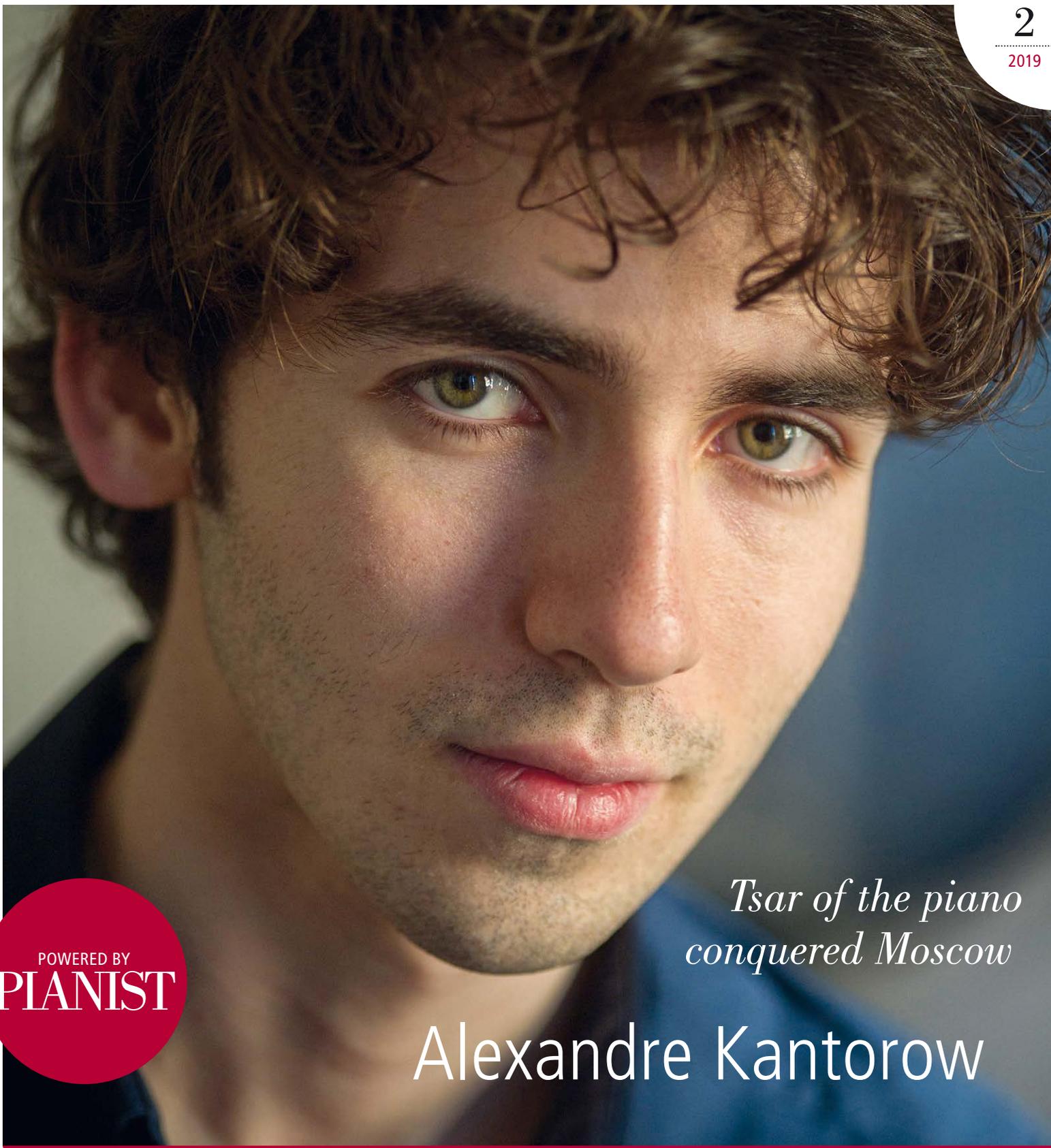


# THE WORLD OF PIANO COMPETITIONS

2

2019



*Tsar of the piano  
conquered Moscow*

Alexandre Kantorow

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CELLINI MOONPHASE





## W E L C O M E

### *Dear readers,*

The World Federation of International Music Competitions (WFIMC) is the umbrella organisation for more than 120 international music competitions, including the leading piano competitions worldwide.

There are thousands of music competitions around the world. And amongst them, piano competitions are by far the most common. This is a fact. There are smaller and bigger competitions, competitions for young, senior, amateur, regional, and national pianists, as well as international competitions. People love to see young artists competing for a prize, exactly the same way everybody likes to see young athletes competing for an Olympic medal. This is a part of our human nature: we need to compare ourselves with others and we cherish the winners, giving them medals, money and fame ...

The question therefore is not to decide on the usefulness of music competitions, but to organise these events as well as possible in order to match the desires and the needs of young musicians and of the world of music. Today's best music competitions are looking for artists capable of building a career for decades, able to present themselves to the media, who are open to new cultural initiatives, willing to experiment with new music and having inside themselves enough resources and energy to live the life of an international artist.

This isn't an easy task, but this is the mission of the WFIMC's competitions.

The WFIMC provides its members with a large panel of services and meetings, helping them to refine the model of music competitions by exchanging practices and ideas. We know the key elements that make a competition good: integrity of the selection, quality of the musical environment, value of the prizes, and media exposure. But it's no longer sufficient: today's best competitions know that what makes the difference is how you care about your prize-winners. Because winning a competition today is only the beginning of something, we try to help our prize-winners build the career they are dreaming of. Concerts, press events, coaching, everyday support, networking, and social media: young prize-winners need our help and our resources to achieve their goal. This is the very reason why music competitions exist! And this is a beautiful mission.

**DIDIER SCHNORHK**

WFIMC PRESIDENT

CEO OF THE GENEVA INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COMPETITION



## THE WORLD OF PIANO COMPETITIONS

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### Stay updated!

For upcoming application deadlines etc. check:

**Alink-Argerich Foundation**  
[www.alink-argerich.org](http://www.alink-argerich.org)



THE WORLD FEDERATION  
OF INTERNATIONAL  
MUSIC COMPETITIONS

## WORLD FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL MUSIC COMPETITIONS

The World Federation of International Music Competitions is dedicated to establishing a global network of internationally recognised organisations that discover the most promising young talents through public competition in the great tradition of classical music and further their careers by presenting them before distinguished juries, general audiences, the media, and the rest of the music community. The WFIMC is a Member of the International Music Council and some 122 of the world's leading music competitions belong to the Federation. A number of important international music organisations are associate members of the WFIMC.

[wfimc-fmcim.org](http://wfimc-fmcim.org)



European Union of Music  
Competitions for Youth

## EUROPEAN UNION OF MUSIC COMPETITIONS FOR YOUTH

EMCY is a network of national and international music competitions for young people across Europe. We believe that music competitions stimulate passionate musicianship. For many, they're a first glimpse of performing in public, playing in ensembles, or of breaking out of orthodox repertoire. They foster a sense of healthy self-assessment, can help conquer nerves, and motivate practise. Young people can be inspired by experiencing fresh interpretations and discovering new works and other European cultures. We do not think of competitions as the end of the learning process: for us, they are the beginning.

[www.emcy.org](http://www.emcy.org)



## ALINK-ARGERICH FOUNDATION

An independent and objective Information and Service Centre for Musicians and Competitions, founded by Gustav Alink together with Martha Argerich. AAF supports musicians and competition organisers and gives them assistance and advice. AAF focuses specifically on the International Piano Competitions worldwide. More than 190 international piano competitions and organisations are affiliated with AAF as AAF member competitions. They are all included in the annual AAF catalogue. Gustav Alink and also other AAF staff members frequently visit piano competitions, report on them and are constantly available to provide assistance whenever needed to the organisers, jury members and participants.

[www.alink-argerich.org](http://www.alink-argerich.org)



## PIANO STREET

PianoStreet.com operates worldwide from Stockholm in Sweden and was formed from the administrative base of Piano Forum, the world's largest discussion forum on piano playing on the Internet (more than 600 000 postings). The resource is Internet based and provides a sheet music library, all pieces in the digital library are connected to recordings in Naxos Music Library. There also are pedagogical materials. Members can also enjoy e-books, autograph manuscripts, mobile sheet music, the Audio Visual Study Tool (AST), a music dictionary, practice tips, etc. Piano Street has over 200 000 members worldwide.

[www.pianostreet.com](http://www.pianostreet.com)



The prize winners of 2017, among them pianists JeungBeum Sohn (first prize), Fabian Müller (second prize) and Wataru Hisasue (third prize).

# The ARD International Music Competition

Elisabeth Kozik: ‘I started working at the Competition in 2001 as a volunteer. I did anything and everything from selling CDs to working as a secretary and translator, before finally becoming the Managing Director in 2009. The Competition takes place every year in four separate categories, which alternate from year to year, and because of its scale and prestige, offers to the participants a unique opportunity for testing their musical mettle against other world-class players, and also offers networking opportunities, the chance to meet agents and music executives looking to sign up the next big talent.

For me personally, a competition is a meeting point between young musicians, audience, music personalities, volunteers, media representatives and many others. We try to create an atmosphere where the most important thing is not “against each other” but “with each other”.

## Festival of Prize-Winners

The competition aims to transform the obvious confrontational situation, into the experience of making music together at least at the end of the event. With the Festival of ARD Prize-Winners, a concert series has been developed, at which former prizewinners from all over the world join forces to rehearse and perform chamber music in various venues. The next piano competition will take

## With each other, not against

The ARD International Music Competition is one of the most renowned and large-scale competitions of its kind. It was founded in 1952 by the public broadcasting radio stations of the Federal Republic of Germany, managed by Bavarian Broadcasting in Munich and takes place every year in September. For many of today’s world-famous artists, an award at the competition in Munich represented a springboard to their major careers: Jessye Norman, Francisco Araiza, Natalia Gutman, Christoph Eschenbach, Mitsuko Uchida, Thomas Quasthoff, Yuri Bashmet, Christian Tetzlaff, to name but a few.

place from September 5 to 13, 2020. At the moment there are 5 jury members who confirmed their cooperation: Janina Fialkowska, Dina Ugorskaja, Imogen Cooper, Andrea Lucchesini and Cyprien Katsaris. Marton Illes is composing a commissioned piece. Two very prestigious orchestras will accompany the competition: the Munich Chamber Orchestra at the semi-finals, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra at the finals.

Application deadline is March 31, 2020. All detailed information about this competition will be available by the middle of November 2019 at the competitions website: [www.br.de/ard-musikwettbewerb/index.html](http://www.br.de/ard-musikwettbewerb/index.html)

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# The World Federation of International Music Competitions

## The Ecosystem of Classical Music

We at PIANIST Magazines are delighted to work with the World Federation of International Music Competitions for this edition of our special on piano competitions. Didier Schnorhk, WFIMC President honours us with a word of welcome and here we speak with Rob Hilberink, director of the Franz Liszt Competition in Utrecht and board member of the WFIMC, about this important organisation. We have listed all the member piano competitions on the pages that follow.

The World Federation of International Music Competitions (WFIMC) was founded in 1957 by 13 European competitions – among them the Queen Elisabeth, Marguerite Long – Jacques Thibaud, ARD, Busoni, Chopin, Geneva – and it slowly developed over the years into what it is today. Rob Hilberink: ‘Seventy years ago there were only a handful of competitions, mainly in Europe. From the 80s of the last century we have seen a development of the classical music scene into a much more global market. As a consequence, there has been a huge increase in the number of competitions, especially in Asia. And now we have members on all continents and half of all members of WFIMC organise competitions for pianists.’

The membership of the federation is a guarantee for quality. ‘The WFIMC is organised as a federation, that means that all major decisions are put to the members. For instance, the admission of new members needs their approval. In order to become a member, competitions need to have a proven track-record of excellence. They also need to comply with strict requirements; we look at the way they are structured and financed, and the importance of their position in the local and international market. It is very important to know how a competition contributes to the ecosystem of classical music. This system has become more fragile the past decade with less funding from the public and private sector. For that

reason some prominent competitions have been forced to resign, but we are still seeing a steady increase in the number of members. This year we have welcomed six new members.'

'Finding great talent', that is your shared mission? 'Yes we all have a passion for promoting young talents, and every competition does it differently, given their characteristics and goals within the marked they operate in.'

Many great musicians have found their way to fame through competitions. 'Yes, they are kind of our ambassadors. And you can see how musicians grow through the experience of performing at their best under very serious conditions. In that respect a competition

is a good general rehearsal for the life of a concert artist.'

The world is changing rapidly and so is the world of music. 'Yes, that is the real value of the WFIMC. Through our members we have eyes and ears in all parts of the world. We are learning from each other by sharing best practices and failures. And we are constantly monitoring and discussing new developments. To this purpose we also strongly rely on our associate members, such as festivals, conservatories, and artists managements. We are very keen on working together, ultimately to be of assistance to young promising musicians who are trying to find their way.'

## Piano Competitions around the world

### BARCELONA

Maria Canals International Music Competition

### BELGRADE

Internationale Jeunesses Musicales Competition

### BERGEN

International Edvard Grieg Piano Competition

### BOLZANO

Ferruccio Busoni International Piano Competition

### BONN

International Telekom Beethoven Competition

### BRATISLAVA

International Johann Nepomuk Hummel Piano Competition

### BRUSSELS

Queen Elisabeth Competition

### BUCHAREST

George Enescu International Competition

### BUDAPEST

Budapest International Liszt Piano Competition

### BYDGOSZCZ

Paderewski International Piano Competition

### CALGARY

Honens International Piano Competition

### CLEVELAND

Cleveland International Piano Competition

### DORTMUND

International Schubert Competition Dortmund

### DUBLIN

Dublin International Piano Competition

### EPINAL

Concours International de Piano d'Epinal

### FORT WORTH

Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

### GENEVA

Concours de Genève

### GLASGOW

Scottish International Piano Competition

### GRAZ

International Competition "Franz Schubert and Modern Music"

### HAMAMATSU

Hamamatsu International Piano Competition

### HELSINKI

International Maj Lind Piano Competition

### HONG KONG

Hong Kong International Piano Competition

### ISTANBUL

International Piano Competition Istanbul Orchestra'Sion

### JAÉN

International Piano Competition Prize Jaén

### KATRINEHOLM

Swedish International Duo Competition

### KIEV

International Competition for Young Pianists in Memory of Vladimir Horowitz

### LEEDS

Leeds International Piano Competition

### LEIPZIG

International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition

### MANCHESTER

RNCM James Mottram International Piano Competition

### MONTREAL

Concours musical international de Montréal



All present members of the WFIMC, directors and representatives of international music competitions in Norrköping.

**MONZA**

Rina Sala Gallo International Piano Competition

**MOSCOW**

International Tchaikovsky Competition

**MUNICH**

ARD International Music Competition

**ORLÉANS**

Orléans International Piano Competition

**PARIS**

Concours Long-Thibaud-Crespin

**PRAGUE**

Prague Spring International Music Competition

**PRETORIA**

Unisa International Music Competition

**SALZBURG**

International Mozart Competition Salzburg

**SAN ANTONIO**

The Gurwitz

**SANTANDER**

Paloma O'Shea Santander International Piano Competition

**SENDAI**

Sendai International Music Competition

**SYDNEY**

Sydney International Piano Competition

**TAKAMATSU**

Takamatsu International Piano Competition

**TBILISI**

Tbilisi International Piano Competition

**TEL AVIV**

Arthur Rubinstein International Piano Master Competition

**TERNI**

"A. Casagrande" Intl. Piano Competition

**TONGYEONG**

ISANGYUN Competition

**TROMSØ**

Tromsø Top of the World International Piano Competition

**UTRECHT**

International Franz Liszt Piano Competition

**VALENCIA**

International Piano Competition "Iturbi Prize"

**VEVEY**

Concours International de Piano Clara Haskil

**VIENNA**

International Beethoven Piano Competition Vienna

**VILNIUS**

International M.K. Ciurlionis Piano and Organ Competition

**VIÑA DEL MAR**

International Musical Competition "Dr. Luis Sigall"

**WARSAW**

International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition

**WEIMAR**

Weimar International Music Competitions

**YEREVAN**

Aram Khachaturian International Competition

**ZURICH**

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**ZWICKAU**

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 A photograph of two young girls with long, curly hair, wearing dark blue dresses, playing a black grand piano. They are positioned side-by-side, with the girl on the right in the foreground and the girl on the left slightly behind her. The piano is a C. Bechstein model. The background is dark and out of focus.
 

Enable and promote

Piano duo Marie and Florentine Lehnert, who were first prize winners at the Bechstein competition in 2014 and 2016.

## *C. Bechstein and competitions*

C. Bechstein has organized various competitions in its long history, and will continue to do so in a tradition founded by Carl Bechstein himself, who established a concert series to promote young artists and even commissioned his own concert hall.

The charitable Carl Bechstein Foundation is committed to promoting the musical talents of children and young people. The aim is to enable as many – mainly underprivileged – youth as possible to learn the piano. Children who play an instrument better develop their personalities, are better at coping with life, improve their IQs and stand stronger in today's often cold and materialistic world.

Since 2016, the Carl Bechstein Foundation has annually organised the national Carl Bechstein competition for children and adolescents, in various categories; this year it is for piano solo: classical as well as jazz music.

### **Linz**

Advertised only nationally in Austria, but not for Germany this time, is the First Bruckner Bechstein Competition Austria. It is being organized by the C. Bechstein Pianoforte AG in cooperation with the Brucknerhaus Linz and is focused on students of Austrian conservatories.

Each school may nominate one student at a time, so it will be a very small but very competitive contest. Professor Michel Dalberto (Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique et de Danse de

Paris), Prof. Roland Krüger (Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover) and Prof. Konstantin Lifschitz (Lucerne Academy of Music) guarantee the greatest possible independence as an international jury. The first prize winner may present himself in the new series of C. Bechstein piano recitals at the Brucknerhaus Linz.

### **Frankfurt**

The C. Bechstein Pianoforte AG is also a partner at the International German Piano Award, which seeks to promote internationally outstanding pianists, with prize money of 20.000 Euros together with follow-up concerts and a CD production. This competition will celebrate its tenth anniversary in March 2020. As different as the competitions are that Bechstein organizes or promotes, in the end they all have the same goal: the promotion of young pianists.

[www.ipf-frankfurt.com](http://www.ipf-frankfurt.com)

[www.carl-bechstein-stiftung.de](http://www.carl-bechstein-stiftung.de)

[www.brucknerhaus.at](http://www.brucknerhaus.at)

International German Piano Award is featured on page 31.

# Tchaikovsky International Music Competition

The Tchaikovsky International Music Competition has been full of surprises and controversies throughout its history. From its first edition when the American Van Cliburn won, the competition has never ceased to surprise and shock people. The XVI edition that concluded in a chilly, rainy Moscow was no exception.

Perhaps the biggest surprise in the entire competition was for An Tianxu (20) in the finals. An had earlier made a request to change the program order to play Tchaikovsky first, which was then approved by the committee. The change, however, was not communicated to the orchestra. In addition, the announcer announced that he would play Tchaikovsky, then corrected himself in Russian only, creating further confusion. It took An a split second to realize what had happened, arriving at the first note a beat late. An sat bewildered during the orchestra introduction, but the jury chairman Denis Matsuev was seen speaking to other jury members at the same time. An was then offered a second performance to allow him to perform his pieces again; he declined but was later given a special award for courage.

The jury selected 7 finalists instead of 6. There was again an inevitable uproar, about who the 7th was and should have been. There was again a strong voice that at least one woman should have made the finals. However, the competition had to go on and choose the winner.

## Lyrical lines

The first day of the finals began with a confident reading of the Prokofiev Third Concerto by Konstantin Yemelyanov, almost as a warm up for the Tchaikovsky No. 1. Yemelyanov was cunning and daring at times, pulling back the dynamics when playing solo,

as if to pull the audience's attention.

Dmitry Shishkin followed with the same repertoire, but in the reverse order. Shishkin showed off his characteristic attention to details, placing precisely calibrated emphasis on each note in phrases and chords. Lyrical lines soared in Tchaikovsky, though he at times emphasized dissonant notes for added colour. Prokofiev was filled with colourful punches, sarcasm and laughter. Shishkin also remained faithful to the distribution of notes in the score in the second movement, clearly bringing out the piercing accents in the second variation in particular.

The aforementioned performance by Tianxu An followed. Though bewildered by the shock, An recollected himself during the orchestra introduction in Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody, and remained cool, and almost at ease. An navigated through the first movement of Tchaikovsky No. 1 confidently, particularly delivering fast runs with a delicate touch. However, anxiety seemed to creep in, and the last movement was barely held together due to excessive rubato and very fast tempo.

## Chamber music

On the following day, Alexey Melnikov's poetic reading of Tchaikovsky No. 1 was sincere and sentimental. Here there were few surprises. The dark, tragic reading of Rachmaninoff No. 3 illus-



Grand Prix winner Alexandre Kantorow in Moscow

trated the composer's struggles with depression, with the lyrical line gasping, though the sense of futility was pervasive. Yet, the climb to the climax in the last movement was carefully measured, with a strong sense of self-awareness and healing.

Alexandre Kantorow had been unique throughout the competition: he was the only competitor to play a Kawai in the earlier stages, and the only one to play Tchaikovsky No. 2 and a non-Russian concerto: Brahms No. 2. The highlight of his performance was the second movement of the Tchaikovsky, where Kantorow was no longer a soloist, but a chamber musician with violin and cello. Kantorow exhibited his sensitivity, remaining keenly attuned to the orchestra, to blend in and to stand out, as the music dictates. The furious second movement of Brahms was delivered with emotional stability and confidence.

### Luxuriant sonority

Maō Fujita opened the last day of the competition, and the ardent fans couldn't get enough of him. Clear voicing in thundering chords in Tchaikovsky No. 1's opening provided a clear definition of its outline. Such clarity was carried throughout his performance, but Fujita showed off his keen sense of ensemble, particularly with a cellist in the second movement of Tchaikovsky. Fujita's characteristic sincerity and transparency was carried through the Rachma-

ninoff No. 3, where he often executed fast lines sans pedale, showing off the intricate structure within the dense score.

American Kenneth Broberg played the same program as Tianxu An. Broberg and conductor Petrenko verbally confirmed that they would begin with Rachmaninoff Rhapsody, as a nod to the earlier incident with An. Broberg delivered a polished and probing performance with more generous pedalling that contrasted with Fujita's drier, articulated approach. Resonant, with some extra notes added in the bass, Broberg projected an expansive, luxuriant sonority particularly in Tchaikovsky.

In the end, a winner had to be chosen, and the rest of the field had to be ranked. The jury awarded the first prize to Alexandre Kantorow. The second prize was shared between Shishkin and Fujita, with the third prize distributed to Broberg, Yemelyanov and Melnikov, and the fourth prize awarded to An, along with a special prize for "Self Confidence and Bravery." At the Saint-Petersburg gala concert that lasted until 1:30 am under the white night, Kantorow was declared the over-all Grand Prix winner. It was the first time that a non-Russian was awarded the first prize in piano since Ayako Uehara in 2002, and the audience exploded into a raucous applause.

**KEN IISAKA**

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Bild © Dan Hammen



Gilles Ledure

# Queen Elisabeth Competition

## New chairman

After 23 years as Chairman of the Jury of the Queen Elisabeth Competition, Arie Van Lysebeth will pass on the baton to musicologist Gilles Ledure for the instrumental competitions. Gilles Ledure has been at the helm of the Flagey cultural centre in Brussels since 2011; Gilles Ledure started his career in the music world in Belgium at La Monnaie and with the Belgian National Orchestra. In 2006 he headed abroad, first to lead the Orchestre Philharmonique du Luxembourg and shortly afterwards to become artistic director of the Orchestre National de Lille and the Lille Piano Festival until 2011.

In 2003 he founded Tactus (Young Composers' Forum), the non-profit organization that supports young composers. He is on the Board of Directors of the Queen Elisabeth Competition and a member of the Artistic Council of the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel.

In 2020 the Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition of Belgium the Queen Elisabeth Competition will be dedicated to the piano. The piano competition will take place from 4 until 30 May.

The online application (<http://cmireb.be>) will open in November and **deadline is Wednesday 4 December at noon**. This competition is for pianists between 18 and 30 years of age, with the exclusion of laureates of a previous Queen Elisabeth Piano Competition.

# Rencontres Internationales de Jeunes Pianistes

## Learning experience

This competition, takes place every two years since 2000. Almost a thousand young piano players from the world over have competed, also from far away, Australia, China, Azerbaïdjan, Brazil, Venezuela, ...

The competition, which also promotes the work of Belgian composers, from 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, is open to all, without distinction of nationality, and has four age categories.

Concerts are organized after the competition, to allow these young players to perform in front of an audience which is necessary to acquire stage experience and to better know and master them-

The "Rencontres Internationales pour Jeunes Pianistes", organised by EPTA Belgium (Wallonie Bruxelles) aim at getting young people from all horizons and qualifications to meet each other through musical performance, but also getting them to meet international teachers and jury members, during the free master classes that are given during the competition.

selves. These concerts are for all laureates, not only pre-professional pianists, since musical practice is known to be a learning experience of high quality.

The 15<sup>th</sup> edition will take place from **3 to 8 March 2020, application closes on 9 January 2020.**



Diane Andersen, President EPTA Belgium Wallonie Bruxelles

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Four of the Steinway players among the prize winners of the Tchaikovsky 2019 in Moscow. Steinway & Sons presented them with a silver Steinway keyring. From left to right: Mao Fujita (2<sup>nd</sup> prize), Alexey Melnikov (3<sup>rd</sup>), Kenneth Broberg (3<sup>rd</sup>), Alexandre Kantorow (1<sup>st</sup>). Dmitry Shishkin (2<sup>nd</sup>) is missing.

The development of artists never ends. One can say the same about Steinway's attention to the young generation and its support, whether during the competitions or later by facilitating concerts.

## Steinway @ Competitions

At the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, for example, the Steinway instrument and service were chosen by the majority of participants, among them five winners of the first, second and third prizes. Needless to say we took care of *all* pianists if they wished for it.

The *Steinway Prizewinner Concerts Network* (SPCN) is more active than ever. The last season saw 42 concerts by 17 prize-winners of 14 international competitions.

In Korea, the tour of Eric Lu (Leeds 2018) was sold out in all seven cities and highly acclaimed. The organizer, *World Cultural Networks*, therefore has decided to invite the winner of not one but two competitions per year in the future. In 2020, it will be the *China International Music Competition 2019* (winner: Tony Yun) and of the *International Telecom Beethoven Competition Bonn 2019* (we will know the winner in December). And the year 2021 is already being planned ...

### Paris Play and Direct Academy

Time clashes are part of the game: September 6, 2019, will be the

day of the finals not only of the *Concorso Busoni* in Bolzano, which celebrates its 70th jubilee, but also of an exquisite project in France: the *Paris Play and Direct Academy* (PPDA), an exclusive cooperation between the *Orchestre de Chambre de Paris* and Steinway. For a whole week, four prize-winners at the renowned competitions Géza Anda, Cleveland, Leeds and Geneva will be coached in leading a concerto performance as a soloist on the piano. Invitations for the winner are already on their way ... From the response as well as applications of international venues and competitions to join the SPCN, we have the impression that the lobby for young, emerging pianists is growing not only in our case but in general. We are very glad to see many young people in the *Steinway Prizewinner Concerts* – audiences already of today and certainly of tomorrow. May this continue! The more concerts, the better for artists, society, and humanity.

Gerrit Glaner  
Steinway & Sons  
Head of C&A Department

# XI Międzynarodowy Konkurs Pianistyczny im. I. J. Paderewskiego

11<sup>th</sup> International Paderewski  
Piano Competition

Bydgoszcz, 10 – 24. 11. 2019

[www.paderewskicompetition.pl](http://www.paderewskicompetition.pl)



## Henryk Martenka

*“Inspiration and satisfaction.”*

Henryk Martenka, director of International Paderewski Piano Competitions, has been associated with the Competition since 1986, following its resurrection after a 25-year hiatus. The first edition of the Competition took place in 1961, and its co-founder was prof. Jerzy Zurawlew, the leading force behind the International Chopin Piano Competition in 1927. Since 1998, the Competition has taken place every three years in Bydgoszcz, Poland.

### In honour of Ignacy Jan Paderewski

A national phenomenon at first, the Competition has been an international event since 1998, with a program founded on the virtuoso repertoire of Ignacy Jan Paderewski. Since 1994, the Competition has been organized by the I. J. Paderewski Music Association, and it will celebrate its centenary in 2022. The board of the Association is chaired by prof. Katarzyna Popowa-Zydroń, an outstanding Polish piano pedagogue.

Since 2004, the Jury has been headed by prof. Piotr Paleczny, but it has featured pedagogues from the finest music schools in the world. In 2007 a system was introduced to preselect candidates, of whom around two hundred apply for each edition. Auditions take place in world-renowned musical centers in Tokyo, Seoul, Moscow, Hannover, Paris, Vienna, New York and Warsaw.

No more than 50 participants are invited to take part in the competition. The total value of the prizes exceeds 60,000 Euros, and the non-statutory prizes include concerts with orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic as well as orchestras in Japan and Poland, and recitals in the USA, Japan, Georgia, Holland, Brazil, Chile, and Ukraine.

Since 2004 there has been a prized partner in Yamaha Inc., which

not only provides the Competition with its best and latest instruments, but, for the purpose of pre-selective auditions, make its venues, instruments and services available in eight countries.

From 2010 onwards the Competition has allowed the participants to select an instrument of their own choice. At their disposal are instruments from Yamaha, Steinway, Kawai and Fazioli.

The Competition has given rise to outstanding laureates: Mariya Kim, Nikita Mdojants, Julianna Avdiejeva, Eduard Kunz, Zheeyoung Moon, Dinara Clinton, Hyuk Lee, and Jakub Kuszlik.

Their high class is confirmed by the number of performances on stages all over the world. Henryk Martenka: “The Paderewski Competition has been broadcast online since 2007, as part of efforts to promote musicians and also to consolidate national heritage, to me it means something even intimate. It brings me so much, in terms of inspiration and satisfaction, to watch the intelligence, talent and hard work of the young artists taking part in the Competition. They hail from different parts of the world, yet they find common values in everything, and nothing can tear them apart. The essence of what’s best in humanity.”



At the first AAF Conference in Barcelona

OLIVER ADELL

# Alink-Argerich Foundation Jubilee

Gustav Alink: “Classical music has always been a great passion for me. Since 1967 I had been playing the violin, and when I listened to the Queen Elisabeth Competition for violin in 1980, I wanted to know more about competitions. After I finished my studies in mathematics, I soon got bored with the PhD topic chosen by my professor, so I quit my job and decided to focus on music again. I travelled all over Europe to festivals and competitions, collecting as much data as I could on competitions. In the beginning I included violin competitions, but I had to abandon that in favour of the piano, as otherwise it would have been too much. As a mathematician I always had a weak spot for statistics, and the combination of this with music fascinated me enormously, plus the fact that at international competitions you see young people from very different cultural backgrounds sharing the same passion for music. Besides that, I have a huge respect for classical musicians in particular; they give so much and they work with such dedication over so many years that I want to be of service to them.”

Another important moment was meeting Martha Argerich in 1981. “I had taken up photography, portrait photography in particular, and that is how I first met her, taking pictures after a concert. We developed a close friendship. She was, and still is, very interested in my work. Many discussions with Martha on competitions strengthened me in my determination to publish a Guidebook, a directory of piano competitions, which didn’t exist at the time. There was no internet yet and I very well remember the fortune I spent on my first computer in 1985! But it proved helpful in making tables and overviews and storing data, which led to the publication of four books on the history of piano competitions in 1990, marking the centenary of the first international piano competition in 1890.”

The Alink-Argerich Foundation’s foremost aim is to give objective information to young musicians, while facilitating organisers of competitions. “We are frequently asked for suggestions, recommendations, verifications and advice when there is a problem, confusion,



Gustav Alink and Martha Argerich, after presenting one of the AAF Awards



Akemi Alink and Martha Argerich

Twenty years ago, Gustav Alink and Martha Argerich founded the Alink-Argerich Foundation, which has developed into an important organisation in the World of Piano Competitions over the years. PIANIST Magazine is proud to have Gustav as a regular contributor and with him we reflect on the early years and also look ahead to the future.

or even a conflict.” With more than 900 international piano competitions in the world today, winning a prize is no longer a guarantee for a successful career. It has become increasingly difficult for young musicians to be the centre of attention, but I still feel that every competition has a right to exist because they can provide in the different needs of different pianists.”

You did a classification of competitions in 2003. “Yes, I made a ranking of 32 aspects, and we compared some 420 international piano competitions on the most important criteria, publishing the results in a kind of Michelin star classification. Now I am thinking about doing this again but perhaps diversification is a better term, showing the special characteristics of each competition, so that musicians can better decide where to compete.”

Like many of us nowadays, Gustav Alink has always had great concerns about the environment. “In this respect, some people might say that online competitions are a valuable addition. But we have to consider this carefully, because classical music should be experienced live in a concert hall. Moreover, there are other problems with online competitions. How does one judge a recording, knowing that the conditions are not the same for all participants? How was the recording produced for example? There are huge differences in sound quality. And, what is very important: who are

judging these recordings? How much time do they spend listening? The judging and evaluation procedures for online competitions are mostly unknown to the participants. There is a great lack of transparency. So, it is very understandable that many people question the fairness of such online competitions.”

“Since 2009, the Alink-Argerich Foundation expanded its activities by providing not only assistance, but also concrete support in the form of a reception for all the contestants at more than 80 competitions and by declaring an AAF Award, which is given to outstanding pianists, who deserve some extra attention and support.” Next year the Alink-Argerich Foundation will host a second international conference in Utrecht in cooperation with the Liszt Competition. “With the first international AAF Conference in Barcelona in 2018, we wanted to further expand our services to the musicians and competitions and it turned out to be one of the best things we had done so far. More than 150 organisers registered and we addressed various important aspects of piano competitions. Next year, we will discuss rules, collaboration with others, image, expectations, diversity, jury composition and preselection procedures, connecting with journalists, impresarios and piano companies. We are looking forward to this very much.”

**ERIC SCHOONES**

Piano Trio  
Voice  
Wind Quintet  
Oboe  
Trumpet  
Piano  
Percussion  
Viola  
Clarinete  
Flute  
Violoncello  
Bassoon  
Trombone  
Harp  
French Horn  
Piano Duo  
String Quartet  
Violin  
Double Bass  
Organ  
Guitar

# ARD International Music Competition



JeungBeum Sohn  
1st prize piano 2017



Prizewinners  
piano duo 2015



Aoi Trio  
1st prize piano trio 2018

September 5 to 13, 2020  
Piano solo  
First prize 10,000 €

August 30 to September 8, 2021  
Piano duo  
First prize 12,000 €

September 2 to 10, 2022  
Piano trio  
First prize 18,000 €



*“A privilege  
and a responsibility.”*

Julia Mustonen-Dahlkvist is professor and Head of the Piano Department at the Ingesund College of Music at Karlstad University. She was the first prize winner of the Nordic Piano Competition in 2004, which she is now organizing herself. During the past few years, her students reached the finals of 9 WFIMC level competitions and won many prizes including Vendome Prize at the Verbier Festival, 1st prizes at Maria Canals, and 2nd at Enescu by Daumants Liepins and 1st prizes at Casagrande and 2nd prize at Gina Bachauer and Viotti by Aristo Sham.

**Julia Mustonen-Dahlkvist**

## A tool, not a goal

What is her general idea about teaching? “First of all, it is crucial to find real talents – pianists I believe in, understand and connect with. Then, I attempt to identify their potential and issues, whether technical or musical. Last, I work to solve everything efficiently. This development should happen at the maximums of both speed and capacity. The more talented a student is, the more complexity there is in this working process. I have developed several systems to solve potential problems, with technical, stylistic, or any other form of interpretational tools such as sound production, pulsation, architectural building, and phrasing on the micro or macro levels. I always try to provide very concrete, tangible, and directly applicable advice. But my main task is to search for this precise element that would make a student’s personal interpretations improve. I generally do not insert my own ideas about how pieces should be interpreted; rather, I try to identify the inner voice and ideas of my students and help them polish their own ‘sculptures’. To work with extremely talented people is not only a privilege but also comes with huge responsibility – a responsibility that requires full-time attention, intensity, commitment, and a complete dedication to the pedagogical work.”

### Attitude

Competition prizes are just a tool, not a goal. “We strive towards the phase after winning a major competition. In the best cases, competitions can be a fair tool, where everyone can share their talent on a worldwide platform. That is precisely why it is vital that we work together to eliminate all forms of favoritism and corruption. Competitions should be organized for one reason only: to discover extremely talented young musicians with long-term career potential and give them opportunities to play and share their talent with the audience.

We work on the music in the same way, regardless of whether it is for a competition or otherwise and we always have a very intensive preparation period beforehand. Afterward we try to maintain a healthy attitude with regards to the results. The real gain in competing is the preparation process in itself, as well as raising of the peak performance level of the student. Of course, it is not easy when the player happens to be misunderstood or rejected, but the most important thing is to never give up, and to move forward towards new challenges and adventures.”



ALLARD WILLEMSE

Jury at the Franz Liszt Competition in Utrecht

# Confessions of a Piano Juror

I've been on many juries.

Inevitably someone in the audience will ask the judges how they could possibly choose a winner from among the group of extraordinary talents on display.

It's always an awkward moment.

To point out in response that jury members are music professionals who discern more acutely than most the differences between performers has a tinge of arrogance – though it is true. Yet the question really is a good one. Several years ago, at one of the American Pianists Association contests in which I was a judge – the organization alternates between classical and jazz competitions – my fellow evaluators and I discussed our decisions at the

end, and it was clear that we had all heard exactly the same things. And yet each of us assigned slightly different weights to the qualities we noted.

How does one value a wildly talented but impetuously irreverent pianist against a more mature one whose restraint was marred by a streak of sentimentality? Each exceeded the bounds of good taste, but in different ways. The age of the performer can become



GUSTAV ALINK

Jury in full transparency at the International Johannes Brahms Competition in Pörschach (Austria)

a determining factor here: it is natural (even important) for young people to sow wild oats, and that is forgivable – the rough edges will likely smooth out over time, and hopefully a creative spark will live on.

In a jazz competition, one might imagine different issues, but in fact the two arts are closely connected. For example, the jury who chose the five jazz finalists one year engaged in a vigorous debate about the legitimacy of a well-known performer who seemed to have severed all connections with tradition. Signaling an awareness of the history of the art can be important.

For that reason, it has often been noted that renegade pianist Thelonious Monk could never win the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition. Indeed, these contests rarely predict future stars. Pianist Bill Charlap, who was on the jury once, told me, “You can shuffle a different set of judges – or even the order in which the contestants appear – and the outcome would be different.”

So why have them? There are myriad reasons: the exposure, the experience, the opportunity to connect with new audiences, the feedback from others “in the know,” the money, the marketing, the ensuing concerts and the recordings.

So a short checklist of the criteria that will come into play for these competitors seems worth considering. The most basic requirement is “playing the instrument well,” according to Mr. Charlap.

“If it is a classical competition, the winner should be ready to play Carnegie Hall. In a jazz competition, it should be someone who can play with anyone in the world. You have to be able to make the gig. What do you do if you get a call from Phil Woods? What if you have to play a duo piano concert? In these players I want to hear the language of jazz – rhythmic freedom, phrasing, the blues,

clarity within the improvised line, an awareness of the roots.”

What’s more, most jurors are looking to discover someone with a personal perspective. “The finalists we picked,” relates pianist John Salmon, “each had a compelling individual voice. They put their stamp on the music.” That has always been essential in both classical and jazz contexts.

Many jurors over the years have expressed a similar sentiment: they search for someone musically intriguing – an artist they want to hear again. However, this idea is sometimes misconstrued.

I was once on a panel at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition when the frequently held assertion was made that the most “interesting” players tend to be eliminated early. I turned to pianist Claude Frank, who was also on the panel, and asked him how he would feel if someone came to him after he had performed and announced, “Claude, that was ... interesting.” He laughed. “It would be a disaster,” he said.

Listeners don’t want music to be merely interesting. They want to be knocked out of their seats, transported, taken on a journey, led through pathways to a deeper understanding. To accomplish this, pianists must learn the secret of the instrument’s sound (every pianist sounds different, even on the same instrument), master dramatic form and texture, probe musical meaning, become familiar with the great models of the past. And they must acquire enough self-knowledge and courage to truly reveal who they are.

It may seem like a tall order. But that’s what art is about.

**STUART ISACOFF**



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Jianing Kong, finalist of the 2016 Sydney International Piano Competition, in which 7 of the 12 concertos with orchestra were played on Fazioli.

# Fazioli Pianos on Stage

“Building Pianos is our way to love music, but also our way to support those who, together with the music, want to build their future,” abiding by this motto in only 40 years of history the Italian Concert grands have conquered the world concert scene and the major international piano competitions.

To love  
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Among the principles of its philosophy, Fazioli refuses to impose any kind of limitations on artists, convinced that they should have the freedom to choose on which instrument they want to play, based purely on the belief that it represents the best vehicle to express their talent. For this reason, Fazioli has always been opposed to signing exclusivity contracts with artists, preferring instead to establish reciprocal partnerships for the sake of upholding artistic standards, which should always have precedence over commercial considerations.

Fazioli’s ongoing cooperation with prestigious schools, festivals and international piano competitions is a testament to the company’s continued commitment to support professional pianists in their careers. As a result, in only 40 years of history, an ever-increasing number of internationally renowned artists are choosing the Fazioli piano in concert halls, schools, and recording studios worldwide. Today, Fazioli pianos are present at the world’s most prestigious piano competitions, such as the latest editions of the Chopin Competition in Warsaw, the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, and the Sydney International Piano Competition of Australia. Reflecting only on the 2017 competitions: at the Rubinstein Piano Competition in Tel Aviv, the “Fazioli” finalists were

awarded a number of prizes, among which first and second place. At the Honens International Piano Competition, 7 out of 10 semi-finalists chose to play Fazioli in at least 1 of the 4 rounds of the competition. Moreover, 2 out of 3 finalists (Han Chen and Llewellyn Sanchez Werner) performed their piano concerto with orchestra on the F278.

Composer and pianist Daniil Trifonov played an extraordinary Chopin-inspired programme on a Fazioli at the prestigious Verbier Festival (Switzerland) in 2018. His recital was live streamed on “Medici TV” and followed by a huge number of fans from all over the world. The Fazioli Concert Hall activities play a key role in the company’s strategy: aside from the main concert season, the “Winners” Series is devoted to the young prize-winners of International Competitions where Fazioli pianos are used. This series has been increasing its importance and notoriety.

Fazioli is truly passionate about music and aims to support those who want to build a better future for everybody through Art and Beauty. This is mainly done through the Fazioli concert pianos used on stage and in the professional field, where pianists can use and enjoy the wide range of possibilities given by each of these individually handcrafted instruments.



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Jeung Beum Sohn, prize-winner of the 9th International German Piano Award

# International German Piano Award

## Best of 10 years

On March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, the International German Piano Award will celebrate its 10<sup>th</sup> edition and thus its 10 years of support for highly talented pianists, organised and initiated by the International Piano Forum Frankfurt.

Together with Maryam Maleki, President and Artistic Director, and the patronage of Valery Gergiev and Lars Vogt, the International Piano Forum has become an incomparable institution for long-term worldwide support within the classical music landscape for pianists. The aim of this piano competition is not to produce prize-winners on an assembly line, but to support its pianists in a sustainable way through worldwide concerts and CD recordings, to name but a few things.

This mission is underlined by the program of the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration from March 28<sup>th</sup> to March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020. The International German Piano Award takes place as a piano competition but furthermore embodies deep thanks to all nominated pianists and award winners of the past editions, such as Lukas Geniušas, Eric Lu, Igor Levit, Andrejs Osokins, Yekwon Sunwoo or Hans H. Suh. They will be represented by Dmitri Levkovich and Alexei Melnikov in the Great Hall of Alte Oper Frankfurt.



The recent prize-winner, Jeung Beum Sohn, already won the ARD Competition in 2017 and only two years later the renowned International German Piano Award. The Korean Pianist is now traveling around the world, impressing audiences with his incredible virtuosity and he is set to record his first CD with the International Piano Forum Frankfurt this year.

More information: [www.ipf-frankfurt.com](http://www.ipf-frankfurt.com)

# Sight vs. Sound

When judging the quality of a musical performance, surely sound should be the most important factor. We try not to judge a book by its cover, or vote for politicians because of their good looks. Similarly, how a performer looks on stage must be secondary to the music they play. But is it as simple as that?

CHRISTIAN SCHNEIDER



In 'Juries in Competition' at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, two out of three juries could not see the contestants performance being reproduced online with the Bösendorfer Enspire System. From left to right: Dr. Werner Zenz, Ewa Kupiec, Peter Hagmann, Anna Malikowa, Emmanuel Mercier, Sergey Belyavskiy, Andreas Weber, Oleksii Kanke, Alexander Panfilov

A scientific study (Tsay, 2013) on the subject of sight vs. sound in the judgement of music competitions yielded surprising results: when listeners – professional musicians and laypeople – were presented with short videos of music competition finalists, they were more able to guess the winners when the videos were muted. Recent efforts to determine the generality of these findings have shown that with only small changes in scientific method, the 'sight-over-sound' effects seem to disappear. Particularly when competition winners were shown in pairs with players who were eliminated in earlier rounds, listeners/viewers with access to the sound were much more able to pick the winner (Mehr et al, 2018).

## Picking the winner by sight

The question remains whether we underestimate the visual aspects of musical performance. After all, sound is created through motion – the best pianists will move in ways that are full of musical meaning. They will look passionate, natural, powerful, persuasive. And in the final round of a competition, when all players are outstanding, couldn't one contestant's visible charisma and expressive "choreography" give him or her the upper hand?

The Piano Street team asked a number of pianists who serve on juries of international competitions how they think their judgements are affected by what they see. The answers indicate that visual perceptions are very much part of the game, not only in competitions, but in all live and filmed performance. When playing live in a great hall, pianists cannot take the same risks as in a recording studio: for one thing, pianissimos have to be limited to



Klaus Kaufmann, Eleonore Büning, Anastasia Vorotnaya, Mag. Sabine Grubmüller, Yedam Kim, Ayami Ikeba, Oleksii Kanke, Rolf Plagge, David Kuyken



Yoko Tsunekawa, Prof. Elisabeth Gutjahr, Andreas Groethuysen, Sergey Belyavskiy, Anastasia Vorotnaya, Andrea Lucchesini, Alexander Panfilov, Jacques Rouvier

be audible even in the last rows of the hall, and it is natural to compensate such limitations by using gestures.

### “We are like actors”

The visual impact takes place even before we start playing. As one pianist put it, “We are like actors: the way we walk to the piano, the way we bow, sit at the piano and bring our hands to the keys, is already saying a lot about our musical interpretation of the piece.” In other words, contestants who do not care about what is happening before the first note, and begin the performance without focusing on the right expression and musical tension, could be dismissed by the jury even before they touch the keys.

When the performance is under way, what our jurors are asking for is a coherence between movements and the music that is being performed. “When the technical gestures are aligned with the musical phrases, the result is always more effective and convincing, letting the music come out in the most natural way.” It seems that pianists would do well to raise their awareness of the potentialities of their body language.

### Presenting musical skills in a visual context

Technology has enabled new generations of musicians to investigate means of audiovisual composition and performance. Engaging in audiovisual production in order to create an artistic profile, has become a direct and inexpensive way for young musicians to present their skills. The music video is no novelty, but is becoming more and more common in connection with classical album re-

leases. In social media, short performance videos are used to promote upcoming concerts and to keep in touch with fans. Many competitions are now being streamed online, generally using a fixed camera situation. As the bigger events proceed to semifinals and finals, production is often aimed for public broadcast and managed by staff working in broadcast media or television. They work like film producers directing the events of the score in accordance with the music’s dramatic content or the artist’s behavior and appearance on stage. Perhaps it could be argued that visual perceptions will have an even greater impact when the public is invited to vote for the Audience Prize Winner based on these broadcast-produced performances.

At a preliminary stage, what does this mean for applicants to piano competitions and their audition material? Many competitions require contestants to submit a video of their performance, which seems to indicate that they also accept the visual aspect as something real. For the many hopeful who apply, it would be useful to know what the jurors will be looking for. Will a hi-end production and good looks increase your chances of being selected? If the answers to our survey are anything to go by, what seems to matter most is a performer’s ability to use gestures and body language to reinforce their musical message.

DAVID WÄRN

David Wörn

**Do We Judge Music by Sight More Than Sound?**

[www.pianostreet.com/sight-sound](http://www.pianostreet.com/sight-sound)

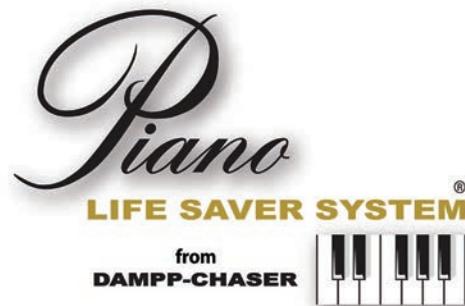


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# In the Spotlights



Aristo Sham

JIYANG CHEN

After his first victory at the Ettlingen competition Aristo Sham went on to win more first prizes and was featured in a documentary “The World’s Greatest Musical Prodigies”, broadcast by Channel 4 in the UK. Now, at 23, he will soon make his debut with the London Symphony Orchestra and Sir Simon Rattle.

“My teacher in Hong Kong advised me to go to Ettlingen and we prepared really well. I played just for fun, and won first prize. The audience wouldn’t stop applauding. It was made into a big deal, because Lang Lang also won at Ettlingen, but he was 12 at the time. It pushed me into the spotlights and I became a local celebrity for a while. I was on tv shows, everybody in Hong Kong knew about it. It was very strange and I had to take a crash course on how to behave in front of a camera but it was fun and I enjoyed that period of my life very much.

Later with much more serious, multi-round competitions, I started to appreciate what it was like to compete for real. I learned so much in preparation and just being there to perform under pressure, and also experiencing the performance of others, and how they prepare, helped me to be the best I can be.

I also enjoy the social aspect, meeting likeminded people, because as pianists we are so lonely all the time. We are all working for the same thing. Very often there is a nice sense of camaraderie. It’s especially touching to see the younger ones enjoying themselves, making new friends. Some people, very few, can promote them-

selves on social media really well, but for most musicians, I do think competitions are necessary to make a career, to get that visibility with concert organisers.

Travelling is my biggest passion and I was always very curious about different aspects of life, when I started my studies in economics at Harvard and music at the New England Conservatory, I wasn’t one hundred percent sure about going into music. The turning point was the Top of the World Competition, where I got to the semi-finals, and hearing the winner, he played better than me, I could hear myself achieving that, so I thought I should try to give everything.

I consider myself very fortunate to study with Julia Mustonen-Dahlkvist, she is like my musical soulmate. The first time I worked with her my playing radically changed overnight. She is able to tap into my way of hearing, my way of constructing music and able to drive me to use it and every time we worked together I learned something essential and new about myself.“

[www.aristosham.net](http://www.aristosham.net)

# First China International Music Competition, Beijing

Twenty-five years ago, in 1994, the very first international piano competition was organised in Beijing. This was realised thanks to the continuing efforts of one of China's foremost piano teachers, Mrs. Zhou Guangren (who was herself frequently a jury member as well at many major international piano competitions around the world, such as the Cliburn, Leeds, Tchaikovsky, for example). This competition was held three times in Beijing and then moved to Xiamen, where it was also held three times.

Over the years, other international piano competitions emerged in China: in Shanghai, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and more recently also in Suzhou and Harbin. The prize money at these competitions is high: back in 2006, the first prize of USD 30,000 was almost at the top (only Seoul and Cleveland offered more). More recently, Cleveland and the Honens Competition in Calgary superseded this, and last year (2018), a new competition in Malta astonished with a 100,000 Euro first prize. This evoked mixed reactions from many musicians. But then, the "First China International Music Competition" in Beijing was announced by the China Conservatory of Music, promising an unparalleled USD 150,000 first prize! Naturally, this attracted the attention of everybody in the Music World.

However, there was no traditional application procedure for this competition. The organisation received recommendations from various peers in the Music World, which finally led to a group of 22 young pianists up to 28 years old, who were invited to compete in this First China International Music Competition.

The event was held from 4 to 21 May 2019, only one month before the Tchaikovsky Competition. This may have been very well the reason for one of them not accepting the invitation to come to Beijing and to fully concentrate on his preparations for Moscow (and with success: Dmitry Shishkin won 2nd prize in Moscow). Four other pianists were selected for both competitions and did their best to excel in Beijing and in Moscow. One other invited pianist

did not come to Beijing, so the competition started with precisely 20 participants.

The expectations were high concerning the three youngest participants: Tony Siqi Yun (18), Sandro Nebieridze from Georgia (18) and Alexander Malofeev (17). Malofeev is already well-known in Russia as one of the most promising young piano talents.

There were four rounds. After two preliminary rounds of altogether two hours of solo repertoire, the semi-finals included a substantial 45-minute vocal recital. Six pianists were admitted to the first phase of the final round, in which a piano concerto by Mozart or Beethoven was played with the Orchestra Academia China, conducted by En Shao. Arseny Tarasevich-Nikolaev and Leonardo Colafelice gave very good performances. Only three pianists could pass to the 2nd part of the finals: another concerto performance, this time with the famous Philadelphia Orchestra and its conductor Yannick Nézet-Séguin. Their collaboration made this competition very special. The three pianists who reached this final stage, were Tony Siqi Yun from Canada, Mackenzie Melemed (USA) and Alexander Malofeev (Russia). In their decisions, the jury had to consider all performances from the previous rounds. As always when the performances are at a high level, there were surprises each time the results were announced.

The three finalists played different piano concertos: Tony Siqi Yun was the first to come on stage and performed Tchaikovsky #1.



Winner Tony Siqi Yun in his final performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séquin.



Yannick Nézet-Séquin, Yoheved Kaplinsky and Liguang Wang with the three prize winners.



Richard Rodzinski views the scene at the conclusion of the competition (on the left, jury member Boris Berman).

## *An unparalleled 150,000 USD first prize!*

After the break, Mackenzie Melemed gave an excellent performance of Rachmaninov's *Paganini Rhapsody*. Alexander Malofeev impressed and astonished by playing Prokofiev #3 at high speed, but the Philadelphia Orchestra teamed up very well, and the sound of this orchestra is a true delight.

The contestants were full of praise about the organisation. Much of the preparation of the competition had been done by Richard Rodzinski (who had also directed the Cliburn Competition for many years, and the Tchaikovsky Competition in 2011). However, he could not help that towards the end of the competition in Beijing, some things were changed. A press conference and a jury symposium had been announced, but did not take place. Instead, the contestants were given the opportunity to meet with the jury members for feedback, which is a very good alternative, of course. After the three finalists' performances with the Philadelphia Orchestra, the jury came on stage and the President of the Competition, Mr. Liguang Wang, gave a speech. Then, without further ado, he quickly mentioned the results, while the finalists were waiting back-stage. So when Mackenzie Melemed was called on stage, it was not immediately understood which prize he had won. He received the 3rd prize and Toni Siqi Yun turned out to be the winner of the 1st prize. In the centre of the stage was a grand piano, but there were no performances any more. An official award ceremony was planned for the next evening, but this was cancelled. Mr. Wang said that the competition would be held again in the coming years, for violin and other instruments.

**GUSTAV ALINK**

An excellent webcast of the competition performances can still be viewed: <https://i.youku.com/cimcompetition>  
[www.cimcompetition.org](http://www.cimcompetition.org)



A view of the harbour of Tromsø at 11:30 pm.

GUSTAV ALINK

# Top of the World Competition, Tromsø (Norway)

The first Top of the World Competition was realised in 2009, and immediately broke a record: it had happened never before that a brand-new international piano competition had attracted so many applicants! Not less than 361 pianists applied for this first competition in Tromsø. It was an overwhelming experience for Tori and of course, a great encouragement that her competition was welcomed as something good. Several elements contributed to this success: a completely free repertoire, a higher upper age limit than usual for a piano competition (35), and substantial prize money: 30,000 Euros for the first prize, and 20,000 and 10,000 for the other two finalists. Moreover, Northern Norway's natural beauty, where the nights never darken during Summer, also provides a special attraction.

It was not easy to make a selection of 24 pianists from so many applicants, but the resulting level was extraordinarily high. The winner of this first edition was Mariangela Vacatello, who had already been a finalist at the Queen Elisabeth Competition, the Cliburn Competition and the Busoni, next to other successes in Santander and Sydney. After her first prize in Tromsø, she entered no further competitions.

Tori Stødle kept the structure of her competition the same in the following years. It was held every two years, always in June, and for each event, 24 pianists were selected to take part. Now, 10 years later, the 6th edition of the Top of the World Competition was held from 15 to 21 June, 2019. How many pianists would apply this time? The competition was held at the same time as the Tchaikovsky Competition, and the application deadline for Tromsø was February 25th. At that time, many pianists were still wondering about the Tchaikovsky Competition, and some of them wanted to keep all options open ...

Yet, once again, many pianists decided to apply for Tromsø: 214! Which can be seen as another triumph for Tori Stødle and her competition. Over the years, important pianists and fine musicians have served on the jury in Tromsø, such as Gary Graffman, David Dubal, Olga Kern, Tamás Vásáry, Janina Fiałkowska and also former prize winners, such as Alberto Nosè and Lukáš Vondráček. As always, the selection process was difficult this year, but an excellent group of 24 pianists received the news that they were welcome to come and compete in Tromsø. As is to be expected, there are a few cancellations (not only scheduling problems, but also



Alexander Panfilov is applauded by the jury and the other two prize winners.

The Top of the World Competition in Tromsø has resulted in several historical records. It all began when Norwegian pianist Tori Stødle had the idea to create a new international piano competition in Tromsø, her town in the very north of Norway (more than 1000 km north of Oslo).

other unfortunate happenings), and 20 pianists performed in the first round. The opening concert was given by the winner of 2009, Mariangela Vacatello. This was the beginning of an extravaganza of great performances; each pianist gave an impressive half-hour recital. The cut after the first round was not overly drastic: 12 competitors were allowed to pass to the 2nd round, where they played another 50 to 60-minute solo repertoire. The jury and the audience could enjoy a great variety of works from piano literature: apart from the usual Romantic and post-Romantic repertoire, some of the participants had prepared compositions by Rameau, Byrd, Carter, Barber, Enescu, Messiaen and Carl Vine.

It must have been difficult for the jury to end up with three finalists. The performance of Andrey Yaroshinsky, for example, in the first round had been absolutely masterly. Scipione Sangiovanni played Händel and Rameau exquisitely and his rendition of Liszt's *Totentanz* for piano solo was truly thrilling. But there were also many other moments of great piano playing.

Finally, Scipione Sangiovanni, Alexander Panfilov and Jakub Kuszlik were admitted to the finals, for which each of them had submitted two piano concertos; the organisation chose the one to

be performed with the Arctic Philharmonic Orchestra. Alexander Panfilov won with a solid performance of Rachmaninoff's third concerto while Scipione (2nd prize) and Jakub (3rd prize) also impressed with Schumann and Prokofiev's second concerto. The organisers had arranged a fine quality live webcast of the competition, and all performances (some of which are true jewels) can still be heard on the competition's YouTube Channel. This year had a special significance for Tori Stødle, because after having put this competition on the map, and having given it a fine reputation over the past 10 years, this was the last edition with her as Artistic Director. The new Artistic Director Sindre Myrbostad has taken on the task to prepare the 7th edition of the Top of the World Competition, which has already been scheduled for 19-25 June 2021, while Tori will organise a Pianofest Tromsø 2020-2023, to which all 21 prize winners of the years 2009-2021 will be invited. This sounds like another good follow-up to look forward to!

**GUSTAV ALINK**

[www.topoftheworld.no](http://www.topoftheworld.no)

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KRISTIAN LOVHAUG

A captivated audience at the Piano Talents Competition in the Casa Verdi.

# *Piano Talents Competition in Milano*

More and more competitions have several age categories and are open to very young pianists. Many of these can be found in Italy. In 2009, Catia Iglesias decided to create a new competition “*Piano Talents*” and to have it in a very special place: *Casa Verdi* in Milan. It is a house of rest, a comfortable home for elderly, retired musicians founded by Giuseppe Verdi himself in 1896! When Giuseppe Verdi took on this project, a large number of fans of the maestro decided to help him financially by giving donations. Among the donors was the family Horowitz Toscanini who left all their money to the Casa Verdi as a legacy.

Not only the building is monumental, it also has a beautiful garden and a sacred place where the graves of Verdi and his wife can be admired. Casa Verdi has a nice concert hall with a Bechstein piano, acquired by the council of the House. On the piano there is an inscription in gold: *donation of the family Horowitz Toscanini*. It was a wonderful idea to let young pianists play here, and to let the music sound again in this historical building with its aging residents, who understand the importance of music so well. (Actually, Martha Argerich was also thinking of creating such a place.) While Catia made all the arrangements and organised everything,

Vincenzo Balzani served as Artistic Director and brought together an international jury.

In the first year, the competition had four age categories, but more categories were added and now there are nine age groups, including piano duo. A few years ago, the maximum age was 29, but this has been brought down again to 21. This year, the competition received 115 applications from 28 different countries. The participants much appreciate performing in such a historical place with its special atmosphere. The residents come in, some of them with a person who assists them. The young participants know the situation and seem to be extra motivated and specially inspired to perform their best. It was a great honour when the *Piano Talents* competition received the official patronage of the European Parliament in May 2019. Next year (June 2020), the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the competition will be held.

**GUSTAV ALINK**

For more information:  
[www.pianofriends.eu](http://www.pianofriends.eu)

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The Nordic Piano Competition in Sweden has been held in Malmö, Sweden, every two years since 2002. It was relocated to Arvika near Oslo, Norway as of 2017. Eligibility to participate in this competition is restricted to those of 16 to 30 years of age, citizen or permanent resident of any of the Nordic countries (Iceland, Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland) or currently studying at a music institution in these Nordic countries.

# The Nordic Piano Competition

For the first time, a youth competition (the 1st Nordic Junior Competition, Category I: 12-15 years old, Category II: 16-18 years old) was also held. In the main competition, 17-year old Anton Mejias (Finland), who played Chopin's Piano concerto Nr. 1 gracefully, won unanimously! He could have participated in the junior category, with his age. The second prize winner was Pontus Carron (Sweden), who impressed with Prokofiev's fourth Sonata. The third prize went to Jonathan Siahaan (Denmark), whom I evaluated especially for his performance of Viennese Classics in the first round.

The 1st Nordic Junior Piano Competition was also very interesting and a great success. I hope it will continue in the future. Actually, the number of competitions for young pianists is increasing in recent years, and we also see that very young pianists are able to play difficult virtuoso pieces very well! Here, too, the 1st prize winners in both categories: Nikita Khnykin (Cat. I, 16 y, Norway) played the 6th Sonata (1st mov.) by Prokofiev and Love Herrdahl (Cat. II, 13 y, Sweden) played *Gnomenreigen* by Liszt, an incredible performance. Blüthner was one of the biggest sponsors of this competition and their pianos were used throughout this event. They are very active and we might see Blüthner pianos more often at the competitions in the future.

This time I judged both competitions. The artistic director Julia Mustonen-Dahlkvist asked us not to read the biographies of the contestants in the competition programme book until the competition was over, and we got papers with only their names and repertoire.



Prizewinners and jury

It is better not to be influenced by the list of previous awards or educational background, and to judge only by the actual performance. In recent years, such competitions have increased, and the contestants' profiles have disappeared from the competition programme books. Recently, I was at the Hamamatsu International Piano Competition in Japan. Realistically, it is rare that the jury members do not know anything about any of the participants. I also believe that many people are curious and of course you can search on the Internet today. However, I found that it was a very good suggestion by the artistic director to omit this information. We see that some people and competitions are starting to move so that fairness can prevail as much as possible.

AKEMI ALINK

[www.nordicpiano.com](http://www.nordicpiano.com)

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is a unique three-monthly magazine, published in seven countries in two special editions with different contents: one in German for Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Luxemburg and Liechtenstein and one in Dutch for the Netherlands and Belgium. The magazine is also distributed in controlled circulation in Eastern Europe with other European countries planned for the future.

Each issue includes interviews with leading pianists and rising talent, news, features, analysis, reviews and comment. We also publish in-depth articles on piano recordings and repertoire, piano brands, retailers, master classes on piano technique and interpretation, reports from festivals, competitions, and so on.

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# International Telekom Beethoven Competition Bonn

Jubilee

Professor Pavel Gililov, Artistic Director and Chairman of the Jury, writes: 'In 2020 we will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of Beethoven's birth. Being the city where he was born, Bonn is uniquely associated with this towering genius. The Jubilee events will already begin in December 2019, and the International Telekom Beethoven Competition Bonn will mark the festive opening. The special repertoire of the competition places Beethoven in a context that bridges the centuries, both as the bearer of tradition and the innovator that left a deep imprint on music history and culture down to the present day.'

'The competition seeks to promote young professional artists and we expect our participants to

express their own visions and ideas in their performances, but without distorting the composer's thought. The audience actively participates in the assessment by voting both in the concert hall and in the internet. Our expressed goal is to discover and encourage excellent young pianists and we also hope to enrich and deepen our understanding of Beethoven's music.'

[www.telekom-beethoven-competition.de](http://www.telekom-beethoven-competition.de)



Pavel Gililov

## *The International Schubert Competition Dortmund*

Schubert & Beethoven



LiedDuo-Competition winners of last year: Esther Valentin (Mezzosopran) and Anastasia Grishutina (Piano).

The International Schubert Competition Dortmund was established in 1987 and has been held at the heart of the Ruhr since then – it seeks to add to the cultural variety and attractiveness of the region. With its high-profile venue for the Laureates' Concert, the atmospheric compressor hall of the Hansa Coking Plant, a listed building, it is invariably a great success. Prizes have been awarded to international candidates in the categories of *Piano* and also *Lied Duo* since 2009. It is aimed at young and talented musicians of the very highest professional standards. Previous laureates include Michael Endres (1989), Elena Margolina (1995), Amir Katz (2003), Vadym Kholodenko (2011) and Samuel Hasselhorn (LiedDuo, 2013). Note that Hasselhorn also won the Queen Elisabeth Competition.

In September 2020, the Schubert Competition will hold its 14th edition for piano. It consists of five rounds, the video preselection, and four rounds in Dortmund, including the third round with the wonderful opportunity to listen to all of Schubert's last six great sonatas and the orchestra final with the Duisburg Philharmonic Orchestra. On the occasion of Beethoven's 250th birthday and because of the regrettable lack of piano works with orchestra by Franz Schubert, only Beethoven's piano concertos will be on the program in the final. The jury of the 2020 competition includes Prof. Arnulf von Arnim (non-voting chairman), Arie Vardi, Eva Kupiec, Tamas Ungar, Ian Fountain, Stefan Heucke, Ingeborg Danz and others.

The entire competition will be broadcast live on its Facebook-page and on [www.schubert-competition.com](http://www.schubert-competition.com)



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It was something new, even for Piano's Maene, a family business based in West Flanders with a rich history of over 80 years, including decades of involvement with the Queen Elisabeth Competition as the supplier of the Steinways for the competition. And last year, eight historical piano's from the company's collection of over 300 were played at the First international Chopin Competition on Period Instruments in Warsaw.

Henk Swinnen, Business Development/Senior Consultant for the Chris Maene Straight Strung Grand Piano: 'The Liszt competition in Utrecht is one of the very few competitions that offers its competitors a choice between instruments of various brands. We were very pleased to find Rob Hilberink to be an adventurous director who is open to this kind of opportunity. I think this is very important because the new generation of pianists is very open minded and curious about discovering new sounds. They see trying a piano they don't know not so much as a risk but an inspiration, connected to their ideas on expression. Of course every piano has its pros and cons, but the Liszt Competition was a logical step for us to introduce the Chris Maene Straight Strung Piano there.'

This was not only because Liszt wrote his music for this type of piano, but also because our modern straight strung piano was originally conceived at the request of Daniel Barenboim, who discovered that new sound world, playing Liszt's own straight strung Bechstein.'

Now we see contemporary composers inspired by the sound of the straight strung piano and, for example, Pierre-Laurent Aimard chose our piano for the Harrison *Birtwistle's* concerto and *Oiseaux exotiques* by Messiaen when he recently played with the *Concertgebouw Orchestra* in Amsterdam. And Stephen Hough, who played at the Proms this year with the Queen's extravagant gold-leaf straight strung piano as ordered by Queen Victoria in 1856, will work with Piano's Maene too.

Henk Swinnen is very happy with all these developments: 'We sincerely hope that other competitions will also work with us, not as a replacement for other brands, but as an alternative, as an inspiration for young pianists.'

[www.chrismaene.be](http://www.chrismaene.be)



Nikolai Medtner, a classic in his lifetime

# *Room for Improvement*

Useful stepping stones, a necessary evil or a crime against music? I am split three ways. I happily sit on the juries of piano competitions, enjoying the music, the different ways in which candidates present themselves and play, and the company of fellow piano-loving jury members. I also know, looking objectively at the process, that the voting is based on subjective judgements and personal taste. How else can Pianist A be eliminated in Competition Y and yet a few weeks later win first prize in Competition Z?



Ignacy Jan Paderewski, prime-minister and versatile composer

For better or worse – and on balance, I think, mainly for better – piano competitions are here to stay. But, on whichever side of the fence you sit, there are some areas that can improve. Jury members are almost always exclusively professional pianists. Some competitions invite music journalists like myself to sit alongside them or to form a separate jury but it is always the verdicts of the pianists that prevail when awarding the major prizes.

But can professional pianists judge any more objectively and successfully than others? Are their views any more important, significant or ‘correct’ than others? Do they take into account anything more than musical ability? I think not. And juries of pianists get it right no more frequently than music critics or well-informed members of the public. How often do we read of Pianist B winning first prize in a major competition and disappearing from view immediately afterwards, while third-placed Pianist C signs a record deal and becomes a major star?

### Verdict

There is much more than mere musical ability to making a successful career as a professional solo pianist. Personality, temperament and stage presence are all important elements involved in the development of anyone embarking on (what they hope will be) an important career but which are not always brought into the equation. Two recent competitions awarded first prize in one instance and third prize in another to artists whose pianistic abilities were not in doubt but who had the personalities of wet dish cloths. Their careers, for all sorts of reasons and with the best will in the world, will not prosper.

For me, a mixed jury of professional pianists, music critics, A & R executives from record labels and their producers all with equal voting rights would achieve more rounded and valuable verdicts.

### Repertoire

The other area which could be improved is repertoire. The obligatory requirement from most competitions is for a sonata by either Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven or Schubert. Playing this standard repertoire perpetuates the Austro-German musical hegemony from which the piano world has suffered for too long. Why always the same, stale corner of the literature? Besides, every member of a professional pianists’ jury will have very firm ideas of how each piece should sound. If you do not play it in the way they approve, the judges won’t vote for you. And although undoubted masterpieces, what if these sonatas by these composers simply do not appeal? To have to play repertoire with which a pianist has, for their own good reasons, no affinity, is hardly going to show them in the best light. The solo rounds of competitions should be less prescriptive.

Some are now amending that. I was invited to join the jury for one competition earlier this year which – hurrah! – gave the option of a Weber sonata. But it is rare to be presented with the option of sonatas by, say, Alkan, Paderewski, Medtner, Griffes or Szymanowski. Own choices of programmes are more likely to show a competitor at their best. Later rounds often allow them to do just that – but only after they have won through with an Austro-German sonata and the obligatory specially-commissioned piece which no one wants to ever hear or play again. If candidates choose the wrong pieces for their solo programme in a piano competition, one that does not illustrate every aspect of their artistry and musical personality, then they deserve to get marked down.

To widen the choice of solo repertoire is an easy option. The same is not true of the (final) concerto round. Candidates are routinely given a remarkably limited choice of over-played concertos. Judges must be sick of hearing them. In one sense, it is understandable: rehearsal time. The conductor charged with leading three, four or five concerto performances in a competition, often over the course of a single day, rarely has the breadth of knowledge of the concerto repertoire that would allow them to direct up to five relatively unfamiliar works in that time. Without adequate notice and rehearsal time, they are unlikely to welcome any off-piste choice from a soloist – and especially one not used to playing with an orchestra. One solution is to have more than one conductor on tap. Competitions should actively encourage pianists to be more daring and curious and the finals of a competition should be an unmissable opportunity for any aspiring soloist to be bold and adventurous. As a member of our newly-constituted multi-faceted jury, I am already going to award higher marks to anyone who thinks outside the box!

**JEREMY NICHOLAS**

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