

## Oberlin Cooper Competition: ten violinists play concertos (July 18)

by Samantha Spaccasi with Daniel Hathaway



23 young violinists descended upon Oberlin this week for the 2017 Cooper International Violin Competition, which began on July 15. After three days of intense competition, only 10 of the musicians advanced to the July 18 Concerto Round in Warner Concert

Hall, when each violinist performing full concertos with piano accompaniment in afternoon and evening sessions.

The afternoon began with an energetic performance of Henri Vieuxtemps' *Concerto No. 5 in A* by 16-year-old Joseph Hsia, accompanied by Yevgeny Morosov. The New Jersey native immediately connected with the music, producing a powerful tone throughout and demonstrating excellent intonation and technique. Though he occasionally sounded nervous, Hsia achieved a textured interpretation, illustrating the piece's emotional profundity with a tasteful use of vibrato.

The sessions were peppered with three performances of Tchaikovsky's *Concerto in D*. The first came from 18-year-old Kiarra Saito-Beckman, partnered with pianist Elizabeth DeMio. Demonstrating masterful technique and an elegant bow arm, the Oregonian began the piece with strength, though she lost some control during the last movement. In general, her performance seemed rushed and needed room to breathe.

Up next was Linyu Dong performing Dvořák's *Concerto in A* with pianist Eric Malson. This was a fitting piece for the 16-year-old, who demonstrated a strong understanding of the work. The Jinan, China native seemed nervous, resulting in some intonation problems. He played with an attractive tone color that would have benefitted from some variation.

Adrian Steele, 17, from Seattle, Washington took on Brahms's *Concerto in D* with Malson. Like Dong, Steele's nerves were apparent throughout his performance. The young violinist struggled with projection. However, he played with a sweet tone throughout and demonstrated robust fundamental and technical skills, illustrated in his stylish cadenza in the first movement.

Closing out the afternoon session was Maya Anjali Buchanan, 17, from Rapid City, South Dakota, performing Sibelius's *Concerto in D*. The violinist planted herself center-stage, which prevented closer communication with pianist Eric Solomon. However, her velvet, nuanced tone and vibrant stage presence illuminated Warner. Buchanan played the dotted rhythms and harmonics of the finale with impeccable attention to detail, resulting in a focused and zesty performance.

Audience members returned to Warner at 7 pm for the evening session, which began with New Yorker Qing Yu Chen, who performed Prokofiev's second violin concerto in G with Akiko Chiba. The 17-year-old demonstrated solid tone color and brought out many of the emotions in the work, Chen's playing was slightly reserved in certain sections, while faster passages felt rushed. Overall, the violinist displayed an elegant, dignified style.

Sweden's Johan Dalene was the second musician to tackle Tchaikovsky's violin concerto. The 16-year-old performed difficult passages with aplomb, radiating a confidence which shone in his playing. Dalene's performance was marked by wonderful phrasing and smart creative decisions. He interpreted the work with lively pacing, clean lines, and excellent color contrast, looking genuinely happy to be on stage with DeMio. His fantastic stage presence communicated directly to the audience.

Beijing native Kejun Guo, 18, gave a fine, clean performance of Mendelssohn's *Concerto in E*, partnering with Alicja Basinska. Though her reserved playing caused her to play too quietly at times, when she connected with the more sonorous aspects of the music, Guo displayed an intelligent use of dynamics. For most of her performance, the pacing was even and measured. Throughout the work, she produced a full tone and nice color.

Christina Jihee Nam, 14, from West Chester, Ohio performed the last Tchaikovsky of the evening, joined by DeMio. She revelled in the longer passages without stretching them out, sounding relaxed and at ease with the music. Nam's technical skills and buttery tone were also on display, though occasionally her playing seemed slightly too sweet. Her interpretation could have used a little more energy and drama.

Like Buchanan, Zachary Brandon, 18, from Battle Creek, Michigan performed the Sibelius concerto. His cadenza was bold and graceful, and he captured the excitement of the work with flair and expression, shining in his gentle harmonics. Later, he seemed to succumb to nerves, resulting in distant playing for the rest of the piece.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 20, 2017.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)