

## The greatest young talents showcased their skills online

Highly talented young people from all over the world in a musical summer camp: that's Astona. This year, however, everything was a little different than usual.

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Due to circumstances, the audience could only watch the Astona concert on the screen.

Photo: Jakob Ineichen (24 July 2021)

It is strange to watch a big gala concert on Youtube. That it can work was shown on Saturday evening during the final concert of Astona.

First things first: Astona is a two-week summer music academy that has existed since 1988 and was founded by cellist Nancy Chumachenco. For decades it has been a permanent fixture in Zug's cultural cycle with great international appeal. After the academy's course was cancelled last year due to corona, it took place online this year. In the past few days, 33 students (violin, viola, cello, piano) from 14 countries all over Europe were taught by six lecturers at different locations.

This online course included private lessons, class lessons, home concerts and public concerts. And that's where we are with streaming - usually, after all the readings, concerts, performances and presentations, one had a bit enough of another virtual concert. Astona, however, took a different approach with the gala concert: The performances were recorded and transmitted by the participants themselves.

Christoph Balmer explains Astona's approach. He has been Astona's manager for years and is therefore also a passionate member of the association.

## **The best in 80 minutes**

The gala concert started punctually at 8 p.m. (you had to provide the gala feeling yourself, of course) with a welcome by Nancy Chumachenco. Then the first highly gifted youngster: Torje Råbu (15) from Norway with Johann Sebastian Bach: Sonata No. 1 in G minor for solo violin, BWV 1001 / I. Adagio II. Fuga (Allegro). That Torje is not just a 15-year-old who enjoys (classical) music became clear from the first notes. This was effectively a "child prodigy" at work, so very much in the spirit of Astona. With Torje, the image and sound quality were just as outstanding as his performance. Paul-Lukas Grün (17) from Germany followed. Like Torje, he also played in a church somewhere far away from Zug. His seven variations on "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen" by Ludwig van Beethoven for violoncello and piano were musically breathtaking.

Since no camera work was possible, the audience concentrated exclusively on the music. This was an advantage over classical concerts as we know them from TV broadcasts, even if one sometimes caught oneself not being used to simply listening to "only" music, even if the whole event only lasted 80 minutes. On a visual level, some contributions had a somewhat irritating shutter effect - but the sound was so cleanly mixed that in almost all cases it was easy to hear the high level at which the young talents were playing. "Streamed concerts can never replace the live experience with an audience. This kind of concert performance is a special challenge for the musicians, as a different form of concentration is required," says Christoph Balmer, who himself was president of the Zug City Orchestra for 25 years. It is also a different experience on the part of the recipients:

"It's similar for the audience. It's not the same as the live experience, a streamed concert can definitely generate more attention to the music and the musicians."

## **Zug companies take care of the broadcast**

For the realisation - and pretty sure also for the excellent editing - they relied on local support. Apoint Film from Steinhausen was responsible for the production.

New this year was the competition idea: all participants had the opportunity to present a folk song of their respective home country in their own variations. The "award ceremony" also took place here via the feed - Nancy Chumachenco pointed out that this participation was voluntary and chose the winner: it was Torje Råbu, who had won a full-time scholarship for Astona 2022 with his entry. How one would have liked to applaud the young talents, the winner of the "Challenge" and Nancy Chumachenco & Team. Because they all tried to make the best out of the current situation and to find creative ways. Maybe in 2022 we will see Astona again in its old splendour and with even greater charisma - because live and as a big summer event.