FRIEDENSNOTE NR. 24

Living in Harmony

The song „Happy XMas (War is over)“ by John Lennon and Yoko Ono stands for hope in a world shaped by dissonance – yet, properly understood, dissonance can also move us forward.

„War is over if you want it“ — isn't this line from John Lennon and Yoko Ono's famous political Christmas song all too naive? The songwriting couple believed in the power of small steps. And they possessed imagination. For decades „Happy XMas (War is over)“ was an inspiration to people who longed for peace. So that „peace on Earth“ does not remain a phrase that is briefly activated year after year and then forgotten again, we must carry John's and Yoko's vision forward. In this contribution for #Friedensnoten, the singer and composer Alexa Rodrian tells us what this song means to her. And together with her husband, Jens Fischer Rodrian, she even presents a cover version of her own.

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SONG Happy Xmas (War Is Over)

PERFORMER John Lennon & Yoko Ono

> *A society should stay connected through shared values and rights such as the right to free speech, the right to self-determination and the right to freely practise one's faith and religion. But when another force, such as fear, escalates to the point where every form of individualism, of personal responsibility, intimacy and privacy is regarded as a threat to the common good of society, then that society is at risk of collapse.*

In this way I let myself be inspired by a thought from Mattias Desmet's book „The Psychology of Totalitarianism", one that strikes me as very coherent, and at the same time I have translated it freely.

What is a community that, because of fear, whether justified or not, is driven into conformity — into a seemingly perfect consonance — or that voluntarily moves there because of the majority trend? It seems logical and inevitable that dissonance, in the case described above, is not welcome and is fought against in that spirit.

Yet the truth is that without dissonance there can be no life, and certainly no development. Free speech, free belief, the right to self-determination and personal responsibility must and always will create dissonance; that lies in the nature of things — we are, after all, all different.

Thanks to the insights of quantum physics and chaos theory we now know anyway that without „dissonance" we could not exist at all — for nothing vibrates, sounds or moves in exactly the same way. Taken further, this means to me: if we strive for conformity and consonance and/or even want to enforce them, we are moving on very thin ice, for unison, seen this way, inevitably excludes anything that sounds different.

In classical Western music, for example, the concept of harmony was for a long time so idealised that music sounding different, or dissonant, was hard to integrate into contemporary listening habits. Styles such as jazz and other highly developed world musics were, and in part still are today, dismissed as second-rate.

Even the concept of cognitive dissonance, which comes from social psychology and is used almost to the point of inflation, sometimes stirs unease in me. To put it simply and provocatively: why on earth should it be so hard to unite contradictory feelings, wishes, opinions, goals and ideas within oneself and with oneself?

Would it not be worth striving, in the spirit of systems theory, to teach people early on to deal constructively with the dissonances that naturally exist, to accept them, to move and to change with them?

To perceive the other in their polyphony, to allow friction, to vibrate together and differently, to lose oneself in chaos and find oneself again — that, I think, is how Yoko Ono and John Lennon lived with each other! They celebrated dissonance and used it deliberately to draw attention to their goals as human-rights activists and peace campaigners. Again and again they made themselves vulnerable, provoked discourse and allowed it to happen.

In 1971 they wrote the song „Happy Xmas (War Is Over)“ together.

▶ www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/flA5ndOyZbI?rel=0

The line „War is over! If you want it!“ has since become the mantra of many people around the world who commit themselves to peace. If we put our faith in chaos theory and the butterfly effect, then there remains the hope that, if we keep singing it again and again, the wars will one day come to an end.

In this spirit: Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alexa Rodrian

Alexa Rodrian, Jahrgang 1966, ist Sängerin, Songwriterin, Lyrikerin und freie Autorin. Nach langjährigem Aufenthalt in New York (Master of Music an der Manhattan School of Music) lebt die Künstlerin heute mit ihrem Mann und ihren zwei Töchtern in Berlin.

Im Juni 2020 erschien ihr 5. Soloalbum „One Hour To Midnight“ bei Enja-Records. 2023 wird zusätzlich noch ein zweisprachiger Lyrikband „Hexenstunde/One hour to midnight“ erscheinen. Derzeit arbeitet sie als freie Musikerin und als systemische Beraterin und kreative Prozessbegleiterin. Weitere Informationen unter alexarodrian.de und mitstimme.de.

Website: alexarodrian.de

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