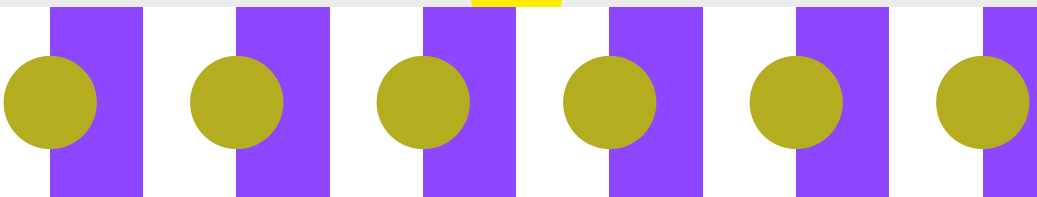


Facilitated by Julius Bär curated by



# Berlin **2020** for Prize Young Artists

*#bpfya2020 Finals  
26. October 2021*





## Dear finalists, dear guests,

Why start a new competition? Isn't there enough competition—enough rivalry, antagonism, perfectionism, and conformism—in classical music already? At VAN, we've covered and often criticized these aspects of our field.

Still, I believe that competitions can be important to young musicians. For artists in the early stages of their careers, competitions can strengthen their motivation to continue, solidify their aesthetic position, and help them decide which professional paths they want to follow—as well as which ones they don't. Competitions are a way for up-and-coming musicians to present their artistic personalities outside the incentives of social media.

For that to happen, a competition needs to give young artists the space to present the unique aspects of themselves. Two years ago, we started discussing the idea for what would become the Berlin Prize for Young Artists with our development partner, Bank Julius Baer. From the beginning, it was essential that the competition avoid the standard, almost athletic, model where musicians clear a series of increasingly difficult technical and interpretative hurdles to reach the finals. Instead, we wanted artists to apply with a program of their choosing: music that they believe in, that they enjoy talking about as well as playing, and that fits with their aesthetic vision.

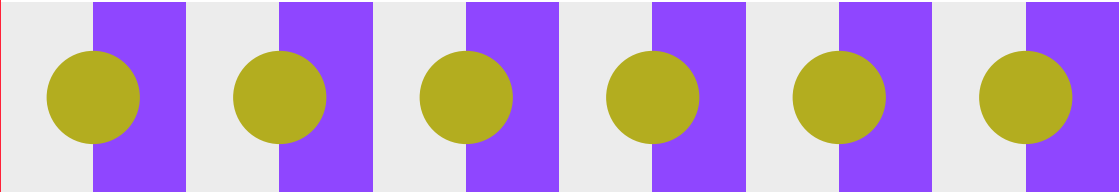
Our work with VAN has shown us how hard it is for young artists to attract the kind of attention they need to establish themselves on a small and ferociously competitive market, especially if their artistry takes them off the beaten path. We want to walk with our finalists on this path for a while. This is reflected in the #BPFYA prizes, which include a website, a video profile filmed at the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, career coachings, and an album recording with the label Outthere Music.

Both the number of applicants and the feedback these applicants have given us show that the idea behind the #BPFYA has hit a nerve. The up-and-coming generation of young musicians combines fantastic training and ability with a diversity of interests and a willingness to question the traditional mechanisms of our industry.

Nearly 300 musicians from 51 countries applied to #BPFYA2020. In today's final, you'll be hearing the six finalists: six fascinating personalities, six exciting programs. I'm thrilled that we're finally able to gather, discuss, and listen. Thanks so much for being here.

**Hartmut Welscher**

*Founder and Editor-in-Chief, VAN Magazine*



## Dear finalists, dear guests,

As I write this, I feel a wonderful sense of optimism. Over the last few months, I've been fortunate enough to attend various concerts, festivals, and cultural events in both Switzerland and Germany. After each experience, I was reminded that nothing can replace live performance. We all appreciated the virtual alternatives provided over the last 18 months. But we also wanted to experience in-person events once again.

I'm extremely grateful that we can at last hold the long-awaited finals for the first annual Berlin Prize for Young Artists. Having gotten to know five of the six impressive 2020 finalists last year at the Elbphilharmonie and at this year's Verbier Festival, I'm now looking forward to their performances. They are all incredible up-and-coming talents.

While the pandemic caused us to delay the #BPFYA2020 finals (twice), Bank Julius Baer—along with our partner and #BPFYA curator, VAN Magazine—didn't want to sit idly by. That's why we've continued this year with the second annual #BPFYA, the finalists for which have already been announced. They will compete in the #BPFYA2021 finals at the end of January.

Bank Julius Baer takes its social and corporate responsibility seriously. We have proudly supported various cultural projects, initiatives, and prizes for the last several decades, and have been especially keen on promoting young talent. We will continue to do so, and look forward to it.

To all of the artists performing today: Have a brilliant performance!

**Linda Krajnak**

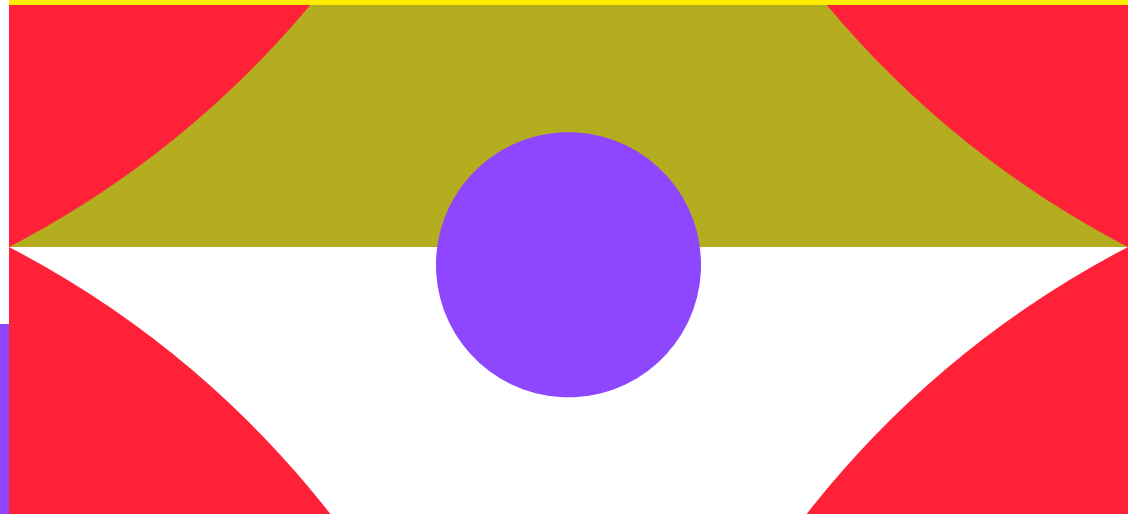
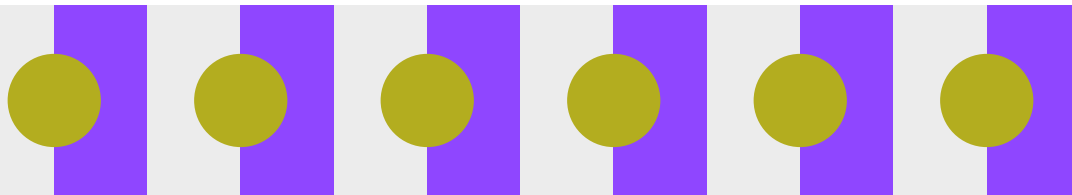
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## Program

- 08:45 a.m. Coffee service
- 09:00 a.m. Opening greetings
- 09:15 a.m. Performance: Gian Marco Medda
- 10:30 a.m. Performance: Valerie Fritz
- 11:15 a.m. Break (with coffee service)
- 11:45 a.m. Performance: Nina Gurol
- 12:30 a.m. Lunch break (refreshments provided)
- 1:30 p.m. Performance: Muriel Razavi
- 2:45 p.m. Performance: Christine Wu
- 3:45 p.m. Break (with coffee service)
- 4:00 p.m. Performance: Juri Vallentin
- 4:45 p.m. Jury deliberation (*guests are invited to enjoy light refreshments and conversation during this time*)
- 6:00 p.m. Winners are announced
- 6:30 p.m. Post-announcement reception for attendees, jury, and finalists

### Host: Susann El Kassar

*Susann El Kassar (\*1986) has been an editor and presenter at Deutschlandfunk since 2017, overseeing piano solo, vocal music, and organ programming.*



# Gian Marco Medda

*\*1997, Serramanna, Italy*



**October 26, 2021,  
9:15–10:00 a.m.**

In Patrick Hart's "700 Club," percussionist Gian Marco Medda plays a game he can't possibly win, like the game of life itself. The performer, on drum set, must attempt to match the speed and rhythms of an electronic music track that accelerates to an impossible frenzy, its gestures a satire of rock-band "shredding," its sound world redolent of pinball. "You have to play to the maximum of your abilities to chase the electronics," Medda says. Medda's virtuosity seems effortless, until it doesn't. The piece is rigged.

That realization cuts to the heart of Medda's program for the Berlin Prize for Young Artists. His vision consists in removing the layers of virtuosity and machismo which surround the image of a percussionist to reveal the instrument's fragility: "I wanted to show a more introspective side of this drummer." Medda threads this idea through works by Hart, Igor C Silva, Rafał Ryterski (who notes that "percussion is a social construct" like gender), and Vinko Globokar. In the final work, Globokar's "Ombre," the instrumental apparatus surrounding Medda is peeled away, until he is left with the most intimate of what could be considered a percussion instrument—the human voice.

This programmatic idea contains shades of the biographical. Born in the village of Serramanna, in Sardinia, Italy, Medda started playing the drum set at age seven, inspired by his father's Louis Armstrong records. In 2008, he embarked on a classical percussion career, finishing his diploma at the Conservatory Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina in Cagliari in 2017. The next year, Medda attended the Conservatory of the Arts in Bern, Switzerland, studying with Brian Archinal and Christian Hartmann. It was his studies in new music there which taught him the definitional flexibility of percussion, leading him back to the drum set. Paradoxically, this often-bombastic instrument helps Medda reveal a truer, more fragile self.

## **PROGRAM**

- Patrick Hart (\*1984): 700 Club (2014)
- Igor C Silva (\*1989): Your Trash (2016)
- Rafał Ryterski (\*1992): Genderfuck (2018)
- Vinko Globokar (\*1934): Ombre (1989)

# Valerie Fritz

\*1997, Innsbruck, Austria



**October 26, 2021,  
10:30–11:15 a.m.**

When cellist Valerie Fritz was eight years old, her mother composed a piece for her titled “The Witching Hour.” Portraying a ghost waking up for a night full of practical jokes, the work includes special effects such as yawns, glissandi, and sul ponticello playing. In its expansion of the instrument, this early “commission” is not so different from Helmut Lachenmann’s solo cello masterpiece “Pression,” which forms the core of Fritz’s program for the Berlin Prize for Young Artists. It also includes works by Ligeti, Simon Steen-Andersen, Arturo Fuentes, and Fritz herself.

Fritz was born outside Innsbruck, Austria. In her childhood, music was “always there,” she says. Both her father and her mother—who, besides composing, gave Fritz her first formal training—are musicians, and the family frequently gathered to play string quartets. Unlike many musicians’ children, though, Fritz was not set on a preordained path. It wasn’t until she finished high school and began playing with the European Union Youth Orchestra that she realized the role the cello would continue to play in her life: “I noticed this unifying element, this feeling of making music with others, was something I wanted to experience more.” She joined other ensembles such as the Lucerne Festival Academy Orchestra and the Vienna Youth Orchestra. In 2017, Fritz began her studies at the Mozarteum in Salzburg with Giovanni Gnocchi.

Given her love of communal music-making, it may seem strange that Fritz is performing in the finals of the Berlin Prize, where musicians are required to curate a completely solo program. But each performance of a work by a living composer—whether by her mom, or by Fuentes—is its own form of collaboration, resulting in what she terms a “joint interpretation.” Dialogue allows her reading of a piece to bloom. In traditional competitions, “everyone plays the same thing, trying to do it better than the others,” Fritz says. “That’s not creative enough for me.”

## **PROGRAM**

- György Ligeti (1923–2006): Sonata for solo cello (1948/1953)  
I. Dialogo | II. Capriccio
- Helmut Lachenmann (\*1935): Pression (1969/2010)
- Simon Steen-Andersen (\*1976): Study for String Instrument  
#3 for cello and video (2011)
- Valerie Fritz: Additional Value for cello bow and live  
electronics (2019)
- Arturo Fuentes (\*1975): Mood for solo tapping cello and  
electronics (2012)

# Nina Gurol

*\*1997, Leverkusen, Germany*



**October 26, 2021,  
11:45 a.m.–12:30 p.m.**

Although pianist Nina Gurol is 24 years old, she has known some of the music on her Berlin Prize for Young Artists program for a decade. The very first composer whose music she discovered was that of Johann Sebastian Bach; she interprets his Prelude and Fugue in C sharp Minor (from Book II of “The Well-Tempered Clavier”) in her concert. At the age of 12 or 13, Gurol gave the world premiere of a composition by the Cologne-based, Blind composer York Höller; she will also perform Höller’s Third Sonata in Berlin. The music of both composers has accompanied Gurol’s entire artistic development, a sign of the depth of her engagement with the oeuvres that speak to her. The taking of care with things, not age, defines maturity.

Born in Leverkusen, Germany, Gurol began piano lessons at age six, as did both her siblings. She was the only one to stick with it. “I’m the middle child, maybe that’s when I’m eccentric,” she says. As an eight-year-old, she was introduced to the music of György Ligeti, whose musical omnivorousness seems to have rubbed off on Gurol: Besides the works by Höller and Bach, her Berlin Prize program includes pieces by Ravel and another eccentric, Russian composer Galina Ustvolskaya. In 2015, Gurol entered the Conservatory for Music and Dance in Cologne, where she currently studies with Gesa Lückner. In 2016, she was awarded the Mieczysław Weinberg Prize for outstanding interpretation of a contemporary work at the TONALI6 piano competition; she regularly performs solo, in chamber music formations, and in concertos with orchestras.

Despite this flurry of activity, Gurol clearly intends to deepen, rather than only broaden, her engagement with the repertoire. In comparison to Bach and Höller, Ustvolskaya is a relatively new composer for the pianist. That hasn’t changed her approach to the compositions. “Ustvolskaya’s music will definitely be a part of my life for a long time,” she says. “It reflects a bit of who I am.”

## **PROGRAM**

- Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750): Prelude and Fugue in C sharp Minor from the Well-Tempered Clavier, Book II (1739–1742)
- Galina Ustvolskaya (1919–2006): 12 Preludes (1953)
- Maurice Ravel (1875–1937): Oiseaux tristes from Miroirs (1904–1905)
- York Höller (\*1944): Piano Sonata No. 3 (2010/11)

# Muriel Razavi

*\*1992, Freiburg, Germany*



**October 26, 2021,  
1:30–2:15 p.m.**

Words, as Syrian poet and diplomat Nizar Qabbani wrote, are like sparrows: They don't require entry visas. The German-born, Iranian-American violist Muriel Razavi rallies Qabbani's dictum toward a world without aesthetic barriers: "I want to cross boundaries towards ultimately eradicating the existence of borders in music." This includes not only borders of musical genre and era, but also borders that cut across the disciplines of literature, performance, and visual arts.

For Razavi, rhythm and meter are in constant exchange with artforms rooted in other sensory modes. One can only hope that each exchange coalesces into something definite and meaningful, a statement intertextual and interwoven. A sign of her years spent studying with Tabea Zimmermann (who famously insists she is "a musician who plays the viola"), Razavi does not rely on one instrument as sole emissary. It is one glittering thread in a resulting tapestry of artistic vision.

Yet on the viola, Razavi's perceptive, empathic tone catches the light and reflects it. The prismatic effect highlights additional elements, from electronic accompaniment to political subtext; from Persian architecture to Silk Road patterns. In 2017, her penchant for seeing the terrain of her performance beyond the borders of music earned her the Fanny Mendelssohn Advancement Award for innovation in music. Her view of music as an integrated expression of the human experience has made her a regular with the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, and she is now assistant principal violist with the MDR Leipzig Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In addition to her studies with Zimmermann, Razavi's musicianship has been guided by Wilfried Strehle, Nils Mönkemeyer, and Tatjana Masurenko. Complementing her dedicated music studies, she also holds a BA in Middle Eastern History and Culture and an MA in Religion and Culture. Under Daniel Barenboim, she is currently completing her doctoral dissertation on Re-Orientalism in Music.

## **PROGRAM**

- Muriel Razavi: Spoken Introduction
- Sahba Aminikia (\*1981): Kereshmeh (2007)
- Muriel Razavi: Work Introduction and Poetry Reading
- Aida Shirazi (\*1987): Fragment – Work in Progress, based on a poem by Simin Behbahani
- Bahar Royae (\*1992): Tombstone (2017)
- Aida Shirazi: Latent (2018)
- Sahba Aminikia: Shetaban (2012)
- Niloufar Nourbakhsh (\*1992): Veiled (2019)

# Christine Wu

\*1995, Dallas, USA



**October 26, 2021,  
2:45–3:30 p.m.**

Music is a wayfinding tool for community; a physical event that can move people in a way both individual and collective. The compass of violinist and violist Christine Wu's young career is calibrated with community as its true north. There is a community with her fellow musicians and audiences. There is also a sense of community with the works that form the cartography of her repertoire, which advocates for a more multi-ethnic and multi-cultural narrative in the music industry.

Confronted with countless Tchaikovsky Concertos and Franck Sonatas early on in her music studies, Wu recalls evading recommendations to learn certain pieces of similar warhorse status, fearful that hearing the same works in a vacuum would lead to a jaded approach. "Effusively indebted" as she is to the works of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, Wu's approach is grounded in hours of research and the pursuit of less ubiquitous works. Though this alone isn't her sole criteria in choosing repertoire: Every work must speak to her on a meaningful level before she dives into it with curiosity and rigor.

"It is imperative for us to advocate for constructive change within ourselves, in society, and especially in the arts," Wu says of such a focus. Her goal isn't to break down the existing canon, but rather to broaden it, and her musical intelligence roves relentlessly, with fields of association free-ranging not only geographically, but also in multiple dimensions.

This includes instrumental dimensions. Her initial focus on the violin has led to solo performances with orchestras from the internationally-renowned Dallas Symphony Orchestra to the heartfelt, community-rooted Mesquite Symphony Orchestra, as well as concertmaster appointments in various ensembles. She studied the instrument with Jaime Laredo, Masao Kawasaki, Nicholas Mann, and Sylvia Rosenberg. Throughout all of this, however, Wu also has honed her proficiency as a violist—another key point on the map of her musical career.

## **PROGRAM**

- Ellen Taaffe Zwilich (\*1939): Fantasy for solo violin (2013)
- Kaija Saariaho (\*1952): Nocturne for solo violin (1994)
- Jeffrey Mumford (\*1955): eight musings . . . revisiting memories (2005)
- Augusta Read Thomas (\*1964): Incantation for solo viola (1995)
- Jessie Montgomery (\*1981): Rhapsody No. 1 for solo violin (2014)
- Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson (1932–2004): Blue/s Forms for solo violin (1979) – I. Plain Blue/s | II. Just Blue/s | III. Jettin' Blue/s
- Joan Tower (\*1938): Wild Purple for solo viola (1998)



# Juri Vallentin

\*1990, Mainz, Germany



**October 26, 2021,  
4:00–4:45 p.m.**

At the foundation of a performance lies the connection between musician and audience. As such, Juri Vallentin makes connections first, with music a close second. His performances reflect the multifaceted relationships between music and space, between performer and observer. When necessary, he's happy to break with classical conventions in order to further that connection.

Juri began his musical studies as a singer, before switching first to the recorder and then the oboe. Both vocal music's intrinsic connection between body and instrument and the influence of his recorder studies come to bear in his musicality on the oboe. A blend of intellect and intuition led to him being the first oboist to win the International Tchaikovsky Competition in St. Petersburg. His talent for connection was recognized with the audience prize at the German Music Competition in Leipzig. Currently, he is a member of the Niedersächsisches Staatsorchester Hannover and the Staatsoper Hannover.

The qualitative aspects of Juri's musicality are paired with his mathematician-precise technique, initially honed at Nürnberg's Hochschule für Musik with Kai Frömbgen and Clara Dent-Bogányi. He continued his education at the Paris Conservatory under Jacques Tys, a product of Marcel Landowski's reforms of the French music education system during the 1960s. This connection was not lost on Juri, who embodies Landowski's view of music as a "discipline of sensitivity."

A natural polymath, Juri tempers sensitivity with knowledge, saying that "music is a phenomenon that is directly linked to our environment and society." His matrix of artistry covers genres and eras, roaming through philosophy, math, and science, as well as the oboe's relatives across time and space. His aptly-titled debut album, "Bridges," was released on the Leipzig-based label Genuin in 2018. An educator now himself, he was appointed professor of oboe at the Hochschule für Musik Karlsruhe in 2021.

## **PROGRAM**

○ Inner Voices – The Sounds of Solitude

○ Gilles Silvestrini (\*1961): Alii mundi (2013) [offstage]

### **Desire**

○ Jacques-Martin Hotteterre (1674–1763): Prélude & Air, Lieux charmans (1719)

○ Luciano Berio (1925–2003): Sequenza VII (1969)

○ From Isolation to Insanity

○ Jacques-Martin Hotteterre: Prélude & Air, De mes soupirs

○ Gilles Silvestrini: Boulevard des Capucines (1997)

○ Heinz Holliger (\*1939): Cardiophonie (1971)

### **Regeneration**

○ Silence

○ Richard Wagner (1813–1883): Hirtenreigen from Tristan und Isolde (1865)

○ Jacques-Martin Hotteterre: Air & Postlude, Je suis aimé (1719)

○ Gilles Silvestrini: Alii mundi (excerpt) [offstage]

# The Jury



## **Mirijam Contzen**

Mirijam Contzen studied with the legendary violinist Tibor Varga. She specializes in unknown repertoire, having recorded works of Nicolas Bolens, Stefan Heucke, and Franz Clement, among others. She has performed as a soloist with the Israel Chamber Orchestra, the Gewandhausorchester in Leipzig, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, and more. She is a professor at the University of the Arts in Berlin.



## **Barbara Lebitsch**

Barbara Lebitsch has been director of artistic planning at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg since 2018. After earning degrees in theater studies, musicology, psychology, and journalism, she served as an artistic planner and director of production at the Konzerthaus in Vienna and for the Wien Modern festival from 2002 to 2012. From 2012 to 2015, she was assistant to the artistic director at the Berlin Philharmonic Foundation. She joined the Elbphilharmonie in 2015 as lead dramaturge.



## **Anne Midgette**

Anne Midgette was the classical music critic of *The Washington Post* for 11 years, from 2008 to 2019. Before that, she was for seven years a regular contributor of classical music and theater reviews to *The New York Times*. She is co-author of *The King and I* and of *My Nine Lives*, and is currently working on a historical novel about the woman who built pianos for Beethoven.



## **Tamara Stefanovich**

Tamara Stefanovich is a pianist who performs a repertoire ranging from Bach to the music of living composers. Raised in Belgrade, she studied at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia and the Conservatory of Music in Cologne. She has performed with orchestras such as the London Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and others, and has performed solo recitals at venues such as Suntory Hall and the Salzburg Festival. She also performs with a free-improvisation quartet.



## **Jeffrey Arlo Brown**

Originally from Brookline, Massachusetts, Jeffrey Arlo Brown studied composition at the Mozarteum and the Conservatory of Music in Basel. He joined VAN as an editor in 2015. His writing has also appeared in *Slate*, *The Baffler*, *Atlas Obscura*, *TAZ am Wochenende*, *Narratively*, and other publications.



## **Julian Steckel**

Julian Steckel was born in 1982 in Pirmasens, Germany. He studied cello in Berlin and Vienna. He currently performs with orchestras such as the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Munich Philharmonic, the Gewandhausorchester in Leipzig, and others. Besides performing as a soloist, Steckel has held concerts at festivals in Lucerne, Lockenhaus, Jerusalem, and Prussia Cove; his chamber music partners include Lars Vogt, Martin Helmchen, Christian Tetzlaff, Janine Jansen, and the Ébène, Armida, and Modigliani string quartets. He lives in Berlin with his family and teaches a cello class at the Musikhochschule in Munich.



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## ***VAN Magazine***

Founded in 2014 and based in Berlin, VAN is an independent online classical music magazine, published weekly in English and German, covering everything from the first documented music to the latest world premieres. VAN is a fanzine, written for music lovers and professionals by music lovers and professionals. The magazine is fueled by over 100 writers who blend serious knowledge with a sense of humor, and isn't afraid of the weird, wonderful, or just plain wrong. Oh, and the name comes from van Beethoven.

## ***Bank Julius Baer***

Bank Julius Baer became a development partner for VAN Magazine in 2019, supporting culture journalism in an international, digital format.

Supporting art and music has been integral to Bank Julius Baer's philosophy for decades. An interest in visual art dates back to the early 1930s when the Baer family began its private art collection. As a result, the family maintained an intensive contact with the art scene in Zurich, Paris and New York. In the early 1980s, Bank Julius Baer founded its corporate art collection. The purpose was—and still is— to support artists who, at the time of a first purchase, are not yet firmly established, but clearly show great potential. Nearly two decades later, the Bank has built on its legacy of artistic support by sponsoring concert halls, festivals, and museums.

Today, Julius Baer supports renowned cultural institutions and digital platforms worldwide.

## ***The Berlin Prize for Young Artists would not be possible without the generous support of:***

- Bank Julius Baer
- Elbphilharmonie Hamburg
- Outthere Music
- Musikbrauerei Berlin

