

Competition Review: CIPC for Young Artists — Semifinal and Final Rounds (June 5, 6 & 8)

by Daniel Hathaway



The Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists brought 22 pianists (ages 12-17) from 11 countries to Cleveland beginning on May 30. By the beginning of the semifinals on Tuesday, June 5, six remained in the junior half of the draw, and seven in the senior. All were impressive performers, some of whom could stand up proudly to participants in CIPC's 18-30 event.

First, a rundown on the semifinal performances by those who *weren't* advanced by the jury to the final concerto round on Friday evening with Gerhardt Zimmermann and the Canton Symphony Orchestra.

JUNIORS

Catherine He (14, Canada) began with a strongly articulated performance of Bach's *Prelude and Fugue in E-flat* from the Well-Tempered Clavier I, then settled impressively into Schumann's *ABEGG Variations* after a slightly tentative beginning. Her realization of the toccata-like moments in Prokofiev's *Sonata No. 3* was bold, her playing of Liszt's *Valse-Improptu* lithe and expressive.

Katherine E. Liu (13, USA) played Bach's WTC II D-minor Prelude with an even touch, and balanced voices expertly in the Fugue. Her slowish tempo at the beginning of Beethoven's "Appassionata" Sonata contrasted starkly with her speedy pace in the

Allegro. Liszt's *Un Sospiro*, Barber's *Nocturne (homage to John Field)*, and Chopin's *Ballade No. 2* received expressive, sympathetic readings.

Seungmin Shin (13, South Korea) brought a light touch and breezy tempos to the outer movements of Bach's *Italian Concerto*, and took an expansive view of Ravel's *Jeux d'eau*. Her treatment of Chopin's *Rondo in E-flat* was diaphanous, if a bit blurry.

SENIORS

David Khrikuli (17, Georgia) adopted an aggressive approach to Chopin's *Ballade No. 4*, and his performance of Liszt's *Sonata in b* — which built to a thundering climax after just a few bars — was a case of too much, too soon. In between, Ravel's *Oiseaux tristes* sounded more threatening than doleful.

Arthur Wang (17, Canada) began with a Romanticized performance of Bach's WTC I *Prelude and Fugue in c-sharp*, unleashed all his firepower on parts of Liszt's "Dante" Sonata, and then turned in a muscular and rhythmically pristine reading of Prokofiev's *Sonata No. 7*. Schubert's G-flat Impromptu was an island of calm in his set.

Ryunosuke Kishimoto (16, Japan) played Bach's WTC II *Prelude and Fugue in b* with cool elegance and brought colorful nuances to Schumann's *Allegro in b*. Clarity marked his performance of Chopin's *Scherzo No. 1*, and well-balanced strength distinguished his playing of Liszt's *Ballade No. 2*.

Uladzislau Khandohi (16, Republic of Belarus) ended Wednesday evening's session appropriately with an evocative reading of Ravel's *Gaspard de la Nuit*. He preceded that with an introspective and lyrical performance of Bach's WTC II *Prelude and Fugue in f-sharp*, and a lyrical, freely-wrought version of Chopin's *Ballade No. 4*.

Late on Wednesday evening, the jury advanced Yunchan Lim, Eva Gevorgyan, Hao Wei Lin, Jiwon Yang, Xiaoxuan Li, and Shuan Hern Lee to the finals.

As it turned out, the six finalists would be performing only two different pieces at the Maltz Performing Arts Center on Friday — the opening movements of Grieg's Concerto and Chopin's Second Concerto. While adapting to three different interpretations of each may have made things more complicated for Zimmermann and the Orchestra, hearing multiple versions of the same piece allowed for some interesting comparisons.

JUNIORS



Yunchan Lim (14, South Korea) had given impressive performances of Bach's *French Suite No. 5* and Chopin's "Là ci darem la mano" variations in the semifinals, playing with composure and well-chosen tempos in the Bach, and setting up the first appearance of the innocent little Mozart tune in the Chopin with a mock-heroic introduction. Something in his musical demeanor puts the listener at ease. His evenness of touch carried over into the first movement of Chopin's Second

Concerto on Friday. Lim was highly alert to Zimmermann and the Orchestra, if a bit eager to sacrifice forward motion in favor of expression.



Eva Gevorgyan (14, Russia) radiated joy in her semifinals set, offering a shapely and rhythmically detailed performance of Bach's G-Major Toccata and athletic readings of Debussy's *L'Isle Joyeuse* and Rachmaninoff's *Etude-tableaux*, Op. 39, No. 2. She ended that round with a bravura reading of Liszt's *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12*. In the finals, Gevorgyan smiled through a strong and vital performance of the first movement of the Grieg concerto. Spinning out longer phrases would only

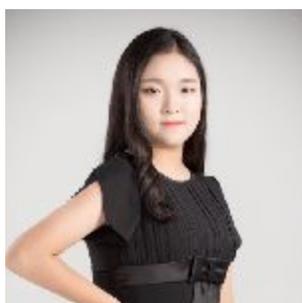
have enhanced her take on the piece.



Hao Wei Lin (13, Taiwan), though physically tiny, produced a rich, expressive tone in Bach's WTC I G-sharp minor Prelude and Fugue in the semifinal round and brought playfulness and subtlety — as well as a strong ending — to Chopin's *Ballade No. 3*. His charming interpretation of Schumann's *Kinderszenen* lingered meaningfully over details, but not to the detriment of the shape of the pieces. In contrast to other performers on Friday evening, his Chopin concerto was a bit

underpowered but intensely poetic.

SENIORS



JiWon Yang (16, South Korea) had played a mini-recital of six pieces in the semifinals which built to a crescendo and eventually caught fire with her fourth selection: a strong but measured performance of Chopin's *Scherzo No. 3*. She ended that set with breathtaking performances of two barn burners:

Liszt's *Réminiscences di Norma*, and Saint-Saëns's shamelessly virtuosic *Etude en forme de valse*. On Friday evening, she brought out all the drama in the Grieg concerto while playing with admirable musicality.



Xiaoxuan Li (16, China) played sharply-etched accounts of the dance movements in Bach's *French Suite No. 5* in the semifinal round, followed by a highly dramatic reading of Brahms' *Sonata No. 1*. It was sometimes difficult to concentrate on the music because of Li's heavy breathing, vocalizations, and exaggerated arm gestures. Those habits followed him into his Chopin concerto in the finals (he even added foot stamping at one point). Histrionics aside, his performance was strong,

eventful and expressive. He made important eye contact with wind soloists and graciously bowed to the orchestra at the end.



Shuan Hern Lee (15, Australia) let his outgoing personality come through during the semifinals. Bach's *Chromatic Fantasy* was shapely, with even runs and fine articulation. Chopin's *Barcarolle in f-sharp* was exotic and warm in tone even in soft passages. After beautifully capturing the essence of each of the four movements of Schumann's *Sonata No. 2*, he wrapped up his impressive set with a festive romp through Balakirev's *Oriental Fantasy*. No less extroverted in the Grieg concerto on

Friday, he expertly shaped his solo lines and sensitively accompanied wind solos. His powerful crescendo in the cadenza brought the concerto and the final round to a thrilling close, after which Lee leapt up to the podium and gave Zimmermann a big hug. He was the lone competitor on Friday evening that the audience called back for a second bow.

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