quietly. Over the years the piano has become, for me, more and more a kind of singing message.

I can well understand that, because I often stand in front of pianos and have the joy that the pianists I get to accompany, and who accompany me, are mostly very good. I experience no sonic deficit in that. And I find the question interesting, whether I myself add to that in my perception, whether this perception is already so shaped by the imagination of a sound's continuity that I supplement it myself. As a singer I can develop a note until my breath runs out — so I'm occupied with an imagination-space in quite different matters than the piano. In that sense I find it interesting, because you naturally know more about it than I do. What Barenboim said to Lang Lang sounds all the more intelligent and brilliant the more one thinks about it. That clearly holds true in the disciplines we work in, in the performing arts, that it applies to everything: that my brain, my perceptual system, when I watch an evening at the theatre, is permanently working to complete something, to understand afterwards what it might mean. The suggestive quality you mentioned — the way Barenboim speaks to Lang Lang — plays, in my perception, an ever-greater role in every musical utterance: the suggestion, the thing left unspelled-out. How far can music be spelled out? That is a very difficult question.

I'd like to come back to the suggestive. I have played a great deal of new, newer, and very recent music — music whose grammar is not at all easy for the listener, not easy at all. It begins with Schoenberg, and to this day his name triggers a kind of Pavlovian reflex. Schoenberg used exactly the same notes as Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven — the semantics changed. There is a moment in the history of music where what we call empirical memory no longer applies, can no longer retain things. So what must a performer do? He must work suggestively. I'm often asked whether I also play from memory. I know most pieces by heart, but I would never play them that way, because that would be precisely the mistake — almost everyone would think I had made a slip, that it was

uncontrollable, even though that isn't true. In the moment when you have that contact with the score and listen to yourself, this act of listening is itself a suggestive process that transmits itself to the audience. If I don't have the music in front of me, I can't produce that. I find that an interesting phenomenon.

What is it that's suggestive about the presence of the score? The score is a text that speaks to you. I could never play from a tablet, that would be out of the question for me, I'm very analogue in that respect. I have the score, the notes, my own markings in it, and when you look at the notes, each time it's also a visual, almost graphic moment — a great inspiration, seeing this text. It speaks to me, and I speak with the text as an interpreter.

Does that mean that the notated text, the image of the notes, is a suggestion to you and not a given, not a fact that you must simply comply with? Both. My perception of a notated text on paper is, depending on the composer, a more or less precise proposal — an attempt to come close to the composer's inspiration, imagination, idea, so that I as the performer can produce something that he might approximately have meant. That is what the performer has to take upon himself.

But do you really mean that the image of the notes suggests something to you, tries to bring something closer to you? Yes, of course. Just the graphic quality of this image alone, which speaks to me and with which I, as an interpreter, enter into contact — just as you do as an interpreter — tells you something immediately. You all know Schubert's B-flat major Sonata, his last piano sonata: seeing the notes, you have a landscape before you. The first two pages — it's indescribable how much this near-motionlessness can tell a performer. This whole first movement is like a tentative feeling one's way into the world. This is not someone like Beethoven, who says of himself that he looks fate in the throat. No, this is an entirely groping approach. If you see that as an image, you know how to play it — hopefully, at least there's a hint, this is how it might be possible.

That's very interesting. But you also said that you've dealt a great deal with modern music, where the notation partly frees itself from the traditional system of staff lines. A Nono score looks different from a Schoenberg score. Schoenberg is the first to break open, with crossed notations in the vocal parts. Would you say that the development in the 20th and 21st centuries is a document of lacking precision, or just another attempt at conveying the suggestive? If one says these are documents of lacking precision, one is wrong — the intention is very precise, and a performer should try to do justice to that situation. Many years ago, still during my studies, I had a very intense period working with the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. In his piano pieces, which are fascinating, great music, he writes metronome markings like 63.5 or 67.3 — that can't actually be realized. But as a musician you know what 60 is, that's one second, and you think, it's minimally faster than 60. Musicians have that in them, and it's actually exactly that. I found it astonishing at the time: we had a digital metronome, and I said to Stockhausen, go on, tap out 78.5! Absolutely precise. Tap out 124.2! Absolutely precise — he could do it. And because he could do it, he also demanded it of the musicians through the score, and he heard it. But someone who doesn't have that ability — and there's hardly anyone in the world who does — will instead experience it as a kind of state of tension, that something moves minimally differently from what happened before. A performer can only produce that in the performance itself. You can't practice at home with the metronome at 63.5, that doesn't work. You have to have done it once — and then you have to forget it, really forget it. Otherwise you're not able to let this music speak, to let it tell something. It's notated, if you like, very pedantically, but then free of all pedantry. Stockhausen demanded that too: that once you have grasped it precisely, you free yourself from it and devote yourself to

the beauty of the tone, of the sound, of the connection between sounds — that becomes the central task for a performer of this music.

Freedom from what — from the notated text, from the material, from the composer's will? Or a freedom towards something? Towards something. It's a paradoxical situation: you free yourself and draw closer at the same time. That's not paradoxical. I can, with freedom towards something... Freedom is a necessity in order to arrive at something, but it also requires freedom from something.

What do you free yourself from in order to arrive at what you just described — listening for the beauty of a tone, the shape of a tone? What must you leave behind, perhaps only in the performative moment itself, which has such a specific condition, in order to arrive at what makes you the interpreter you are? **I have to know very precisely what is meant. If I believe I've reached this moment, I have to step back from it.** The performer is a translator, and he needs something that, for me, is the formula for art in general. A great deal has been thought about the question of what art is, and I have found a simple formula for myself: **Art is form and freedom.** There is no art without form, and none without freedom either. Form and freedom, that is art. The form is grasped — not only as architecture, but also in the inner parts, the inner modes of expression of a piece. Then comes the material that one has made one's own, and then the step back: to distance oneself and draw closer at the same time. That's a truly interesting story. **Music also lives from aura, and Walter Benjamin has that beautiful definition of aura as the unique appearance of a distance, however near it may be.** This interplay between distance and closeness is very important for a performer — this unique appearance of a distance, a Schubert string quartet, which is both far from us and near to us at once, that has to do with the aura of music, with the message that great music is capable of conveying.

And how is it in this interplay of distance and closeness? You've already hinted at it with the forgetting of what one believed one knew? You said one must make something one's own, must trace it, go in search of what is meant or was meant? I'm not sure whether this "meaning" is a meaning of the composer's, or whether it is already shared with you, in your capacity to read what the composer makes available to you.

I find that interpretation and interpreters, across all musical genres, are very much worth looking at in terms of how they read something. We're here in the Nikolaus Harnoncourt Hall — for me it began with how Harnoncourt read things. And this reading is already a certain distance from certainty, unless one has the privilege of being able to discuss with the composers themselves how something is meant. You were able to ask. The only person I ever asked that was the aforementioned Karlheinz Stockhausen. I really avoided meeting composers. Deliberately. Deliberately. I understand that completely. I didn't want to meet them. I did have one true life companion among composers: Luigi Nono. Salzburg is the only city in the world that, with my help, performed the complete works of Nono, rather exemplarily. Let me tell a little story I've told often before, but it's a good one: at the time I had learned the piano piece by Nono that he wrote for Maurizio Pollini — it's called "...sofferte onde serene...", "suffered serene waves." It is Venice cast into music, nothing else: the myth of this city, of the sunken cities, of the bells, of the water — everything that makes up the acoustic identity of Venice. It would have been natural to meet him, I also knew his wife well, Schoenberg's daughter. I arrived by train from Vienna in Venice one Easter Sunday at half past five in the morning and stepped out of the station. You couldn't see anything, only fog — but you could hear Venice. Everything you could also hear in Nono's music, without it being blatant or trivial, you suddenly heard. I walked through Venice, hour after hour,

and suddenly the sky broke open, Easter Sunday, and the most wonderful sun shone down on this city. I went to the Giudecca Canal, which I particularly love, and in a café there sat Luigi Nono. I stood there and thought: **Should I speak to him now, now or never? And I decided on never.** He sat there, just as you're sitting here now. He didn't know me, but I knew him — and I chose not to speak to him or get to know him. I've avoided that almost always. I didn't want that. I already have what the composer gave me, and I believe that in most cases it isn't helpful to talk to the composers themselves about how to play something. I believe that the moment a piece is written and published, it is free. We can't ask anyone — for almost all the music we're confronted with every day in concerts. We can't ask anyone. There are people who say they know how it used to be done and how it must be done. But music is far freer than this form of apodictic constriction. A great deal is permitted — but only if what one does, one does sincerely, not as a strategy, not as a marketing gimmick or self-stylization. If one approaches these things sincerely, music grants the greatest freedom. That's certainly true. I believe that too.

I'd like to highlight something you just said, because I think it's great literature: he just said, now or never — I decided on never. One can't simply let that pass unmentioned. A great phrase that will stay with me a long time. Thank you. Now or never. I decided on never.

That is, in a sense, a manifesto for freedom in music — that the first step for us as performers is, in the reading itself, to trust that we find the seriousness in our engagement with the material that justifies not constantly asking composers what something means. At night I passionately listen to things on YouTube — it's a great fortune that one can hear and see things one could never have experienced before, because one simply wouldn't have found them. Now all of that exists. We're here at the Harnoncourt Centre, and what Nikolaus Harnoncourt found and told with Bach's music is, without question, one of the greatest interpretive achievements of recent decades. Once an algorithm suggested something to me, and I heard what, for me, was the greatest Bach player of all time: Glenn Gould, playing a slow movement from the D minor piano concerto, conducted by Leonard Bernstein. Fantastic. There's no question at all whether it's right or wrong or stylistically fitting — a miracle happens there in that D minor concerto. Look it up on YouTube: Bach, D minor concerto, Gould, Leonard Bernstein. Those are two completely different planets, and I believe Gould never spent a single second thinking about historical performance practice. He played the way he felt it, and the way his — gigantic — technical abilities allowed. That too is a form of freedom in encountering music. We first encounter music before we form any kind of connection with it, and this encounter cannot be determined, cannot follow rules, cannot follow laws. It's like an encounter with a person or with nature, and then something else begins to work within you. In the moment I heard that slow movement by Gould, the question of right or wrong, permitted or not, becomes moot — it is permitted. If you play the way Gould does, it's permitted. That's how it is. Absolutely. I'm entirely in favour of it: you're actually allowed to do almost anything.

If you now think of yourself not as a performer at the piano, but as a curator for art, for music theatre, for concerts, for festivals — is a decisive criterion for your selection, whether you suggest a piece to a performer, entrust him with a piece, believe he can handle a piece, the trust in the seriousness of that artist's engagement with his own work? That can be a very important moment, but heaven knows it's not applicable to every musician — one has to be careful and tactful. Let me give an example that confirms this: Igor Levit, to whom I suggested a great deal of repertoire for the Festival — I had heard his Bach, and we were sitting in a restaurant in Vienna, and I said, come to me next year, play a piano recital, think about whether you'd like to play Shostakovich's 24

Preludes and Fugues. He looked at me and said, yes, I'll do that. And he played these 24 Preludes and Fugues for the very first time in his life at the Salzburg Festival, and later recorded them on CD. I also introduced him to Schoenberg's "Ode to Napoleon" and suggested a great deal more. One can't offer that to everyone, but I know who has the capacity to take on such things free of vanity, free of staked-out territory. In opera it was, in a certain sense, easier for me. Who do I choose, who stages something like that? You used the word curator — I've never felt like a curator myself. I never carried out this profession, which I did for many years, out of strategic considerations. I concerned myself with something that interests me vitally, and that's music, in every form. This curatorial ability requires a great deal of knowledge, hopefully a fairly large portion of intelligence, but above all intuitive intelligence. One also has to be able to recognize the psychology of performers: what's happening there? Where is there a longing, a secret, an unfulfilled wish? These are hard-to-grasp things, but I believe I sometimes had a good feeling for them, and from that feeling something then arose. One of the great performances of recent years was "Salome" in Romeo Castellucci's staging. I knew exactly that I wanted to offer him this piece, and that I would also offer him "Orpheus and Eurydice" — which I did at the time as artistic director of the Vienna Festival. I've told this story often: I met him in Rome, knew he had to take the bait, confronted him with the piece, and he said, yes, I can do it, but only if I find a young woman who is in the state that Eurydice is in, namely in a kind of in-between realm, no longer here and not yet there. Precisely the realm that no science will ever be able to decode, this transition, this threshold one crosses from life. I found this girl, with great help from doctors in Vienna. She lay in a hospital, in her hospital bed, and heard through headphones the singing of Orpheus, who can call her back into life through the beauty of his song. Why am I telling this? Because I'm convinced that being an artistic director doesn't mean creating numerical sequences of pieces, but that with music one must be able to tell stories, to communicate something. **Music is a message**, every piece of music is a message. **There is no music that came into being outside a social, a political complex — everything is somehow connected to everything else.** And coming back once more to the phenomenon of suggestion, how one conveys complicated content, namely new music: this music always stands in relation to what has already been written. There is, however, a decisive moment in the history of music, the years 1909 to 1912: Gustav Mahler writes his ninth symphony with an enormous Adagio at the end that never really stops. It's a farewell to his own life — he knew he was going to die — a farewell to an empire that is collapsing and will never rise again, a farewell to tonality, a farewell to the form of the symphony. In these thirty-five minutes of Adagio in the Ninth Symphony, Mahler tells everything that can be told. In the same year Schoenberg writes his second string quartet and adds, in the last movement, a soprano solo, a poem by Stefan George that begins with the lines: "I feel the air of other planets." Something new enters the world. And on the other side of the world, a composer who was actually an insurance broker, Charles Ives, writes a piece of less than ten minutes' length titled "The Unanswered Question" — and thereby formulates something that remains valid to this day. This question is not answered, and if, as a performer, you're dealing with this unanswered question, you have to find means of making this music speak. **Music as sonic speech — new music too is sonic speech, above all sonic speech.** And I'm so convinced of that, also by the pianists I admire beyond measure: one knows what, in the truest sense of the word, is being played there. I find that a beautiful familiarity.

Listening to you, I have a thought I must put to you as an artistic director. You were, for many years, artistic director in the most varied places. What I'm getting at is the connections between the various pieces from which you build programmes — it almost seems as though you deal with

these pieces the way you deal with the individual parts of a piano piece you're interpreting — as though being an artistic director, in your understanding, does have management aspects one has to go along with, but is actually an art form: putting a festival, for instance, into a shape, into an arc, that corresponds to the inner mechanics and function of a piece of music. **You are the artistic interpreter of our time, facing cultural production and cultural history, and the work is the festival.** Can one see it that way? I find it lovely that you feel that way. I wonder. I would be glad if at least certain moments of these many years were seen that way. If you look at the press coverage of recent years, it says as a special feature that Hinterhäuser is an artist-director — sometimes it's mentioned that the last artist or musician among directors was Karajan, and I believe Ruzicka was also a musician. So the special thing isn't that you're a cultural manager, but that you, as an artist, design a festival as its director. But that carries a different meaning. I think it's understood that you sit at the piano as an artist and play pieces, that's your art. But the thought that interests me now, after your account, is rather whether your conception of directorship isn't itself a contemporary, and perhaps thereby an art form. Yes. I've never said that, but it has in fact been the case, and perhaps in some moments I've even managed to live up to this art form as an ideal. In any case, I never saw the directorship at the Salzburg Festival, nor at the Vienna Festival, as a kind of management, truly not. You can't manage art, you can't manage music, it can't be done. You can only help music come into its own right, and that's what one should do. When you practise the piano, a little miracle sometimes happens: suddenly everything works, you don't know why, but you can be sure that the next day it won't work anymore, and the struggle begins again from the start — until at some point that moment comes again when everything works, everything is there, and then it disappears again. And sometimes, at the Festival for example, it succeeded in creating a situation in which space, work, performer, and audience become a single act of listening, a single ear — this experience of a shared communality arises. We supposedly all hear the same music, but everyone hears their own music, and yet something incredibly connecting arises, a form of shared participation in what's happening there. That's very beautiful, and it can't be produced on a technocratic level, that's simply impossible. It has a great deal to do with sensibility: what is someone capable of, in what space does one let music sound? Is there a difference between hearing something in the Kollegienkirche in Salzburg — other works, other constellations — or in the great Festival Hall? Everything has its own beauties, its own laws, which one has to recognize. It doesn't work if you simply say, this happens there and that happens there and then we have a festival — I've never pursued that, never. What you just said, that's very beautiful. I'm glad about that.

It doesn't bother me. That I'm glad doesn't bother you? That pleases me too.

Without wanting to be too much of a keen student, I'd like to bring the arc back to the original idea of the imagination-space. We began with an imagination-space that takes place in the moment of imagining, before the striking of a note. Your last statement leads us into the imagination-space of the shared perception of a great work of art at the Festival, where everyone, as you rightly say, in my view supposedly hears the same thing, but in the imagination-space of one's own self, something private, personal is made of it. It is this quality of process that connects us all.

The sense of connectedness in an audience, in a moment where we're all doing something personal and our own, yet together. That's possibly the correspondence we can create among ourselves, for one another, in the human condition, and that then produces great moments which, in turn, we can only acknowledge and discuss in art. Right. But you said beautifully, creating this space by hearing

something together. At home we can have entire skyscrapers of loudspeakers, but that never replaces the moment of hearing something together, of a shared — however differently it may be felt — sensing. This moment is further intensified by the fact that music, whether one knows it or not, is the most ephemeral of all art forms. Music sounds and disappears — that is also the melancholy of music, that it cannot be held onto. A picture can, in a sense, be held onto, a text can be held onto, a sculpture can be held onto. Music disappears, and that has a melancholic, but above all a truly ephemeral quality. There are those beautiful lines by the English Romantic poet William Blake: "He who kisses the joy as it flies lives in eternity's sunrise." That is tremendously beautiful. One has to catch this moment. "He who kisses the joy as it flies lives in eternity's sunrise." That is very, very beautiful. That is the magic, the mystery of such moments. I'm not at all esoterically inclined, not at all, but it's something one can experience, and when one has that experience, it's the most precious thing one can experience with music — there's nothing more precious than that. I've always marvelled, with my own children and also discussing it with other parents, why my children, year after year, wanted to hear their favourite book anew every single evening, and listened before the decisive passage with the same enthusiasm and anxious excitement, even though they knew the text better by heart than the author himself. That is a grace, I would say the grace of presentness — the smaller children are, the more gifted they are in this ability to be present and, in their own self-understanding, to act as if they don't know what's about to happen. I'm of the opinion, to a certain extent, that being a musician or an artist requires a certain category of persistence in childhood, but also presentness: when I sing *Winterreise* for the hundred-and-twentieth time, in these great works I succeed in achieving the presentness of almost-not-knowing what comes next. That is a state that interests me most about this activity and this discipline — this presentness, and perhaps also a bit of that childlikeness in the face of not knowing what, secretly, is nonetheless coming.

And now another thought I want to put to you: why can we listen to music, even recorded music, from YouTube, CD, or Spotify, again and again, when we love it? Why does it wear out less than so many other things? And possibly — this is my question — it's because we always complete music personally, individually, for ourselves, and that we can forget that again: how we completed, in our own personal imagination-space, what we encountered as music the last time. And that can always remain new. Is it that way for you — you listen to Gould with Bernstein not just once, but fifty times? At least. Why is the fiftieth time still interesting? There must be something that stays new, where a presentness occurs, so that you don't say, I know this, get rid of it. There's always something new to discover, but that also has to do with one's own state of being. It has less to do with not yet having had the attentiveness to pick out that one particular frequency on the F-sharp, and more, as you say, with one's own state of being, with what individuality one brings to it. I too used to believe — when I sang *Winterreise* for the first time, I thought, this will change my life. Then I sat there at night and told myself, it will not change my life. But I moved forward, because I understood: my life will change *Winterreise*. My progress in life changes how I sing *Winterreise* the next time and what I have to say through it. That means, one's state of being changes the way we ourselves complete what happens in art. That something in art can remain new and alive lies, above all, in our own attitude, in how we encounter it. That's exactly what I tried to describe with the term "state of being." You're a wonderful *Lieder* singer.

That's so interesting, I've spoken about it often too, but it doesn't stop me from discovering something new every time, because I also carry on a kind of conversation with others about it. A song lasts three, four minutes, no more, and yet everything is in it: life, existence, wishes, dreams

— really everything in these three, four minutes. And it doesn't matter whether it's a song by Schubert, Schumann, or Mahler, or a completely different song like "Yesterday." The whole world knows that one, from the North Pole to southern Indonesia, from Argentina to Australia. Everyone knows that song, and a song that lasts three minutes accompanies a whole life. You hear it again and again, sometimes through an open window, sometimes from a car, sometimes because you want to hear it, sometimes you seek it out yourself. You never tire of it, because each time there's a different nuance, a different facet that tells you something different, because you yourself are in a different state, a different state of being. Music has a great deal to do with the triggering of associations. We listen to music because we love it, and we've listened to it for many years or decades, and we don't tire of it, because the greatness of this music, the revelation it carries within it, cannot be tamed. We are, in a way, at the mercy of this revelation, in the most beautiful way, sometimes also in the saddest way. But that can't be tamed, this urgency that music communicates to people. Music, I believe, is written only to communicate something — a message to people, to those who want it. Not everyone wants that. But if you want it, if you allow yourself to engage with it, it's the greatest gift.

Sometimes I think that music strikes us so and doesn't let go, again and again anew, even though we already know it, because in principle we don't understand why it does to us what it does to us. I don't understand it, I haven't read anything about it anywhere either. Maybe it's good that one doesn't understand it. I believe it's necessary that one doesn't understand it. I believe the only relevant form of describing art may be another art form. If I wanted to try to describe what's grandiose about Winterreise, it wouldn't work in language — I'd have to sing about it again, in my own discipline. A painter might say, I try to express it through painting. But that music is a language of content, one that is revelatory in our culture of perception, which we experience perceptually and understand in the experience — we understand only the experience, not the mechanics behind it. **I believe we don't tire of music precisely because, in principle, we don't understand why and how it works.** It's wonderful not to understand it. It's also a presumption to say, I understand this music — a real presumption. There's even an academic discipline devoted exclusively to that. It won't work. The fact that music is a grammar that isn't really graspable — that's an interplay: if you look at a picture, you can say various artists use the same colour, coming from the same tube, and yet it's a different colour, but still recognizable as what it is, as a tree, as a house, as the sea, as a cloud, as the sky. In music that's not possible, it's completely abstract. It also works with psychological moments — there's very interesting work on the psychology of music, of keys, of note sequences, of modulations in particular directions, major or minor, especially pronounced with Schubert. Since you mention Winterreise: that middle section of "Der Lindenbaum," which we spoke about earlier — "I had to wander past it again today, in deep night, and even in the darkness I closed my eyes" — and then Schubert shifts, "and its branches rustled, as if they were calling to me." It keeps going like that, and these are things one should leave unexplained. That's wonderful. In reality we almost make a distinction, a discrimination in the quality of things, according to whether or not we can decode them. Why do some of us find popular hit songs less interesting than, say, Schubert's B-flat major sonata? Because with hit songs we understand how they're made — similar to Hollywood: the best directors also make better films, but the mediocre ones make films based on the knowledge and understanding of function. If I build this scene and then wait two seconds, now the music comes in, the major chord, and now the audience cries — and they're incredibly good at that, they know exactly where they want to go, they know the functions and can deploy them. But if we can see through how something is made, if we can decode its construction, it's no longer as wonderful as something before which we stand

baffled, asking ourselves why it moves us so deeply. For me the greatest things are those where I keep marvelling at why it still moves me so much. This absence of explanation, of the possibility of calculating it, is fortunately for us what makes music a gift. If we could unravel it, it would probably be over in that moment. There's nothing to add to that. One also doesn't need to be able to decode everything, that's not necessary — other areas of life may be more suited to that than the realm of feeling. For someone who doesn't approach music analytically, who doesn't unravel it, music remains a space of feeling. The slow movement of Schubert's String Quintet is a space of feeling that opens up. Of course there are analyses of this string quintet too, very clever ones even, but they don't help with the feeling, perhaps a little with the listening — but only for a few. Knowing how something is composed, how the form is constructed, can help with listening, but not with the feeling one brings to listening to music. And that feeling is essential, far more essential than any analytical quality, which tends rather to pass by the magic one can feel.

Do you need the analytical quality to sharpen your categories in your art? I've been teaching at the mdw for ten years, I'm at the university every day I'm in Vienna, and I work with young people, and I have to listen with the utmost attentiveness to what they do, in order to analyze precisely how they do it, so that I can give them feedback on how to do it better. Then, when I go to a concert, I sometimes have trouble switching off the professor in me. But that's your teaching activity — before that it probably wasn't like that. The moment you have to explain something to a student, you verbalize something that, for yourself, you would never have verbalized, you intellectualize and rationalize it, in order to find a linguistically expressed explanation. You don't explain it by singing it for them — hopefully not, I don't think that's a good way to teach. You have to find a kind of language, a rationalization of what you're currently working with, you have to step back, and then perhaps you can convey something — but that has to do with verbalizing things, which one normally, when not teaching, never gets into at all.

But as artistic director you've been in the situation a thousand times where you imagine a work and have to decide whether, say, to engage Conductor A, and you say, no, that's terrible, what he does. That also has to do with personal taste. There certainly are musicians who are my life companions, even if they're long gone from this world. That really has to do with taste, ranking one above another, and that's fine too, there's no claim to absoluteness there. I've also sometimes taught in masterclasses — I never had a professorship like you have, but I have done masterclasses. That's really interesting, because there stand people who want something from you, and you ask yourself, how can I manage to give them something. You have to find a formula for that, and that formula can't consist of playing something for someone and saying, play it like me — that's really stupid and not helpful at all. You have to find a formula that's like an instruction manual, very rational, and then he can do what he wants — which, hopefully, is also what he'll end up doing. For example, I tried quite intensively to teach Lieder in masterclasses, and the first thing I always did was ask the singer to tell me the poem — not to sing it, I wanted to hear the poem, Eichendorff's "Mondnacht" [Moonlit Night], and what Schumann later did with it comes later. They couldn't do it from memory, knew nothing about it, but could somehow sing it. The moment it moved away from the essential thing, a truly remarkable helplessness showed itself. There you have to try to make a kind of intervention that isn't intimidating, not frightening, but somehow creates a productive situation. And then you start thinking about yourself: how did you yourself play that, how did you yourself get into this story? Out of this reflection, a kind of explanation then arises.

But can one give something to the listener who goes to a concert or to the opera? I decided to advocate very intensively for the programmes of the Salzburg Festival by explaining them, but without any didactic claim, quite honestly trying to help the people who come to Salzburg and buy these tickets develop a kind of friendship with the works — whether they're more complicated, well-known, or less well-known. That's been my task; I've never tried to make anything didactically clear, and I've also never invited anyone to give introductions to concerts themselves, I don't like that. I've never done pre-concert talks, but there I said, we're dealing with the concert situation and the composer, and I tried to tell that story — sometimes I felt like an entertainer at Club Méditerranée, not entirely without success, but it was interesting. The explanations were, precisely because I wasn't didactic, not simple. But one of the great experiences of these many years was that the audience wants to be challenged and also has a right to be challenged. And then you get every kind of gratitude back, every bit of it, because a kind of friendship arises that's important for this space of feeling that opens up — and suddenly, sitting in it, are not two or four people, but two thousand. That's what a director creates, but not by being didactic or driven by a pedagogical eros. I've never had that, I gladly leave that to others.

But I find the idea of friendship an interesting category, because it suggests that your hope, perhaps even your expectation of the audience, is that they trust you in the seriousness of your work. Yes, and they do, they have done that. That's your experience. That you encounter an audience that, in principle, trusts you, that your working attitude is as serious, as deeply felt and meant, as is within your power, and that this is justified by the fact that you, as director, stand there and say, this is our programme. Only that justifies it. But this trust can't be produced at the push of a button, it takes time, it's a process, it takes several years, but then it's there. Not everything I put on was a blockbuster — some things in Salzburg were quite difficult, and they were nevertheless received wonderfully, gratefully, empathetically, because it was entirely clear that visitors follow a demand that is neither dictatorial nor pedagogical, but simply present. That has a great deal to do with freedom. I believe you do no one any favours by telling them, you must hear it this way and no other. That doesn't work. The freedom of listening, the freedom of receiving what one can experience — in the theatre, everywhere — is actually the most essential thing, and the rest may or may not follow. If it doesn't follow, it's no tragedy; if it does, so be it.

Interesting thought, I've never thought about it in this form before, but I'm delighted that, for all the force of opinion I can bring to bear, I can force no one in my audience to understand it the way I would like them to. I had the privilege of working with Nikolaus Harnoncourt for fourteen years, and it was decisive that the force of opinion we encountered as performers, as fellow musicians in the rehearsal process, was the greatest I can imagine in my professional career — but it was relinquished in the concert. That's what made working with Nikolaus Harnoncourt so possible and so special: in the rehearsal process, everything was discussed, one tried to force it, shape it, bend it, and then in the concert came the famous Harnoncourt gaze, which meant: right, now it's your turn. That made it possible for the categories of the power of opinion and the force of opinion to meet humanity — to say, we now open this up precisely, from me to you, from you to the next, to all of us. And then it opens out into the concert hall, and we have the chance to let that space of experience arise, by which we are all animated. But you used the word "force of opinion" — I witnessed a great many of Nikolaus Harnoncourt's rehearsals, I also saw him teach at the Mozarteum, in his dealings with students, with the Vienna Philharmonic, with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, in all kinds of constellations, and I experienced him as someone who had a very precise idea of what he wanted to achieve with a piece, but who was not authoritarian. He

was an authority — that's a big difference — but never encountered anyone in an authoritarian way, the way some conductors do. He opened up spaces of thought that were truly wonderful, he also had the ability to develop images, to explain music almost simply — this paradox between a relatively simple explanation and the complex process of interpretation, or the extremely difficult explanation and the simple interpretation. I believe there are very antagonistic forces at work in the interpretation of musical works, and bringing these antagonistic forces into productive contact is one of the great ambitions that many people have, and rightly so. In order to achieve something that either consists in this friction or leads to a pacification. The friction can itself be a pacification — it's not as though we're creating some kind of comfort zone. The friction is gratifying, because it's exciting. Pacification is something quite different from gratification. It is pacifying, let me correct myself. No, I find gratifying much more interesting. No, not I. Not? Friction. We don't agree — finally, finally, perhaps this is a good moment to disagree, in order to keep working.

Dear Markus, I was not bored. I thank you most warmly for coming, for your attention, for your sensitivity, I thank you for your work. Let me say this quite clearly too: I was very selective, in the years when you were most recently responsible for the Festival in Salzburg, in being your guest, and that was always a personal concern of mine, because the attitude we've also spoken about today was always very present to me — from the way you sought out collaboration, through to its realization and execution. So I now find myself in the special position of being able to thank you, for being here today, but also for our collaboration over the past years. Thank you for everything. Thank you.