

Radio Interview Capriccio, broadcast October 2024

Introduction

Lili Veronika Békéssy: This is *Capriccio*, the shared musical café of *Papageno* and Klassik Radio 92.1. My guest today is Vera Blum, who founded the artist agency Veracity Artists in 2023. Vera gained most of her professional experience as a personal assistant to conductors such as Ádám Fischer, Rubén Dubrovsky, Iván Fischer, and Roland Kluttig, which led her to various opera houses and orchestras worldwide. She studied musicology at the University of Vienna and later completed the Executive Master in Arts Administration at the University of Zurich.

The host is Veronika Lili Békéssy. Welcome to the broadcast!

Vera Blum: Thank you very much, and warm greetings to all listeners.

Lili Békéssy: I'm very happy that you're here. I've known you for several years and have followed your work with great interest. What I found particularly fascinating is that you grew up in a family that was passionate about music. How did that path lead you to study musicology?

VB: The fundamental question is first how, as a Swiss person, I ended up in the circle of Hungarian musicians at all. And I owe that primarily to my grandfather, Tamás Blum, who was a conductor and translator for musical theater — among other things, he was an assistant to Otto Klemperer at the opera in Budapest. My Hungarian family — my grandfather, grandmother, and father — fled Hungary in the 1970s and came to Zurich thanks to Klemperer, who was living there at the time.

That's why I grew up in Zurich. However, my grandfather passed away before I was born, so his widow, my grandmother, partly raised me. She taught me Hungarian and shaped me with her love of music — we often went to concerts together. Sometimes I wonder how my life would have turned out if I hadn't learned these two things: the Hungarian language and the love of classical music. I can't imagine doing anything else because these two elements are the central pillars of my life.

My grandmother always said, „Do one thing, and do it properly.” Today, at 30 years old, I can say that I'm just not that type of person. I played the piano, but I'm not the kind of person who pursues one thing to perfection. I like being able to do many things and combining them, but I'm not a world champion type. I don't want to focus on just one single thing — that's one of a million reasons why I didn't become a musician. Besides playing the piano, I played chess, went to circus school and dance classes, and I really loved playing soccer — as a child, I actually wanted to become a soccer player. It's the same with languages: I don't speak any language so perfectly that I could write a novel or poetry, but I can communicate in multiple languages — and that is important to me. I attended a very good high school in Zurich, and besides languages and many other subjects, the most valuable skill this school taught me — one that I still use today —

was dealing with diversity. Our class was incredibly multicultural, with people from completely different backgrounds, religions, and ways of life. There, I not only learned to navigate these differences but also to appreciate them. Our math teacher once told us, „You’re a complete freak show,” which I found very fitting. And in hindsight, I believe it was the best preparation for my work with orchestras. Because in an orchestra pit, you find such a clash of different personalities that it’s almost unbelievable — but that’s exactly what makes this work so exciting.

As a teenager, I developed a near addiction to attending opera and concert performances — I went to shows four to five times a week. As a result, I sometimes neglected my studies a bit. I remember sitting in the opera, memorizing French vocabulary for an exam the next day. To this day, attending concerts remains an essential part of my life. That also included waiting at the stage door after performances, going for drinks with the artists, and discussing the experience, life, God, and the world. This is still incredibly important to me.

At that time, I realized: I wouldn’t become a musician, but I wanted to work in the music industry. The hardest part was finding a path that would connect me to classical music without having to be on stage myself.

Career

LB: And how did you end up in an assistant position? How did that find you?

VB: Yes, that’s a good question...

Looking back on my career, I’ve always explained it as a chain of happy coincidences — I stumbled from one situation into the next without really knowing what was happening to me. I moved from one position to another, but in hindsight, I think it all made perfect sense, and in our industry, it might even be considered a typical career path, given the shortage of skilled professionals. When someone sees a young person who is interested in classical music and speaks multiple languages, that’s often enough to spark interest. And that’s exactly what happened to me — practically from 2012 to 2023, for over ten years, I kept slipping from one job into the next.

It all started in 2012 when Pussy Riot was arrested. This led to many discussions in Zurich about art and freedom, and about what should or shouldn’t be allowed in art. At one of these events at the Schauspielhaus Zurich, Ádám Fischer was one of the speakers. After his talk, I simply went up to him to congratulate him, and he asked me four questions: „Do you speak Hungarian?” – I said, „A little.” „Are you interested in classical music?” – „Very much.” „Are you the granddaughter of Blum Tamás?” – „Yes.” „Would you like to join me on Tuesday for a rehearsal of Die Entführung aus dem Serail at Zurich Opera?”

That was difficult for me because I was still in highschool at the time and technically wasn’t allowed to skip class. And anyone who knows me knows how much I follow the

rules. But calling in sick that day and going to the opera instead was one of the best decisions of my life. It was a bit risky, though, since the opera house was very close to my school.

LB: (laughs) Were you scared?

VB: Yes, I was afraid I'd run into a teacher, but everything went fine. And at Zurich Opera, I saw things for the first time that are now part of my everyday life. I have very fond memories of that day — like the first time I saw musicians in the orchestra pit wearing regular clothes. Or witnessing how incredibly fast the pit empties when a break starts — I had no idea musicians could run that fast, especially while carrying an instrument. I also saw a man with sheet music who kept running to the conductor, saying, "The orchestra is too loud," as if that were his sole job, to keep repeating it. For the first time in my life, I heard singers marking, and then, the director broke his foot, so the rehearsal had to continue in front of the curtain. For me, it was a wonderful first experience. Afterward, I talked with Ádám in the canteen, and — I was only 16 at the time — he asked if I could assist him at Müpa in Budapest, where he was conducting The Ring as part of the Wagner Days. I said I would love to, but I couldn't because I was still in school. He replied, „Alright, then after your final exams, in two years — so in 2014." And I thought: I don't know this man, maybe he's crazy, I have no idea who he really is, I don't know if he'll remember this, or what it even means to be his assistant in two years. But he kept his word, and two years later, I suddenly found myself in Budapest, standing in front of the Radio Orchestra in the broadcasting hall. When I saw and heard those hundred musicians playing Wagner, I knew: This is what I want to do with my life.

I moved to Vienna to study musicology — and just to be clear, I have to admit: I didn't learn much in Vienna. I wasn't at the university very often. It was the kind of degree that I found incredibly boring, and on the side, I had three jobs.

LB: That's quite a lot.

VB: Yes, it wasn't the kind of musicology degree where you actually study things in depth — I practically only showed up for exams and some classes. And in the beginning, there were a few months when Ádám was in America, and I only had four hours of university classes per week. But I had moved to Vienna specifically because I thought I would study seriously, and then it turned out I only had four hours a week. I had no idea what to do with myself. And then, another coincidence: I was at the Jazz Club Moods in Zurich and started a conversation with a man, telling him about my situation. He said he had a friend who was a Baroque specialist, who lived in Vienna, and was looking for someone. Two days later, I got a call from Rubén Dubrovsky, the director and conductor of Bach Consort Wien. He gave me an address and a time, and I went. From then on, I was the manager of this Baroque ensemble — I took the job because, up until then, I had no exposure to Baroque music. I thought it would be good

to push myself into an unfamiliar situation. I already knew the world of Wagner and symphonic music, but the world of a Baroque ensemble is something entirely different.

LB: So, you like deep waters.

VB: Yes, I have to! I'm the type who learns best by doing — I learn by trying things out. Lately, I've been thinking that I might not actually be an intellectual type at all, I just happened to attend a good high school. But really, I learn through work. It was the same with Bach Consort: I started organizing things like instrument transport, hiring musicians, processing fees, booking hotels and train tickets. The highlight was that the first concert I fully organized — from the placement of the music stands to assigning which musicians played what — took place at Müpa in the Festival Theater. So I returned to my old performance venue, but this time with my new orchestra. That was a very special concert for me. At the same time, I continued assisting Ádám, traveling the opera world with him, which I loved. But after four years, I felt that I needed to take the next step. Not because the work with him wasn't great — I loved it, it was an incredibly happy time in my life — but I felt I had outgrown that role. If I had stayed, I probably would have stayed forever, and I didn't want that. It was a very difficult decision, but I resigned. I was very interested in dramaturgy, so I became a dramaturgy intern and surtitler at the Vienna State Opera. And then came the next coincidence: I remember I was napping at home in the afternoon when I got a call from the Vienna State Opera. That evening, there was a Domingo anniversary performance being broadcast live on ORF (Austrian national TV) — but due to a communication error, neither the opera house nor ORF had arranged for the surtitles. This meant there was no surtitler and no prepared piano score with cue marks indicating when to press the button for the next line of text. They asked if I could come and save the live broadcast. I ran out the door — I even had to turn back because I was still wearing my pajama pants and had to quickly change. Then I ran to the opera house and... it wasn't even just one opera, but three acts from three different Verdi operas. So, I had to quickly copy the sheet music, got a preformatted text, and marked the cues in the piano score accordingly — except I could only prepare the third act during the intermission because the live broadcast had already started. Then it turned out that the text displayed on TV was formatted completely differently from the one I had received. This meant my entire preparation was useless, and I had to set the piano score aside. I pressed the button by ear — I had to guess, live on TV, what they were singing in Italian. It was a hellish situation, the circumstances were terrible, but I made the best of it. Thanks to that incident, I got a job at ORF. Barbara Rett, one of the most well-known classical music presenters at ORF — she used to host the Vienna Opera Ball and the New Year's Concert — had seen the whole situation. She asked me to become her editor for her classical music TV program.

I did that for a year, but I had to admit to her that it wasn't my world. I missed live music so much, and I belong backstage — I never felt comfortable in front of monitors. I wanted to be with the artists in the concert hall. Barbara was incredibly kind – not only

did she accept my decision, but she also arranged job interviews for me at the Wiener Konzerthaus and the Salzburg Festival. The Salzburg Festival had been a big dream of mine because I had spent a lot of time there. So I was absolutely thrilled to receive an invitation for a job interview. Besides, at that time, I was 24 years old, and my life seemed to be falling perfectly into place. I was probably going to get a job in Vienna or Salzburg, my boyfriend was from Vienna and played in the Vienna Philharmonic. If I got the job in Salzburg, we would even be able to spend summers together, since he played there. I had built a life where my work and relationship were both in Austria. I thought I had reached my goal, and that this was how things would be for years to come.

But just at that moment, the Budapest Festival Orchestra and Iván Fischer came into play – literally at the last second. I was in Vienna at a concert by the Festival Orchestra with András Schiff. After the performance, I went to Schiff to congratulate him, and he told me to go to Iván's dressing room, where a lot of people were gathered, and that he would join us shortly. So I went to Iván's dressing room, and as we started talking, he began questioning me about whether I would like to work for the Festival Orchestra. I told him that it would be a dream, but I had a job interview in Salzburg the day after tomorrow – so if there was a concrete position, he needed to tell me now, because if I got the job there, I would move to Salzburg. He said there wasn't an open position at the moment, he just wanted to ask if I was generally interested. I replied that I definitely was, but that given the timing, it probably wouldn't work out. Then I went to Salzburg, did the interview, and got the job. And at that very moment, I received a call – coincidentally, Iván's personal assistant had just resigned. Iván called me and said he needed someone immediately. This put me in a huge dilemma. I traveled to Berlin for three days, where his assistant was still working, and simply followed her around everywhere. That's when I realized: what I could learn at Iván's side, everything happening around the Festival Orchestra – I couldn't miss this opportunity. I couldn't say no. There was so much to learn, and I loved the whole touring life. Maybe I also panicked a little because, at 24, I already had a stable relationship in Vienna and a job in Salzburg – and I started to fear getting stuck there...

LB: It was too settled.

VB: Yes, exactly – too settled. I just felt too young to settle down permanently. In a way, I'm also a bit afraid of becoming too rooted in one place. So I had to make the hardest phone call of my life: I called the Salzburg Festival and turned down the job. That was extremely painful. Even today, it still feels a bit strange when I go there and meet the organizers – I think they haven't really liked me since. But it was an important and obviously the right decision.

At Iván's side and with the Festival Orchestra, I learned everything that makes me a professional today. Planning, correspondence, touring, fast and effective communication – and most of all, how much I can achieve as an individual if I really want to and put in the work. It's incredible what I managed to do and learn in those two years with Iván.

LB: And all of this in your mid-20s!

VB: Yes, and I am very grateful for it. But at the same time, it was so much work that my entire life in Vienna – my relationship, my every day life – fell apart. There was no saving it. Suddenly, I was in a completely different world and disappeared from Austria. I was constantly traveling between Berlin, Zurich, and Budapest – working in Berlin, working in Budapest, and in Zurich, I started my master's in Performing Arts Management. I kept this up for two years until I was completely exhausted. Then COVID hit, making everything even more intense. In early 2021, I decided to take a break – a time filled with strange job interviews and amazing job offers. At the same time, I had met my future husband at the Festival Orchestra. That meant I had to consider my private life when choosing my next job. I simply couldn't be available 24/7 anymore and constantly travel around the world. During this phase, I learned to say no – even to very good offers. For example, I couldn't imagine working as a tour manager for the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and still having any free time. I had to turn down many offers. After a completely disastrous job interview in Budapest, I was so frustrated that I couldn't stay there and couldn't find a suitable job. They kept rejecting me, saying I was "overqualified" – which, to me, isn't a valid reason, because if I want to do a job, that's my decision. I got so angry that I just went online and applied for the first job I found – because time was running out, it was already July, the new season was about to start, and I was afraid of ending up without a job.

And there was a position at the Graz Opera – as assistant to the chief conductor. After every conductor I worked with, I always told myself: this is the last one. After Ádám, I wanted to stop, after Rubén, I wanted to stop, after Iván, I wanted to stop – and then I thought, well, one more. The job in Graz was advertised with dramaturgical tasks, I was responsible for chamber music programs, and I got to write texts. I liked this variety. So I moved to Graz – and fell in love with the city. I knew: if I ever had to truly settle somewhere, it would be here. It felt right.

I also really enjoyed working at the opera. I arrived with the energy from the Budapest Festival Orchestra – which meant that by noon, I often felt like I had already finished all my tasks and then wondered what I could do for the rest of the afternoon. So naturally, I turned to the orchestra, because that was my passion. At that time, the Graz Philharmonic didn't have its own management or office, so I started taking on more and more tasks.

It was an incredible feeling to see how my work – small adjustments here, a letter there, an order somewhere else – improved the musicians' professional lives. It was a "love story" with this orchestra; everything just worked incredibly well.

But then came the abrupt end. Like many colleagues might know that situation, I experienced what happens when there is a change in artistic leadership — many contracts were not renewed, including mine. It hit me much harder than I wanted to admit. And once again, I was faced with the question: What now? Should I apply to another orchestra? By then, it was actually the other way around — orchestras were reaching out to me. I knew I could return to orchestra management at any time. Or

should I work for a conductor again? Move once more? But where — Stockholm, Lübeck, Frankfurt? Changing cities every two years?

I decided: That's it. My life with orchestras and opera houses was over. It was a painful process last year, but I knew it was time. The idea of starting an agency had been in my mind for years — it wasn't something new. But after being let go in Graz, I knew: Now is the moment. I was turning 30, I was married, and I finally wanted to be my own boss. I wanted to work from wherever I lived.

Veracity Artists

LB: That's a very interesting career path you've outlined, and also how you came to start your own agency. Based on what you've shared, you have deep insight into the workings of the opera world, orchestral life, and the organizational challenges that come with it. What was your main goal when you founded the agency? Did you want to work with soloists or orchestras? And what was your top priority?

VB: Many people asked why I wanted to start an agency now — after COVID, everything was supposedly more difficult, everything was at its most complicated, and nobody needed artists or agents. There was a lot of headwind. But at the core, I founded this agency because I see the bigger picture: I truly believe that the arts make life both more peaceful and more exciting. Bringing art to life requires excellent organization. And what's so interesting about organization in the arts is that it brings together both administration and art — you have to understand both, even though they are very different. The question is how well these two worlds can work together. I think that in the ten years of my rather turbulent career, I've learned a lot about bridging these two sides. And I believe I can connect them. I just had to find the right way to do it. If you look at the entire field of the arts, my small niche is the organization of high-quality classical concerts. And I no longer wanted to do that from a fixed position within an orchestra, in an office, in a single location. Instead, I wanted to do it as a partner-in-crime, as a manager and representative of the artists I work with — traveling the world. I didn't start the agency because I already knew exactly which artists I wanted to represent, but also because the world is changing at an incredible speed. The role of agencies is going to change drastically, and I want to explore where this entire industry is headed — because it is evolving, like everything else.

In the past, there was the impresario, who traveled everywhere with the artists. He didn't just sell them — he took on the entire financial risk. He rented the venue, sold the tickets, handled the marketing — he was a full-scale organizer. Over time, this split into two directions: local presenters, who are rooted in their communities and know their audiences — such as orchestras, festivals, concert halls, etc. — and, on the other side, agents, who try to place their artists in various locations.

As you could already sense from my introduction, I feel that the agency side suits my personality much better — it allows me to be mobile since I have a certain restlessness in me. I am not someone who is locally anchored; I want to support those who are. I

founded the agency a year ago because I had gathered so many questions over these past ten years, and with this agency, I want to find the answers.

LB: And what are these questions?

VB: The problem is that in the first year, I have gathered even more questions. But I am happy to share what I have learned so far. The starting point was that, over the past years, I have spoken with hundreds of musicians and sensed an almost hostile attitude toward the agency world. There were many complaints, and I tried to distill the fundamental issues from all these conversations. I identified two key points where I thought I might be able to do things better.

The first point musicians criticize is transparency. Time and again, and not uncommonly, I hear that artists are incredibly excited to finally be taken on by an agency, sometimes even paying a fixed fee for it, only to receive no concert bookings. And when they ask what is going on — whether they are not in demand, whether the agent has no time to work for them, who has been contacted — they get no response. This leads to a huge breach of trust. The lack of transparency creates a trust issue between the agency and the artists. That was my starting point, which is why I named my agency „Veracity Artists.“ Of course, it is a wordplay on my name — Vera + City, because you can find me in any city where there is a concert hall or even just a garage where concerts take place. [But "veracity" also means honesty in english.] My goal — still a work in progress and not yet technically 100% functional — is to give musicians access to my online notes. They can always see whom I have written to, who has responded and who has not, and also the reasons why something may not be working out — whether, for example, a violinist is not needed or if there are less pleasant reasons, like someone not wanting a musician of Asian heritage. Of course, unpleasant things may come up. But I give musicians this access. Whether they want to look at it is another question. Some artists check it weekly and write to me: „Oh great, I saw that you contacted these 50 people in Italy.“ Then we can start a conversation: „I see you have sent many emails to Italy, but I will be in Berlin soon, and I would rather focus on Berlin — who should we reach out to there?“ I want to handle this as openly as possible with musicians.

The second issue is that many agencies — of course, not all, but this perception has developed — especially large agencies, charge a fixed commission on the artist's entire income. They justify this by saying, „Once you are with us, all engagements happen only because of our agency, so it is justified that we take a share of all earnings.“

My agency is practically a newborn, just founded — so it does not work that way for me. For me, it is the exact opposite: My agency has income because the artists already have concerts, many of which I did not even organize myself. I wanted to find a compromise for this. Because what does NOT work is discussing every single request and trying to figure out whether an engagement came about because of a champagne round with the artist after the concert or because I had a good phone conversation with the artistic director. That leads nowhere.

Instead, I offer musicians the option of submitting a contact list when they join the agency — a win-win situation. This way, I get valuable contacts and do not have to spend a lot of time researching. In return, the artist can stipulate in their contract that these contacts are "protected" from the highest commission level. If an inquiry comes from one of these existing contacts, the artist can decide: Either they handle it themselves — in which case I take 0% — or they pass it on to me because they do not have the time to manage it, and then I take a mid-level commission. But never the highest.

I think this is a very fair compromise because artists have invested years into these relationships, and I see no reason why I should charge 20% for something they built themselves. I am currently experimenting with this model. On one hand, it is very fair, but it also means more work for the artists since they have to decide which category an inquiry falls into. Some musicians simply say, „I don't have time to deal with this, or my career is going well anyway — I don't want to reconsider every inquiry." With them, I can agree on a fixed commission for everything. But this is optional; the musicians can choose for themselves.

On the other hand, I have also spoken with presenters to understand their issues with agencies, and two main points have emerged here as well. The first is that many presenters say: „Vera, you wouldn't believe how often I have to chase down information. Why don't agencies send the necessary materials on time? Why do I always have to follow up, five times even?" I have met some truly desperate people. The second point — and this is my advantage — is that many presenters say agents have a very particular way of thinking, and they quickly notice when someone has previously worked on the presenter's side. That is my strength: I can think like a presenter. I have often received feedback that they immediately realize that I fully understand what next steps need to be taken on their end. This allows us to work together more quickly and efficiently.

That is also why I founded this agency. I feel that I have identified the fundamental problems, and now I want to see if they can be solved. If not, then not — but I will try. Of course, there are challenges, but also advantages.

LB: How many musicians or ensembles are you currently working with?

VB: Twice as many as I can actually handle.

LB: Maybe you will need an assistant soon.

VB: Yes, if the money is there, I will hire an assistant immediately. At the moment, I am working with eleven artists. My initial goal was six because that number was floating around — six artists per person is manageable. The fact that it became eleven is partly because I probably did not say „no" often enough. But also because in December, I made a Facebook post announcing the launch of the agency — and since then, I have received a flood of applications.

What surprised me was not just the quantity but especially the quality of the artists reaching out. Some musicians with well-established careers were genuinely happy that a small agency had been founded — big names, really. For various reasons: some have a good number of concerts and have managed everything themselves so far but now want to hand that off. Others say they no longer feel comfortable in their large agency and are looking for a more personal collaboration with an agent.

But honestly, my agency is currently overloaded. In the coming months and years, I will have to work extremely hard because I have already spent three-quarters of my budget and urgently need to start making money again before I go broke. My top priority at the moment, unfortunately, is simply selling the artists. I have many good ideas and plans, but I can only implement them if the agency generates revenue.

I feel a bit like a shop that has just opened. I have carefully selected: a loaf of bread, some butter, maybe a shampoo — a nice little assortment so there is something for everyone. But so far, there are no customers, while at the same time, 18 shampoos and 36 loaves of bread are knocking on the door, all wanting to be sold. I respond to every email and explain to the musicians that I currently have no capacity. If the situation stabilizes and I can project my income two to three years in advance, I might be able to hire employees and expand the offering. But right now, I would ruin myself. With eleven artists, the situation is quite delicate — it is just an enormous amount of work. One of the biggest challenges for me is that I have never worked at an agency before. The traditional path would be to first gain experience in an agency, then eventually branch out independently, taking a few artists along — and, most importantly, a network of contacts.

I do not have that network. Of course, one could say, „But you know so many people.“ Yes, but these people know me as an assistant or as an orchestra manager. And they might prefer that I remain in that role because it is useful for them. The shift in roles — where I am now someone trying to sell them artists — is a big hurdle. For me, but also for them. I am no longer the nice girl who assists or organizes a festival. My job now is to sell musicians.

That is a very difficult transition. That is why building a network is a major challenge — it requires a lot of work and patience. Sometimes more patience than I have — but that is just how it is.

And another tricky topic: I have mentioned to agents that presenters often complain about constantly having to chase down information, and that my goal is to respond immediately or at the latest within 24 hours when a presenter requests something — or to prepare the information so that it is easily accessible. But the agents warned me: „Be careful, it is not as simple as just assuming the agent is lazy and not doing their job. Often, the problem is that they do not get the necessary information from the artist.“ And I laughed and thought: „Okay, I have known my artists for years, this will work out.“ But there are already signs that this issue will come up.

What do I do if I am at the stage with a presenter where we are already discussing the program, and they say, „The artist can come if we receive the program by Thursday“ — and then the artist does not send it? Do I beg the artist: „Please, please, please send it

to me," constantly call them — which takes up a lot of time and causes stress for me — or do I say, „If the program arrives, there will be a concert; if not, then not," and instead focus on artists who respond on time?

And that leads to the next problem, which is not just related to the arts but is a global issue: communication channels. When and on which channel we share certain information is a big topic for me. And I would say this is not just an issue in the arts — I am sure I speak for many people: Instagram, Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, iMessage, SMS, and — my favorite! — voice messages are NOT work platforms. If I have to gather information from eight different channels, it makes my job impossible. Maybe it is a personal disadvantage, but I prefer all information to be in one place — in my case, email.

I communicate with hundreds of people, and in our industry, there is information that needs to be retrievable even four years later — why we did not use a particular venue back then, what the issue with Mozart was, or whatever else. And I will not scroll through a Messenger chat in four years — if the account even still exists — because such information does not belong there.

And here I face a difficult decision: To what extent do I need to educate people, and to what extent do I let them communicate in the way they prefer? This also includes phone calls. Some people call their agent just because something has come to mind. That is a big problem for me because either I am currently calculating something in an Excel spreadsheet, or I am in the bathtub, or I am in a rehearsal where I need to stay silent. Then I rush outside because someone is calling me – and it turns out it is not important information or it is about something that I was going to send to everyone next week anyway. This is a major issue. So, I still need to develop a system for how my artists can support me with all the work that is coming my way.

LB: This is a very exciting and complex task. As our conversation is slowly coming to an end – and there is still so much more to discuss, truly! – I would like to ask just one final question: What future do you see for this agency and for yourself?

VB: The central question for me and my agency is: Will there even be a need for agencies in the future? And my answer is: To a certain extent, yes. This is just my theory, but I believe that there will be technological tools that allow artists to manage themselves – tools that will take over the major and important tasks of agencies in terms of communication and self-promotion.

Whether that will actually happen is another question: Do artists even want that? Are they ready for it? Are they capable of it? Because we know that some artists say, "I am dissatisfied with the situation of CD labels, so I will start my own label." And then there are artists where, right before the performance, you need to check whether they are actually wearing their pants before they run on stage. Everyone has different „organizational assistance needs," I would say.

But ultimately, I firmly believe in the future of classical music. I do not think it will disappear. I also believe that billions of people love classical music – they just don't know it yet. And currently, something is happening worldwide – I read about it recently and found it very interesting: Humanity is gaining more and more free time. People are working less and have more leisure time. It has been observed that this also leads to more drug problems, and I want to say: Instead of taking drugs, let's go to a concert or a museum – it makes life much more exciting and is also healthier.

I see the future tasks of my agency primarily in broadening the scope of career management. My strength lies in „doing a little bit of everything.“ Topics such as marketing – to what extent it should be the agent's task to help the artist get a good website, recordings, or funding for certain projects – are central questions for me. Beyond making music, there are so many more topics: How do you protect your hearing? – a huge issue. How do you protect your mental health? – also a huge issue. Or the instrument repertoire: Agents have told me that I should not take on a clarinetist or a cellist in the agency because they cannot be sold. If a clarinet concert has taken place in a venue, clarinet is “checked off” for the whole year – there is only room for violin, conductors, and piano.

And my question is: Where do we break this cycle? Who is willing to represent clarinet or cello? For example, I have included trumpet, brass quintet, and cimbalom in my portfolio. Where can we break out of these established patterns? I want to – maybe a strange word – „support” instruments and bring them more into the repertoire so that other agencies also have the courage to take on guitarists or oboists – not just always the classic top three instruments.

And finally, I must unfortunately say: I see it globally – this is not just a local problem – that too many music academies are still solely training their students to master their instrument at the highest level. Yet there are so many other topics that would help a musician's career – or conversely: If they are not learned, they can ruin a career. Many academies are not willing or able to teach such content – whether due to a lack of funds or a lack of vision.

Someone has to fill this gap. And I find it very dangerous to say: „That is not the agent's job.“ Okay – but whose job is it then? And if agencies do become obsolete in the future because there are technical tools that allow musicians to manage everything themselves – if that happens – then new tasks will have to be found. And what if this is precisely one of those new tasks?

This is tricky terrain. Before I implement such things, I always carefully check with other agents to see what happens when I do this or that. But my goal is to experiment. And that is exactly what I can explore with Veracity Artists – and I am excited that I will now have the time to do so.

LB: Vera, I am very happy that you have given us insight into a world that usually remains hidden from us. And I think it is fantastic that you have embarked on this

agency adventure. I am curious to see where you will stand in this process in a few years – until then, I wish you great success and thank you for being here today.

VB: Thank you very much! I will come back and report.

