

## The HungaroConnections Project

### Background

The *HungaroConnections* project was jointly initiated in 2006 by the PANKKK programme for contemporary popular music (*PANKKK – Program A Nemzeti Kortárs Könnyuzenei Kultúráért*) of the *Music Export Hungary* agency of the *Ministry of Education and Culture*, and the *Performing Arts Office* of the *Artisjus* agency of authors' right.

*HungaroConnections* is a popular and successful exchange programme that gives concert subsidies to semi-professional or amateur Hungarian and foreign bands to perform together in both countries. The target group is bands that perform "popular music", i.e., rock, pop, metal, electric, folk, world music or jazz. The grant amount is HUF 100 000 (400 EUR), to be equally shared and spent on the two concerts and can be used to cover travel expenses, marketing costs or fees.

### How it works

*HungaroConnections* operates through two open calls a year. A pair of bands can apply together in order to realise at least two joint concerts. The Hungarian band must select a partner from abroad and the proposal must include:

- one concert in Hungary, where the two groups play on the same stage; and
- another concert in the country of the partner, where the two play together.

Even after eventually publishing a couple of records and radio or TV-recordings, these semi-professional bands continue to make their art on a shoestring. Most of them would be reluctant to indulge in sophisticated application procedures. Indeed, available funds are rare in these circles. Accordingly, a very simple procedure is applied in order to obtain the little money available from the programme. Applicants receive clear and simple instructions about what the uniform lump sum can and cannot be used for. They are to submit an expenditure report following the concerts in order to receive payment. In most cases, the bands also receive a share of the box office revenue generated by the concert, except for e.g., free open air festivals financed by a local government. In a few cases, the 200 EUR might be the only revenue generated. In most cases these groups are already quite mobile and often go abroad in hope of expanding their "career" opportunities or just for the fun of it.

The applicant is the Hungarian band but the foreign counterpart is also a beneficiary. Each band must submit at least one song to the website administered by the Trade Union of Musicians and Dancers from where the music can be downloaded against payment; bands are to receive a royalty from the income generated on the downloads. Music posted to the site is selected by a small panel of experts chosen by the trade union.

### Results

Since 2006, *HungaroConnections* has supported 82 Hungarian bands: 13 of them won twice, and three groups have had three grants. Up to now 145 concerts have been realised – by definition, about half of them abroad.

Foreign partners are mainly from nearby countries but occasionally from further away. The division of foreign partners by country is: Austria (37), Germany (14), Slovakia (13), Netherlands, Romania (6), Czech Republic (5), Poland (4), Italy (2), Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Serbia, Switzerland and USA (1). This list tells at least as much, if not more, about the possibilities for arranging concerts in various countries than about the orientation of Hungarian musicians.

The project is sometimes criticised for not making the right choices. In addition, *Music Export Hungary* (which provides marketing support for *HungaroConnections*) is often blamed for inadequate marketing and the smaller than expected box office revenues. Opposition parties accuse the programme as being a device used to make political in roads among the youth.

*HungaroConnections* aims to legalise financial transactions in the semi-professional pop music scene which, for the most part, operates within a grey zone. For example, in order to receive a grant, bands are required to document their revenues and expenditures in a more official way than was done in the past. In 2007, the Hungarian copyright office (*Artisjus*) reported 50 million HUF more income thanks to this (and other) programme(s).

The project applies mobility incentives in an area that is sensitive from several points of view: semi- or non-professional operators of youth popular culture. It enhances cross-border mobility, either confirming existing bonds or provoking the establishment of new ones, leaving the geographical choice up to the applicants. It works on the basis of reciprocity without diplomatic coercion, to be appreciated in a region where cultural diplomacy is usually limited to sending rather than receiving. Beyond that, continued bilateral co-operation is not a goal of the scheme: those bands are eager to seek new environments, new publics and new partners.

*HungaroConnections* has its local variant; the *Retour* scheme promotes mobility through reciprocal performances between regions of Hungary along similar principles, but with less money.

## **Sources**

PANKKK programme: <http://www.pankkk.hu>

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