

**Performancepreis
Schweiz**

**Prix Suisse de la
Performance**

**Premio Svizzero
della Performance**

Press release: 24.10.2017

The national Swiss Performance Art Award created in 2011 is a joint initiative of the Cantons of Aargau and Basel-City, and the City of Geneva. In 2014 they were joined by the Cantons of Basel-Country and Lucerne, then in 2016 by the Canton of Zurich. The partners rotate annually to host the event and so present Swiss Performance Art in different settings to an ever-increasing audience. The Canton of Zurich picked the Gessnerallee as the site for the event. Spatially, the event took the artists' wishes into account, with the result that the public and the jury, separated into four groups, followed different programmes and were able to view some performances neither simultaneously, nor identically. This year's edition was marked by long pieces, such that the long afternoon of Swiss Performance Art took on the character of a festival. In 2018 the Canton of Basel-City in cooperation with the Tinguely Museum and the Kaserne Basel will host the competition.

The five members of the jury selected seven candidates from a total of 98 submissions. The performances were presented live in the Gessnerallee on 22 October 2017. The artists were judged and rewarded on the basis of the performance presented.

Award Winners 2017

The award winners of the Swiss Performance Art Award are:
Leo Hofmann & Benjamin van Bebber (ZH/Hamburg), «Preliminary Study of a Nomadic Life»
The audience award went to:
Gregory Hari (ZH), «I'm sitting here driving. Doing all the driving, man.»

Nominees 2017

Nicolas Cilins & Tina Smoljko, Geneva/Waadt
Gregory Hari, Zurich
Leo Hofmann & Benjamin van Bebber, Zurich/Hamburg
Jérôme Leuba, Geneva
Annina Machaz & Mira Kandathil, Zurich
Dawn Nilo, Basel-Country
Ramaya Tegegne, Geneva

Jury 2017

Madeleine Amsler (freelance curator), Geneva (jury member 2017)
Yan Duyvendak (artist), Geneva/Marseilles, 2017 (jury member 2017-2019)
Sophie Jung (artist), Basel/London (jury member 2017)
Roger Merguin (artistic direction & management Gessnerallee), Zurich (jury member 2017)
Pascal Schwaighofer (artist), Zurich (jury member 2015-2017)

Coordination 2017

Andrea Saemann (artist, Basel) (coordination: 2011-2017)

Leo Hofmann & Benjamin van Bebber «Preliminary Study of a Nomadic Life»

Leo Hofmann (1986) studied Music and Media Art at the Hochschule der Künste Bern. After his BA he earned an MA in Contemporary Arts Practice and Research in the Arts. His practice involves musical theatre formats, sound performances and experimental approaches to audio dramas. Benjamin van Bebber (1984) studied Theatre and Music Sciences and Philosophy in Frankfurt/Main, as well as Musical Theatre Direction in Hamburg. Together they run the «Institute for Applied Partial Knowledge», a research and production group that searches for qualities beyond virtuosity in classical music and opera.
www.leohofmann.com / www.benjaminvanbeberber.jimdo.com

Leo Hofmann and Benjamin van Bebber take in the music. In a gentle, almost introverted manner they perform extracts from Schubert's Winterreise. They use voice, keyboard, wireless speakers and microphones to deploy the lieder, dosed in such a way as if essentials were always a matter of limits. When distance jeopardizes the contact, when melodized speech hovers in space as virtually only a memory, and the possibilities of the virtuoso delivery yields to a fine-grain dialogue, the performers take the public on a moving balancing act between earnestness and knowing humour, embodied vulnerability and the abstract search for the existential.

They can bear the fact that they are small in the concrete hall of the Gessnerallee. Even more: they take the dimensions of the sparingly and regularly lit space as a basis for their show of isolation, longing and revolt. Whether in t-shirt and gym shoes, or in heavy sweaters and barefoot, Hofmann and van Bebber take up Schubert's musical language as equals. The public has positioned itself lengthwise along the space and listens attentively as the performance follows the famous score like an ephemeral signalling system. The modest but subtly programmed technical equipment that lay on the ground in the middle of the space at the beginning never imposes itself with powerful sounds. The performers have something defenceless about them, as when one of them begins to sing without amplification and the other bends over a keyboard or operates a control, looking like a self-oblivious child.

Slowly, in nearly frozen attitudes, the image of the lonely wanderer comes into motion. The teamwork permits ever new forms of play: when Hofmann begins by lending his voice and van Bebber accompanies, the roles are often exchanged along the way. In a precisely rehearsed sequence Hofmann and van Bebber feel out the space, measure it in quick paces or test its height, throwing speakers to or at each other like balls. With surprising twists the performance avoids lapsing into the grey zone of a tragedy: when van Bebber questions his heart in «The Post», the synthetic accompaniment expands the complaint into a masterfully performed pop hit, and the eerie wingbeat of «The Crow» gains a space of its own through the feedback loop between the microphone and speaker. Danger is almost constantly in the air, falling silent becomes a metaphor for finitude, and by disappearing behind the rows of spectators, the bodies deprive the voice of volume and resonance. Since one cannot keep an eye on both actors at the same time throughout there arises a consciousness of a Here and a Beyond that is at the bottom of the struggle for life and love.

The jury is impressed by the density with which, as it were, a watered-down performance of the Winterreise calls forth inner images. The duo lovingly appropriates the romantic piece and seeks its contemporary, electronically expanded version. For nearly an hour the performers maintains a balance between physical presence, technical actions and musical interpretation. That they approach a mastery which their art – breaking away from traditional concertante culture – basically rejects does not take anything away from the intensity of their performance. Their «Preliminary Study of a Nomadic Life» fragments the classical lieder, translates them into stark theatrical gestures and now and then opens out into a playful interaction with the public.

The two artists were awarded CHF 30'000 in prize money.