

Underwater musicians bankrupt: victims in international insurance case

The underwater orchestra Between Music has gone bankrupt after international insurance companies refused to pay a claim of 650.000 euros.

Between Music has toured the world since 2016 with their underwater concert AquaSonic. From Australia to northern Norway and from Hong Kong to Russia, the musicians have performed on their custom built instruments immersed in five large aquariums.

Paradoxically, it is a major water damage that has caused the problem. In connection with a concert at an art gallery in Germany in 2019, a leak occurred in a water tank at night, and 1500 liters of water ran out and caused damage in a restaurant kitchen under the gallery. Between Music had been hired to perform the concert in a very special set-up, which made it necessary to change the security measures that are otherwise a fixed procedure in Between Music's set-ups. The gallery had previously been made fully aware of this consequence.

"Our insurance company had told us that we were insured for this type of damage. Likewise, prior to setup, the gallery had consulted with their own insurance company. Therefore, it came as a shock that both insurance companies still refused to cover the damage. Since the restaurant's insurance lawyers could not get money out of either ours or the gallery's insurance companies, they have sued us instead," says Robert Karlsson, innovative manager of Between Music.

"The lawyers in Germany have always known that once the bankruptcy has been paid, then there is nothing left for those for whom the water damage had consequences. Nevertheless, they have chosen to sue us and thereby destroy an otherwise well-functioning artistic company," says Laila Skovmand, artistic director of Between Music.

"As a non-profit association, we do not have the means to try our case in a German court or pay an expensive compensation - I do not think there are any Danish art companies that have. Therefore, it is deeply regrettable that there are no other options than to file for bankruptcy," says Robert Karlsson.

The unique underwater concert has taken over ten years to create and has been developed in collaboration with researchers, instrument builders, free divers and other specialists from around the world. The underwater concert has garnered great international acclaim and the orchestra's videos have gone viral several times. The New York Times has called the concert "spell-binding" and many major media such as The BBC, Discovery Channel and Al Jazeera have made reports on the project.

For Between Music, the bankruptcy is a huge blow. After a long COVID-crisis, there was again a demand for concerts, and the orchestra had worked on plans for a sustainable water and peace festival that would tour the world, and where local enthusiasts and international researchers would be activated in conversations and artistic experiences with and about water.

"Our life's project that we have invested several years of hard work to develop and realise has been torn out of our hands. Here and now we have to get over the shock and then look at how we can continue our artistic visions, which we think are too important to give up," says Laila Skovmand.

The bankruptcy means that Between Music loses both aquariums and instruments, but several of the orchestra's members are working to save as much as possible through and upcoming crowdfunding.

"We have spent hundreds of hours learning to play these custom-built underwater instruments. They have no value to others but are invaluable to us. It's awful to lose them," says musician Nanna Bech, who hopes that Between Music can re-emerge in a new form.