

Cooper Violin Competition: six play 30-minute recitals (July 24)

by Daniel Hathaway



Having survived Tuesday's concerto rounds, the six remaining violinists in the Cooper International Competition returned to their solo repertoire, playing half-hour long recitals in Oberlin's Warner Concert Hall on Wednesday evening, July 24. The lucky three who prevailed would move on to play concertos with The Cleveland Orchestra

under the baton of Gemma New on Friday evening at Severance Hall.

Jin Yucheng, 17, from Shanghai, China, brought handsome tone, tasteful vibrato, and well-executed double-stops to the Adagio from Mozart's *Concerto No. 5*, and faultless intonation to Ysaÿe's *Sonata No. 3*. His reading of Wieniawski's *Variations on an Original Theme* was muscular, dramatic, and musical.

Shihan Wang, 14, from Beijing, China, achieved a rich sound and played with minimal vibrato in Bach's *Sonata No. 1 in g*, going on to create clean runs, and make excellent dynamic contrasts in the Allegro con brio from Beethoven's *Sonata 1 in D*. He spun out a sweet tone and dialed up the vibrato in the Adagio from Mozart's Third Concerto, and his account of the Wieniawski *Variations* featured arresting changes of color.

Eric Charles Chen, 18, from Princeton, NJ, began with a fiery but clean performance of the Presto from Beethoven's *Sonata No. 4*, following up with a strong, straightforward reading of the Largo from Bach's *Sonata No. 3 in C*. His last two selections explored the Romantic side of his personality. In Chausson's *Poème*, his playing was big, intense, and expressive. He didn't shy away from the sentimentality of Amy Beach's *Romance*, treating the piece to a range of colors and contrasts.

Isabella Brown, 16, from Gurnee, IL, turned in fine performances of works by Korngold, Bach, Paganini, and Saint-Saëns. Her playing was strong in Korngold's Concerto, though her tone tended to thin out in the treble, and she handled the Andante from Bach's *Sonata No. 2* with expressive grace. Paganini's *Caprice No. 24* and Saint-Saëns' *Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso* displayed her impressive technique as well as revealing a few slips in intonation.

Enrique Rodrigues, 17, from Fair Lawn, NJ (but also with an address in Canada), exuded all the confidence of a veteran virtuoso, playing the Adagio from Mozart's Fifth Concerto and the Allegro assai from Beethoven's *Sonata No. 8* with penetrating tone and abundant vibrato. He made Ysaÿe's *Sonata No. 3* a piece of theater, sending its last gesture our dismissively, and conceived Bloch's *Nigun* on an epic scale with a big, commanding tone.

Yiyang Hou, 14, from Shanghai, China, although lacking nothing on the technical side, played nearly her entire set in fortelando, rarely venturing into other dynamic ranges or making changes in color. This made the Siciliana and Presto from Bach's First Sonata, Paganini's *Caprice No. 22*, the Andante cantabile from Mozart's *Concerto No. 4*, and Saint-Saëns' *Introduction and Rondo* sound remarkably as if cut from the same bolt of cloth. She shows a great deal of potential, but more nuances and contrasts would have paid off in this important round.

The excellent collaborative pianists for the evening were Elizabeth DeMio (Yucheng and Brown), Alicja Basinska (Wang), Akiko Chiba (Chen and Hou), and Nelson Padgett (Rodrigues). They deserve their own hearty round of applause for simulating an orchestra on Tuesday, and for keeping such a range of repertoire at the ready throughout the week of sessions.

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