

## Cooper Competition culminates in concertos at Severance Hall (July 26)

by Daniel Hathaway



By virtue of their performances in the semi-final, concerto, and recital rounds, three young violinists earned the privilege of standing in front of The Cleveland Orchestra in Severance Hall on Friday evening, July 25 for the final round of the 2019 Thomas and Evon Cooper International Competition. Concertos by Mendelssohn, Prokofiev, and Dvořák were on the agenda, and prizes of \$20k, \$10k, and \$5k were waiting in the wings.

Shihan Wang, 14, from Beijing, China, Eric Charles Chen, 18, from Princeton, NJ, and Isabella Brown, 16, from Gurnee, IL, were probably the most evenly matched

finalists in the five-year history of the violin competition, which has alternated with a piano competition since its launch in 2010.



This year's finals were also distinguished by a new figure on the podium. New Zealand-born Gemma New, who is music director of the Hamilton Philharmonic, resident conductor of the St. Louis Symphony, and principal guest conductor of the Dallas Symphony, stepped in on short notice to replace the ailing Bramwell Tovey. She presided over the three different concertos with grace and acuity, and her experience working with young musicians as conductor of the St. Louis Youth Symphony was evident. New was ahead of the game all evening, uncannily anticipating and correcting problems before they had the chance to happen.

She kept a tight rein on Shihan Wang (top photo) in the Mendelssohn Concerto, guaranteeing him a clean, tidy, and luminous performance distinguished by fine

intonation, control of tempos, and shapely lines. Carrying easily through the Orchestra, he zipped through the finale with flair.

New partnered excellently with Eric Charles Chen (middle photo) in the very different Prokofiev Second Concerto. Chen was a collegial soloist, easily negotiating the opening off-kilter, five-beat motives, keeping closely in touch with the Orchestra and engaging in a special dialogue at one point with the bass section. He played the finale with shimmering spookiness.



After intermission, Isabella Brown delivered an intensely lyrical and scintillating performance of the Dvořák Concerto, playing the first movement double-stops with complete control. She neatly changed the musical mood with her transition into the slow movement, and soared out nicely over the big orchestra in the finale, making the Bohemians dance.

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 30, 2019.*

*Click here for a printable copy of this article*

[Return to the Front Page.](#)