

## Review

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

by Daniel Hathaway



Gerard Aimontche launched the Sunday afternoon session with Beethoven's A-flat sonata, op. 110, then went on to play Chopin's "Octaves" Etude (op. 25/10) and three of Kapustin's *24 Preludes in Jazz Style* from 1988. Though he seemed to be skimming the surface more than penetrating in the Beethoven (it sounded unsettled), he obviously connected with the audience, who broke into applause for the first time in the middle of a set. Aimontche held the pedal down for the Chopin and flew through its contrasting middle section, making an admirably long, slow crescendo back to the precipitous opening theme. He played three Kapustin preludes nos. 23, 4 and 17)

back to back with a fine sense of jazz style.

Ben Kim began his set with a graceful reading of J.S. Bach's F-sharp prelude and fugue (WTC I), subtly pointing up its details with interesting, mixed articulations. Long, well-shaped crescendos and diminuendos showed a good sense of the fugue's points of tension and release. A second performance today of the first Schumann sonata found Kim reconciling the divergent sides of the composer's personality in a remarkably lucid way. The first movement unfolded gradually, not in flurries and torrents, and he played with a large, well-constructed tone, clearly etching themes in the listener's ear as they came around. That made it easy to keep track of the progress of the quirky first movement. The second movement *Aria* was beautifully laid out, the scherzo light and agile but full. The recitative was a big surprise. Kim made a strong, declamatory moment out of the finale, crafting a big fugue subject and a grand ending.

Haydn's E-flat Sonata (Hob. XVI:52) was first on Julia Kociuban's list, followed by Chopin's op. 49 *Fantasy in f*. She captured Haydn's sophisticated twists and turns with a full tone whose color and dynamic shadings could turn on a dime. There were, as there should be, many surprises, including the sudden outburst of a bass recitative in the slow movement and the unexpected rests in the cheeky finale (she smiled at those). Her well-paced and spacious Chopin began nobly and grandly. She found just the right sense of playfulness in its fantasia sections and its march and lyrical chorale were full-voiced and expressive.

Andrejs Osokins began with a slow, meditative progress through Bach's e-flat minor prelude (WTC I) and surprised the ear with a *pianissimo* statement of the fugue subject which later turned into a remarkable effect when he accompanied one entry with *sotto voce* voices. Ligeti's *Der Zauberlehrling* etude featured remarkable fingerwork. He turned to Chopin next, playing fleet right-hand figures against muffled left-hand material in the a minor Etude (op. 10/2). Beethoven's last sonata, op. 111 was almost Lisztian in scale. Osokins continued to experiment with textures and juxtapositions in the *Arietta*, creating a huge and jazzy episode with loose dotted rhythms followed by *pianissimos*. Iconoclastic, but quite fascinating.

Last up was Meng-Shen Shen, who began with a hyper-percussive performance of Corigliano's elemental *Winging It: Improvisation for Piano* from 2008. Big and brutal, Shen attacked it with conviction and with technique and power to spare. He followed that with a fluent, robust performance of Chopin's third sonata, showing a clear sense of its musical architecture and producing wonderful digital frou-frou in the finale. Shen's performance this afternoon underlined the benefit of giving all contestants another go in the second round.

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