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## 2019 WIPAC Finals: in Perfect Harmony

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While waiting for the jury to announce the winners of the 17th Washington International Piano Artists Competition, one might have expected a lot of nail-biting angst by the pianist competitors. Instead, the spirit of camaraderie and love for music that has characterized WIPAC's competitions over the years took over and several finalists took to the stage in perfect harmony for an exhilarating impromptu performance of four and six-handed works by the classical repertoire masters. It was clear, the musicians were there, not only to compete, but to express their passion for music and to share it with the enthusiastic audience.

The 17th WIPAC Festival of Music came to a close on Sunday. The Finals were held at the iconic Corcoran Gallery Museum auditorium, which is now part of George Washington University. It was an historic occasion as the Corcoran site was the venue for the WIPAC in

2009. This year's Competition Chairs were Judith Ramage and John Dassoulas. As in past years, Jerome Barry, Founder and Director of the Embassy Series, served as the gracious MC.

After three days of intense performances by 26 pianists, 12 semi-finalists emerged and on Sunday, 6 finalists came to perform to determine not only who would be selected as the first, second and third prize winners, but also the winners of the many other awards in various categories. The thousand dollars in prize money was contributed by many arts patrons.

The First Prize was awarded to Johnathan Lee. Undoubtedly, Mr. Lee's performance of Liszt's Mephisto Waltz, which was electrifying, carried the pianist to the First Prize win. His playing is "Horowitzian" with an immediacy and spontaneity that captures the listener's attention from beginning to end. Johnathan Lee also performed the Bach Partita Number 1 in B-flat Major, BWV 825 for his finalist selection. His technical prowess was revealed as he played the Bach work with virtually no pedal, yet with a flawless legato. Lee was also awarded the Audience Award.

Second Prize was awarded to Deirbhile Brennan, who has already been successful on the competition circuit, receiving awards in Europe and the USA. Her pianistic style is characterized by a wonderful tonal clarity in her performance of Joseph Haydn's Andante con Variazioni in F minor, Hob XVII:6, as well as broad and powerful musical strokes in the Liszt Apres une lecture du Dante: Fantasia quasi Sonata.

The Third Prize was conferred to Robin Stephenson. A pianist from France, residing in England as a researcher in mathematics at Oxford University, Mr. Stephenson can best be described as an artist of eclectic tastes, having performed a diversified repertoire featuring the works of Nikolai Kapustin in the Preliminaries. For his finalist performance, Robin Stephenson chose the Chopin Sonata No 3 Opus 58. It was indeed a thoughtful performance, with an intensity and musicality that the artist maintained throughout the piece.

In preserving the tradition of world-wide amateur piano competitions, WIPAC also celebrates those pianists who have excelled in their performance in various categories. The jury had a difficult challenge in choosing the awardees. These included:

- **HONORABLE MENTION AWARDS:** Jeanne Craig, David Lee, Vivienne Fleischer
- **SPECIAL AWARDS** MOST IMAGINATIVE PROGRAMMING: David Lee
- ROMANTIC PERIOD: Jeanne Craig, Chopin Ballade in G Minor
- BAROQUE PERIOD: Jeanne Craig, Bach French Suite in G Major
- CLASSICAL PERIOD: Utako Tanigawa, Haydn Sonata HOB:xvi 46
- COMTEMPORARY PERIOD: Vivienne Fleischer, Sacan Toccata
- PRESS JURY AWARD: Jeanne Craig
- AUDIENCE AWARD: Jonathan Lee
- BACH PERFORMANCE: Jeni Kong, Partita No. 2 in C Minor, Sinfonia
- MOZART PERFORMANCE: Kathleen Penny, Variations on Salve tu, Domine, K.398
- BEETHOVEN PERFORMANCE: Robin Stephenson, C Minor Variations
- CHOPIN PERFORMANCE: Deirbhile Brennan, Scherzo No. 4 in E Major, Op. 54
- PADEREWSKI PERFORMANCE: Robin Stephenson, Intermezzo Pollaco

- LISZT PERFORMANCE: Jonathan Lee, Mephisto Waltz
- SPENCER HUFFMAN PERFORMANCE: David Lee, Mazurka in A minor
- LATIN AMERICAN COMPOSER: David Lee, Villa-Lobos, Bachianis Braseleros, No.4

As the second oldest amateur pianist competition in the world, after “Le Concours des Grands Amateurs de Piano in Paris, France,” WIPAC gives accomplished and talented pianists a venue to perform for an audience that continues to support the art of piano performance. It is important to remember that without the audience support and appreciation, this art form would indeed falter. While surely artists will continue to play at home and in local venues for their own enjoyment, as they also pursue professional careers in other areas, WIPAC and other Amateur competitions give pianists recognition for their dedication and willingness to continue to perfect their art form.

Indeed, the pianists have to be truly dedicated to their art to succeed. Deirbhile Brennan, a Chartered Accountant (CPA equivalent) in Ireland fits an hour of practice during her lunch hour before returning to her office. She is also the mother of four children. Andrew Celentano practices for an hour before going to his office, and Jeanne Craig, a middle school teacher, practices for an hour before heading to teach. Thankfully, her school is only one mile away from her home. Every hour of the day is a precious commodity.

WIPAC 2020 will undoubtedly attract new talented pianists as well as many of the 2019 contestants who will feel inspired and motivated to improve their skills to compete and experience the excitement, camaraderie and friendship that the competition affords. They will be welcomed by WIPAC Founders John and Chateau Gardecki, and all those who make the event possible, including its current President, Michael Davidson.

This year, WIPAC reached an international audience through its live-streaming of the competition made possible by pianist Andrew Celentano.

As a final thought, to quote Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Every artist was first an amateur.”









