



EXPERT MEETINGS 2017

'FUNCTIONING HERITAGE'

THE FUTURE OF MUSICAL HERITAGE

12 OCTOBER 2017 – MUSEUM SPEELKLOK, UTRECHT

The Expert Meeting is a new initiative by Museum Speelklok that aims to stimulate the debate about restoration and conservation ethics and guidelines concerning 'functioning heritage'. The first edition was held on 12 October 2017 with a small group of specialists. These curators and restorers – these 'heads' and 'hands' – were brought together to discuss the tangible and intangible functions of musical heritage.

Participants

Paul Born, Marian van Dijk, Sophie Elpers, Alberic Godderis, Menno Hoencamp, Friedell ten Holt-Derksen, Marieke Lefeber-Morsman, Hans Piena, Erwin Roubal, Jan Kees de Ruijter, Jeremie Ryder, Melgert Spaander, Giovanni Paolo di Stefano.

In this document we aim to present an overview of the discussed themes, agreed (and disagreed) upon views, and the main points that were brought forward during the discussions. It is therefore not a manifest, where all participants necessarily agree with all stated opinions.

1. Museum objects as information carriers

Restoration of an object can result in the loss of information that is important to improving our understanding of history, such as information on the original construction, the materials that were used or function of an object. In many cases, restorers do not have enough knowledge, time or financial means to facilitate in-depth prior research. In the 1960s, for instance, when the interest in old music was on the rise, many authentic instruments were restored a bit too hastily and a lot of information was lost. That might explain why many museums exercise restraint in their restoration policy, as few museums have access to sufficient time and means to conduct research.

2. Authenticity and experience

Functioning heritage often has several different meanings: musical instruments do not just tell us about a certain period's music, but also about musical practice, the furnishing of houses and social history, for instance. Even if an object were in perfectly authentic condition, it would still be impossible to recreate the exact same sound it produced when it was created, or the circumstances that applied to it at that time. Perhaps the desire to play authentic instruments stems mainly from some sort of romantic notion.

Of course playing an authentic instrument has some added value, but many instruments are too vulnerable to be played, presented or demonstrated. Furthermore, restoration is not always feasible, and it is impossible to maintain standard policies when it comes to restoration, as weighing risk against result requires careful consideration for each individual instrument. The other question, of course, is what the museum visitor's experience is if they were to see a damaged, non-functioning object – would a functioning replica not offer a more satisfying experience?

3. Intangible heritage

Functioning heritage such as musical instruments has both a tangible and an intangible component to it. The intangible side does not just include the way the instrument is used or the stories and music an instrument refers to, but also the craftsmanship involved in creating the object. In many non-Western cultures, craftsmanship is still passed on to next generations verbally. It is important that intangible heritage is kept alive by new developments and technologies. The craft of restoration should be able to continuously develop by using new materials, tools or techniques, for instance.

4. Tangible and intangible heritage: two sides of the same coin?

Separating tangible from intangible heritage may aid in temporarily improving the understanding of a certain specific aspect, but to get an overall picture of functioning heritage, tangible and intangible heritage are inextricably linked. To understand the intangible aspect, it is important that the object is functioning – a musical instrument has to create a sound in order to reveal information about the music and musical practice of its day. The problem, however, is that while using a musical instrument will certainly cause wear, *not* using it has the same effect, certainly in the case of mechanical instruments. That means that continuous maintenance and repeated restorations are necessary, and should be viewed as an integral part of functioning heritage.