

## Cooper International Competition: Then there were ten

by Mike Telin



The 2019 Thomas and Evon Cooper International Competition got underway on Saturday afternoon, July 20, when 24 young violinists representing seven U.S. States and eight countries played

their Semifinal Rounds in Warner Concert Hall at the Oberlin Conservatory. On Monday evening the field was narrowed to ten. On Tuesday, July 23, those competitors played full concertos, and each of the musicians brought solid technique and musical flair to their performances.

### Session One at 1:30 pm

**Yixuan Jiang** (age 14, from Shanghai, China) kicked things off with Paganini's *Concerto No. 1 in D*. Filled with technical wizardry, the piece presents performers with numerous interpretive challenges. The young violinist delivered beautiful lyrical lines and did her best to negotiate the thorny virtuosic passages. Throughout, Jiang kept in close contact with her collaborator, pianist Alicja Basinska.

**Jin Yucheng** (age 17 from Shanghai, China) brought a rich, full-bodied sound to Tchaikovsky's only violin concerto. The opening movement was defined by well-shaped phrases and attention to contrasting moods. The second movement was sensitively played, and from the beginning of the third, Yucheng was off and running. Pianist Elizabeth DeMio brought Tchaikovsky's colorful orchestral score to life.

**Shihan Wang** (age 14 from Beijing, China) was the epitome of good taste during his charming performance of Mendelssohn's *Concerto in e*. Playing with a colorful,

focused sound, he was technically at ease throughout and produced many lovely lyrical lines. He and pianist Alicja Basinska were well-matched musical partners.

**Alexandra Woroniecka** (age 17 from Stoney Brook, New York) gave the first of four performances of Dvořák's *Concerto in a*. The violinist was in control of the first movement's numerous double-stops and she produced many attractive lyrical passages. In the second, Woroniecka played with a lush tone and was technically at ease during the spirited third. Pianist Nelson Padgett wonderfully captured the composer's Romantic orchestral score.

**Eric Charles Chen** (age 18 from Princeton, New Jersey) offered up a performance of Prokofiev's *Concerto No. 2 in g*, that wonderfully caught the work's many moods. The opening was rich in tone and he tossed off the faster passages cleanly and with direction. He allowed his instrument to sing in the second, and although he had a brief lapse of memory, he recovered quickly. A physical player, Chen dug into the third movement with gusto. The collaboration between Chen and pianist Akiko Chiba was great.

**Isabella Brown** (age 16 from Gurnee, Ill) delivered a musically mature and technically solid performance of Dvořák's *Concerto*. Brown possesses a natural feel for the work's Bohemian character, which was in evidence from the beginning. Her double-stops sang in the first movement, while the lyrical second had an anguished beauty. The third was full of changes of dynamics and color — and puckish humor. Brown and pianist Elizabeth DeMio played from a single mind throughout.

## **Session Two at 7:00 pm**

The evening began with back-to back performances of the Dvořák *Concerto*.

**Joanne Lin** (age 16 from Taipei City, Taiwan) began her performance with an attractive, grand opening. She brought some eloquent phrasing to the second movement and set a spritely tempo in the third. Again, pianist Nelson Padgett brought life to the orchestral score.

**Claire Arias-Kim** (age 17 from Hoffman Estates, Ill) brought a nicely focused tone and well-shaped lines to the opening movement. The lyrical second was heartfelt, and the third was full of spunk. Arias-Kim and pianist Elizabeth DeMio were a well-matched pair.

**Enrique Rodrigues** (age 17 from Fair Lawn, New Jersey) delivered a captivating performance of Bruch's *Concerto No. 1 in g*. The opening solo line was full of

passion, as his rich sound filled the hall. The Adagio sang out, and in the joyous third, Rodrigues brought a playfulness to his nuanced lines. He and pianist Nelson Padgett made a great team who looked like they were having fun.

**Yiyang Hou** (age 14 from Shanghai, China) ended the day with an enjoyable performance of Sibelius' *Concerto in d*. The opening was silvery with a prudent use of vibrato. She handled the work's thorny technical passages with ease. Hou brought a huge sound and big vibrato to the slow, second movement and musical confidence to the third. Pianist Akiko Chiba was a consummate collaborator.

Six of these performers will advance to the Recital Round on Wednesday, July 24 at 7:00 pm in Warner Concert Hall. The Cooper Competition culminates in the Concerto Finals on Friday, July 26, as three finalists perform complete concertos with Gemma New (replacing Bramwell Tovey) and The Cleveland Orchestra at Severance Hall in Cleveland. One finalist will emerge as the 2018 Cooper champion—with a grand prize of \$20,000.

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