

BIO (extended version) - English

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

He is driven by a desire to constantly discover and push his own musical boundaries. For him, music is a language through which he seeks to express himself in different ways: by reading and performing existing music, but also by speaking and writing himself.

As a pianist, Brecht is known for his carefully crafted solo programmes, in which familiar and lesser-known repertoire is brought together with his own work, with a particular focus on music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His programme *Ex Nihilo*, in which Ligeti's *Musica Ricercata* enters into dialogue with his own compositions, grew into an album released by Antarctica Records in 2026, which was positively received internationally.

The piano also occupies a central place in his compositions. His music is characterised by strong rhythmic inventiveness and has been heard several times on national and international radio. Alongside his own piano works, he is currently writing commissioned works for I SOLISTI and SPECTRA, which will be premiered in 2027. His work can also be heard in several jingles for Klara, Belgium's classical music radio station.

His passion for contemporary music has led him to collaborate with, among others, Ictus Ensemble. Improvisation is also an important part of his practice, alongside his work as a chamber musician and in various ensemble settings. He forms an improvisation duo with drummer Robbe Broeckx and a piano duo with Dmitry Batalov. He works with ensembles and musicians from different generations, including, more recently, the Karski Quartet and Jan Michiels.

Following his acclaimed debut at Festival 20·21 in 2024, he began a multi-year trajectory as Artist in Residence at the festival. The central thread of this trajectory is an integral performance of Ligeti's works in which the piano plays a central role, each time in dialogue with his own work and related repertoire. As part of this trajectory, Brecht is also expanding his *Rhythm Studies* into a complete set of twelve studies.

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

As a soloist, Brecht has performed piano concertos by composers including Beethoven, Liszt, Poulenc, Janáček and Shostakovich with orchestras. He has performed at festivals including Lisztomanias Châteauroux, Festival 20·21, Festival van Vlaanderen Kortrijk, Iedereen Klassiek, Lunalia, Belgian Music Days, Musicorum, Midis-Minimes, Zomer van Sint-Pieter, Concerts de Midi Liège and Fazioli Fest. He has also appeared at venues including Bozar, Flagey, deSingel, Concertgebouw Brugge, Palais des Beaux-Arts de Charleroi, Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ and Bimhuis Amsterdam.

Brecht has also been active in the Belgian music scene beyond the concert stage. In 2021, he was a member of deZes, the youth panel that followed the Queen Elisabeth Competition for Piano for Belgian broadcaster Canvas. In 2023, he was selected by Klara, Belgium's classical music radio station, as one of De Twintigers. For one week, he was featured as a young Belgian musician, culminating in a concert recording that was broadcast on Klara and made available on VRT MAX.

Brecht's musical education began at an early age. As a young child, he started out playing the drums, 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 the age of fifteen, he was given the opportunity to join the Young Conservatory of Antwerp, where he studied chamber music with Nicolas Callot and Wietse Beels. A year later, he began his piano studies with Nikolaas Kende at the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp, who guided him with great dedication for eight years. At the same conservatoire, he studied composition with Wim Henderickx, Alain Craens and Mathias Coppens.

He later studied for four years with Eliso Virsaladze at the Scuola di Musica di Fiesole. He is currently continuing his studies with Claudio Martínez Mehner at the Hochschule für Musik Basel.

His musical development has also been enriched through masterclasses with a broad range of international pianists and pedagogues, including 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 Van den Eynden.

His artistic development is supported by Stichting Robus and SWUK, where he is an Artist in Residence.