

Review**Cleveland International Piano Competition:
Round Two, Session One (August 3)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Time for second impressions! Ryoyu Huang stepped up first in the second round with Haydn, Britten and the last half of Chopin's Op. 28 *Preludes* (he had played the first dozen in the opening round). Huang's breezy excursion through Haydn's E Major sonata (Hob. XVI:31) didn't leave him much room to sniff out details. He played with an agreeably hefty tone, and many of his lines had a good sense of direction. Britten composed his gloomy *Notturmo* for just such a competition as this one (Leeds), giving pianists a catalogue of nuanced effects to tackle, and Huang did a fine job with that. The Chopin set was at times expressive, and at others could have benefited from a

bit more emotion (No. 15).

Two Scarlatti sonatas in f minor (K. 387 and K. 519) allowed Pavel Yeletskly to vary his articulation in striking ways and make them into true piano pieces rather than just transcriptions from the harpsichord. His characterful and well-wrought interpretations of Brahms's *Klavierstücke*, op. 118 followed the composer's instructions to the letter (*appassionato*, *teneramente*, *agitato*, *grazioso*) and he brought contrasts to the individual pieces by altering his voicings and coloration. Yeletskly closed the set dramatically with Chopin's "Revolutionary" Etude, smearing some passagework and allowing some left-hand chords to submerge themselves under the busy material overhead. It would be to his credit to figure out how to play loud without making the instrument sound harsh.

Jin Uk Kim began with the only Rameau works we'll hear during the competition. Both *L'Enharmonique* and *L'Egyptienne* are festooned with ornaments that can sound unnecessary on a modern concert grand — but Kim played their trills and other French baroque fripperies with ease and style. The balance between his hands in the second piece was admirable. Chopin's g-sharp minor Etude (op. 25, no. 6) was immaculate if a bit notey; accents at the end of runs sounded odd. Kim ended with the early Beethoven sonata in E-flat, op. 7. Nice changes of color and dynamics and long crescendos were attractive features of the second *Allegro*. The finale might have taken Beethoven's marking, *grazioso*, more seriously, and the whole performance would have profited from more changes of mood and character.

Last up on Saturday morning, Konstantin Shamray heralded his set with Ligeti's attention-grabbing *Fantares (Etude No. 4)*, achieving a fine balance between handsfull of contrasting material that got passed back and forth, and expertly voicing weighty, *fortissimo* chords. He effectively changed up the melodic articulation in Chopin's A-flat Étude (Opus 10/10), exploring subtle dynamic shadings and elasticizing the tempo. He ended with an unapologetically bipolar reading of Schumann's first sonata (op. 11), leaving the composer's unresolved personality traits hanging out in plain sight and revealing his own ability to radically vary his touch and articulation. It was a crazy ride that made sense.

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