

Andreas Sønning (2024): Creative Concert Production and Entrepreneurship: Concert Dramaturgy and Project Development for the Performing Arts, Routledge Publishing

Book Review

Florin Luchian

„George Enescu” National University of Arts from Iași

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Andreas Sønning's "Creative Concert Production and Entrepreneurship", published in 2024 by Routledge, arrives as a timely and comprehensive resource, providing a thorough exploration of the musical and dramaturgical challenges involved in concert production. With an extensive experience as a classical flautist, Sønning, Professor at the Norwegian Academy of Music and a successful artistic manager and producer, offers a unique blend of theoretical frameworks and practical methodologies for navigating the complex landscape of modern concert production.

With this book, the author fills a real gap in music education and professional development: how to transform musical excellence into compelling stage experiences that resonate with audiences and create sustainable career pathways. Rather than treating entrepreneurship as separate from artistic concerns, Sønning successfully integrates these domains, showing how artistic integrity and business insight can strengthen one another.

This book is thoughtfully divided into two main sections: Creative Concert Production and Cultural Entrepreneurship. In the first section, which consists of four chapters, Sønning explores the complexities of music and cultural communication, project development, and the techniques for creating engaging stage productions. He underscores the necessity of possessing high artistic skills, cultural awareness, and the flexibility to adapt to different performance settings and formats. The detailed discussions on concert dramaturgy and the comprehensive approach to music production are especially beneficial for both students and industry professionals. The second section, made up of five additional chapters, shifts its focus to the entrepreneurial side of the performing arts. Sønning introduces essential concepts of innovation and entrepreneurship, emphasising the importance of value systems, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the role of music production organisations. The inclusion of case studies, such as the Telenor Culture Programme and the Kennedy Center project, offers practical insights into effective cultural initiatives and their societal impact. Contributions from guest authors Daniel Nordgård and Paul Rutter further enhance this book by examining the global music industry and the current challenges in music production. Nordgård's exploration of the digital transformation within the music sector and Rutter's insights on value chains and copyright protection provide important viewpoints on the changing dynamics of music production and distribution.

Sønning structures his analysis around six critical challenges facing today's music professionals, which form the backbone of this book's approach: **(1) Developing artistic skilfulness and a distinctive voice**—Sønning emphasises that technical mastery, while essential, must be paired with a unique artistic identity to truly stand out in a crowded field; **(2) Building production competency**—musicians must develop dramaturgical skills to create comprehensive stage experiences that engage audiences on multiple sensory levels; **(3) Establishing value systems and value chains**—Sønning provides frameworks for understanding how musicians fit within broader networks of collaboration and commerce, highlighting the importance of customising productions for

specific contexts; **(4) Creating value-based cultural communication**—as music has the power to communicate across cultural boundaries and serve broader social purposes; **(5) Mastering both live performance and digital documentation**—acknowledging the tension between perfected recordings and the immediacy of live performance, offering strategies for excellence in both domains; and **(6) Adapting to the transformed music industry landscape**—this book presenting a clear analysis of how digital disruption has fundamentally altered musicians' career paths, with practical guidance for navigating these changes.

What sets this book apart is its interdisciplinary approach. Sønning draws connections between artistic concerns, production processes, and business frameworks in ways that feel organic rather than forced. His discussion of "hybrid concerts" that blend multiple artistic expressions reflects a sophisticated understanding of contemporary performance trends, also offering very valuable models coming from his extensive experience.

This book's greatest strength lies in its tripartite toolset for addressing these challenges: **(1) Analytical approaches**—such as audience dynamics, dramatic structure, and communicative effectiveness, which help musicians make intentional artistic choices; **(2) Production process approaches**—outlining collaborative methodologies that foster creativity and innovation, with particular attention to the "storyboarding" process that connects artistic vision to practical implementation; and **(3) Institutional form approaches**—analysing entrepreneurial models that can support sustainable artistic careers, ranging from sole proprietorships to integrated cultural programmes.

This book's discussion of value systems is particularly illuminating, showing how musicians can position themselves within various "value chains" to maximise their impact and sustainability. By acknowledging the reality that most musicians will pursue portfolio careers rather than traditional institutional positions, Sønning provides practical guidance for a path that many musicians will inevitably follow but for which they often receive little formal preparation.

What makes this book especially valuable, in my opinion, is its focus on concert production as a complex and dynamic form of cultural communication. Sønning's analysis of how music functioned in the wake of the 2011 terror attacks in Norway provides a powerful example of music's capacity to frame collective experiences and process complex emotions.

This book's emphasis on intercultural communication and value-based programming offers a vision of musical practice that extends beyond entertainment to encompass diplomatic, educational, and therapeutic functions. This expanded view of musical purpose feels especially relevant in our increasingly fractured cultural landscape.

For educators in this field, this book offers a blueprint for curriculum development that better prepares students for contemporary realities. For practicing musicians and students, it provides frameworks for reimagining their work and expanding their professional horizons. For arts administrators and cultural policymakers, it offers insights into fostering more vibrant and sustainable musical ecosystems.

"Creative Concert Production and Entrepreneurship" represents a significant contribution to our understanding of what it means to be a musician in the 21st century. By reframing concert production as a form of integrated cultural communication that encompasses artistic excellence, dramaturgical awareness, entrepreneurial thinking, and social consciousness, Sønning offers a vision that is both practical and inspiring.

This book successfully bridges theory and practice, providing concrete tools while also encouraging readers to reflect deeply on the purpose and potential of their musical work. For students, educators, and professionals navigating an increasingly complex musical landscape, this book offers valuable guidance for creating performances that are not only artistically compelling but also socially relevant and economically sustainable.

Sønning's comprehensive and inspiring book on creative concert production and entrepreneurship is highly relevant to the general music world and particularly beneficial for faculty and students in art, research, and education. It is an enormously important and helpful tool, pointing towards new possibilities for meaningful and sustainable musical practice. This makes this book an essential resource for anyone seeking to understand and shape the future of live musical performance.