

Review

Cleveland International Piano Competition: Round One, Session Three (August 1)

by Daniel Hathaway



Annika Treutler (23, Germany) opened the third session of the first round on Thursday afternoon with a well-conceived performance of J.S. Bach's f minor prelude and fugue (WTC I), marking arrivals at important harmonic moments, pointing up each entrance of the fugue subject and giving the fugue an expressive profile through subtle crescendos and decrescendos. The balance between hands in Chopin's F Major Etude (op. 10/8) was admirable, her right hand filigree strong-fingered and lucid. Treutler ended her set with Beethoven's op. 109 sonata, creating a light, airy texture at the outset and shining little lights on details. Aside from a few boomy moments, her playing was well-balanced and quasi-playful in the right spots.

Ukrainian pianist Oleksandr Polivkov, 25, is a big guy but can play with a soft touch, as he demonstrated from the outset in his elegant voicing of J.S. Bach's c# minor prelude and fugue and later in graceful passagework in Haydn's A-flat sonata (Hob. XVI:46). The second movement was perfectly exquisite. A light, cottony texture with fine layering and balances suited Chopin's A-flat etude (op. 10/10) nicely. Polivkov saved his big playing for Skoryk's *Burlesque*, a jazzy and sometimes boisterous romp with a surprise ending to which the pianist brought a dark, full tone and loads of digital virtuosity.

A solid performance of J.S. Bach's sixth *English Suite* was first on Swiss pianist Beatrice Berrut's playlist. The prelude was meditative, deliberate and expressive, its fugue fast but fastidious. Berrut changed up her articulation effectively to give new textures to the *Courante* and *Bourées*, and tossed off the *Gigue* with élan at a perfect tempo. Two of Heinz Holliger's brief *Elis* pieces brought a twentieth-century atonal moment into her set; she played their stock gestures with clarity and finesse. Chopin's b-minor Etude (op. 25/10) was dramatically turbulent at the beginning and end when Berrut played its cascading octaves with a hefty, dark tone, and sentimentally wistful in the gentle, lovely middle section.

Oskar Jezior (28, Poland) began with extremely expressive readings of Scarlatti's d minor and E Major sonatas (K. 213 and K. 162), then played a digitally impressive performance of Chopin's a minor Etude (op. 25/4) as his middle piece studded with fine and accurate offset bass notes. But a bit of head scratching was in order for his take on Brahms's *Vier Klavierstück, op. 119*. The first piece was painfully slow to the point of structural col-

lapse. The second proceeded in fits and starts. The third was vertical, halting and choppy. The fourth fell more within normal parameters but still felt deconstructed without having been put back together again.

South African pianist Ben Schoeman, 29, brought the session to an end with Bach and Haydn that felt completely right. His reading of the *Toccata*, BWV 911 was dramatic in concept, full in tone, his playing virtuosic where it was meant to sound improvisatory and clear and neat when counterpoint was involved. Schoeman responded to Haydn's delightful C major Sonata (Hob. XVI:50) with elegantly cheerful playing full of character and contrast and festooned with pearly passagework. South African composer Surendran Reddy's *Toccata for John Roos* was pure dessert: jazzy, bluesy, caffeinated and just bordering on the pianistically trashy, Schoeman played it with amused glee.

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