

***Die Neue Musikzeitung (NMZ), July/August 2022, p. 46: New members take a bow: Barbara Mayer. Piano evening "International Metamorphoses from Brazil to Finland"***

As part of the series, "New members take a bow", organised by the Association of Musicians of Augsburg, the pianist and composer Barbara Mayer showed herself to be a highly accomplished and versatile artist in the Rococo Salon of the government of Swabia on Friday, May 27. Under the motto "International Metamorphoses from Brazil to Finland", she offered a varied and out-of-the ordinary concert programme with musical treasures of the 20th and 21st centuries as well as multifaceted compositions and improvisations of her own.

This imaginative musical world tour began with Barbara Mayer's composition "Rigoletto in the Land of Mirrors" in which she transposes alienated and mirrored themes from Liszt's Rigoletto paraphrase into the tonal language of contemporary music. She played this technically highly complex work, obvious to both the eye and the ear, for which she had already received a special prize in the Ibla Grand Prize Competition, with impressive bravado, entirely in the spirit of her role model Liszt.

With the "Ciclo Brasileiro" by the Brazilian composer, Heitor Villa-Lobos, a work that is extremely rarely performed in this country found its way into the concert that in each of its four movements presents a scene from life in Brazil in a charming blend of Brazilian folklore and European art music. For example, the 1st movement "Plantio do Caboclo" sets the monotonous work of a plantation worker to music weaving delicate polyrhythmic tapestries and using a pentatonic ostinato in the piano range. Mayer displayed extreme sensitivity in the way in which she teased out the floating, almost impressionistic timbres. The waltz-like 2nd movement "Impressoes Seresteiras", by contrast, is characterised by the orchestral volume of its sound in the style of the Late Romantics. Here the pianist conjured up a fulminating display of sound pyrotechnics from the work's highly virtuosic passages, cascades of fully fingered chords and resonant sustained notes. With consummate ease, Mayer also mastered the almost breathtakingly fast chord repetitions and complex rhythmical finesse of the highly demanding 3rd movement "Festa no Sertao" by allowing the audience to share in the relaxed atmosphere of a jungle party. The final movement of the cycle is the "Dance of the White Indian", dotted with fast, re-struck repetitions and furious triplet chains with glissando effects.

The next item in the programme was dedicated to an equally unknown but no less interesting work from a compositional perspective: the "Suite per pianoforte" in three movements by the Italian composer Luigi Manenti which he composed in 1936 in impressionist style with clear Italian accents. True to this background, Barbara Mayer unleashed a whole range of glittering colours in her interpretation.

As the concert wore on, so the focus fell increasingly on the improvisational element. For example, Mayer achieved a surprise effect in her improvisation on the third movement of Beethoven's piano sonata op. 109 by shifting the initial theme song to a jazz rock soundscape

with much musical wit, invention and an infectious groove, proving that she can easily bridge the supposed gaps between musical genres.

To round off the evening effectively, she performed a work for video and piano (with improvisations), “Finland – Scenes of a Landscape” that had been created in 2019 in collaboration with the artist Brigitte Heintze. In this multi-layered art project, Heintze retraces selected stations of her artist-in-residence stay in Finland on the basis of artistically and skilfully edited snapshots. Barbara Mayer embellished this impressive sequence of images from a compositional perspective to form a soundscape as varied as it is balanced.

Mayer has without doubt found her musical path with which she opens up innovative perspectives and encourages other artists to explore new avenues far from the traditional concert repertoire. The young musician leaves a lasting impression through the unique combination of her pianistic, compositional and improvisational talent, her spell-binding virtuosity, her brimming creativity and her subtle design abilities.

*(Felix Koch)*