

Speech during the annual conference of the Villa of Composers
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Mr President, members of the board, fellow members of the Villa, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for welcoming me into your inspiring circle and into your beautiful Villa. It is a great honor.

Some time ago I had a conversation with Mr Christophe Guyard about the perspectives of the Villa. He kindly asked me to give a short speech on my vision of the strengths of composer groups in general according to history and the distinctive advantages of the Villa of Composers.

Nature versus expectation

Although we do not always like to admit it, even to ourselves sometimes, we as composers are used to and, to be honest, like spending most of our time by ourselves, alone. It is something that is natural to our job and therefore natural to our character. Unfortunately this quality is not very convenient when it comes to promoting the works we write. We can not depend fully on managers and publishers alone. We need to get out there ourselves and we need the back-up of a circle of kindred minds. Our audience expects to feel a direct connection with us, with the creator of the music they are trying to grasp.

Composers gathering in the past

When you look back at history, you see that a lot of composers had the tendency to travel to cultural centers like for example Paris and Vienna. There were simply more chances to get your works performed and more financial opportunities. But most of all, there were other masters at work, kindred souls; people who understood your work, your frustration and joy. People who would inspire you and with whom you could share your ideas and mind. Even though the world was by far not as globalized as it is now, art was already an international language.

Colleagues were more inclined to premiere your pieces, being less afraid of radical music. They would review new music and since the ones reviewing it already made their career, people respected their opinion. The older generation of composers would look after the young generation by introducing them to the right people and getting them started with commissions. The new generation would show their admiration by performing the music of the established generation. But what is maybe most important is that they would continue performing and premiering the music once an established composer died. This way the music survived since some of the greatest performing musicians, conductors and pianists, were in fact composers.

The Villa

Nowadays globalization has reached its summit, making it even more difficult to get our music to the public's attention. It's hard to choose, for publishers, for producers and performers which composer to promote, to record or to perform. It is our duty to make their choice easier.

By presenting ourselves as one, one in the sense of a group with common principles on quality, ethics and esthetics, we send out a clear message to our audience and we become more visible to the world. Instead of staying on 28 little islands spread around Europe, each one in danger of disappearing into the ocean of the masses, we bundle our thoughts and talents in this Villa that has the potential of becoming the 21st century version of a cultural center.

Individual contribution

Being part of a community means feeling responsible for and contributing to that community. By ways of adding to the repertoire and adding to the internal and external growth of it.

A simple example would already be the social media: We may all use our Facebook to post updates on how our works are progressing and how our premieres are being received by the media and the audience. But we all realize that our own updates never reach as far as we would like them to. It is the updates, references and reviews of respected colleagues that have a real influence on the general opinion. By supporting and sharing the music of our fellow members on social media, we expand the network exponentially. Although there is an overflow of contemporary music, I often meet ensembles, mostly young and upcoming, who encounter difficulties with putting together a coherent program. When you are being approached as a composer for a commission, I believe it can be one of your responsibilities to advise the ensemble on the choice of repertoire that will surround your piece during the performances. As a member of the Villa you have direct access to a most intriguing and diverse set of composers and music, which will make it easy to introduce your colleagues and matching music into any program.

Considering the history and looking at the prospectives now, to me the fundamental idea of the Villa of Composers is *"Together we are greater than the sum of our parts"*.

Thank you very much for your attention.