

Review

**Cleveland International Piano Competition:
Semi-Final Round, Day Two (August 7)**

by Daniel Hathaway



On Wednesday, with the moment of decision only hours away, the last four pianists in the semi-final round stepped up to the Hamburg Steinway in Gartner Auditorium to vie for a slot in the final round with The Cleveland Orchestra on Friday and Saturday night.

Annika Treutler (23, Germany) assembled a program of Haydn, Hindemith, Scriabin, Chopin and Liszt for the afternoon's opening set. Her elegant phrasing, graceful but forceful technique and fine sense of musical line and architecture touched everything she played. Only subtle shadings of color and dynamics differentiated each of Haydn's f-minor variations from the other. Hindemith's *Suite "1922"*, a piece parodying popular dances of the era — which the composer later advised his publisher not to bother to re-print — was far more eventful as Treutler navigated her way through its *Marsch*, its gloomy, atonal *Shimmy*, its thick-textured but later sparkling *Nachtstück*, its waltzy and rhetorical *Boston* and its uptime *Rag*, which sported a huge ending. Scriabin's op. 13 *Preludes* were by turns rumbling, wistful, ornate and powerful. Treutler played Liszt's re-workings of Schumann's songs, *Widmung* and *Frühlingsnacht* with grace and agility, and Liszt's own *Hungarian Rhapsody No. 8* with characteristic spirit. The audience enthusiastically applauded after each item in the set.



Oskar Jezior (28, Poland) proposed an interesting program, beginning with Alban Berg's op. 1 sonata and concluding with Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* sonata (op. 106), with the *entremet* of Liszt's evanescent *Nuages gris*. It's obvious that the Berg is close to his soul: he played the sonata reverently and expressively, caressing its soft sections and bringing out the work's inherent lyricism and melodic qualities, even in its louder passages. His slow, lingering reading of *Grey Clouds* apparently had cosmic resonance, summoning up bursts of thunder and sheets of rain. Jezior's approach to the standard repertoire often seems to be iconoclastic, and so it was with his concept of the *Hammerklavier* sonata. Playing petulantly and too fast for coherence, he smeared runs with pedal and blurred important motives. The *Adagio* was dead slow, the *Allegro risoluto* rather frantic.

It's something of an intractable piece on the best of occasions, but this performance was one of the more unusual.



First to play in the evening, Stanislav Krishtenko (29, Russia) began with a colorful, percussive reading of the Bartók sonata, masterfully juxtaposing loud and soft statements of the same material and varying touch and attack. He played the last movement with signal brilliance, contrasting its nervous left-hand figures with right-hand themes and creating arresting, colorful accents. Expert layering of material (though the left-hand sometimes overbalanced) and *rubato* in the right places made the first movement of Schumann's *Fantasie in C* moodily expressive and formally coherent. His quixotic approach to individual phrases suited the second movement well. Following tonight's cell phone intrusion (an every-session phenomenon), Krishtenko turned to the last movement, playing with romantic abandon and shaping a noble, exultant *coda*. His showpiece was Liszt's *Rhapsodie espagnole*, based on some well-known Iberian tunes. Brilliantly rhythmic, the medley gave Krishtenko the opportunity to contrast Lisztian fury with charmingly lyrical dance tunes.



François Dumont (28, France) began the last performance of the semi-final round with a stormy and capricious account of the first movement of Beethoven's op. 111 sonata that had both shape and suspense. His handling of the immensely long *Arietta* — a conundrum to many pianists — was masterful, his dotted rhythms first graceful then imbued with a gentle swing. He used the whole dynamic range to fine effect, and though restrained and orderly, his interpretation still allowed Beethoven's restlessness and eccentricity to shine through. It was revelatory to hear a French pianist of Dumont's caliber play Ravel's *Gaspard de la nuit*. Though clean-textured, the three movements evoked strangeness and mystery. Dumont drew out their fantastical nuances and moments of malevolence while respecting their musical architecture — and never made them sound as difficult as they are. He ended with Liszt's *Vallée d'Obermann*, beginning with lyrical restraint, then surging ahead with blazes of handsome tone. Dumont is a complete pianist with a mature feel for his repertoire and a sure sense of interpretation.

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