

Review**Cleveland International Piano Competition:
Round Two, Session Three (August 4)**

by Daniel Hathaway & Mike Telin



To open Sunday morning's session, Oleksandr Poliykov chose a single work, Brahms's f minor sonata, op. 5, beginning grandly, then fading to a beautiful *pianissimo*. The first movement explored the whole range of emotion from the explosive to the sensitive while the rest of the sonata featured moments of stunning, lyrical beauty even in brooding and introspective passages. Poliykov can play with enormous power that never gets blurry and his sense of the spacious and expansive gesture suited Brahms well.

Beatrice Berrut began her second round set with a completely delightful journey through Haydn's F Major Sonata (Hob. XVI:23) that was clean, touchingly lyrical and shapely. Her tone, full of color and dynamic contrasts, was readily apparent in her all-around brilliant performance of Chopin's b-flat minor Sonata, op. 35. The third movement *Marche* also showed her great sense of line. These were two very well-conceived and executed performances; Berrut followed up with a winning smile at the end.

Mozart was first on Oskar Jezior's list — the Sonata in F, K. 332 — and he pointed up some of its very interesting details during his spirited and idiosyncratic playing. His second work was Rzewski's *Winnsboro Cotton Mill Blues*, an arresting piece that begins with a chugga-chugga bass, turns minimalist with clusters that gradually crawl up the keyboard, then after a quieter section, morphs into chordal textures over a boogie-woogie bass. Anything could happen next and Rzewski manages to tuck a fugue and some ragtime into the mix before the piece ends with big climaxes and a treble fadeout. Jezior was well in charge of all its challenges and put the piece across splendidly. His playing in the minimalist sections was as steady and reliable as an atomic clock.

Ben Schoeman chose Schumann's *Kreisleriana* as his opening work and explored all its polarities from poetic to passionate while maintaining — for Schumann — an unusual level of lucidity. Schoeman graced its poetic and nostalgic moments with lovely, lingering tone and his passagework in moments of drama was fluent and dashing. He skillfully linked one mood to another with subtle transitions and created continuous shifts of color and dynamics that drew the listener in and obviated the sense of being tossed back and forth that can so often cause Schumann fatigue. He ended his set with a surging account

of Chopin's "Octaves" Etude that featured more remarkable transitions in and out of its middle section — which Schoeman played with good forward movement and a flexible tempo.

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