



CONCEPT

Sounds of Somme

working title

A project for Europe

Music for choir and improvised
instruments from the trenches of
WWI.
Première in the crater of Lochnagar
(La Boisselle)

Concert

Documentation of the research,
development and realization of
the project: building of the instru-
ments, contemporary witnesses,
sources, participants and premiè-
re of the concert

Film

Interacative, multimedia internet
presence,
audio, video, commentaries, contex-
tual backgrounds

Portal

The Concert



Background

In World War I, soldiers built improvised music instruments out of old munition boxes or other materials at hand which they then played at the front. Based on that fact

- such instruments are being found and rebuilt
- the destinies of the soldiers who built those instruments are being retraced
- their traces are being researched in written records
- a percussion instrument („Schrapnellophone“) will be built from old shell casings that are still to be found in great number in the former battle grounds in France

The composition of a work of music precisely for those reconstructed instruments; the percussion instrument as well as a choir with soloists will also be commissioned. Its libretto will be based on texts that will be written/ selected during the course of the project.

The Concert



Performance Venue

This work of music will be performed for the first time in the crater of Lochnagar situated on the former front line near the village of La Boisselle. The crater was formed on July 1st, 1916 when the British army exploded the mines which they had placed under the German positions. This event marked the beginning of the battle at the Somme.

Richard Dunning (London) has been the owner of that crater since 1978 and maintains the site as a memorial with the support of the local association, „The Friends of Lochnagar“. Mr. Dunning totally supports the project of a concert in his crater and is a partner of the entire project.

Memory sites like the subterranean fortifications of the Chemin des Dames or the charnel house of Verdun could be other suitable places for the orchestra and choir to perform the commissioned music. In addition, a tour to other memorials selected by the countries involved could be envisioned.



The Film

The film attempts to unveil the stories contained in the improvised instruments and the numerous post cards sent from the front that have been conserved as first-hand witnesses of their time. It retraces the destinies of the people we encounter in those testimonies. As an example that of August Thureau and Albert Ansoerge, both soldiers of the 6th Reserve Infantry Regiment, who built that double bass which then was painted by their comrade, the artist Walter Schultz-Matan who bequeathed that instrument after WWI to the Bavarian Army Museum in Ingolstadt.

„Sounds of Somme“ is a film which will accompany and document all stages of the project. It will be shown on tv and in movie theatres, recalling to the spectators' memory what is at risk in Europe if we forget what makes its strength.



The Film

The production company, bernsteinfilm, using professional equipment (RED 4K), has already filmed the following segments:

- The search for shell casings in the former battlefields of the Somme
- Dominique Zanardi's café-museum in the town of Pozières (the reconstruction site of a trench where were found about 1500 shell casings as well as numerous other objects associated with the First World War)
- Acoustic tests in the Lochnagar crater. Bernhard Zanders plays there a reconstructed musical instrument.
- Taking of the measurements of the double bass in Ingolstadt by the lute maker Bernhard Zanders in order to reconstruct that instrument.

The Portal



From its very beginning, the project „Sounds of Somme“ will be accompanied by an interactive multimedia on-line-portal in German, French and English reporting on all of the project’s different aspects and events. The portal’s constantly growing contents are presented in an audiovisual manner, that is, radio broadcasts, articles and video clips offer the visitor to the website the latest information on the current state of the project and all its various stages. Visitors to the website can also contribute actively to the development, the research part and the shaping of the project as well as offer their opinions and start discussions.

The portal „Sounds of Somme“ intends to initiate a broad and topical debate on the subject of war and peace. It attempts to motivate young people to respond online to letters sent from the battlegrounds of WWI by the soldiers and in so doing to involve themselves with that project. Particularly suitable responses may find their way into the libretto of the commissioned work of music.

The Project

Motivation



The basic idea to organize a concert played on reconstructed instruments of the trenches was developed by the lute maker Bernhard Zanders who in his turn was inspired by a similar project by the French cellist Emanuelle Bertrand in 2011.

To this day, World War I stands for the desolation and absurdity of all war. The belief in mankind or God could easily be lost for good if there hadn't been those slight signs of hope and humanity which kept up a very different image of Man.

Some of those signs have been preserved in objects like the improvised music instruments which often were made out of unlikely materials that could be gathered at the front and which have become witnesses of their time. Those instruments were not meant to kill and destroy but to uphold the individual soldier's dignity in the face of the chaotic and inhuman sounds of war.

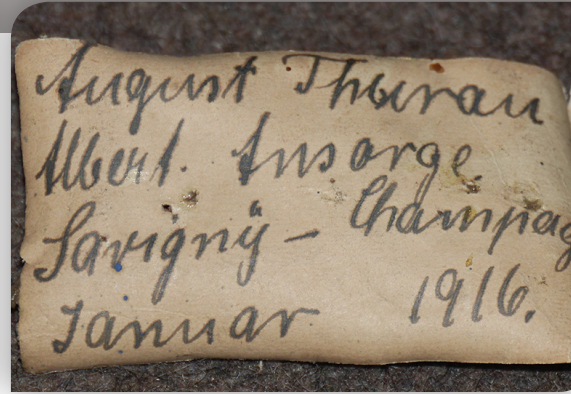
„Sounds of Somme“ does not emphasize numbers, testimonials, images, facts which illustrate and document the madness of war. Rather, it focuses on human creativity as the sole way out of the hell people can inflict on each other.

The improvised music instruments are the messengers of an individual and indeed vital creative resistance to war and fanaticism in general. Given the crisis in contemporary Europe, this message is of great importance.

Both by means of the concert and the film, as well as by the digital portal, „Sound of Somme“ wishes to implement the putting into practice of the values of a peaceful cooperation and living together in modern Europe.

It is precisely in the interconnection that this project is groundbreaking, since young people from different nations develop responses to desperation and despair, as well as to the initial enthusiasm for warfare. By doing so they create a new and different perspective. Because of this new attitude toward past events, neither the protagonists nor the general public yield to a fascination with horror, nor do they remain paralyzed by fear. Instead they discover the healing and uniting strength of music as well as the power of human creativity. This undercuts the logic of war and destruction and functions as a creative inspiration for individuals' lives and future.

The Project



Instruments

- **Cello**, called „le Poilu“ which comrades built for **Maurice Marechal** out of former ammunition cases (the original is to be found in the Conservatoire de Paris) and which in 2011, the cellist Emanuelle Bertrand asked Jean-Louis Prochasson to reconstruct.
- **Double Bass** which **August Thurau** and **Albert Ansoerge** built in summer 1916 in Savigny and which was painted by **Walter Schulz-Matan** (the original is to be found in the Bavarian Army Museum in Ingolstadt). The builders of the instrument were members of the 6th RIR that participated in the battle of the Somme. This instrument was very close to the front. Reconstruction by Bernhard Zanders.
- **A Violin** represented on a post card from the front. Reconstruction by Bernhard Zanders.
- Other instruments - if possible also of English origin - will be added to these ones.

Who built them? Where and under what conditions were these instruments built?

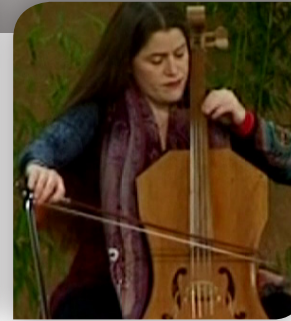
In which regiments served their builders and what became of them? How did the instruments find their way back from the front and finally into a museum?

Shell casings will be collected and rebuilt into a percussion instrument, the „Schrapnellophone“.

What did they sound like then and what shall they sound like today? In which factories were they once built?

The answers may be found in sources like the **diaries and postcards from the front by Maurice Marechal** or other documents as the history of regiments in which the builders of the instrument once served. Answers may also be given by the **descendants of contemporary witnesses like the painter's Schulz-Matan's daughter Uta Schulz-Matan**, living today in Munich.

The Project



Lute makers

Instrument-makers busy themselves with the reconstruction of instruments built at the front. How do they build the instruments, what materials and tools do they use to do so? What do they experience while reconstructing those instruments? What are their thoughts and feelings?

Participants

The French cellist Emanuelle Bertrand will play the reconstructed instrument of Maurice Marechal. In so doing, her desire to find a German equivalent to the French „Le Poilu“ will be fulfilled. In 2012, Bertrand staged her own program in which she had the actor Didier Sandre read texts by Marechal to which she then responded on the reconstructed cello. Elements of that concert may also form part of the concert in the crater of Lochnagar.

The Ensemble Amacord has signaled their interest in participating in the project.

An art director who organizes the concert and chooses additional musicians has to be selected.

The percussionist Martin Gruber has been asked to play the „Schrapnellophone“.

The team in charge of the portal will organize the responses of young people to the soldiers' letters and will continuously up-date the portal with radio-, audio-, video- and text-contributions.

The Project



Historians

Historians will provide the scientific frame-work to the research.

Christopher Clark (Cambridge) and Professor Gerd Krumreich (Düsseldorf, he organizes excursions to the former battle-fields) could provide the project with important insights.

In addition, it is desirable to involve the IWM - Imperial War Museum, London and gain the support of the corresponding French institutions.

Partners

Collectors like Dominique Zanardi, the owner of the „Cafe du souvenir“ support the project and fully appreciate the enduring importance the „Great War“ has today for both the battlefield regions and the world.

KONTAKT

Michael Bernstein
Karl-Theodor-Str, 66, D-80803 München
T +49-89-122 86 866
+49-178-55 22 238
www.bernsteinfilm.de
mich@bernsteinfilm.de

Bernhard Zanders
Büschen 1, D-41334 Nettetal
T +49-2153-46 33