

The Concert Truck brings CIPC talent to Edgewater Beach (July 23)

by Stephanie Manning



'Tis the season for outdoor concerts, and after a beautifully mild weather pattern swept in last weekend, this may be one of the best weeks this year to enjoy them. In other words: July 23 was the perfect day for a concert on the beach.

To be fair, the Concert Truck wasn't actually *on* the sand at Edgewater Beach, but it was close — parked right outside the Beach House and facing the water. Beachgoers and locals gathered on a bright sunny day for the

lunchtime concert, presented by the Cleveland International Piano Competition.

Pianists Nick Luby and Sarah Zhang, co-directors of The Concert Truck, kicked things off with a four-hands rendition of John Adams' *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*. It made for an exciting opener, even if some streams of notes were a little muddled by the electric keyboard. But the melodies stood out much better in two movements from Maurice Ravel's *Mother Goose Suite* — "Pavane of the Sleeping Beauty" and "Conversations of Beauty and the Beast." The glissandos especially caught the ear, and multiple passersby began to stop and wander over.

Although some of the audience was transitory, a semicircle of people remained throughout the majority of the set. The amount of shade could have been increased, but the sound level coming out of the speakers needed no improvement. The main acts, two of the Quarter-Finalists from this year's CIPC, each spoke about their repertoire and their background before they played — a nice way of building rapport with the audience.

Zhu Wang, from China, was up first. He contributed another Ravel work with *La Valse*, which began a bit murkily but ended powerfully, his fierce playing inciting cheers and whistles. More memorable was his performance of Zhang Zhao's *Pi Huang (Moments from Beijing Opera)*, an easy-to-follow work with trills and bouncy sections that coaxed

some smiles and wiggles out of a toddler near the front. Wang spoke passionately about the colors the piece evokes, designed to mimic a vocal technique used in Beijing opera.

Having arrived in the U.S. for the first time only two days earlier, French pianist Mirabelle Kajenjeri was eager to perform. “It’s a dream, playing in front of the water,” she said. Her selections were a matched set: Fritz Kreisler’s *Liebesleid* and *Liebesfreud*, both transcribed for piano by Sergei Rachmaninoff. The contrasting pieces complemented each other well, lyrical and joyous by turn. She then capped things off with George Gershwin’s jaunty *I Got Rhythm*.

The high quality of both Kajenjeri and Wang’s playing, even in such a non-traditional location, certainly spoke to their potential in the concert hall. Concertgoer Franklin Piccirillo, 79, said he was also impressed by the performances, calling the event “absolutely fantastic.” He had been excited to hear that the competition would be hosting an event at Edgewater Beach, which he had learned about that morning on WCLV.

Piccirillo said he appreciated CIPC’s efforts to take the Concert Truck to different neighborhoods. A lifelong Clevelander, he said arts events like this are a big reason he loves the city. “I’m amazed how fortunate we are, on so many levels.”

The Concert Truck will continue to feature more CIPC contestants in three more performances: Friday, July 26 at Cleveland City Hall (12:00 pm) and Saturday, July 27 at the North Union Farmers Market (10:00 am) and Pivot Center (3:00 pm). The competition then kicks off this Sunday, June 28 with the Grand Piano Playoff at Playhouse Square.

Published on ClevelandClassical.com July 25, 2024.

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