

Cooper International Piano Competition: Seven Perform in Concerto Round (Aug. 2)

by Daniel Hathaway



Andrew Sijie Li, 15, from Boston, Canada & Hong Kong, led off the Wednesday afternoon piano-with-piano session with an assured performance of Beethoven's *Concerto No. 3 in c*. The opening movement was grand, the slow movement had a lovely vocal quality, and he kept in close contact with his collaborator Annie Lin.



Sophia Shuya Liu, 14, from Montreal, followed with Saint-Saëns' *Concerto No. 2 in g*, creating a lovely, ruminative opening cadenza, capturing the improvisatory feeling of the movement. A zesty scherzando and a thrilling presto followed. Elena Zyl handled the orchestral duties stylishly.



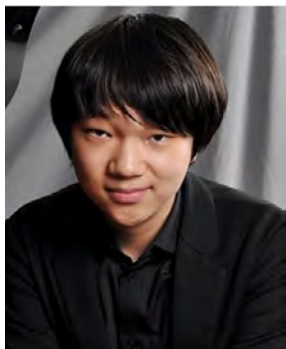
No. 3. Yanyan Bao, 16, from Zhuhai, Guangdong in China played Chopin's *Concerto No. 2 in f* for the second time this month — she also competed in and won 3rd place in the senior division of the Cleveland International Competition for Young Artists. Her revisiting of Chopin No. 2 on Wednesday was once again well-shaped, relaxed, and often playful, and she coaxed a lovely, dark tone from her Steinway while giving space for Chopin's filigree to play its proper role. Annie Lin supported her well.



Filip Trifu, 18, from Vienna, Austria gave an excellent, insightful reading of the Schumann Concerto. His playing was strong and clean — and poetic when the composer changed moods — and he passed off phrases lyrically with his collaborative colleague Elena Zyl. He made sense out of Schumann’s sometimes bizarre rhythms and seemed totally in control.



Seo Eun Lee, 14, of Suwon, Gyeonggi, South Korea, played a fleet-fingered performance of Chopin’s e-minor concerto where the composer’s filigree sometimes took precedence over other musical elements. She might have let the concluding rondo be a bit more raucous. Elena Zyl captured the unique charm of the orchestration.



Taige Wang, 13, from New York City, gave an incisive, witty reading of Rachmaninoff’s *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, Op. 4. His playing was amazing — strong, virtuosic, and appropriately mischievous, bringing instantaneous mood changes to each new variation. The famous lyrical variation pulled at your heartstrings. Annie Li was more than up to the task of acting as an orchestra. Together, they suggested that the piece could stand alone as a duo-piano extravaganza.



Pyotr Akulov, 16, from Moscow, Russia, played Liszt’s Concerto No. 1 in E-flat with fierce drama and torrential virtuosity, often gazing into the heavens as if communing directly with the Abbé Liszt. Maybe he was, and to great effect. Annie Li matched his bigger than life performance.

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