

## **Press reviews**

### ***In Richter's footsteps***

The first evening of the Tübingen pianist festival in the concert hall

[...] only a small floor lamp gave the pianist light. Older concertgoers may have remembered the legendary piano recital by Svjatoslav Richter in Tübingen. But also on the Bechstein wing J. Sebastian Bernard converted to Richter's footsteps. Bernard approached the French Suites No. 4 and 5 by Johann Sebastian Bach with strict access. This was not "spring sunshine and violet scent", as the Great Bach researcher Philipp Spitta had seen bursting out of these suites, but chiselled. Bernard's meaningful Bach interpretation was immediately convincing, but her full sense only opened up at the end of the concert.

Musical rather than pianistic abysses

It was as if the whole evening had just been spent on this moment when the restrained beginning of the B Minor Sonata by Franz Liszt sounded. Bernard designed the enormous work with the deepest seriousness and creative power. He let the pianistic abysses, like the dreaded double-octave runs, disappear completely unpretentiously under his stupendous virtuosity in order to draw the attention even more to the musical abysses.

The contrasts between the most violent eruptions and the enchantingly scanty Schumannesque episodes by Bernard were breathtaking. And then, in the downhill and upheavals, the lounges suddenly became audible, in the energetic section of the fugues the fugued giges of the French suites were audible. The audience thanked with ovations. Bernard is the future.

Südwest Presse 2012

### ***The pianist convinced the enthusiastic audience***

[...] his game became a reflection of Mozart's playful cheerfulness. With a sensitive attack Sebastian Bernard developed from a simple soundtrack an excitingly harmonious event in full-grip and secure playing. [...] the sounds raced madly up and down. [...] The highlight of the evening Bernard sat with the B minor Sonata by Franz Liszt. Once with the utmost power and then again in sensitive soft tone modeling, the one-movement sonata revealed various instrumental colors. Again and again, the enthusiastic audience experienced the highest tension and relaxation as musical images of human passion and mental struggles [...].

Südkurier, 2004

### ***'Altes Rathaus' transforms for two hours to the 'Alte Oper Frankfurt'***

Concert: Pianist Johannes Sebastian Bernard shines with a virtuoso, colorful play – Distinctive interpretation of a Liszt sonata.

[...]

Cultural Officer Gabriele Schmidt had committed an artist who today is one of the most interesting pianists – not only in Germany.

In Miltenberg he celebrated with perfect technique, with amazing playful ease even in the most demanding passages and with a complete renunciation of disturbing self-presentation an exciting journey through two centuries of piano literature.

Entry in a class of its own

Johann Sebastian Bach's French Suite No.5 of 1742 was already a first-class entry: Bernard's precise attack, the clear structure of his playing, which would vividly elaborate the varied themes in the seven movements of the suite and thus the extremely different characters of the stylized dances Bach himself was probably enthusiastic – which, as we know, was rarely the case.

[...]

Without exception highlights on the grand piano, but 'only' brilliant 'accessories' alongside the absolute highlight of the concert, which alone would have paid off the longest journey. Franz Liszt's Piano Sonata in B minor was often referred to as the "Journey into the Self". As Bernard interpreted this work, which is one of the most important and technically demanding pieces of Romanticism, places him equally in the impressive range of great pianists who have ventured on Liszt's sonata.

Distinctive interpretation

And – most importantly – He offered his very unique interpretation of this work, which must indeed be played like a brilliant improvisation. Bernard did not interpret, he offered a living direction as he made a journey through all the abysses and peaks of human life in 29 minutes with the almost monolithic, twice G.

It was a journey through all conceivable moods and attitudes between self-restraint and exaltedness. There were wild runs and brilliant chord progressions in contrast to a kind of soulful loneliness in Andante sostenuto.

A piano journey into one's own self, in addition in a darkened hall, which was illuminated only by a floor lamp on the stage, exposes also layers, which seemed already long spilled. Can music achieve greater?

Main-Echo Aschaffenburg, 2014

### ***The day and night string***

[...] Bernard with a bright, forward-looking clarity:

Rachmaninoff's Sonata in B minor op. 36 – bulky and grouchy depressive – got a heroic-defiant impetus.

A mature interpretation that deserves the highest respect.

[...] Bernard, the musical chameleon, which adapted congenially to each style: in spotted Staccato Bach's 4th French Suite, artfully the Jeu perlé in Mozart's Rondo KV 485. Bernard earned much applause for Chopin's B minor Scherzo, which he played with passionate force, and finally for his last

sweet: Liszt 's Second Hungarian Rhapsody – Horowitz and Bernard additionally with virtuoso deposits minded.

Schwäbisches Tagblatt, 2006

### ***Virtuoso under power***

Rarely has the pianist festival started so exciting and rich in contrast – with three artist personalities, as they could hardly be more different. The first evening on Thursday was all about romance.

Sebastian Bernard is a brooding lyricist, a pianist of moods. [...] At his request, the light in the hall was extinguished, Bernard played in the light of a floor lamp.

The homely lighting matched the intimate atmosphere Bernard certainly had the most tender and touching timbre of the evening: a sensitive, sometimes almost fragile-looking attack, soulfully floating tones with enamel and nostalgic patina. Brahms Intermezzo in A major and Ballad in G minor from Opus 118 or Fauré's Nocturne op. 119/2 had a fragile poetic melancholy.

Still muted, oblivious, two of the most-played Chopin waltzes danced their stealthy circles.

In contrast, four Etudes Tableaux and Préludes by Rachmaninoff were sonorous, dream-heavy. [...]

Bernard likes to end his performances with keyboard acrobatics, this time from Moritz Rosenthal's humoresque "Carneval de Vienne".

The 450 listeners in the university ballroom responded with bravo shouts and the strongest applause of the evening.

Tübingen, Schwäbisches Tagblatt, 2008

### ***With the piano on the road on a soulful journey***

[...]

Without a doubt, the pianist interpreted Schubert's sonata [B-flat major] from the year of his death in 1828 so convincingly that he did not have to hide from his famous 'predecessors' like Claudio Arrau or Alfred Brendel. He found his own approach.

Bernard intensely tracked all the facets of the sonata in 40 minutes, the restrained, hesitant beginning, the escape from the threatening horror into aesthetically beautiful melodies, the extreme slowing down in Andante sostenuto and – in nice contrast – the lively, light scherzo. This thrilling journey was bundled with all the sentimental facets in the fourth movement, which Bernard interpreted so congenially in all its diversity between breezy cantilenas, the forte of punctuated chords, disturbing pauses, and some 'crooked' harmonies, so that with closed eyes 'soul music' in the very best sense could experience.

Main-Echo Aschaffenburg, 2014

### ***Bernards performance a study in skill, power and poise***

[...] that have earned him worldwide attention as a new, young brilliant pianist.

The Oregonian, 2004