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NEWS & TERMINE DER SEMMEL CONCERTS VERANSTALTUNGSSERVICE GMBH

Joja Wendt

„The Best Thing About a Piano“

Biography 2009

“A few days without a piano and I really get nervous’ asserts Joja Wendt. “I constantly hunger for the keys, five hours playing feels like only hour to me.” Joja Wendt is a pianist through and through, his concerts fill the largest concert halls. He is, without doubt, technically brilliant and driven when at his instrument. However, when he talks about his music, easily sitting back and yet elegant, it seems impossible that this man could ever get nervous. Even his small talk is ‚great entertainment‘ - Joja Wendt is charming, attentive, articulate and quick-witted, in a word: poised. A characteristic that not only his audience appreciates. He has reached the point, where his name is used synonymously with that of his instrument: Joja Wendt = Piano.

The fascination of the singing keys grips the boy before he can even pronounce his own name “Johan” correctly. The name remains “Joja” and he stayed with the piano. But what started as a game, quickly turns into an all encompassing part of his life.

The parents are not thrilled that their son plays until late into the night and thus the boy lets himself be locked into the music room of the school by the janitor - secretly, of course, and well provided with sandwiches and something to drink. Joja Wendt even misses his ‚A‘ Level graduation party, because he is playing and he finally goes to study in Hilversum (Netherlands) and afterwards in New York at the Manhattan School of Music.

At least since their honeymoon his wife knows that she has serious competition. Four weeks on a dream of an island in the South China Sea, with one drawback: No keyboard to be found for miles around. Salvation comes in the form of a 5-star hotel at the other end of the island. That means several hours of marching through dense jungle, following a guide. And all that for a mediocre keyboard, but at least the honeymoon can continue.

Today Joja Wendt lives in Hamburg with his wife and two children; obviously his love of the piano has not harmed his marriage. After all, Joja Wendt is not a grim nerd, he can easily distance himself from his work. For recreation he reads about evolution biology and he has been playing table-tennis in Hamburg’s highest class to keep body and mind in tune. And if he wants more thrills, the passionate free rider takes his skis to the best powder snow runs on the planet.

Numerous concert tours have taken Joja Wendt around the world. From Germany and Europe to the stages of glittering metropolis’, such as New York’s Carnegie Hall as well as out-of-the-way corners like a small music school in the Siberian peninsula of Kamtschatka, of which he likes to tell in his concerts. He played with icons like Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry, played as support for Fats Domino and Joe Cocker on stage, hosted TV shows, composed the music for one of Germany’s most successful cinema film and currently is part of the

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jury for the ambitious children TV project “Your Song”, in which the composition of children have the chance of being performed by stars.

In the year 2006 “Steinway-Artist” Joja Wendt was on a world tour with the “Steinway Family Tour” for nearly 6 months and played in sold out concerts before enthusiastic audiences on 4 continents, in Australia, New Zealand, China, Japan, Singapore, Korea, Indonesia, the USA and Canada.

Joja Wendt has done, seen and played many things, but his thirst for more is still unquenched: Whether he plays incognito with a false beard and hair piece at small festivals, works on a virtuoso electronic project named ‘Classic Reloaded’ or plans rock versions of classical pieces with the help of an alternative band - he never seems to run out of ideas. Where does this drive come from? Joja Wendt shrugs and laughs his youthful laugh: “I simply love doing it. I am a pianist.”

The Best Thing About a Piano

The unique range of his concerts has a simple reason: ‘As a child I have decided on an instrument, but until today I have not yet decided on a musical genre’, says Joja Wendt. ‘There is simply a lot I like as long as it is good.’ He doesn’t wear blinkers, his selection is not based on style or epoch, but on quality and uniqueness. After very successful concert tours with various members, Joja Wendt now comes alone with his piano, but certainly not with a dry piano concerto. ‘The Best Thing About a Piano’ is a virtuoso and humorous journey. It follows Joja Wendt’s personal milestones of piano music, seasoned with amusing anecdotes, artistic interludes and illustrative presentations. He asks questions, such as what the most-played jazz piece worldwide is, plays the boogie-woogie “Stomp”, the driving rhythm of which was the background to the destruction of the interior of the Carnegie Hall in 1938 by the enthusiastic audience, spends time on formative greats such as George Gershwin and his “Rhapsody in Blue” - but, of course, the party version of the classic that was developed by Gershwin later on and is partly played lying on one’s back. True to his motto “Playing the piano is fun” Joja Wendt now and again interrupts himself, explains and comments individual passages and facilitates entirely new, laughing, relishing insights into the piano and music. And once in a while, when it gets complicated, he doesn’t mince words: ‘I am sure, I will make a mistake here – and just as sure nobody will notice!’

Joja Wendt confirms the topic of the tour with immense technical difficulties: As the first German he is trying to play the infamous ‘Variations on Bizet’s Carmen’ of the genius Vladimir Horowitz, Joja Wendt’s favourite classical pianist. The piece is considered one of the most demanding in the history of the piano, and making it more difficult is the fact that each note has to be transcribed individually, because no score exist. ‘Originally it was idée fixe. As unconditional optimist I have made a bet with a daily newspaper in Hamburg - and now I have to see it through. It will cost me blood, sweat and tears, but I will get this almost unplayable piece ready for a concert some day.’

Even in such moments of utmost concentration, Joja keeps his sense of

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humour, the precondition for any of his appearances. A good concert is much more for him than simply a brilliant performance, it requires charisma and presence, in order to engage the audience: ‚I noticed that I play best, when the atmosphere in the audience is relaxed and not self-conscious or tense. For me the often rigid distance in so many classic concerts is counterproductive - I don't need that: After all, I am no different from the people in the audience, I am interested in the same music, probably have a similar sense of humour. The only difference is that I play piano perhaps a little bit faster.‘

Further information and photographs:

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