



‘Sternstunde’

Interview with Miha Pogacnik, classical concert violinist and leadership consultant on what business can learn from classical masterpieces

“Great Art really mobilizes the total human nature and that is very important.”
(Miha Pogacnik)

One of the objectives of Age of Artists is to promote the dialogue and exchange with thought leaders at the intersection of art and business. One of our first conversations brought us to Miha Pogacnik, classical concert violinist and leadership consultant that taps the largely unexplored potential of art as a significant force for productivity, creativity and organizational renewal. Miha is Slovenian Cultural Ambassador, entrepreneur and adjunct professor of Art and Leadership at IEDC - Bled School of Management. Details about his passion and profession can be found at www.mihavision.com.

Age of Artists spoke to Miha for more than one hour during an inspiring video interview while he was at home in Hamburg on June 14th 2014. Here are some of the gems from that inspiring conversation:

About his goal in life

My ultimate goal is to take the formative forces of art to reshape or recompose the human society. That’s really my goal.

About the privilege to be an artist and how he used this privilege to bring people from East and West together in the late eighties and early nineties to meet and collaborate on various subjects in a cross-disciplinary fashion.

It is a privilege position to be in, it's not an easy life but you do get around and you get respected. During the East/West conflict of the cold war, we were everywhere respected in the former east bloc and we could always to some degree play a role of the jester on the court of the emperor. We could always say things that were kind of taboo and we still



didn't get to jail. And the best thing was we were able to extend that privilege and protection to everyone that was involved with us at that time which was more than 800 people. So basically that privilege I started sharing with thousands of people which were my audiences. [...] So it was really a proof that taking the privilege of a violinist into the large social context was in a sense revolutionary. But in a gentle way. It was not something where you start fighting with people outwardly but something that happens in a fine way.

[...] The second privilege which we artists have is the privilege of performing the most divine musical masterpieces of classical music. This is a privilege. It's a privilege if you think what we play. Those quartets of Beethoven. You know what a privilege that is in your life but most people don't know this. This is very much, very esoteric for the masses so to say. So I felt the privilege of masterpiece is the next step to be widened or socialized, and that's why I went into business. I went into business because I discovered that the problems that leadership is dealing with on all kind of levels is the problem that is solved in a masterpiece, but on a very high level, on a very subtle and very refined level in masterpieces of great composers from Bach to Bartok and beyond. I am now able to make that connection between a masterpiece in music and leadership in business and I am also able to make it transparent to others and to guide them through this process.

On the business synonym for the privilege of being an artist

"You see it is basically a concept of intrapreneur and entrepreneur, so you can be either entrepreneur where you start a new business or new concepts out in the world or you are intrapreneur where you bring new life into existing business from within, but it is an entrepreneurial attitude that is important that should today be examined because **in my experience entrepreneurs and artist are growing from the same sources**. It is the same source only then branch it into another sphere, but at the end they meet because at the end any future business will have to be holistic in a sense of being able to relate to everything else - and that's already happening. [...] **The source is called the meaning of life**. [...] Let's just say we have a crisis of meaning. Most people today live from yesterday into tomorrow without knowledge or experience of where we come from or where we want to go. It's - this very short breath of living. So how do we create an environment in business that everything that happens is penetrated by meaning like you know is in a masterpiece. If you take a Brahms Sonata, every note is meaningful there. Just take one out and put it somewhere else and you have a disaster, so everything is meaningful. [...] **Meaning becomes an inner muscle**. We don't have this, we don't take meaning seriously enough but how to deal with that, how it feels when you emerge out there to a very meaningful life, suddenly you are full of positive energy and enthusiasm and willing, willing to do something not just because you make money with it."

On purpose and belonging in times of an emerging complex whole

"To belong is something very good, yes indeed and you want to feel that you belong to something that is in our time really in harmony with current, what I would say movement out of the ashes of something that is sort of falling apart because we are now at this crossroads. There is still traditional and growth-only oriented, destructive, we don't care, not 12 generations. So again, there is a lot of that still there while at the same time many people would rather go for a job that is less paid but they feel to be part of something that is emerging and it is addressing all the issues as one complex whole. **There are**



people who are beginning to look at the things as a whole and they feel very personally disturbed if you are only [...] making a quick money or quick success but you feel it on the other side you are destroying something.”

On the process creating great art in classical music

“I have been able to identify three domains which have to be [...] taken good care of. The first one is the physical domain, which is the violin itself. Of course, you have to take care of your instrument. [...] That’s the physical domain, just simply. It is important that your instrument is intact and so it responds to what you want to, but then comes the sphere of playing itself not what you play but just playing. Playing itself is it you see and that’s where I have had some very interesting experience as youngster my great idol, my great so let’s say master was Henryk Szeryng, who died in ‘85. He was the – to me I think the most balanced great violinist always and I experienced him in some master classes very close and my feeling, my experience was that is when he played [...] his way of movement of his hands, the way he connected with instrument, I felt like if life would be squirting out of his hand, life, so it was full of living. He was so organic. It is the transition from technique to life. So it’s not technique the technique becomes a living organism and then playing takes on a very different quality so that is the second domain. It is a transition or transformation that the violin becomes extension of human larynx. Larynx where the world is created. So instead of playing on the violin which most people do you start playing out of the violin so violin becomes extended organ. You start speaking. So then the next level is the aesthetics. The [...] what you play. The content and that’s where I have all these years of research and practical experience. I quite definitely know that one must try to break through the aesthetics because very often the musicians stay within a certain style. You hear them and you know, ah, New York style; ah, a Russian style; ah, Israeli style; ah, Belgian style. You know they follow a certain style and they do it very well, you know it. But you know this immediately aha, that’s the school they come from, but we see that has to be overcome you have to come through that, that must not be an issue you have to go through aesthetics, through everything as to know how to – what’s the style of playing Bach or Mozart or Brahms so all these things are very important but then you have to get through it and coming to the other side without forsaking it. That must stay. It’s the “Gerüst”. You know that’s the form which you have to keep if you are professional musicians. It’s the rules. You know you cannot just throw it out of the window, but then but you have to get through it and it must become a “mysterium”. It has to become an archetypal search for the most essential human issue which is identity and spiritual perception of the world. You know: world view. So in another words it cannot stay only within aesthetic sphere, so that’s what is very important to me. [...] **I just want to say you have the physical reality which is the violin instrument. Then you have living reality which is the next which means playing in itself which must go from mechanics into the life organic process which in itself gives a special quality, which means you start – you are striving to speak. And then, the third one is going from aesthetic – through aesthetic into an experience of the general, I could say “allgemeine”, so general experience of human nature one could say, biography and journey and solution, potential solution search which is expressed in these masterpieces. [...] But in the end, I always make a point that when in the end of any such process there must be a performance because music is something to be performed.[...] So suddenly you realize this is once and never again and we call it then “Sternstunde” or something like that but now I can describe why and what’s the journey to this “Sternstunde” and why that is possible. And of course, those moments when that happens, these are the moments people will never forget lifelong. So that’s why they are so precious and that’s why you cannot put a price on it you know okay you can only strive you cannot force them. You**



can only create environment in which they may realize or they may not so there is something you could afford. Those are the beautiful things about it.”

On recognizing the bigger picture, what he calls “playing the macro violin” and his contribution to Otto Scharmer’s book Theory U

“When I first time played there (*Cathedral of Chartres*) you know then **this concept was born for me of playing on the macro violin which was playing on the cathedral.** [...] So it’s something that is totally unique. So I started to realize, aha, instead of just myself playing violin I am now inviting everybody who is interested in this idea to become co-players on a macro violin, and the reason why this has some merit is also because in the meantime in 2005 I shared my experience of Chartres [...] with Claus Otto Scharmer at MIT in Boston and he was just then writing his in the meantime very famous book Theory U, and he said, oh, can I put that into my book? I said, of course. **So now if you read Theory U you will find the curve, the process by which the co-creation can unfold and so on and with the final phase called “playing on the macro violin” and that is my story to him.** So I feel very honored to be part of that journey.”

On creating an inspirational environment

“You can never force inspiration. You can only prepare yourself for inspiration. You can strive to create an environment but inspiration will hit or it will not hit; you cannot force it. Never inspiration can be forced. So that means I was describing the three stages which can be prepared but now I am also talking about business really. That these three things are intact and if there is a striving attitude to create that environment, then inspiration can hit; and then of course we have names and say flow, it’s great, it moves, I do impossible things and so on [...] But how do we create conditions for that and this is what I am so interested in terms of business. [...] Our organizations and our whole planning of business and work is truly on a mechanical level that second level has not become life and is not on the living level. So it is not very musical. “

“Only we have not taken enough heat into the researching how ... what are the stages to enable that (*inspiration*). I told you before you cannot force it but **you can create conditions that that kind of state of flow happens which means that conditions how you create and this is something, this is unknown territory, but we artists have been doing this for hundreds of years.**”

On ego versus rules and identifying with rules

“I very often make a comparison (*from organization*) to orchestra. If you have a symphony orchestra you have 80 individuals who are quite problematic people. Musicians they are all big egos I suppose including myself too. But as soon as they start playing Bruckner or Brahms, this ego is gone and masterpiece takes them onto the next platform instantly. There is no problem with ego. That’s gone and you are immediately serving something much greater. So I say what is this code that’s missing in organization that we don’t drop the egos. We don’t have that score yet, so the organization or business does not have yet Bruckner or Brahms and Mozart [...]. But what are the elements of Bruckner or Brahms? Well, that’s music but what are elements in the business? Well, you know **music is written on five lines and business is only today written on one line which is the bottom line** that’s



the problem. So what are the other lines? Aha, social responsibility; aha green and so and now sustainability. So in other words there are new stakeholders coming into the inner circle of planning of organizations and they must be welcomed in because they will sort of begin adding material from which a score can be composed for really great modern organization.”

“It’s all about the question of how we identify with rules and so on because when the rules are human friendly and meaningful then we love to identify with this. So it’s also the question of who composes the rules. Are we the self-composers of the rules or do we just get them passed on and we end up in a very rigid situation where we have to just obey the rules. There are so few people in most organizations that really burn for what their rules are on the wall. Their vision, mission and so on. Very few people will identify. What we need is now to create an environment in a company. We have to invest into an environment in which connection with one’s own goals and visions and missions can be reestablished that’s what’s missing in the organization.”

On feedback and critique.

“When you are an innovator and you are sort of dancing on the cutting edge you don’t really have the possibility of feedback very often. You are right there and things are just happening and they are just emerging and something is emerging that never has been there so you don’t have a way to check it and then to you don’t get a guidance”.

On the idea of a synonym for a masterpiece in business

“The first thing is that the masterpiece is always – it has to be looked at as far as I’m concerned – anthropomorphically which means you have to see the human being – human shape as microcosm that sort of reflects everything else that there is in universe. It’s not without reason that the human being has been called microcosm. So then you look at humans and their inner provinces, their inner layers [...] of thinking, feeling and will. You look [...] at all these things and then you can say, well: **how organization would look like if it was inspired by the human organization?** Then you would immediately discover that there is one fundamental problem that human organization has left and right [...], a more rational and more inspirational side, but in organizations we don’t have that. We only have the rational side. We have the boardroom and nothing else. There is no inspiration center in the company.”

On companies growing big, losing inspiration and how to get it back

“It’s (*inspiration*) at the early stage. In pioneer stage when a company starts those problems are not present because there is somebody inspired and there are followers and they go and they move and they are all screaming [...] and they are all willing to go through hard times if there [...] because they believe in it. So, and then it is lost. Suddenly there is a differentiation stage and then you have [...] divisions and departments come up. [...] The politics come in and then there you are. So how do we, in a mature company, reestablish a kind of spirit of the pioneering early stages, but on that level where the company is now which means you need new tools, you need to involve people in different ways. And of course the way I work in this respect is that I identify dissidents in a company. You know we will be trying to make a prototype. **You need just few people**



who are crazy enough to probe this status quo and then you have to have them to create prototype which then sort of makes the others a little bit nervous and they say, oh, what's going on there. They have something great going on. I want to be part of it."

On whether great art thrives under scarcity

"Well one could say the other way around. When artists are covered with money that certainly can very quickly divert certain inspirational flow so if we look at it from the other side I am sure it's probably true but it's not like you have to make them hungry in order to be artist. So that would not be right thinking. **I would say when you as an artist take on a vision and decide to go for it then this question becomes real. You cannot expect people coming to you and giving you money, feeding you and so on. You have to fight.** So that's true in that sense. If you really have a burning issue, burning vision as an artist and you say this is what has to happen and this is out of the traditional circuit of the arts where there is money, at least some money and some budgets, some organizations then you are really in a situation where you may really get hungry and I've been all my live dancing on that edge, I have family and ask my family how much trembling they have gone through again and again when there are best times and better times or bad times so in other words one has to decide. [...] You have to fight for it."

Environment for and inner discipline of an artist

"You need an environment and you need inner discipline with which you strive for that kind of state of mind. The environment supports your state of mind and your state of mind supports the environment."

Finally, on staying an artist

"I always think that if I don't keep developing as a violinist I have no business doing other things you know."

