

Review**Cleveland International Piano Competition:
Round Two, Session Five (August 5)**

by Daniel Hathaway



Stanislav Khristenko displayed his gentle and expressive side at the opening of Monday afternoon's session with elegant, characterful playing in Beethoven's op. 2 sonata. Light, moody and colorful, the sonata was a delight — delicate in the scherzo, impetuous yet graceful in the rondo. His reading of Chopin's "Torrent" etude (Op. 10/4) was nicely layered; he tossed its ending off with a dismissive musical nod. He ended his set with Montsalvatge's witty *Sonatina para Yvette* from 1962, playing the opening toccata moodily, creating an eloquent "beauty and the beast" dialogue in the second movement, and stylishly molding its finale, another toccata, scampery this time, out of which twinkled the surprise of a well-known nursery rhyme (Mozart knew it by its French title).

Henry Kramer confirmed first round impressions with a strong reading of Haydn's E-flat Sonata (Hob. XIV:49), ably contrasting its sunny and dark polarities and mixing gentle runs with weightier passagework. He played subtly and effectively with rhythms in the concluding Minuet. Next up was Chopin's g-sharp minor Etude (Op. 25/6), impressive for its cascades of notes in the right hand and its flexible rhythms. He ended with seven movements from Ligeti's *Musica Ricerta*, creating a wide variety of articulations and playing Ligeti's obsessive motifs with amazing stamina (the left hand figures in No. 7 are killing, but Kramer barely batted an eyelash). He brilliantly completed the set with No. 10, remarkable for its arrestingly sinister bass line and bitonal, parallel chords.

Maria Mazo chose a single work, Brahms's third sonata, bringing a wealth of pianistic prowess and a vast emotional palette to the task and painting with a broad brush. She began it explosively and with heavy accents in the bass line, contrasting that with rich lyricism in its more relaxed moments. In the second movement, Mazo went for a completely different tone, understated but robust at climaxes. The scherzo returned to the explosive with heavy accents; later it turned into a waltz of Lisztian proportions. Insistent motives marked the Scherzo and the finale, played rather choppily with heavy bass motives, which ended with a very brisk, percussive coda. Exciting but perhaps just a bit too large in concept.

Quang Hong Luu chose music by Beethoven and Chopin. In his confident performance of Beethoven's C Major sonata, op. 2, he brought out the composer's motives with admirable clarity but his dynamics ranged from the very loud to the very soft with few gradations in between. In his attempt to bring out important figures, his touch occasionally got a bit harsh on accented notes. Chopin's famous A-flat Polonaise wanted more pride and flair as well as that wider range of dynamics.

Wenjib Jin ended the session with an attractive mini-recital of Bach, Kirchner, Chopin and Mozart. His tempos in the *Courante*, *Gavotte*, *Bourrée* and *Gigue* were brisk in the extreme and turned a dance suite into a string of toccatas, sometimes at the edge of playability. Jin followed with a well-balanced performance of Leon Kirchner's *Interlude II*, contrasting its colorful, atonal roulades with lovely lyrical sections of complex chords. His Chopin, the Etude in e (Op. 25/5) was playful and well-balanced, with a well-articulated tenor theme. He ended with a tidy and sensitive reading of Mozart's K. 311 sonata with a finely-paced cadenza and expressive connecting runs.

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