

pianomania

A film by
Lilian Franck & Robert Cibis

Length: 93 min., Format: 35 mm



FIRST RUN FEATURES

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PRAISE FOR *PIANOMANIA*

"★★★★ Surprisingly compelling! Too intriguing and entertaining to be left to the specialists... A captivating film not just for pianomaniacs."

– **Trevor Johnston, *Time Out London***

"★★★★ Enthralling!"

– ***The Financial Times (London)***

"★★★★ An excellent film. In keeping with its subject matter, this high-minded documentary has elegance and exactitude...Knüpfers is a thoroughly engaging personality."

– **Peter Bradshaw, *The Guardian UK***

"A delightfully esoteric documentary."

– ***The Telegraph (UK)***

NOMINATIONS, AWARDS AND PRIZES

Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland: **Semaine de la Citique** in its section

International Filmweekend Würzburg: **Audience Award for Best Documentary**, January 2010

Cinema Festival in Lünen, Germany: **The Lüdia (first prize)**, November 2009

Diagonale Graz, Austria: **Best Editing**

European Film Academy: **22nd European Film Prize**.

The Film Evaluation Committee in Wiesbaden: **Highly Recommended rating**.

EURODOK Film Festival: **Honourable Mention**



SYNOPSIS

A smash in Europe and winner of the Golden Gate Award for Best Feature Documentary at the San Francisco International Film Festival, *Pianomania* comes at last to theaters in the United States. Directed by Lilian Franck and Robert Cibis, *Pianomania* takes you into the secret world of sounds – a place where passion and the pursuit of perfection collide with artistic obsession and a little bit of madness.

As Steinway & Sons' chief technician and Master Tuner in Vienna, Stefan Knüpfe is dedicated to the unusual task of pairing world-class instruments with world-famous pianists. Juggling the demands of the pianist, the piano, and the piece to find the perfect match requires boundless enthusiasm, but also endless patience and nerves of steel. No detail is too small or too inconsequential for Knüpfe, not even the tiniest speck of dust on a piano string.

Tensions run high as performances loom while the pianists adamantly demand that pianos be tuned and re-tuned endlessly. Knüpfer is everywhere, from helping prepare Pierre-Laurent Aimard for a seminal recording of Bach's works to making sure Lang Lang has a bench sturdy enough to withstand his physical playing style. With a commitment and understanding of sound as powerful as the musicians paired with a rather mad sense of humor, Stefan somehow manages to help them achieve perfection.

Lilian Franck has been producing and directing films for the international market for the past ten years. Her first feature length film was *Jesus Loves You*. *Pianomania* is her second. Robert Cibis co-directed *Disgustingly Healthy* with Michaela Kirst and was awarded the Ekotopfilm 2007 prize. Both also worked on the film *Human Capital*. They also attended the Film Academy in Baden-Württemberg in addition to other European and American film programs.

BIOS

Stefan Knüpfer

Sometimes Stefan Knüpfer has nightmares about torn strings. The Hamburg native is the chief technician for Steinway & Sons, Austria. In the Vienna Concert House, he is responsible for the tone of the grand pianos of great pianists.

Knüpfer began his apprenticeship as a piano builder and concert technician at Steinway & Sons at the age of 15. Previously, he himself had wanted to become a pianist. But he didn't consider his talent to be adequate. Even then Knüpfer's expectations of himself were too high.

The film accompanies Stefan Knüpfer in his unusual profession and shows – beside the passionate technician – the person. Like when he lovingly takes care of his dog Julius during the breaks, or bringing home made cookies made by his wife to his colleagues.



When star pianists like Alfred Brendel, Lang Lang or Pierre-Laurent Aimard give a concert, every tone has to be right. Even more; it has to have its own character. Whether open, closed, more intimate or rounder – the pitch expectations of the pianists are exceedingly precise. Stefan Knüpfer attempts to please everyone in every situation. And even when his daily clients are the world stars of piano music, Knüpfer always remains down to earth and maintains his sense of humor.

Stefan Knüpfer loves his instruments and working with them. When he tunes a grand piano, he controls the hammerhead, string for string and tirelessly looks for the perfect pitch. He cannot understand colleagues who work with a measuring device that ascertains the right tone frequency. "Those who tune exclusively with the device depend on their eyes, not their ears." Knüpfer prefers to listen closely. "Everything changes the pitch." He comprehends a sound not as a defined frequency, but rather as a color within whose shades and progressions are possible in innumerable nuances.

Lang Lang

Let's hope the bench holds up! Wherever Lang Lang appears, he always wants the most stable sitting accommodation that the House can offer, because the Chinese pianist is known as much for his wild emotional style as for his musical talent. In the film we see Lang Lang in performance at the large hall of the Vienna Concert House in November 2006, and the preparations with Stefan Knüpfer for this concert. In the film, Mozart and Schumann passages are primarily heard

The eccentric artist has advanced to the status of a downright pop star even in Germany. Millions



of viewers saw him in "Wetten dass..." Kerner and Beckmann invited him to be on their talk shows, an unusual media presence for a classical musician. In China, it is said, his success has given the piano hitherto unknown popularity; about 20 million young Chinese are now taking piano lessons.

Allegedly, Lang Lang became aware of Western classical

music in a rather unconventional way; this through one of the episodes of the cartoon series Tom and Jerry that he saw on television at the age of two. Cat Tom's interpretation of Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2 in cis-Moll is supposed to have awakened his interest in piano music.

Pierre-Laurent Aimard

In the film, Aimard plays the central role among Stefan Knüpfer's clients. The preparations for his recording of Bach's "The Art of Fugue" compose the most important narratives.



Pierre-Laurent Aimard tweaks on every single tone of the grand like no other pianist. Pierre-Laurent Aimard began his studies at Conservatory in Lyon at the young age of twelve. Later he entered the College of Music in Cologne, and perfected his playing under Yvonne Loriod, the wife of composer Olivier Messiaen. In 1973, at the age of 16, Aimard won the Chamber Music Prize of the Paris Conservatory – a pivotal point in his career. And later in the same year he was awarded the first prize of the international Olivier-Messiaen-Competition. In 1976 he was one of the founders of the Ensemble Intercontemporain.

Alfred Brendel

We see Alfred Brendel in his recital of Haydn, Mozart and Schubert compositions at the Grafenegg Music Festival in August 2007. Brendel was the first pianist who recorded Beethoven's entire body of piano compositions – and remained faithful to his passion for the great composer until the end of his career. In 1999 he recorded all five of Beethoven's piano concertos once more with Sir Simon Rattle and the Vienna Philharmonic. Brendel was also one of the few pianists who recorded all of Mozart's piano concertos. He has received innumerable awards for his work, the German Recording Prize, among others. Brendel has been living in London since 1971 with his second wife, Irene.



Alfred Brendel gave his last public concert in December 2008; but even after the end of his active career, he doubtlessly remains one of the great contemporary pianists. The benchmark of his career is his interpretation: consistently true to the composition. Unlike many of the younger pianists, Brendel is of the opinion that the artist should adapt to the work, not that the work should adapt to the artist.

Julius Drake

In the film, we see Julius Drake in the preparation of a song recital with the British Ian Bostridge at the Grafenegg Music Festival. Julius Drake and Stefan Knüpfer are good friends.

Julius Drake's passion is chamber music. Unlike most other pianists, this London musician, from the beginning of his career, never pursued the big solo piano concerts; in fact, he preferred to play music on the stage together with other musicians. Drake loves to accompany singers like Thomas Quasthoff, Dorothea Röschmann, Thomas Allen and Ian Bostridge on the stage. And when he organizes one of his own song recitals in the Middle Temple Hall in London, there is hardly a famous artist who needs to be asked twice.



Till Fellner

We meet Till Fellner in the Hamburg Manufacturing Company Steinway. As a musical advisor and expert, he helps Stefan Knüpfer with the selection of a new grand for the Vienna Concert Hall, to replace the Number 109 that is supposed to be sold to Australia.

The well known pianist Till Fellner comes from Vienna, where he studied with Helene Sedo-Stadler. Later he studied with, among others, Alfred Brendel, whom he cherishes as an important mentor. His international career began in 1993 with winning the 1st prize at the Clara Haskil Competition in Vevey (Switzerland). Since then Fellner has been in demand as a guest of famous orchestras in the large music centers in Europe, the US and Japan, as well as at important music festivals.



Till Fellner has been concentrating lately on work with the Orchestre National de France (Kurt Masur), the Philharmonia Orchestra London (Sir Charles Mackerras), the Orchestre Symphonique de Montréal (Kent Nagano), as well as the Munich Philharmonic (Lothar Zagrosek). Till Fellner's most important recordings up to now are the works by Schumann, Schubert, Beethoven, Mozart and Bach.

Aleksey Igudesman and Richard Hyung-Ki Joo

In the film, we meet the two in Stefan Knüpfer's workshop, where they are plotting new ideas for the next programme. Stefan Knüpfer met Richard Hyung-Ki Joo when they were working with pop star Billy Joel, for whom Joo arranged and recorded piano-compositions. Through the work with Joo, Knüpfer also met Aleksey Igudesman.



Igudesman & Joo combine great music and sharp humour in their barefaced classic-cabaret-shows. Over and over they prove the audience that piano and violin are wonderfully applicable aside from the traditional scope. Above all, they make fun of the vanities of famous pianists and violinists .

The former boys wonder have been working together since they were twelve. They had met at the Yehudi Menuhin School near London. Besides their shows as comedians, both are involved in other projects as serious musicians: They compose, perform as soloists, and are both founders of established chamber music ensembles: Igudesman plays in the string trio "Triology" and Joo in the piano trio "Dimension". In these constellations, both have produced several well-known CDs.

Chamber Orchestra of Europe (COE)

The Chamber Orchestra of Europe receives rave reviews regularly. The orchestra was formed in 1981 as the former Musicians of the European Community Youth Orchestra (ECYO); which had the age limit of 23 years. Since the members had the desire to continue playing music even past this age, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe was established.

The management of the orchestra is based in London. The members of the orchestra, however, travel to rehearsals and concerts from their home countries, since this orchestra is not a full time institution but works on a project by project basis and has no permanent location. Several of the concert halls in which the Chamber Orchestra of Europe can often be heard are the Alte Oper in Frankfurt am Main, the Cologne Philharmonic, and the Cité de la Musique in Paris. The orchestra also plays regularly at the Festivals in Salzburg and Berlin.

The Recording Engineers:

Christoph Claßen

Christoph Claßen is the musical producer at the “Art of Fuge” recording by Pierre-Laurent Aimard. He is the primary point of contact for the pianist in matters of interpretation and sound. He tries to be the antithesis to Aimard and Knüpfer’s experiments by representing the commonly accepted sound aesthetic, so that an F does not sound like an F sharp, and a piano does not sound like an organ. Besides that, he is a chatterbox, especially in discussions with his partner, Tobias Lehmann.

Tobias Lehmann

Tobias Lehmann is a sound engineer and part owner of the studio that works for Aimard. After the restructuring of the Warner Music Group and its associated label, Teldec Classics and the Berlin Teldec-Studios, he, Friedemann Engelbrecht and Martin Sauer established the Teldex Studio Berlin GmbH in January 2002. Thus the tradition of this studio is being carried on.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTORS LILIAN FRANCK AND ROBERT CIBIS

What moved you to make a documentary film about piano music?

Robert Cibis: I come from a family of musicians, and my brother Paul Cibis makes his living as a pianist. Through him, I have direct access to his world. I've always been an interested observer of professional pianists, but it was only since becoming a director that I actually comprehend the deep artistic commitment of the pianists. Filmmaking has given me a comparable passion. I have known Stefan Knüpfer for a long time, as he tunes the piano for my brother, who now lives in London and Berlin. His old grand piano is still at our parents' house. Steinway & Sons had sent Knüpfer to us when my brother, an ambitious young pianist, was dissatisfied with his first piano tuner. Although Stefan Knüpfer now lives in Vienna, he still visits my parents in Lippstadt regularly. That is where he met Lilian Franck at lunch one day.

Lilian Franck: Although I have no distinct personal connection to the world of music, I was immediately fascinated by Stefan Knüpfer and his stories. He was able to transport the people around the table into the eccentric world of the piano stars very quickly, and to make them laugh heartily. It was on this occasion that I first had the idea that he could be an ideal film protagonist. Later, I realized that he was just as much of a perfectionist as the stars that he always talked about.

***Pianomania* documents the search for something perfect. What can we learn from this search?**

Lilian Franck: The film gives an insight into the world of piano music, but is also exciting for people who have had no previous interest in classical music. *Pianomania* shows how works of art are created. The search for the perfect sound is ultimately a metaphor for the search for something that is larger than one's own life.

Robert Cibis: In order for us to be able to concentrate on the making of the film, we one day bought a handbook for housewives, which was supposed to help us to waste as little time as possible on housework. (Better Simply – Simply Better, by Bianka Bleier and Birgit Schilling.) In it we read the following sentence: "One saves 50% energy when one is satisfied with 90% of perfection". Isn't that brilliant? If we are prepared to make a 10% compromise in our aspiration to perfection, we save an enormous amount of energy.

That could be an interesting tip for many of the things we have to do. However, when Stefan Knüpfer records Bach's "The Art of Fugue" with Pierre-Laurent Aimard, then it becomes about the last ten percent. Our film describes that threshold which does not facilitate daily life, but which enables great art. Our goal is to make the creation of enduring works of art comprehensible and perceptible. Ever since we have been making films, we have become familiar with the slow but steady work on a film project, which simultaneously becomes a slow and steady working on ourselves. This has given us new insights into Stefan Knüpfer's and the star pianists' particular devotion to their profession, or better said, to their vocation. We were able to feel the intense passion of our principal characters for their work during our research and our first days of filming. Their obsession should touch the film's audience in exactly the same way it touched us. Isn't there in every person the desire to create something that goes beyond their own existence?

Why does the film totally forego explanations of piano techniques?

Lilian Franck: In *Pianomania*, technical explanations only occur when they are relevant to the story. The focus is on the story, and too many technical details would diminish the dramatic tension. *Pianomania* is not an educational film but the personal story of the protagonists, for whom there are many obstacles to overcome. The film lives through the plot of the scenes. In a

darkened movie theater, the audience would like to experience emotional moments with our film heroes. If the viewer's curiosity about the technical details increases, so much the better. These persons will soon be able to satisfy their curiosity with videos and detailed explanations on our website, www.pianomania.de.

Which aspects of the film are you proudest of?

Lilian Franck: We are happy to be able to provide a glimpse into an intimate working environment that the viewer normally does not have the opportunity to witness. I think that we were most successful at this with the Bach recording. Pierre-Laurent Aimard never before allowed a camera to be present during a music recording. Besides that, we especially like a few of the edited passages that visualize the music - for which we are grateful to our editor, Michelle Barbin. We are also especially proud of the fact that the film was shot totally from an observer's point of view, and the story is told in narrative form.

What were the greatest difficulties during the shooting of the film?

Robert Cibis: World class musicians work hard and are used to being in top form when presenting themselves to their public, on the stage or on recordings. Therefore, the biggest challenge was to gain their trust so that they would also show the obstacles in front of the camera. In essence, they had to forget the camera and not feel the same way they usually do when audiences are there. This was only possible because of a large number of shooting days, so that we were ultimately able to capture the completely normal life of the classical stars and the concert technician.

Lilian Franck: It was a process that stretched over several years, and it was a great help to us that Stefan Knüpfer's experience with us during the research period had been positive.

Robert Cibis: The other great difficulty was to technically capture the piano sounds so well that it ultimately becomes possible for the *Pianomania* viewers to distinguish between the various piano tones in the same way as the people present in the room. Thus we actually had an excellent music soundman on the team for every shooting day (dispersed over two and a half years), who was able to record the grand pianos – as well as sometimes the singers or orchestras – optimally in surround sound. In recording orchestras, for example, we had more than 90 sound tracks. Our technical sound requirements were most endangered when the protagonists decided spontaneously to re-try the one or another instrument, because setting up these microphones normally takes a long time. We put together a fairly mobile music technology, which made it possible to react quickly – because the most exciting scenes are often the ones that happen spontaneously. It was also only possible to create such an observant film because the music team was able to hide in other rooms, so that only the sound recordist and I, with the camera, were with the protagonists. It surely made it easier for them to overlook the camera at some point.

What was the most exciting moment during the filming?

Robert Cibis: The atmosphere was most tense shortly before the Bach recording with Pierre-Laurent Aimard. This tension was transmitted to the film team. One can feel that even behind the camera, like I was. I used my adrenaline in order to remain as concentrated as Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Stefan Knüpfer are when they are working. And I noticed, behind the camera, "That what is happening here right now is important – and isn't going to happen so quickly again:"

What was the most surprising realization about piano music and piano technology that you were confronted with during the shooting?

Lilian Franck: It was a widening of my horizons to discover how crucial the preparation of an instrument by a piano technician is for the interpretation of a pianist, and that the piano technician,

in his way, is not only a skilled worker, but also an artist.

Robert Cibis: I had already read books and watched films about piano technology before we began filming. Only, when one is there, it's all very different. Unlike the chitchat about classical music, the reality is that people spend hours and days working continuously. That never ceased to impress me, and should also be conveyed by the film. The questions of musical interpretation get a tangible dimension. Stefan Knüpfer is simply the technician and interpreter. He tries to understand the pianist and achieves that by tinkering and turning screws, poking, etc. The surprising thing is that it's all very simple when one knows what needs to be done! It gives the appearance that anyone could learn to do it.

What was the most important experience you, personally, had during the filming?

Robert Cibis: Of course, one always compares oneself to the people one is filming. I found many parallels with Stefan Knüpfer where work is concerned, many parallels to our filmmaking work. Ultimately, a film or a successful recording is a complicated thing. What every outsider might ask is "How did they accomplish it?" The admirers say, "They must be talented," But if you look at how something like that is created, then all these questions disperse. Johann Sebastian Bach is supposed to have said about the Brandenburg Concerto. "Anyone who had worked on it as much as I have, would have written it just as well."

Lilian Franck: There is only one important goal in the observation of our protagonists: The search for the perfect sound. Everything else is secondary and subordinate to this. How much Stefan Knüpfer earns, if he is married or has hobbies, it all becomes irrelevant. It is all about one thing, the creation of art. That doesn't happen accidentally. One has to expend all one's energies; that impressed me.

You shot a great deal more material for the film than you can see in it. What did you leave out, and why?

Lilian Franck: We filmed a number of scenes of Stefan Knüpfer working with other stars, including Tzimon Barto, David Helfgott, Matthias Goerne and Rudolf Buchbinder, just to name a few. The major challenge in the editing was to take leave of such completely successful scenes. We realized that we had to concentrate on one single story – the upcoming Bach recording – so that the dramatic intensity would remain. Had we included more stars, then it would have become an episodic film with less "drive". In the choice of pianists, we also liked the idea of juxtaposing three generations as the main protagonists. Lang Lang, Pierre-Laurent Aimard and Alfred Brendel. At the end of the day, there are more scenes and more concert footage of them, too, than we were able to use in the film. We had intentionally planned a higher shooting ratio in order to be able to include the absolutely best moments. We would like to release the film as a double DVD later, in order to make some of these other highlights available as bonus material.

Track List

Béla Bartók: Klavierkonzert Nr. 2, Sz 95
Radio-Symphonieorchester Wien, Orchester
Peter Eötvös, Dirigent
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Piano

Robert Schumann: Fantasie C-Dur, op.17
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Sonate Nr.13
Lang Lang, Piano

Robert Schumann: Fantasie C-Dur, op.17
Franz Liszt: Ungarische Rhapsodie Nr.6
Lang Lang, Piano

Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck:
Mein junges Leben hat ein End
Ingomar Rainer, Chlavichord
Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck,
Baletto del Granduca
Ingomar Rainer, Cembalo

Ludwig van Beethoven: Klavierkonzert Nr.3,
op.37

Maurice Ravel: "Ondine", Gaspard de la nuit
Till Fellner, Piano

Johannes Brahms: Sommerabend, op.85
(text: Heinrich Heine)
Ian Bostridge, Tenor
Julius Drake, Piano

Joseph Haydn: Sonate, Hob. XVI: 20
Franz Schubert: "Impromptu" Nr.1, op. 142
Ludwig van Beethoven: Sonate nr. 31, op.
110,
3.satz (Fuga.Allegro, ma non troppo)
Alfred Brendel, Piano

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:
Klavierkonzert Nr.13, KV 415
Chamber Orchestra of Europe
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Piano & direction

A Little Nightmare Music, courtesy of
Only Hands Small Productions
Aleksey Igudesman, Violine
Richard Hyung-ki Joo, Piano
www.igudesmanajoo.com

Erik Satie: Gymnopedie
Richard Hyung-ki Joo, Piano

Johann Sebastian Bach:
Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Piano

Sergei W.Rachmaninoff:
Rhapsodie über ein Thema von Paganini
für Klavier und Orchester, op.43
Rudolf Buchbinder, Piano

Elliott Carter, Caténares
Pierre-Laurent Aimard, Piano
by permission of Boosey & Hawkes Music publishers Ltd.

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<http://thephoenix.com/Boston/movies/122702-pianomania/>



Review: Pianomania

By [BETSY SHERMAN](#) | June 21, 2011

3.0 Stars

You don't need to be knowledgeable about classical music to savor *Pianomania* any more than you need to know about Donkey Kong to enjoy *The King of Kong*. The Vienna-set documentary burrows into the professional life of Steinway & Sons' chief technician and master tuner Stephan Knüpfer. By necessity, Knüpfer takes an empathetic approach to fulfilling the needs of both pianists (we watch him work with some of the greats) and pianos — which, though massive, are fragile creatures of wood and wire. Directors Lilian Franck and Robert Cibis eschew "How'd you get started?" chitchat and instead observe the lanky, intense Knüpfer during the year-long preparation for a recording session in which Pierre-Laurent Aimard will perform Bach's *The Art of the Fugue*. Their camera takes a fantastic voyage to the innards of the instrument, as Knüpfer labors to achieve the artist's desired effect with materials as complex as sound reflector panels and as simple as a strategically placed piece of felt.

93 MINUTES | MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

<http://www.npr.org/blogs/deceptivecadence/2011/06/23/137368313/pianomania-takes-persnickety-pianists-to-a-new-pinnacle>



deceptive cadence
from npr classical

'Pianomania' Takes Persnickety Pianists To A New Pinnacle

by [Tom Huizenga](#)

Anyone with a piano at home can tell stories about piano tuners — or piano technicians, as they prefer to be called. In more than a dozen years of producing classical music here at NPR, I have a few stories myself about brilliant but picky pianists and the extraordinary demands they've made on our piano technicians. Like the time I had to page the entire building in search of a hairdryer so the felt hammers in the piano's guts could get a blow-dry.



Now there's a new feature-length documentary that renders any average pianist vs. piano technician nightmare utterly trivial. *Pianomania*, directed by Lilian Franck and Robert Cibis, takes persnickety to a new pinnacle.

The movie follows the adventures of Stefan Knüpfe, chief piano technician for the German branch of Steinway & Sons, who over the course of the film preps pianos for [Lang Lang](#), [Alfred Brendel](#), Rudolf Buchbinder, Julius Drake and the high priest of fussiness, [Pierre-Laurent Aimard](#).

Very few pianists travel with their own instruments, so they're generally at the mercy of whichever piano resides in a given concert hall. Each pianist is in

search of a perfect sound, and it's fascinating to see how they go about chasing it. Lang Lang shows up the morning of his concert in multicolored sneakers to test-drive a Steinway. After a few bars he stops, saying, "Somehow it's not so clean. It doesn't have a perfect disappearing." And there's a pedal problem. Later, at his recital, one wonders whether the pedal will even stay attached — or the keys, for that matter — as he practically pounds the instrument into matchsticks in [Liszt](#)'s explosive Hungarian Rhapsody No. 6. He's a rock star.

Steinway technician Stefan Knüpfer discusses the piano with Lang Lang in the new documentary *Pianomania*.

Brendel is more subtle. He runs his fingers lightly up and down the keyboard — something's not right. "Now we even out the tone," he says. Then calmly pronounces, as if reading the Ten Commandments, "A concert piano should have the same color from top to bottom and the same dynamic possibilities." Knüpfe steps in with his trusty wrench.

Some clients are more enigmatic with their assessments. Drake, preparing to accompany tenor Ian Bostridge, gives it to Knüpfe in a single phrase: "There isn't any magic in the piano."

And then there's Aimard. The longest thread in the film follows Knüpfe's quest to find the perfect piano for Aimard's approaching [Bach](#) recording and tweak it along the way to fit each style of Bach the pianist plans to record.

At the piano, Aimard hits a single note and explains that the pieces based on harpsichord works need a "deeper expression," more of an echo. When Knüpfe asks him if he wants a big, blossoming tone for the note or a more compact, intimate tone, Aimard responds, "I would like to have both." Knüpfe pulls out a tool, makes an adjustment, and Aimard plays the note again. He's pleased, but the satisfaction doesn't last long. He creates a lexicon for his needs in all the styles of Bach. There's the "clavicord-situation," "harpsichord-situation," "organ-situation," "chamber-situation" and the "ensemble-situation." It'll be Knüpfe's job to make sure all those needs are met, no matter how esoteric.

The film's overall focus won't appeal to everyone. Piano technicians might be in heaven, but I suspect I'm not alone in wishing for more music. After all, Franck and Cibis landed some of the greatest pianists working today, and it would have been more satisfying to hear the results of Knüpfe's magic in the form of actual performances. And it's easy to grow weary with the many scenes of Knüpfe, nervously pacing the hallways of grand venues like Vienna's Konzerthaus, worrying about the next crisis, not to mention the seemingly endless, overly detailed scenes of Aimard's recording sessions.

Still, *Pianomania* provides a fascinating glimpse into a very specialized corner of the music world. Pianist [Andras Schiff](#) once said, "Whatever we do on the piano is a collection of illusions." After watching *Pianomania*, you will understand.

Pianomania is screening in Chicago, Boston, Seattle, San Francisco and Washington, D.C. over the summer.