



# FOUNDER SPOTLIGHT: LENA PARZER, OPEN PIANO FOR REFUGEES

May 13, 2019 | Aneta Pawlik

While universally known and praised for his writing, Leo Tolstoy had a secret passion – classical music. He even wrote in his diary that “music is a stenograph of feelings” and committed long hours pondering the effect music has on human emotions. It’s difficult not to consider the very same sentence when one witnesses one of the spontaneous piano concerts in the city made possible by Open Piano for Refugees.

Open Piano for Refugees, run in cooperation with the social music institute DoReMi where refugees are employed as music instructors, is one of the ventures participating in the found! 2019 accelerator program. The initiative places pianos in open public spaces to invite integration through music, strengthening the social participation of refugees and social cohesion. We spoke to one of the people behind this musical initiative – Lena Parzer.

## Street Piano in Vienna with George Harliono



## What inspired you to create an initiative that supports refugee assimilation?

We wanted to inspire the public to enter into an exchange with each other, to communicate, verbally or non-verbally, and to give the refugees an opportunity to present themselves positively – through the path of music.

## Why piano?

A piano stands out – it not only looks good but also reaches an unbelievable number of people acoustically. And that is, after all, the goal – to inspire as many people as possible with it. The piano functions not only as a musical instrument but also as an integration instrument. A piano offers the possibility to play it together, but also to play it together with other instruments or to accompany a choir or vocals.



Photo courtesy of Open Piano for Refugees

## How did you create the network of partners you have today?

Our motto is: Whoever asks wins. We presented our project to our current partners and everyone was enthusiastic about the idea right from the start. In the meantime, people know us, either because they have already passed an open piano and experienced the magic and dynamics of the project for themselves, or because they have heard of us from friends or through the media. We ourselves all have a connection to music and know musicians, who in turn introduce us to new people from the music scene. The big popularity results from word of mouth.

## What have been your biggest milestones so far?

We could open our social music school DoReMi in March last year and can already teach 160 students in the 3rd semester on a “pay as much as you can” basis. Socially disadvantaged persons (with and without migration background) learn how to play an instrument together with another person, who is higher in income. We started with only 20 pupils, so this is a really big increase and shows us that there is a big necessity. Our



students are all super motivated, as are our teachers, which leads us to expand this music school even further – we plan to be in other cities and even countries.



Photo courtesy of Open Piano for Refugees

## What are the biggest challenges you have encountered?

When founding an association, there are several bureaucratic things to consider. One has to deal with the requirements that such a foundation entails and then deal with employment etc.. However, there is no challenge in itself that cannot be mastered – we have many talented and skilful people around our core team who stand by us in the most diverse matters, should we not be able to cover them ourselves.

## What are the logistics of organising Open Piano for Refugees?

First of all, we have to organise the location itself – we have to contact the shopping centres in the winter season and the public authorities in the summer season, to get permission to play in the streets. Then there is a grand piano to organize and in consequence the piano transport. And of course, we need a piano supervisor for each location to ensure that everything runs smoothly.

# How is found! supporting you? How are you utilising the programme?

The people who support us at found! all come from the professional field – there is an incredible amount of input and very helpful ideas. We are currently working on the definition of the task packages, we are working on our organizational structure. In addition, we are currently setting up some marketing strategies, with the mentors of found! actively supporting us.



Photo by Johanna Leitner

## The best moment of the program so far was...

To get to know all the other great participants and initiators of the projects and to see how much time and motivation these people put into their startups to make the world a bit better!

## What's next for Open Piano for Refugees?

We are in the process of organizing the summer locations, from May on we will be hosting our Open Piano almost every weekend in a different city in Austria and Germany. The 'We are Vienna Festival' in June is also just around the corner, where we



will be standing with our grand piano in every district for 23 days. And in the long run, the expansion of our music institute is on the agenda – we will not only leave it at Vienna



Find out more about Open Piano for Refugees on [their website](#), or follow them on [Facebook](#), [YouTube](#) or [Instagram](#).



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