

47th AEC ANNUAL CONGRESS and GENERAL ASSEMBLY 6 & 7 November 2020

Going On(line) - Connecting Communities in the Digital Age

This year everything is different. In our private as well as in our professional life, we are faced with new and unexpected challenges. We were forced to get away from the way of social interaction we were used to, and only then many people realised how crucial these are to our quality of life. The pictures we have seen last spring are burned into our memories. Our sympathy goes especially to the victims of the pandemic and their families. But COVID-19 also has disastrous consequences for many of those who have survived the crisis without damages to body and soul. Especially many freelance musicians and many other professionals and workers of the music and, more in general, cultural and events sector, have lost their sources of income overnight.

Compared to this, most AEC member institutions got off fairly lightly. As institutions that are as a rule subsidized by public funds, their very existence was never really at stake. This also entails a very particular responsibility. We can't just wait for a vaccine to come or for the epidemic to vanish in thin air and then go back to our old habits. Especially in times of crisis, Music HEIs have a special responsibility to guarantee a high level of learning and teaching activities and appropriately prepare students not only to cope with the challenges of the future, but also to proactively shape further developments.

The AEC Annual Congress 2020 is a very special congress that forces organisers and hosts to break new grounds. When it turned out to be obvious that we had to give up our original plan to hold the congress in Antwerp, we were and still are happy and incredibly grateful for the commitment of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw) to fill in at short notice. Mdw has outstanding facilities and technical infrastructures and spontaneously agreed to take the risk of hosting an AEC Congress whose precise course of events might only be known at the last minute.

It seemed reasonable to address the special challenge that is triggered by this special time in terms of content at this congress, but also to link it in a meaningful way to the leitmotif of AEC's current Creative Europe project: Strengthening Music in Society. Albeit in a form adapted to the technical and communicative possibilities of online transmission, this AEC Congress 2020 will aim, more than ever, at *connecting communities* and constituencies that are divided by physical distance - among other barriers - and are therefore more and more in need to communicate, exchange, confront and collaborate. As usual and despite the constraints given by the situation, the AEC Congress will offer a whole gathering of workshops, discussion forums, best practice presentations, panels and plenaries to work together to find constructive and forward-looking solutions.

This congress should, however, also give space to try out new forms of presentation and communication. This includes not only the use of chat rooms, but also teleconferencing systems that enable musical interaction on the Internet. Via LoLa, Milan and Tallinn will be connected to Vienna as part of a pan-European network and acting as co-hosts of this year's AEC congress.

With this in mind, you are warmly welcome to join the AEC Congress 2020 to explore new ways together with the AEC family in search of the role of Music HEIs in tomorrow's society.