

It's great to be here for the eighth Tallinn Music Week (TMW), an event that has grown from its simple roots as a showcase for exciting lesser known music in the Baltic region and beyond, to an event that draws people from all over Europe and from North America and from further afield.

A conference that brings together musicians and the recording industry is always something special in our part of the world. But this year thanks to the great work of Helen Sildna, who has been involved in all kinds of broader endeavors for the last several years, it is even more. Helen has to come to the conclusion music is not enough and under the title "Creativity for Change" to bring people together to go beyond just music.

Yet from the first TMW, where I spoke about Pussy Riot, who had been arrested only a week earlier, TMW has always been inextricably tied to events around us. At that time I just wished to point out that making music is not something that's always easy and comfortable, that making music can lead to all kinds of other results. So TMW actually has always been inextricably tied to events around us.

This year, I would argue, even more so. And, more than we generally think about when we read the headlines of terrorism, growing populism and the rise of extremist parties in Europe and elsewhere, spewing language and simple solutions that just a few years ago would have led to their being shunned if not ostracised by the public at large.

We think these things don't touch us, or that they touch us in a vague way or perhaps if someone knows someone who has been touched by these events. But to bring home to where we are, who we are, what events mean to us here at TMW, consider the following: Few people, and certainly not the broader media actually noticed who was attacked in the Paris terrorist rampage in November. We perhaps recognize the name of the theater, the Bataclan. We perhaps read it was a rock concert. But most people thought it was just some American band.

But the band that played there that night was one of the more alternative and out there bands making music today, the Eagles of Death Metal, yet another Josh Homme creation. How many people here know who Josh Homme is? Good, I thought this audience would recognize the name. Even the band's name is post-modern ironic, referring to themselves as the formulaic and bland band, mildly country-rocky "Eagles" (mocked already some 35 years ago by Steely

Dan). The name, combining the bland Eagles with the teen-age primitive genre "Death Metal" is actually a joke. Nor is the joke hardly surprising given that Josh Homme, who has pushed the limits of modern rock with his Desert Sessions and other records, came to be known more broadly with an equally self-ironically named band, The Queens of the Stone Age.

This self-mocking is part of the ethos of liberty, that we need not take anything that seriously and all is ultimately open to being lampooned, even ourselves.

In short, the people, those 89 people who went to listen to this esoteric and little-known band and were killed by terrorists, were just like you and me, people who listen to something other than what your average radio station would play, very much a part of alternative music culture. Well perhaps not like me since most people my age aren't listening to this music, but I do. They were people who listened to something other than what your average "Rock music station" would play. I would have gone to that concert had I been in Paris at the time. I imagine many of you at Tallinn Music Week this year would have as well.

The point is, that whom the terrorist targeted that terrible day were not the usual symbols – government officials or military installations. They targeted something that in many ways is a synecdoche

, a

pars pro toto

of liberal democracy: a musical audience that is irreverent, open to alternatives, hardly the "mainstream" or the "powers that be".

While Daesh or ISIS or however we chose to name these murderers elected to attack the vibrant cafes of Paris and an alternative music concert, we find that here in Europe and elsewhere, voices of reaction, simplistic demagogues, strengthened now by the horrific bombings in Brussels last week, are quick to take up a refrain little better than the manichean black/white world of the terrorists.

Let us not delude ourselves. The prejudiced, often racist reaction that has been resurrected in Europe has no more tolerance for the liberal open spirit that allows us to play the music we want to play, listen to what we want to, believe or not believe in what we want. The mentality of the people who attacked in Paris is not that different from the mentality of the people in Europe who today are again speaking in the tones of the 1930s.

As much as it is fashionable to deride what we and our predecessors have achieved in Europe, the spirit of openness symbolized by open borders, freedom of expression and the rule of law is only a recent development. Here in Estonia across Eastern Europe it is only a quarter century old; in Western Europe, if we recall where authoritarian Portugal, Spain and Greece were only a few more decades ago, liberal democracy and freedom of speech as the general norm dates back only to the 1970s. While the UK has enjoyed its liberty for centuries, here on the continent the record is, as any student of history knows, rather mixed.

As a number of historians have pointed out over the years, we tend to believe that whatever present we live in, will continue. That what we have won't, can't change, is here to stay. We project from what we have today to the future. Perhaps there will be a faster and better iPhone, but the fundamentals, we believe are permanent. Here in Estonia some 77 years ago, in the cafés and salons of the progressive anti-establishment – the poets and artists of the time – no one really imagined that within a year we would be invaded and occupied by the Soviet Union and then invaded and occupied by the Nazis and then invaded by the Soviets again... who proceeded to deport tens of thousands to Siberia.

Few people imagined in the liberal if not libertine demimonde of Berlin in the early 1930s described by Christopher Isherwood and that would later be captured in the musical Cabaret as well as inspiring the late Lou Reed's brilliant

Berlin

, that all of that would shortly plunge into Nazi terror, concentration camps and all the other horrors we now know about. Again, people could not imagine that, they thought that free and open spirit of Berlin in 1930-31 would simply continue as it was. But it did not.

I don't want to get all depressive on you here. I simply believe that what we see around us is dangerous.

So how does this touch Tallinn Music Week? I think quite directly, actually. What this gathering represents is a coming to together of people who want to discover what is new, no matter how irreverent or different it may be. People who know what freedom means, or if they don't, should. Music, Rock music, as I have repeatedly stressed in my opening remarks here over the years, is something that gathers people who challenge, protest against the status quo, break boundaries. All things one can do in a liberal democracy. Even if we say "Oh, we're apolitical, we don't want to deal with that stuff, we just want to do our thing and play our music" or do what whatever you want to do. Yet, all that is enabled by free and open societies.

What makes liberal democracies different from authoritarianism, be it the Daesh variety of the sort of hard right we see today all over Europe is that democracies accommodate, adapt and absorb the challenges that free people pose; liberal democracies change through cultural change. They become something new and different until, once again, they again are challenged. What was once shocking becomes the norm. And after it becomes the norm it becomes passé or even a joke. Elvis Presley's once censored pumping hips, seem funny now even though in 1954 it was shocking; the Beatles hair and later concept album Sgt Pepper's, that we once considered to be so revolutionary today are passé; the Rolling Stones' universal "Street Fighting Man" finds himself a few years later as the German Foreign Minister and as head of the Greens, a coalition partner in the government.

Yet what we see today, with the emerging challenges of the rise of intolerance, with anti-refugee slogans and demonstrations, even violence, is that governments alone are no longer capable of doing the job. Instead of leadership we all too often see leaders, democratically elected leaders chosen to make tough decisions shy away from them. At the same time extremist parties and politicians exploit the current refugee crisis, like they exploited the economic crisis, they exploit the dissatisfaction of voters with the often anodyne and milquetoast resolve of European leaders. Citizens await decisive responses to crises; that after all was why leaders were elected... to lead. When traditional parties do not provide responses, citizens look for those whose rhetoric sounds decisive yet carries within it the "decisiveness" of reaction, of simple, often un-European solutions the Union was created to rid Europe of forever. We are, in short, in the situation Yeats described 100 years ago:

The best lack all conviction,
While the worst are full of passionate intensity

Which brings me to why TMW is important to me especially this year in its broader form, Creativity for Change

... With musicians, yes but also many leaders from the tech world – this is after all the home of Skype, Transferwise and a host of other exciting start-ups. But as well we have people who have first hand experience with the refugee experience such as entrepreneur Hamdi Ulukaya and start-up guru Fadi Bishara from Syria, both refugees, by the way, and math education entrepreneur Conrad Wolfram and... We have a festival full of concerned citizens who care and who can offer innovative solutions.

Liberal democracy needs the help of people who don't want to see Europe turn into a

reactionary, nationalist group of countries with closed borders and closed opportunities. We don't want a return to Europe as it was before 1939.

If we want to keep this free and democratic Europe of ours free and democratic, we must enlist ourselves, our skills and our commitment to liberty and justice. The problems we face are too great to simply say, let the politicians do it. I say this as a president. We all need to help and to use our creativity, be it musical, artistic, entrepreneurial or technological to make a change for the better.

It was this same joining of musicians and artists, entrepreneurs and people from science and technology that liberated this country from totalitarian communist rule. Certainly what we face today is nothing like Soviet occupation. People from all pwards of society came together, to play music or write poetry, came together to help out with new technolocites to be able to play music for huge audiences. They came to together for liberty. Certainly what we face today in Europe is nothing like Soviet occupation. If a playwright like Vaclav Havel can liberate a whole country, certainly an army of creative people can save our Europe and our freedom.

So it's up to us, folks. Let's do it.