

Brecht Valckenaers (b. 2000, Leuven) is a versatile pianist and composer who combines his love for classical and contemporary repertoire with his own compositions and improvisations.

As a young child, Brecht started with drumming but soon found himself drawn to the piano. He received his first piano lessons from Carl Vandoorne at the De Vonk Academy in Haasrode, where he also took his first composition lessons with Pieter Schuermans and Boudewijn Cox.

At fifteen, Brecht had the opportunity to attend the Young Conservatory of Antwerp, studying chamber music with Nicolas Callot and Wietse Beels. A year later, he began his studies at the Royal Conservatoire of Antwerp with Nikolaas Kende, who guided him with great dedication for eight years. At the same conservatoire, he took composition lessons from Wim Henderickx, Alain Craens, and Mathias Coppens.

Since September 2024, Brecht has been studying with Claudio Martínez Mehner at the Hochschule für Musik Basel. Additionally, he has been studying with Eliso Virsaladze at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole since 2021.

Brecht is grateful for the masterclasses he received from among others Kirill Gerstein, Eldar Nebolsin, Björn Lehmann, Jura Margulis, Rena Shereshevskaya, Cyprien Katsaris, Ricardo Castro, Polina Leschenko, Steven Osborne, Milana Chernyavska, Martin Helmchen, Zlata Chochieva, Barry Douglas, Hannes Minnaar, Severin von Eckardstein, Lukas Vondráček, Vitaly Samoshko, Shai Wosner, Julien Libeer, Piet Kuijken, Lucas Blondeel, Liebrecht Vanbeckevoort, Jan Michiels, and Jean-Claude Vanden Eynden.

Brecht has won several first prizes in competitions such as the Steinway Piano Competition, Cantabile Piano Competition, and Le Concours de Piano Andrée Charlier. In 2023, he earned second prizes at the Breughel Piano Competition and the EPTA Piano Competition, where he also received the award for the best Belgian work with one of his compositions. In 2025, he received the Third Prize and the Prize for the Best Performance of a Dutch Work at the YPF European Piano Competition in Amsterdam.

He has performed as a soloist with orchestras in piano concertos by among others Beethoven, Liszt, Poulenc, Janáček, and Shostakovich, and has played at festivals such as Lisztomanias Châteauroux, Festival 20-21, Musicorum, Midis-Minimes, Zomer van Sint-Pieter, and Fazioli Fest. He has appeared in venues like Bozar, Flagey, deSingel, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ and Bimhuis Amsterdam.

His compositions – characterized by a strong rhythmic inventiveness – have been featured several times on national radio and are enthusiastically received on YouTube.

In 2021, Brecht was a member of *deZes*, the youth panel that followed the Queen Elisabeth Competition for piano for the Belgian broadcaster Canvas. In 2023, he was selected as one of *De Twintigers* by Klara (Belgian national classical radio), where he was highlighted for a week, culminating in a concert recording broadcast on Klara and available on VRT MAX.

After a celebrated appearance at Festival 20-21 in 2024 with his project *Ex Nihilo*, Brecht is delighted to continue his collaboration with the festival as Artist in Residence. Over the next editions, Brecht will perform all of Ligeti's works in which the piano takes centre stage, alongside other projects.

His project *Ex Nihilo* is released as an album in February 2026 on Antarctica Records.

Driven by a desire to keep exploring and pushing his musical boundaries, Brecht approaches music as a language to be experienced in all its forms: reading and reciting through the performance of classical and contemporary repertoire, speaking through improvisation, and writing through composition.

Brecht gratefully acknowledges the support of the Stichting Robus and the SWUK, with which he is Artist in Residence.