

Oberlin Cooper Violin Competition: ten contestants play full concertos (July 28)

by Mike Telin & Daniel Hathaway



After three days of semifinal rounds, the original field of 22 young violinists ages 13-18 representing seven countries was narrowed down to ten performers, each of whom played full concertos with piano accompaniment in afternoon and evening sessions on Tuesday, July 28 in Warner Concert Hall at the Oberlin Conservatory.

MT:

The afternoon session began with an impressive performance of the Tchaikovsky concerto by 16-year-old Karisa Chiu from Palatine, Illinois, accompanied by Inah Chiu. The violinist's fine technique was in evidence in the opening movement and she displayed a lovely sense of phrasing in the Andante. Her vigorous playing in the finale brought the piece to a thrilling conclusion. If only she had given the concerto more room to breathe.

15-year-old Belle Ting from Taiwan brought a mature sense of musical purpose to Glazunov's a-minor concerto. She was impressive from the beginning, playing with a rich sound and a beautiful sense of line. Ting displayed an obvious understanding of the structure of the piece and her cadenza was a joy to hear. Color and vivacity characterized the final movement. Roberta Whitely was her partner at the keyboard.

The first of three performances of the Brahms concerto to be heard throughout the day was given by 18-year-old Eric Tsai from Birmingham, Alabama, with Whitely at the piano. His assured performance of the first movement was technically solid, played with beautiful tone and fine intonation. His well-paced cadenza was nicely controlled. Tsai's second movement approached the sublime. While he negotiated the fast technical passages in Brahms's folksy finale with precision, Tsai also took very few chances with his interpretation.

Ria Honda, 16, from Japan, was the second performer to take on the Tchaikovsky concerto, this performance accompanied by Laura Kennedy. Her otherwise assertive first movement began promisingly and she handled its technical passages with finesse. Her slow movement was nicely paced, and Honda showed wonderful bow control during the spirited finale. She, too, could have benefitted from allowing the music to breathe in places.

Gallia Kastner, 18, from Arlington Heights, Illinois, displayed great promise during the 2013 Cooper Competition. Her majestic performance of the Brahms concerto on Tuesday (with Nelson Padgett at the piano) confirmed that initial impression. She brought fine energy and a rich, focused tone to the first movement, and was in total control of the cadenza. Sensitive phrasing, beautiful color changes, impressive tone, and impeccable intonation characterized her playing of the slow movement. Her spacious, well-paced finale displayed both great technical facility and a singing sense of line.

DH:

The evening session began with the third of five performances of the Tchaikovsky concerto. Berkeley, California-based Albert Yamamoto, 18, brought a big, rich tone and abundant vibrato to the beginning of the concerto, an approach that continued throughout the piece. More playfulness, changes of color and attention to phrasing would have added welcome variety as the concerto went on. Accompanied by Allie Su, Yamamoto displayed strong bow technique and fine projection, though he tended to rush through technical passages.

15-year-old Joshua Brown from Gurnee, Illinois, provided a dramatic contrast to the romantic concertos with his riveting performance of Shostakovich's first concerto. Playing its bleak opening movement *sotto voce*, with controlled vibrato and sustained intensity, Brown made a complete contrast in the Scherzo. Rock-solid rhythm, a more extroverted intensity and color changes held the attention until he finally let everything loose during a wild Klezmer dance. His sensitive side re-emerged in the Passacaglia, followed by an expressive account of the startling cadenza. Brown's impeccable handling of the meter changes in the final dance brought the piece to a thrilling conclusion, in partnership with pianist Nelson Padgett.

Lucas Stratmann (18, from New York, NY) followed with the Brahms concerto (Roberta Whitely was at the piano). Beginning with a strong, sinewy tone, Stratmann impressed the ear throughout the concerto with his carrying power. Beautiful triplet figures in the slow movement gave him the rare opportunity to explore softer dynamic levels. His musical athleticism was completely in evidence in the finale.

15-year-old Alice Haekyo Lee from Toronto (accompanied by Alicja Basinksa) brought dash and spirit to the Tchaikovsky concerto, playing its slow movement with charm and

its finale with well-managed transitions and a sense of musical shape. Her lighter approach to the work provided a welcome contrast to some of the heftier performances that had gone before.

Maya Anjali Buchanan, 15, from Rapid City, South Dakota, displayed verve, direction and an excellent sense of musical architecture in the last Tchaikovsky performance of the day, accompanied by Laura Kennedy. Her haunting tone at the beginning of the slow movement contrasted beautifully with the color change she made when the mute came off. Her fluent playing in the finale was highlighted by fine articulations, skillful tempo changes and a general sense of control that still allowed her to be expressive. Her harmonics whistled like birds.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 29, 2015.

Click here for a printable copy of this article

[Return to the Front Page.](#)