

Chicago Tribune, 25. 10. 05

Kienberger comically plays off childhood memories

By Michael Phillips
Tribune theater critic

The other night, at the Chopin Theatre's festival of European solo performance known as "I-Fest," I caught a Swiss actor and musician working mostly in German and a little bit in English, in a show called "I Am So Alone." Being an ugly American barely conversant in English, let alone languages beyond, I had doubts about being there. Yet there was no problem. There was no "language problem."

The wide-eyed, frizzy-haired and bespectacled performer, Jurg Kienberger, handed the multinational Chopin crowd a wonderful 90 minutes. Encountering Kienberger, a man of enormous and delicate comic style — he did everything from "That's Amore" to Comedian Harmonists-style impressions of jazz band instruments — was like meeting the Swiss answer to Victor Borge, or a spiritual cousin of Peter Schickele, a.k.a. P.D.Q. Bach. I hope he returns soon.

Kienberger grew up the son of a hotel owner in the Swiss Alps. With a dazed smile recalling Andy Kaufman's, he played two roles based on traveling musicians he knew as a child. One was that of a (fictional) aged pianist given to coughing spells, requiring sips of tea while playing — a sight in itself. In the other role, the pianist's nephew, he proved a tiger on the accordion, a purveyor of such global kitsch classics as "That's Amore," and a vocalist of high, dry falsetto distinction.