



I wish you find many doors that open

Welcome Address of the President of the Max Planck Society

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer

On the Occasion of the Max Planck Schools Day 2023

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- Check against delivery -

Today I want to talk about your career, about the Max Planck Schools and about a legendary guitarist.

I am talking about Keith Richards, one of the most influential guitar players of all times. In an interview last week, he said his fingers no longer slide over the fretboard as smoothly as they used to. Maybe not surprising given he will turn 80 in December.

But he added something interesting. He said, *"(...) the guitar will show me there's another way of doing this. Some finger will go one space different and there's a whole new door just opened here."*

What confidence! What trust in one's own intuition. What a desire to play the guitar!

Here is something that passionate musicians and scientists have in common. They maintain their enthusiasm and they don't lose heart when one door closes. Because they find another door that opens.

A warm welcome to all of you, above all to the PhD candidates of the Max Planck Schools of Photonics, Cognition and Matter to Life! The Max Planck Schools offer a lot of doors to open. They provide many exciting opportunities.

Don't be disappointed if something does not work out the way you planned it, the way you wanted it to be or the way it usually should - because that will happen. It is part of your scientific journey. But in my experience, there is always an alternative path.

So how do you find your path? It is as simple and as difficult as this: Follow your passion, learn whenever you can, and stay critical and open-minded!



This requires courage. But we need your courage! Your research field needs it, the Max Planck Schools need it, and the global scientific community needs it. This is how science progresses. And you can contribute to it. You open your own doors.

But it is also clear: the circumstances change. We find ourselves in troubling times. Just a week ago, the horrible terrorist attacks against Israel added a new dimension. Terrorism never offers any prospects for the future. We assured our colleagues and friends of our solidarity and we try to help where we can. In such times we should remember how wonderful it is to be in science. Science brings people together from different ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Science is a peace-building project, and we can all contribute to it: to respect each other, to learn from each other, and to build bridges in the world.

This is why your community is so important! You have gone through a rigorous selection process. We had around 900 applications. A huge number. But I was not surprised. Because we know from a recent evaluation that our concept works.

The Schools exist since 2018. They are based on an idea of former president Martin Stratmann. The idea was to bring many of the best research groups together – in certain fields and from all over Germany, without institutional boundaries.

More than 50 academic institutions contribute to a unique network. I would like to thank the Steering Committee, the speakers of the Schools and the Deans. Walter Rosenthal and Jan-Michael Rost – thank you for your tireless efforts! And: the coordination teams are really essential. Thank you so much! Finally, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research funded our network. And we hope it continues to do so, because we think the Max Planck Schools are of national interest.

Last but not least, I would like to thank all PIs and all Fellows. It is their scientific excellence, their technological expertise and their collaborations that allows for your graduate training.

I also want to congratulate the PIs on the new junior researchers. Outstanding scientists attract excellent talent, that is how it works. But don't get me wrong: In science, it's not just the newcomers who learn from the established researchers. The inspiration goes both ways. I always learned from my coworkers!

Maybe Keith Richards would put it this way: You want to be around people who show you new chords, new riffs and new licks – as this opens new doors and will lead to exciting new music.

I wish that you find many doors that open, that you have a successful time within our Schools, and that you make friends for a lifetime. All the best for the future!