

Modern Snare Drum Competition makes its Cleveland debut (May 28)

by Mike Telin



There are competitions for everything, so why not one for snare drummers? Anyone who might have scoffed at the notion need only to have attended the final rounds of the Modern Snare Drum Competition on Saturday afternoon, May 28 in Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art. The eight finalists competing in two

divisions all brought superb artistry to their performances of a required work as well as a solo of their choice.

The brainchild of Tom Sherwood, the first [Modern Snare Drum Competition](#) was held in Atlanta in 2008 when Sherwood was principal percussion of the Atlanta Symphony. After winning a section position with The Cleveland Orchestra in 2015, Sherwood moved the competition to Cleveland.

A total of 35 competitors — 22 in Division I (ages 26 years and under), and 13 in Division II (ages 19 and under) — began vying for first, second, and third prizes in each age group on Friday morning at the Cleveland Institute of Music. Each division included three rounds during which contestants performed repertoire consisting of a rudimental work, such as drum corps or marching band; a standard classical work; and a contemporary piece. Required repertoire in Division I included two works commissioned for the Competition: Ali Jackson's *Table Top Grove* and Steven Snowden's *Left of the Dial*.

By Saturday afternoon the jury — consisting of Sherwood and his TCO section mates Marc Damoulakis and Tom Freer, as well as Charles Settle (Atlanta Symphony) and

David Skidmore (Third Coast Percussion) — had reduced the field to four in each division.

Once the finals got under way, over 60 audience members were treated to some jaw-dropping technical wizardry and musical flair worthy of major competitions for the piano and violin. Each player brought a variety of colors and moods to the performances, from the subdued to the overly aggressive. It was also interesting to hear how everyone approached the required repertoire. Robert Cossom's *The Clock Talked Loud* (Division II) is a well-crafted work that inventively explores the many facets and color palettes that rhythm can produce when played with snare sticks, timpani sticks, or brushes.

On first hearing, Steven Snowden's six-minute *Left of the Dial* for solo percussion and electronics (Division I) came off as an attention grabber with its instrumentation of two snare drums and a ride cymbal and its short interjections of recorded fictitious radio broadcasts. And, while each player reacted to the electronics with their own sense of inventiveness, by the end of the second hearing it had begun to wear thin. The electronics began to sound distant and separated from the solo lines.

In the end, Division II prizes were awarded as follows:

- First place \$500 cash prize to Peter Nicholas (solo, Nicolas Martynciow's *Impressions*.)
- Second place \$300 cash prize to Benjamin Cornavaca (solo, Dave Maric's *A Greek Tragedy*)
- Third place \$200 cash prize to Ryan McHenry (solo, Alexej Gerassimez's *Asventuras*)
- Fourth place to Riley Barnes (solo, Bob Becker's Etude #8, from *Rudimental Arithmetic*)

Division I prizes:

- First place \$1,000 cash prize to Chad Curmmel (solo, Andy Akiho's *Stop Speaking*)
- Second place \$750 cash prize to Kevin Rittenauer (solo, Joe Tompkins' *To Varése*)
- Third place \$500 cash prize to Taylor Newman (solo, Joe Tompkins' *Walkin' Down Coolidge*)
- Fourth place to Shiqi Zhong (solo, Nicolas Martynciow's *Tchik*)

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