

Advance Democracy – The 33rd EAS Conference in Vienna (Austria)

From 8 to 11 April 2026, the [University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna \(mdw\)](#) hosted the 33rd Conference of the [European Association for Music in Schools \(EAS\)](#). Under the title **“Advance Democracy. Participation, Diversity, and Social Cohesion in Music Education,”** the conference brought together 450 music educators, researchers, teacher educators, students and practitioners from 59 countries, across Europe and beyond.

The conference theme could hardly have been more timely. At a moment when democratic societies are facing growing polarisation, populism, misinformation, social fragmentation and declining trust in democratic institutions, education has a crucial role to play. Democracy is not simply a political system that can be taken for granted; it also depends on people’s ability and willingness to participate, to listen to different perspectives, to negotiate differences and to take responsibility for living together. Music education can make an important contribution to these processes. Through collective music-making, dialogue, artistic expression and reflection, music classrooms can become spaces in which participation, agency, diversity and social cohesion are experienced rather than merely discussed.

A particular highlight of the conference were the **three keynote lectures**, which approached the conference theme from complementary perspectives. [Wolfgang Beutel \(Leibniz University Hannover\)](#) opened the keynote programme with *“Education for Democracy as a Challenge.”* He encouraged participants to look critically at the structures and power relations within educational institutions themselves and asked how schools can become genuinely democratic places of learning. [Nate Holder \(Royal Northern College of Music\)](#) addressed *“Music & Colonialism,”* challenging Eurocentric traditions and asking how music education can become more inclusive, diverse and responsive to histories of colonialism and marginalisation. Finally, [Yvonne Wasserloos \(Mozarteum University Salzburg\)](#) presented *“‘Destroy Democracy’ – Undermining Society through Mainstream Music and AI-generated Hate.”* Her keynote examined how music, popular media and increasingly AI-generated content can be used to normalise extremist ideologies and spread racism, antisemitism and misogyny. All three keynotes were recorded and are **available on the [EAS YouTube channel](#)**, offering an excellent opportunity to revisit these important contributions or to share them with students and colleagues. The recordings were specifically made available following the conference.

Democracy education was not confined to the keynotes; it ran through the entire conference programme. Sessions addressed **democratic practices, democracy and research, social cohesion, global citizenship, diversity and participation**, while workshops and symposia explored democratic music education from theoretical, empirical and practical perspectives. Particularly noteworthy were the roundtable on **Democratic Music Teacher Education**, organised by the Network Democratic Music Education (NeDeMu), and discussions of how democratic principles can become lived practices within teacher education itself.

The **artistic program** further reinforced the congress themes. Concerts and participatory music-making created moments of shared experience that transcended linguistic and cultural

boundaries. These artistic encounters demonstrated how music can connect people and foster democratic and humanistic values in powerful ways.

The conference also provided an important platform for the [Erasmus+ Teacher Education Academy for Music \(TEAM\)](#). Several sessions presented findings on democratic and diverse music teacher education, including the TEAM workshop “*Democracy in Music Education*,” the roundtable on new TEAM Learning Outcomes, research on school music education in 31 European countries, and work on intercultural school internships and equitable participation.

The programme was complemented by the [EAS Student Forum](#) and **Doctoral Student Forum, school visits, concerts, the EAS General Assembly, networking activities and numerous opportunities for informal exchange**. The opening ceremony at the historic Schlosstheater Schönbrunn, featuring Benjamin Britten’s choir piece *Advance Democracy*, provided a particularly fitting artistic beginning to a conference devoted to democracy and its future.

The EAS 2026 Conference demonstrated that music education has much to contribute to the democratic societies we want to build: not by turning music lessons into political education, but by creating spaces in which people learn to participate, listen, question, collaborate, disagree constructively and recognise the value of different voices. In terms of sustainability, it is worth noting that the mdw Vienna organised the entire event as a **certified “green conference”**, meeting the criteria of the [Austrian Ecolabel](#).

A very special thank you goes to the Rectorate of the mdw for its support and hospitality, to the dedicated technical staff and all colleagues at mdw who made the complex infrastructure of the conference possible, to the students of the music education program whose commitment and energy contributed so much to the event, to the EAS Board for its close and inspiring collaboration, and to all presenters, chairs, volunteers, student forum participants and further colleagues involved in making EAS 2026 in Vienna such a memorable and meaningful conference. For further information and impressions, please visit <https://eas-music.org/2026-vienna>.

For the EAS 2026 organising committee

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