

## International Violin Competition of Indianapolis: A conversation with gold medalist Jinjoo Cho

by Mike Telin



On September 5, thirty-seven young violinists representing fourteen countries began their quest to win the Gold Medal at the Ninth Quadrennial International Violin Competition of Indianapolis. After the field had been narrowed to sixteen contestants, and then to six, on Saturday, September 20 the jury announced that Jinjoo Cho was the winner of the competition's top prize.

For her accomplishment, Cho was awarded a \$30,000 cash prize, international concert engagements including a Carnegie Hall Stern Auditorium recital debut, career management for the next four years and the four-year loan of the 1683 'ex-Gingold' Stradivarius. Cho holds a bachelor's degree (2011) and a master's degree (2013) in music performance from the Cleveland Institute of Music. She is currently pursuing Professional Studies at CIM.

"I'm really grateful and honored to have this opportunity," a very excited JinJoo Cho said during a recent telephone conversation. "I'm actually the second First Prize winner of the competition to have come from CIM. Judith Ingolfsson won it in 1998, so I feel like I am continuing a really great Cleveland legacy. I'm very happy about that."

For her performance during the preliminary round, Jinjoo Cho chose works by Bach, Mozart, Paganini and Fauré. Was there a strategy behind this decision? "No, I didn't have a strategy, I wasn't thinking about that. They're just pieces that I like," she said with a laugh, adding that the pieces also met the competition requirements.

During the final round, the six finalists were required to play a Classical concerto with the East Coast Chamber Orchestra, for which she selected Mozart's *Violin Concerto No. 5*, K. 219. They were also required to play a Romantic or Post-Romantic concerto with the Indianapolis Symphony. Many found Cho's choice of Korngold *Violin Concerto in D*

*major* during the Final round to be an interesting one. “A lot of people have asked why I chose it, but to me it just made sense. Yes, it’s not played as often as some other concertos so there is no pre-decided perception of the piece. And because of that I felt that if I brought some uniqueness to my interpretation, it would be appreciated rather than judged. I also feel like I have a connection to the piece.” Cho said she also liked the idea of challenging herself to play a work with which she was still not 100% comfortable. “It was a big challenge to me and I liked the idea of the challenge.”

Has she had a chance to listen to the recording of her Korngold performance? “Yes,” she says bashfully, “and, oh well, you can never be happy with everything, but I’m glad that people liked it. And, I’m very thankful that the judges appreciated it.”

While the 26-year-old violinist is no stranger to competitions — she also won first prize at the 2006 Montreal International Musical Competition, the 2010 Buenos Aires International Violin Competition, the Schoenfeld International String Competition and the 2005 Stulberg International String Competition — was there anything different about her time in Indianapolis? “Honestly I don’t really know, but somehow, for some reason, I just focused more this time. I was much more comfortable with the surroundings, since Indianapolis is not so different from Cleveland. I also didn’t have jetlag so everything just kind of came together.”

In addition to the \$30,000 gold medal award Cho also took home \$1,000 for the best Performance of a Bach Work, \$500 for the third best performance of a Paganini Caprice as well as an extra \$5,000 for the best performance of a Romantic or post-Romantic concerto. That’s a total of \$36,500 in cash, about which Cho gleefully exclaimed that she’s very happy to not have to worry about being able to pay back her student loans, at last for a while.

Then there’s the four-year loan of the 1683 ‘ex-Gingold’ Stradivarius. “I haven’t actually received the violin yet, but I’m eager to find out what it’s like. And to see how it fits with my playing and personality.”

But above all, the opportunity to have four years of concert management that excites her most. “I will now have more opportunities to perform in different places, and this is what I have wanted all of my life. Now I have somebody who will really be helping me to get on the concertizing pyramid.”

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