

Pianomania

A documentary by Lilian Franck und Robert Cibis

Length: 93 min., Format: 35 mm

Produced by WILDart Film (Vienna) & OVAL Filmemacher GbR (Berlin)



www.pianomania.de

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Nominations, Awards and Prizes

Pianomania has received a number of film critic and audience awards since its introduction to film festivals.

In January 2010 *Pianomania* received the audience award for the best documentary at the 36th International Filmweekend Würzburg.

At the end of November 2009 *Pianomania* received 'the Lüdia', first prize at the 20th Cinema Festival in Lünen, Germany.

Pianomania also received the award for 'Best Editing' at the Diagonale Graz, Austria.

Above all our documentary was chosen as the 'Semaine de la critique' in its section at the Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland.

Pianomania was also nominated by the European Film Academy for its 22nd European Film Prize.

***Pianomania* received the rating 'Highly Recommended'**

The Film Evaluation Committee in Wiesbaden, the official body for certifying the artistic, documentary and historical quality of films in Germany, awarded *Pianomania* the rating 'Highly Recommended'.

Pianomania received honourable mention at EURODOK 2010

Pianomania received an Honourable Mention diploma at the EURODOK film festival held by the Norwegian film institute in Oslo.

Cinema Release

The opening of the film *Pianomania* in European movie theatres started in the beginning of 2010. The German cinema release is organized by *Farbfilm Verleih* in distribution of *barnsteiner-film*.

Festivals

Pianomania was and will be screened at the following festivals:

Berlinale / Germany

Max-Ophüls Preis / Germany

Unerhört Hamburg / Germany

Locarno International Film Festival / Switzerland

International Filmweekend Würzburg / Germany

Diagonale Graz / Austria

Zurich Film Festival / Switzerland

Valladolid International Film Festival / Spain

International Hofer Film Days /Germany

DOK Leipzig / Germany

Corona Cork Film Festival / Irland

Sheffield Doc/Fest / UK

SoNoRo Bukarest / Romania

Kinofest Lünen / Germany

International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam / The Netherlands

Göteborg International Film Festival / Sweden

Sofia International Film Festival/ Bulgaria

Hong Kong International Film Festival / China

Macau International Film Festival/ China

BAFICI – Festival Internacional de Cinema Independiente Buenos Aires/ Argentina

St. Paul International Film Festival Minneapolis/ USA

Doc Outlook-Market / Switzerland

San Francisco International Festival/ USA

DOK.Fest München/ Germany

Melbourne International Film Festival/ Australia

New Zealand International Film Festival/ New Zealand

Jecheon International Music & Film Festival / South Korea

Synopsis

Pianomania is a film about love, perfection and a little bit of madness.

„The tone isn't breathing.“ – complains pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard, distraught. This is a typical sentence in Steinway & Sons' chief technician and Master Tuner Stefan Knüpfer's normal work day. Each piano has its own personality, each piece demands its own timbre, and every interpretation has a particular temperament.

Pianomania takes the viewer along on a humorous journey into the secret world of sounds, and accompanies Stefan Knüpfer at his unusual job with world famous pianists like Lang Lang, Alfred Brendel, Rudolf Buchbinder, Till Fellner and Pierre-Laurent Aimard, among others. To find the right instrument with the necessary qualities, compatible with the vision of the virtuoso, to tune it to perfection and to finally get it on the stage, needs nerves of steel, boundless passion, and the extraordinary competence in translating words into sounds.

This unusual film by Lilian Franck and Robert Cibis tells – with love and humor – of moments of absolute love of attention to detail and perfection. *Pianomania* observes, from unique angles, the suspenseful search for the perfect tone.

Press release

Relaxing – closing one's eyes – enjoying. But what is actually behind an award winning sound recording or a successful concert?

Pianomania illuminates the dark corners, goes behind the limelight, and discovers a blond piano technician. One is astonished to observe what a decisive role Stefan Knüpfer plays. Lang Lang, Alfred Brendel, Pierre-Laurent Aimard - the stars swear by him, because he is precisely as obsessed by the idea of the perfect sound as they are – out of love for perfection; and from those rare divine moments during which one approaches it.

The collaborative work between Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Stefan Knüpfer is at the center of the film. Bach's „The Art of Fugue“ is to be recorded. Pierre-Laurent Aimard has decided in favor of concert grand Nr. 109 for the Bach recording. The film begins one year before the recording, and the long odyssey of sounds for the two men.

88 keys, 230 strings on a cast iron frame, a weight of 480 kilogram for the oscillations of the sensitive sounding board. Stefan Knüpfer wants to bring the best out of them; but what is this elusive 'best'? Every piano has its own personality. Every composition demands specific tone colors. Every artist has an individual temperament and a vision.

Knüpfer wants to study instruments from the time of Bach for Aimard. He experiments with sound absorbers made from felt and with glass sound mirrors. But as fate will have it, the number 109 grand piano is sold to Australia a few months later; and that is not the last obstacle that gets in their way. Knüpfer and Aimard meet regularly, and when the tension is so thick it can be cut with a knife, Knüpfer saves the day with his sense of humor. The road toward the pianist's longed for "bravo" is long.

Stefan Knüpfer is a communications wizard; but he is also a technician who assembles, tightens, and fine tunes. He works with all his senses and produces pianos that give artists wings.

Pianomania observes Knüpfer's suspenseful undertaking of searching for the perfect tone, from the interior of the instrument to the exterior, and in the full concert hall.

One afternoon, a rather sleepy artist in jeans and sneakers shows up. It is the Chinese star pianist Lang Lang, who will be giving a guest performance in the Viennese concert hall. Still suffering from jet lag, he has to choose an instrument to play. His overcrowded tour calendar leaves little time for individual settings. Instead, and almost shyly, he asks for a heavy bench that will hold up through his extroverted style of playing without sliding around. The Piano superstar completes his performance in the large hall in a dark suit and wild hairstyle. The bench holds up, and he receives thunderous applause.

The sketches of the comedy duo Igudesman and Joo always parody the elitist music world. Together with Knüpfer they come up with some of the craziest scenarios for the next show.

But then the atmosphere is again so intense that even the quietest air vibrations can be heard. An intake of breath remains an elusive moment.

One of Alfred Brendel's last concerts takes place at the Grafenegg Music Festival. Knüpfer prepares the piano for him while the star pianist gives his directions humorously.

„The tone isn't breathing“, complains pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard, distressed.

„There is no magic in that piano.“ ascertains pianist Julius Drake with resignation.

„...I wouldn't say neurotic“ says the piano technician Stefan Knüpfer in describing his clients, „I would say special.“

The film's point of view is totally observant; and the complex subject comes across as light as on the wings of angels. However, corresponding to the struggle of the protagonists to find the perfect sound, the sound recording of the film itself was made with the greatest possible effort. All the scenes were recorded in Dolby Surround quality and on up to 90 separate sound tracks. *Pianomania* is a veritable "Ear Opener", an acoustic jewel and, last but not least, a valuable contemporary document of our time. Lang Lang is getting older every year, Brendel no longer performs in public, and Pierre-Laurent Aimard, who was known to a faithful audience, has since advanced to become the demigod of 20th century music. Lillian Franck's and Robert Cibis' *Pianomania* will be watched and heard with enjoyment even 20 years from now.

Cast

Stefan Knüpfer *1967

Sometimes Stefan Knüpfer has nightmares about torn strings. The Hamburg native is the chief technician for Steinway & Sons, Austria. In the Vienna Concert House, he is responsible for the tone of the grand pianos of great pianists.

When star pianists like Alfred Brendel, Lang Lang or Pierre-Laurent Aimard give a concert, every tone has to be right. Even more; it has to have its own character. Whether open, closed, more intimate or rounder – the pitch expectations of the pianists are exceedingly precise. Stefan Knüpfer attempts to please everyone in every situation. And even when his daily clients are the world stars of piano music, Knüpfer always remains down to earth and maintains his sense of humor.

Stefan Knüpfer loves his instruments and working with them.



When he tunes a grand piano, he controls the hammerhead, string for string and tirelessly looks for the perfect pitch. He cannot understand colleagues who work with a measuring device that ascertains the right tone frequency. "Those who tune exclusively with the device depend on their eyes, not their ears." Knüpfer prefers to listen closely. Not even a piece of dust is allowed to be removed from the sound board afterwards. "Everything changes the pitch." He comprehends a sound not as a defined frequency, but rather as a color within whose shades and progressions are possible in innumerable nuances.

Knüpfer began his apprenticeship as a piano builder and concert technician at Steinway & Sons at the age of 15. Previously, he himself had wanted to become a pianist. But he didn't consider his talent to be adequate. Even then Knüpfer's expectations of himself were too high.

The film accompanies Stefan Knüpfer in his unusual profession and shows – beside the passionate technician – the person. Like when he lovingly takes care of his dog Julius during the breaks, or bringing home made cookies made by his wife to his colleagues.

Pierre-Laurent Aimard *1957

Pierre-Laurent Aimard tweaks on every single tone of the grand like no other pianist. Because what would rhythm, melody and interpretation be if the sound of the instrument did not match them? Every piece has its own character. And one has to be able to hear it.

Aimard is only satisfied then when the sound is perfect. And until this perfection is reached sometimes an entire concert grand piano has to be exchanged at short notice or sound recordings made several times. The end is an ambitious goal: Perfect music.



Pierre-Laurent Aimard began his studies at Conservatory in Lyon at the young age of twelve. Later he entered the College of Music in Cologne, and perfected his playing under Yvonne Loriod, the wife of composer Olivier Messiaen. In 1973, at the age of 16, Aimard won the Chamber Music Prize of the Paris Conservatory - a pivotal point in his career. And later in the same year he was awarded the first prize of the international Olivier-Messiaen-Competition. In 1976 he was one of the founders of the Ensemble Intercontemporain.

From then on, Aimard's path crossed those of famous contemporary composers like Boulez, Stockhausen and Ligeti. Aimard is also known for his talent to make this contemporary music accessible – without neglecting his traditional repertoire as a soloist and chamber musician - to a wide audience. Aimard plays alone or with the orchestras of such conductors as Christoph von Dohnanyi, Kent Nagano or Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Aimard is the artistic director of the Aldeburgh Festival since 2009 and for the next three years.

In the film, Aimard plays the central role among Stefan Knüpfer's clients. The preparations for his recording of Bach's "The Art of Fugue" compose the most important narratives.

Alfred Brendel *1931

Alfred Brendel gave his last public concert in December 2008; but even after the end of his active career, he doubtlessly remains one of the great contemporary pianists. The benchmark of his career is his interpretation; consistently true to the composition. Unlike many of the younger pianists, Brendel is of the opinion that the artist should adapt to the work, not that the work should adapt to the artist. A high quality delivery was always more important to him than pompous promotion of oneself.

Unlike many other pianists, Brendel's career was not predetermined. He was not considered to be a child prodigy nor does he descend from a musical family. Brendel was born in Wieseberg, in Moravia (in today's Czech Republic), as the child of a family with German, Austrian, Italian and Slavic roots. He began studying the piano at the age of six.

After attending several master classes (with the Swiss pianist Edwin Fischer, among others) he developed his playing style auto didactically.



Brendel was the first pianist who recorded Beethoven's entire body of piano compositions – and remained faithful to his passion for the great composer until the end of his career. In 1999 he recorded all five of Beethoven's piano concertos once more with Sir Simon Rattle and the Vienna Philharmonic. Brendel was also one of the few pianists who recorded all of Mozart's piano concertos. He has received innumerable awards for his work, the German Recording Prize, among others. Brendel has been living in London since 1971 with his second wife, Irene.

In the film we see Alfred Brendel in his recital of Haydn, Mozart and Schubert compositions at the Grafenegg Music Festival in August 2007.

Lang Lang *1982

Let's hope the bench holds up! Wherever Lang Lang appears, he always wants the most stable sitting accommodation that the House can offer, because the Chinese pianist is known as much for his wild emotional style as for his musical talent.



The eccentric artist has advanced to the status of a downright pop star even in Germany. Millions of viewers saw him in „Wetten dass...“, Kerner and Beckmann invited him to be on their talk shows. An unusual media presence for a classical musician. In China, it is said, his success has given the piano hitherto unknown popularity; about 20 million young Chinese are now taking piano lessons.

Allegedly, Lang Lang became aware of Western classical music in a rather unconventional way; this through one of the episodes of the cartoon series Tom and Jerry that he saw on television at the age of two. Cat Tom's interpretation of Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in cis-Moll is supposed to have awakened his interest in piano music.

From then on, his career took off like a rocket. He had his first piano lessons at the age of three, and at the age of five he won a piano competition in his home town of Shenyang in North China. At the age of nine he began studying music at the Conservatory in Peking, and at the age of eleven he won his first international prize at the Fourth International Youth Competition in Germany. He had his international breakthrough in 1999, when he filled in for the impeded Andre Watts on short notice and played Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto under the direction of Christoph Eschenbach. Since then, Lang Lang's schedule is full of concerts all over the world.

In the film we see Lang Lang in performance at the large hall of the Vienna Concert House in November 2006, and the preparations with Stefan Knüpfer for this concert. In the film, Mozart and Schumann passages are primarily heard

Till Fellner *1972

The well known pianist Till Fellner comes from Vienna, where he studied with Helene Sedo-Stadler. Later he studied with, among others, Alfred Brendel, whom he cherishes as an important mentor. His international career began in 1993 with winning the 1st prize at the Clara Haskil Competition in Vevey (Switzerland). Since then Fellner has been in demand as a guest of famous orchestras in the large music centers in Europe, the US and Japan, as well as at important music festivals. The directors with whom he has worked Claudio Abbado, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Christoph von Dohnányi, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Heinz Holliger, Marek Janowski, Franz Welser-Möst and Hans Zender. Till Fellner plays regularly in a trio with Lisa Batiashvili and Adrian Brendel, and further intensive collaboration associates him to the tenor Mark Padmore.



Till Fellner has been concentrating lately on work with the Orchestre National de France (Kurt Masur), the Philharmonia Orchestra London (Sir Charles Mackerras), the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal (Kent Nagano), as well as the Munich Philharmonic (Lothar Zagrosek). Till Fellner's most important recordings up to now are the works by Schumann, Schubert, Beethoven, Mozart und Bach.

In the film we meet Till Fellner in the Hamburg Manufacturing Company Steinway. As a musical advisor and expert, he helps Stefan Knüpfer with the selection of a new grand for the Vienna Concert Hall, to replace the Number 109 that is supposed to be sold to Australia.

Aleksey Igudesman and Richard Hyung-Ki Joo



Igudesman & Joo combine great music and sharp humour in their barefaced classic-cabaret-shows. Over and over they prove the audience that piano and violin are wonderfully applicable aside from the traditional scope. Above all, they make fun of the vanities of famous pianists and violinists .

The former boys wonder have been working together since they were twelve. They had met at the Yehudi Menuhin School near London. Besides their shows as comedians, both are involved in other projects as serious musicians: They compose, perform as soloists, and are both founders of established chamber music ensembles: Igudesman plays in the string trio "Triology" and Joo in the piano trio "Dimension". in these constellations, both have produced several well-known CDs.

In the film, we meet the two in Stefan Knüpfer's workshop, where they are plotting new ideas for the next programme. Stefan Knüpfer met Richard Hyung-Ki Joo when they were working with pop star Billy Joel, for whom Joo arranged and recorded piano-compositions. Through the work with Joo, Knüpfer also met Aleksey Igudesman.

Julius Drake *1959

Julius Drake's passion is chamber music. Unlike most other pianists, this London musician, from the beginning of his career, never pursued the big solo piano concerts; in fact, he preferred to play music on the stage together with other musicians. Drake loves to accompany singers like Thomas Quasthoff, Dorothea Röschmann, Thomas Allen and Ian Bostridge on the stage. And when he organizes one of his own song recitals in the Middle Temple Hall in London, there is a hardly a famous artist who needs to be asked twice.



Julius Drake began taking piano lessons at the age of seven. Later, he studied at the Royal College of Music in London with Angus Morrison, where he discovered his love of chamber music. When he finished studying, the Australian pianist Geoffrey Parsons took him under his wing and opened up the large repertoire of song to him.

In the film, we see Julius Drake in the preparation of a song recital with the British Ian Bostridge at the Grafenegg Music Festival. Julius Drake and Stefan Knüpfer are good friends.

The Orchestra

Chamber Orchestra of Europe (COE)

The Chamber Orchestra of Europe receives rave reviews repeatedly "Die Zeit" wrote the following about Aimard's last Mozart concert with the COE: *"This is one of the most beautiful Mozart recordings of all time. Aimard plays Mozart with greatness and pure esprit, with pizzazz and warmth, with Latin clarity and grandeur; he is lyrical without pampering, and represents Mozart's severity and Mozart's submissiveness. In short, he is the ideal Mozart pianist because he loves him; and because he has waited long enough for him."*

The orchestra was formed in 1981 as the former Musicians of the European Community Youth Orchestra (ECYO); which had the age limit of 23 years. Since the members had the desire to continue playing music even past this age, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe was established.

The Management of the orchestra is based in London. The members of the orchestra, however, travel to rehearsals and concerts from their home countries, since this orchestra is not a full time institution but works on a project by project basis and has no permanent location. Several of the concert halls in which the Chamber Orchestra of Europe can often be heard are the "Alte Oper" in Frankfurt am Main, the "Cologne Philharmonic", and the "Cité de la Musique" in Paris. The orchestra also plays regularly at the Festivals in Salzburg and Berlin.

The Recording Engineers

Christoph Claßen *1968

Christoph Claßen is the musical producer at the „Art of Fuge“ recording by Pierre-Laurent Aimard. He is the primary point of contact for the pianist in matters of interpretation and sound. He tries to be the antithesis to Aimard and Knüpfer's experiments by representing the commonly accepted sound aesthetic, so that an F does not sound like an F sharp, and a piano does not sound like an organ. Besides that, he is a chatterbox, especially in discussions with his partner, Tobias Lehmann.

Tobias Lehmann *1968

Tobias Lehmann is a sound engineer and part owner of the studio that works for Aimard. After the restructuring of the Warner Music Group and its associated label, Teldec Classics and the Berlin Teldec-Studios, he, Friedemann Engelbrecht and Martin Sauer established the Teldex Studio Berlin GmbH in January 2002. Thus the tradition of this studio is being carried on.

Track List

Béla Bartók: Klavierkonzert Nr. 2, Sz 95
Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien, Orchester
Peter Eötvös, Dirigent
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Piano

Robert Schumann: Fantasie C-Dur, op.17
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonate Nr.13
Lang Lang, Piano

Robert Schumann: Fantasie C-Dur, op.17
Franz Liszt: Ungarische Rhapsodie Nr.6
Lang Lang, Piano

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck:
Mein junges Leben hat ein End
Ingomar Rainer, Clavichord
Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck,
Baletto del Granduca
Ingomar Rainer, Cembalo

Ludwig van Beethoven: Klavierkonzert Nr.3, op.37
Maurice Ravel: "Ondine", Gaspard de la nuit
Till Fellner, Piano

Johannes Brahms: Sommerabend, op.85
(text: Heinrich Heine)
Ian Bostridge, Tenor
Julius Drake, Piano

Joseph Haydn: Sonate, Hob. XVI: 20
Franz Schubert: "Impromptu" Nr.1, op. 142
Ludwig van Beethoven: Sonate nr. 31, op. 110,
3.satz (Fuga.Allegro, ma non troppo)
Alfred Brendel, Piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:
Klavierkonzert Nr.13, KV 415
Chamber Orchestra of Europe
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Piano & direction

A Little Nightmare Music, courtesy of
Only Hands Small Productions
Aleksy Igudesman, Violine
Richard Hyung-ki Joo, Piano
www.igudesmanajoo.com

Erik Satie: Gymnopedie
Richard Hyung-ki Joo, Piano

Johann Sebastian Bach:
Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Piano

Sergei W.Rachmaninoff:
Rhapsodie über ein Thema von Paganini
für Klavier und Orchester, op.43
Rudolf Buchbinder, Piano

Elliott Carter, Caténaires
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Piano
by permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music publishers Ltd.

Interview with directors Lilian Franck and Robert Cibis

What moved you to make a documentary film about piano music?

Robert Cibis: I come from a family of musicians, and my brother Paul Cibis makes his living as a pianist. Through him, I have direct access to his world. I've always been an interested observer of professional pianists, but it was only since becoming a director that I actually comprehend the deep artistic commitment of the pianists. Filmmaking has given me a comparable passion. I have known Stefan Knüpfer for a long time, as he tunes the piano for my brother, who now lives in London and Berlin. His old grand piano is still at our parents' house. Steinway & Sons had sent Knüpfer to us when my brother, an ambitious young pianist, was dissatisfied with his first piano tuner. Although Stefan Knüpfer now lives in Vienna, he still visits my parents in Lippstadt regularly. That is where he met Lilian Franck at lunch one day.

Lilian Franck: Although I have no distinct personal connection to the world of music, I was immediately fascinated by Stefan Knüpfer and his stories. He was able to transport the people around the table into the eccentric world of the piano stars very quickly, and to make them laugh heartily. It was on this occasion that I first had the idea that he could be an ideal film protagonist. Later, I realized that he was just as much of a perfectionist as the stars that he always talked about.

"PianoMania" documents the search for something perfect. What can we learn from this search?

Lilian Franck: The film gives an insight into the world of piano music, but is also exciting for people who have had no previous interest in classical music. "PianoMania" shows how works of art are created. The search for the perfect sound is ultimately a metaphor for the search for something that is larger than one's own life.

Robert Cibis: In order for us to be able to concentrate on the making of the film, we one day bought a handbook for housewives, which was supposed to help us to waste as little time as possible on housework. (Better Simply – Simply Better, by Bianka Bleier and Birgit Schilling). In it we read the following sentence: "One saves 50% energy when one is satisfied with 90% of perfection". Isn't that brilliant? If we are prepared to make a 10% compromise in our aspiration to perfection, we save an enormous amount of energy".

That could be an interesting tip for many of the things we have to do. However, when Stefan Knüpfer records Bach's „The Art of Fugue“ with Pierre-Laurent Aimard, then it becomes about the last ten percent. Our film describes that threshold which does not facilitate daily life, but which enables great art. Our goal is to make the creation of enduring works of art comprehensible and perceptible. Ever since we have been making films, we have become familiar with the slow but steady work on a film project, which simultaneously becomes a slow and steady working on ourselves. This has given us new insights into Stefan Knüpfer's and the star pianists' particular devotion to their profession, or better said, to their vocation. We were able to feel the intense passion of our principal characters for their work during our research and our first days of filming. Their obsession should touch the film's audience in exactly the same way it touched us. Isn't there in every person the desire to create something that goes beyond their own existence?

Why does the film totally forego explanations of piano techniques?

Lilian Franck: In "PianoMania" technical explanations only occur when they are relevant to the story. The focus is on the story, and too many technical details would diminish the dramatic tension. "PianoMania" is not an educational film but the personal story of the protagonists, for whom there are many obstacles to overcome. The film lives through the plot of the scenes. In a darkened movie theater, the audience would like to experience emotional moments with our film heroes. If the viewer's curiosity about the technical details increases, so much the better. These persons will soon be able to satisfy their curiosity with videos and detailed explanations on our website, www.pianomania.de.

Which aspects of the film are you proudest of?

Lilian Franck: We are happy to be able to provide a glimpse into an intimate working environment that the viewer normally does not have the opportunity to witness. I think that we were most successful at this with the Bach recording. Pierre-Laurent Aimard never before allowed a camera to be present during a music recording. Besides that, we especially like a few of the edited passages that visualize the music - for which we are grateful to our editor, Michelle Barbin. We are also especially proud of the fact that the film was shot totally from an observer's point of view, and the story is told in narrative form.

What were the greatest difficulties during the shooting of the film?

Robert Cibis: World class musicians work hard and are used to being in top form when presenting themselves to their public, on the stage or on recordings. Therefore, the biggest challenge was to gain their trust so that they would also show the obstacles in front of the camera. In essence, they had to forget the camera and not feel the same way they usually do when audiences are there. This was only possible because of a large number of shooting days, so that we were ultimately able to capture the completely normal life of the classical stars and the concert technician.

Lilian Franck: It was a process that stretched over several years, and it was a great help to us that Stefan Knüpfer's experience with us during the research period had been positive.

Robert Cibis: The other great difficulty was to technically capture the piano sounds so well that it ultimately becomes possible for the PianoMania viewers to distinguish between the various piano tones in the same way as the people present in the room. Thus we actually had an excellent music soundman on the team for every shooting day (dispersed over two and a half years), who was able to record the grand pianos – as well as sometimes the singers or orchestras – optimally in Surround Sound. In recording orchestras, for example, we had more than 90 sound tracks. Our technical sound requirements were most endangered when the protagonists decided spontaneously to re-try the one or another instrument, because setting up these microphones normally takes a long time. We put together a fairly mobile music technology, which made it possible to react quickly – because the most exciting scenes are often the ones that happen spontaneously. It was also only possible to create such an observant film because the music team was able to hide in other rooms, so that only the sound recordist and I, with the camera, were with the protagonists. It surely made it easier for them to overlook the camera at some point.

What was the most exciting moment during the filming?

Robert Cibis: The atmosphere was most tense shortly before the Bach recording with Pierre-Laurent Aimard. This tension was transmitted to the film team. One can feel that even behind the camera, like I was. I used my adrenalin in order to remain as concentrated as Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Stefan Knüpfer are when they are working. And I noticed, behind the camera, "That what is happening here right now is important – and isn't going to happen so quickly again."

What was the most surprising realization about piano music and piano technology that you were confronted with during the shooting?

Lilian Franck: It was a widening of my horizons to discover how crucial the preparation of an instrument by a piano technician is for the interpretation of a pianist, and that the piano technician, in his way, is not only a skilled worker, but also an artist.

Robert Cibis: I had already read books and watched films about piano technology before we began filming. Only, when one is there, it's all very different. Unlike the chitchat about classical music, the reality is that people spend hours and days working continuously. That never ceased to impress me, and should also be conveyed by the film. The questions of musical interpretation get a tangible dimension. Stefan Knüpfer is simply the technician and interpreter. He tries to understand the pianist and achieves that by tinkering and turning screws, poking, etc. The

surprising thing is that it's all very simple when one knows what needs to be done! It gives the appearance that anyone could learn to do it.

What was the most important experience you, personally, had during the filming?

Robert Cibis: Of course, one always compares oneself to the people one is filming. I found many parallels with Stefan Knüpfer where work is concerned, many parallels to our filmmaking work. Ultimately, a film or a successful recording is a complicated thing. What every outsider might ask is: How did they accomplish it? The admirers say: „They must be talented“, But if you look at how something like that is created, then all these questions disperse. Johann Sebastian Bach is supposed to have said about the Brandenburg Concerto: „Anyone who had worked on it as much as I have, would have written it just as well.“.

Lilian Franck: There is only one important goal in the observation of our protagonists: The search for the perfect sound. Everything else is secondary and subordinate to this. How much Stefan Knüpfer earns, if he is married or has hobbies, it all becomes irrelevant. It is all about one thing, the creation of art. That doesn't happen accidentally. One has to expend all one's energies; that impressed me.

You shot a great deal more material for the film than you can see in it. What did you leave out, and why?

Lilian Franck: We filmed a number of scenes of Stefan Knüpfer working with other stars, including Tzimon Barto, David Helfgott, Matthias Goerne and Rudolf Buchbinder, just to name a few. The major challenge in the editing was to take leave of such completely successful scenes. We realized that we had to concentrate on one single story – the upcoming Bach recording – so that the dramatic intensity would remain. Had we included more stars, then it would have become an episodic film with less “drive”. In the choice of pianists, we also liked the idea of juxtaposing three generations as the main protagonists. Lang Lang, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Alfred Brendel. At the end of the day, there are more scenes and more concert footage of them, too, than we were able to use in the film. We had intentionally planned a higher shooting ratio in order to be able to include the absolutely best moments. We would like to release the film as a double DVD later, in order to make some of these other highlights available as bonus material.

Official rating "highly recommended"



Film Review – "Pianomania"

The FBW-Jury, with a 4:1 vote, gave the film its "highly recommended" rating.

A nice documentarial rarity. The subtitle of "Pianomania" outlines the subject, "The Search for the Pefect Tone".

The protagonist of this search is Stefan Knüpfer, the head technician of "Steinway Austria" in Vienna. Stefan Knüpfer is obsessed. In a sophisticated odyssey, along with world famous pianists (Lang Lang and Alfred Brendel among others), he endeavors to find the sound of perfection, just for the ideal of the perfect tone ("It is like a research project").

At the center of the film, however, is the year-long work with Pierre-Laurent Aimard on the recording of Bach's "The Art of Fugue". A time of experimentation and the tenacious struggle for the realization of a musical vision. It is a time full of stress situations, full of setbacks and creative impatience, but also full of magical and divine moments. The viewer experiences and "suffers" an insight into a totally distinct and intimate working environment, which normally remains barred to spectator eyes.

"That was a process that stretched out over years", so director Lilian Franck. But "Pianomania" does not bear the traces of this creative exertion, nor the scars of the massive effort of all participating parties. The film seems playfully light and fascinates through fantasy and lighthearted gaiety, is entertaining in the best sense of the word, and is especially interesting and appropriate for those viewers who don't consider themselves to be musical insiders!

The aspirations of the film makers "to bring out the complexity of the subject as lightly as on angel's wings" is not an empty promise, it is fulfilled in the most positive way. The unusual camera perspectives are also distinguishing, particularly those showing the "inner workings" of the musical instruments. All in all, this is a musical jewel and a contemporary artistic document of distinction!

Members of the jury:

Dr. Eberhard Frank, Fred Gehler, Hedda Gehm, Barbara Grokenberger, Prof. Kurt Johnen

Wiesbaden, 24th of Februar 2009

Im Entwurf gezeichnet:

Fred Gehler Bettina Buchler

Vorsitz

Für die Richtigkeit:

Filmbewertungsstelle Wiesbaden

Prüf-Nr.: 25 300-DVD, Tag der Bewertung: 17.02.2009



Le Jury de la Semaine de la critique
du 62^e Festival international du film de Locarno, 5-15 | 8 | 2009
décerne le

SRG SSR idée suisse
Schweizerische Radio- und Fernsehgesellschaft
Société suisse de radiodiffusion et télévision
Società svizzera di radiotelevisione
Sociedade svizra da radio e television

Prix SRG SSR idée suisse
au film PIANOMANIA - Auf der Suche nach dem perfekten Klang
réalisé par Robert Cibis et Lilian Franck

Le Jury de la Semaine de la critique:	André Ceuterick	Marisa Marzelli	Markus Wille

Critic's Prize – Jury statement

Pianomania won the "SRG SSR idée suisse/Critic's Prize" at the 62nd Film Festival in Locarno.

The Jury, composed of André Ceuterick/Belgium, Marisa Marzelli/Switzerland and Markus Wille/Liechtenstein presents the SRG SSR idée suisse/Critic's Prize, to the value of 8.000 chf to:

PIANOMANIA by Robert Cibis and Lilian Franck, Austria/Germany

"Unanimously, the jury decided to award PIANOMANIA. Robert Cibis and Lilian Franck were able to present an exciting and passionate film, even though the subject does not seem very cinematographic at first sight. A refreshing insight into the secrets of the mysterious work of a piano-technician is provided. The relationship between artist and technician is visualised in a humorous and energetic way, their love for music above all. The film also represents a tribute to classical music. We hope that this film will find a large audience in cinemas!"

Association Suisse des Journalistes cinématographiques ASJC

WILDart FILM

concentrates on the development and production of art-house fiction and high quality creative documentaries for cinema & television that appeal to an international audience. Most of our films are realized as coproductions. We are interested in crossovers of film cultures and formats and offer space for young talent.

Recent Films:

DOMAINE, fiction, 2009. starring : Béatrice Dalle. D: Patric Chiha, CoP: Aurora Films, F
PIANOMANIA, feature docu, 2009. D: Robert Cibis & Lilian Frank. CoP: OVAL Filmemacher
Rating in Germany: highly recommended. Austrian Award: best editing / documentary. Festival Premiere: Locarno
ALIVE!, fiction, 2009. D: Artan Minarolli. CoP: ART Film, ALB; AGAT Films, F
Karlovy Vary International Film Festival 2009, East of the West
A JOURNEY WITH PETER SELLARS, feature docu 2007. D: Mark Kidel, CoP: Agat Films, F; Calliope Media, GB.
HOME, fiction, 2006. D: Patric Chiha, CoP: Aurora Films, F. Festivals: Viennale 06, Diagonale 07,
Indielisboa/Lissabon, Belfort, Pantin (Prix de la Presse, Prix Emergence)

In production:

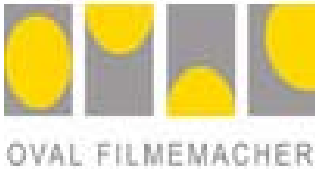
FORGOTTEN SPACE, cinema docu. D: Noel Burch & Allan Sekula. CoP: DocEye, NL
BORN IN THE YEAR OF THE HARE, feature docu, 2009. D: Ebba Sinzinger

In development:

ART 278a: THE MEASURE TAKEN, docu. D: Igor Hauzenberger
THE VIRTUAL ORCHESTRA, docu. D: Werner Boote
WOMEN IN THE RING, docu. D: Ruth Kaaserer
STALIN ON MY MIND, docu

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OVAL Filmmacher was funded in 2002 by the two filmmakers Lilian Franck and Robert Cibis. We are specialized in international co-productions, tailored to please viewers in different countries. These productions focus on both the needs of high profile non-fiction TV slots and on long-term, in-depth and creative documentaries. OVAL is specialised in science, cultural and social topics and since 2006 is being supported by the EU MEDIA Slate Funding Program.

Right now we are developing a film about brain-computer interface technologies with all the risks and opportunities that this direct connection between the human brain and the computer represents.

The newly finished documentary „PianoMania“ is an elaborate production about the search for the perfect tone and shows the piano technician Stefan Knüpfer working together with star pianists like Lang Lang, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Alfred Brendel. After a successful start in the 2009 Festival season with the prize for „Best Editing / Documentary“ at the Diagonale in Graz, we are looking forward with anticipation to celebrated festival screening worldwide. The official theater release will take place in the fall of 2009 in a number of European countries. In addition to the countries of production - Germany and Austria – cinema exploitation is ensured in Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Sweden and Latvia. Negotiations with other countries are taking place.

“Jesus Loves You“ had its premiere at the Berlin Film Festival in 2008. The film is about radical Christians who held a large scale missionary operation in Germany during the Football World Cup, in order to save as many souls as possible.

Previous films have earned OVAL Films wide acclaim. Our two part documentary about the medical use of leeches and maggots won Slovakia's Environmental Ministry Prize at the Ekotopfilm Festival 2007. In 2003, “Half a Chance?“, a humorous documentary about French film distributors trying to keep secret the nationality of German films in France, earned OVAL the Talent Award at the 2003 German-French Journalism Prize. Our ARTE-documentary “Human Capital: the Employment Trade“, about the globalisation of the employment market, has been sold in five countries. Our staff has been nominated for the Grimme Award, SACD Prize of the Semaine de la Critique in Cannes and an Academy Award.

We have worked with a wide range of television networks worldwide, and excel at meeting the needs of documentary broadcasters. In addition to ARTE and ZDF, stations that have used our work include ARD, RBB, WDR, SWR, NDR, RTL, 3Sat and ZDF in Germany; ORF in Austria, France 3 and Mezzo in France; ERT in Greece; Tango TV in Luxembourg; YLE in Finland and FSTV in the USA.

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