

# In a world of division, music brings together people

Josh Island When I'm on stage playing one of my songs, I'm in the happiest place. When the audience listens to what I have to say, joins in unison to hum a melody, or sing along to a lyric, I am constantly reminded that being a musician is the best job in the world.

In a time of constant conflict and stronger divides between people, music is a universal language that transcends boundaries, cultures and backgrounds. Whether a Fête de la Musique in the city centre, a jazz festival at the Philharmonie, street musicians in the Grand Rue or a blues band down in the Grund, people of all ages, ethnicities, and social statuses come together to celebrate the magic of music.

I believe music is one of the most powerful art forms on earth and that it does two things to us humans: first, it makes us feel something. Music triggers a deep emotion within us, whether nostalgia, excitement, rebellion, calm or gloominess, and which is uniquely different for every person, even if they're listening to the same piece of music in the same physical space. Second, it brings people together in that physical space. There is a common sense of belonging, even if you are all strangers to each other. For just a short moment, a concert draws you into a world that makes you forget about everyday thoughts.

Music also shapes us with age. A teenager discovering punk music may find a sense of rebellion and self-expression in the genre, while an elderly person might connect with classical music, finding solace

and reflection in its melodies. Music helps us define who we are and what we stand for, serving as a soundtrack to our lives.

I feel lucky I get to experience these moments first-hand as a musician. When I was six my parents gently nudged me towards the classical guitar, and whilst maybe not thinking about it consciously at that age, I found it to be an instrument through which I could channel my emotions and feelings - all without words, which for many people is a much easier form of expression.

My first rock band as a teenager met in the basement of the guitarist every week, and even though we absolutely sucked, we had fun and became good friends, playing gigs around the country before finally dissolving. And believe me, this was a good thing. I continued exploring songwriting and noticed that whenever I performed these stories I had written, people seemed to understand me and wanted to hear what I had to say.

They connected to the message of the song and sang in jointly to a catchy melody or meaningful line of text. Music may be the only art form in the world

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Josh Island is a Dutch singer-songwriter based in Luxembourg since 2010. He was raised in the UK and Germany before moving to the Grand Duchy, where he started his music career right after secondary school. He has opened for Passenger, James Morrison and toured around Europe. His first album was released in September 2023, and he is performing at Opderschmelz Dudelange on 11 November with a 9-piece band.

where people can be ‘one’ singing the same message at the same time. Not only did it make me feel like I had something to say, but that I was creating a community.

While writing this I considered other examples of community and identity building through music. In small communities in Africa, the head of the tribe (often the eldest), called the Griot, brings together the village for drumming, singing ceremonies and prayers. Slaves in America jointly sang songs of resistance in the fields. Protest songwriters like Joni Mitchell or Bob Dylan weighed in on the rights and wrongs of current affairs and the state of humanity. The Jewish community during the Second World War lifted any remaining spirits with secret underground performances. The Woodstock Festival united multiple generations. And although a different time and age, even a massive concert like Taylor Swift brings together tens of thousands of people to be ‘one’ for an evening.

Despite our disagreements as people, music offers a powerful counterpoint by promoting inclusivity and shared experiences. It erases the lines that might otherwise separate us and, for a brief moment, unites us in the rhythm and melodies that touch our hearts. Music has the ability to transcend borders and social boundaries.

### Music in an open Europe

I’ve always felt proud to grow up in Europe and be a musician travelling around the continent. It may come to no surprise that open borders and the free movement of services and people make our lives as musicians much easier, allowing us to tour abroad with less fuss and grow our audience. This forges new friendships and connections while making an honest living off our work. Every night I meet different people with different national and cultural identities.

Even when regions distance themselves politically from one another, music is a unifying force. A survey by the Independent Society of Musicians (ISM) in the UK concluded that a quarter of UK music industry workers have had no work in the EU since the country left the Union, and almost half have much less work in the EU in general. They are considered third-country nationals and that makes it more of a hassle to live and work here. Those who do still work here remain connected to a culture they were once a closer part of.

One of the most impactful projects I experienced following the pandemic, and an example of the



Josh Island Live

unifying power of music, was a songwriting camp in Cyprus. 20 musicians from all over Europe gathered for several weeks to write, record and release a 15-track album. How on earth is that possible if you’ve never met before and don’t know whether it’ll work? Would the album be a complete flop?

Indeed, we met for the first time that day, but within a few hours of chatting over coffees and noodling on guitars lying around, we started composing. We had all different kinds of stories to share, despite very

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different upbringings, cultures and histories. There were no boundaries or walls that needed tearing down. But there was a united voice. The result is a beautiful album called *On A Red Thursday*. It was recorded during the final stages of the pandemic, a period that showed that people turn to music and art when they crave hope, emotion and direction.

Music finds its way everywhere, even into politics. When celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Maas-tricht Treaty and Benelux anniversary I performed an entertaining song I had composed about these historical milestones. Like any political event, the happening was rather sterile, so I was able to pep up the programme with song and satire. I was sure to make the heads of state and EU representatives whistle along to a catchy hook, breaking down the invisible social barrier between them and others. That's what music is all about: being together.

Europe has several programmes in place that support musicians living and working in the Union, promoting creativity and safeguarding diversity and cultural heritage. Over €100 million was spent on supporting cooperation platforms, promoting music

mobility in the last half decade alone. While they may seem just vague numbers, at the end of the day it trickles down to musicians like us who get to collaborate with others, hone our craft and explore our art further.

Luxembourg also deserves recognition for promoting culture, both at home and abroad. The truth is that often the bottleneck is money. The Ministry of Culture has long supported local musicians with funds to help record their first album, and the Fonds stART-up is a huge boost to young creatives. Meanwhile, Kultur | lx does a great job at 'exporting' Luxembourg acts abroad, helping them find new team members there to expand in new regions. All these resources are incredibly valuable and would severely restrict our options to be creative if they did not exist. There are many countries around the world - even neighbouring ones - where living off art poses a huge challenge. At least Luxembourg gives artists a perspective that it is achievable to do what we love most, and I'm grateful to the Grand Duchy for doing that. The world would be a sadder place without music; I'm happy I get to contribute with a few songs. ♦

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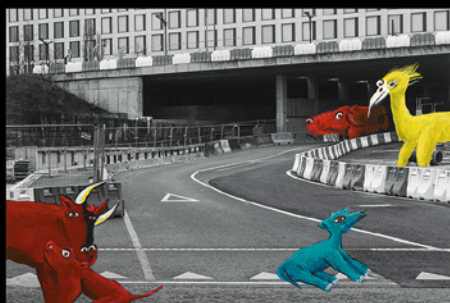
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vernissage  
le dimanche 12 novembre 2023  
de 16.00h à 20.00h

ouverture de la galerie  
samedi et dimanche:  
de 15.00h à 18.00h et sur rendez-vous  
du 12 novembre au 10 décembre 2023



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12 novembre - 10 décembre 2023