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WIPAC Once Again Celebrates The Art of Piano Performance

by Lisa McFarren-Polgar • August 6, 2017

The 2017 Washington International Piano Artists Competition judges once again met the very difficult challenge of selecting from amongst 23 very talented pianist who traveled from throughout the world to perform selections of the finest piano classical repertoire. Held at the Music School of George Washington University, the pianists have for the last 3 days demonstrated their passion for performance as artists who also happen to devote their lives to full time careers in other professions. Such is their love for music, that they are able to set time aside from their busy professional careers to perfect the art of piano performance and compete with the best.

The contestants have been performing before a distinguished group of judges who had the task of choosing from the original 23 contestants, 13 semifinalists who included John Blasdale, Joseph Lipare, Andy Liao, Alexandra Nica, Kotomi Suzuki, Simon Finlow, David Caldine, Ferdy Talon, Judy Darst, Max Sung, Hiroaki Taniguchi, Utako Tanigawa and I-Wen Tseng.

After two days of exciting performances of the classical piano repertoire the judges narrowed the field to 6 finalists, including Joseph Lipare, Ferdy Talon, Andy Liao, Simon Finlow, Hiroaki Taniguchi and I-Wen Tseng.

Although the tradition of “amateur” (stemming from the word “lover of”) pianists is a long one, it has been a recent phenomenon to acknowledge pianists who have chosen to pursue their dedication to the art of piano performance without being confined to the label of “professional.” The creation of international amateur piano competitions such as those held in Paris, Warsaw, Kiev, Tokyo, Boston, San Diego and Washington recognize pianists whose musical insights and skills would allow many of them to be in the “profession” if they so chose.

Unique to the Washington International Piano Artists Competition has been their reputation, as stated by some of the contestants, as the friendliness and most welcoming competition of all. Pianist Utako Tanigawa in particular noted the hospitality accorded to them by the organizers of WIPAC, notably its founders Chateau and John Gardecki, and Executive Board members Jean Wigham, Diane Merriam, Karl Woelflein and Portia Davidson.

The awards for First, Second and Third Prize winners will be selected on Sunday, August 6 at the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC. Other awards are given for best performance of Bach Work, Best Performance of Romantic Work, most Imaginative Programming. The first prize winner will receive the Austin Hay award for \$3000 dollars. This year WIPAC will be distributing over \$10,000 dollars in award prizes for 2017.

The spirit of WIPAC could not be better expressed than with the quote by preliminary contestant Melinda Morse, a retired public school teach, who stated, "Music has been a constant, beautiful and inspiring companion for me since childhood. I think it has been for other amateur pianists as well. It is a special privilege for us to get to share our 'companionship' with each other at the WIPAC and other competitions."

