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"Of Unplumbed Depths and the Joy of Love"

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Swaying quietly and serenely smiling, Verena Rein trills during Lepe Sumera's "Tāhed" ("Stars") even as pianist Axel Bauni's threatening trills and tone repetitions transform the song's verses into dark and murky depths. Several times during the evening, the Berlin soprano Verena Rein laughs her youthful laugh, as she sings of happiness in Jazeps Vītols' "Laimite" and recites sensual, beautiful declarations of love from the Song of Solomon in Anatolijus Senderova's "Two Songs of Sulamite".

But this evening at the NordTöne Festival is not so much about sensual pleasures and the venue hints at that: Most of the time, the Zentrum für Umweltkommunikation [Centre for Environmental Communication] (ZUK) of the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt [German Federal Foundation for the Environment] (DBU) is a place for discussing environmental protection projects. DBU Secretary General Fritz Brickwedde referred to the historical ties between the Baltic States and Germany, which were also reflected in the programme featuring songs from Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as well as by Johannes Brahms.

These songs served as both a reference and starting point for a journey into the world of Baltic music. Dark, impressionistic chord arpeggios by Mart Saar contrasted with Brahms' idyllic "Abenddämmerung", followed by his "Der Tod und die kühle Nacht", Op. 96: no. 1, with its morbid sensuality and René Eespere's "Epigramm".

Rein and Bauni crossed the boundaries not only of space, but also of time: This perfect team displayed a repertoire spanning from Late Romanticism to Modernism: Rein with her guttural depth, her mobility and powerful heights, and Bauni who, with all the due modesty of an accompanist, seeks to realise his full potential. And rightly so, as Verena Rein's voice carries despite the venue's problematic acoustics.

The penultimate night of the NordTöne Festival then saw another successful concert that not only demonstrated the wide range of contemporary Baltic music, but also – as in the case of Jazeps Vītols' compositions – its place in history.

With perfect pronunciation, Verena Rein performs works in six languages: Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Latin, German, and eventually even Hebrew, as the musicians play music by Anatolijus Senderovas, whose two "Songs of Sulamite" clearly demonstrate that Baltic music anything but ends at its geographical borders. The tonal language has an oriental touch, and with the vivid imagery of the Song of Solomon Verena Rein describes Sulamite's beloved, accompanied by Pavel Giunter's oriental drum and the minimal percussive piano chords."