

Piano Cleveland: CIPC for Young Artists Concerto Final Round (July 15)

by Daniel Hathaway



The last hurdle to be cleared on the way to the awarding of prizes in Piano Cleveland's Competition for Young Artists brought the finalists to the stage of Gartner Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Art on Saturday, July 15 to play concerto movements with the Canton Symphony Orchestra, led by Steven Byess.

Six items were on the docket: the three Junior Division players chose the opening movements of concertos by Beethoven, Mozart, and Grieg, while the three Seniors each chose Chopin, with only one repetition. Piano Cleveland president Yaron Kohlberg emceed the proceedings. I watched the well-produced webcast.

Concertos, which occupy a singular position in the orchestral ecosystem, are often performed with only a read-through beforehand, which means that both the soloist and the orchestra have to show up well-prepared. But anything can happen in the heat of battle — and adjustments have to be made on the spot with intelligence and sensitivity.

Here are some brief impressions.

JUNIORS



Zhonghua Wei, 14 (China), played an impressive, noble performance of the first movement of Beethoven's Third Concerto: strong but playful, and featuring even runs and scalar passages. He was closely attentive to his orchestral colleagues and happily bobbed his head to their rhythms when not playing himself.



Elisey Mysin, 12 (Russia), turned in a fine opening movement of Mozart's Concerto No. 23 in A, K. 488, with shapely runs and good tradeoffs with the orchestra. His cadenza sounded free and spontaneous. Although he made little eye contact with conductor and instrumentalists, ensemble was natural and perfect. It would be difficult to fault any aspect of his playing.



Qinyaoyao Ji, 13 (China), played the opening Allegro Moderato of the Grieg Concerto, Op. 16 with moody tempo changes and sudden bursts of virtuosity that gave an appropriately episodic character to the solo part. Her cadenza — and Grieg wrote a long one — was well-paced.

SENIORS



Ryan Wang, 15 (Canada), played the opening movement of Chopin's e-minor Concerto dramatically, hovering intently over the keyboard. Poetic and expressive, his playing was enlivened by sudden flights of fancy.



Saehyun Kim, 16 (South Korea), followed with the same Chopin movement, making a strong and dramatic entrance. Another performer who likes to hover over the keyboard, he frequently made eye contact with his orchestral neighbors, and his technical passages were well-controlled.



Yanyan Bao, 16 (China), ended the evening with the first movement of Chopin's f-minor Concerto. Setting a good, sprightly tempo, she managed the work's many nuances with expressive phrasing and skillfully coordinated her playing with Byess and the orchestra.

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