

Review

**Cleveland International Piano Competition:
Round One, Session One (July 31)**

by Daniel Hathaway



The Cleveland International Piano Competition got off to a strong start on Wednesday afternoon in Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art. If the other twenty-three contestants can match the quality of the first five who played, this should prove to be a very interesting eleven days.

24-year old Ruoyu Huang from China was the lucky recipient of spot number one in the draw. He led off with nuanced performances of two Scarlatti sonatas (K. 45 and K. 17) that showed off his fleet passage work and clarity of touch. A

Chopin set (the first 12 *Preludes*, *Etude in e*, op. 25/5 and *Ballade in G*, op. 23/1) had both fine and uneven moments. Some of the preludes fluctuated in tempo beyond an expressive *rubato*, and Chopin's interesting harmonic progressions sometimes went unheralded. The *Ballade*, though exciting, became episodic and nearly Lisztian in scale.

Pavel Yeletskiy (30, from Belarus) fussed with the height of his bench for several minutes before launching into a crystalline reading of Kurtág's *Seven Pieces from "Játékok"* full of colors and variations in touch and articulation. His immediate segue into Beethoven's *Appassionata* sonata, op. 57 seemed intended to link the pieces on some aesthetic level. It was a nice touch, but after beginning Beethoven *sotto voce*, Yeletskiy proceeded to shape a performance notable for extremes of dynamics and expression — almost a sonata *Arrabiata*. Mesmerizing, but blurry.

Messiaen and birds were first on Jin Uk Kim's agenda. The 29-year-old from South Korea led off with a precise and compelling reading of *Le Lorient* from *Catalogue d'Oiseaux* featuring wonderful textural contrasts and kaleidoscopic colors. He followed that with a characterful performance of Brahms's *Klavierstücke*, op. 76. After the third of the six pieces, a certain sameness of approach set in and one began to wish for longer, more shapely melodic lines.

After the first change of pianos, 28-year-old Konstantin Shamray from Russia gave exquisite, understated performances of J.S. Bach (the *Tocatta in f-sharp*, BWV 910), and Mozart (the *Sonata in F*, K. 533/494). Playing introspectively but with a handsome tone, Shamray shaped the toccata's improvisatory lines elegantly and over-articulated the main

fugue subject to fine effect. His Mozart was fastidious and clear-textured but the composer's signature playfulness was missing.

Nino Kotrikadze (27, Georgia) began her set with a darkly brooding, well-controlled performance of Shostakovich's *Prelude and Fugue in e-flat, op. 87/14*, following it with a spirited account of Mozart's *Sonata in C, K. 457*. Well-paced and clearly articulated, her playing came very close to exposing Mozart's humor at several points.

These are only first impressions of five fine pianists. We'll hear them again under different circumstances in the second round.

Published on clevelandclassical.com July 31, 2013