

DIPLOMATIC POUCH

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Lifestyle

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Washington's International Amateur Piano Competition

The top winner of the Sixth Annual Washington International Piano Artists Competition this year was Ricker Choi, a software engineer originally from Hong Kong who is now making his home in Canada. Meanwhile, Rebecca Davis, a homemaker from Minnesota, won the most awards including the Audience Award and Honorable Mention from the press jurors for "her great sense of performance and her ability to build a program."

In all, 35 international adult amateur pianists flew in to compete for these honors, distinctions and cash awards from as far away as South Korea, Japan and Vietnam. The Washington International Piano Artists Competition showcases amateur — as in one who loves something — pianists from all kinds of backgrounds who have incorporated their piano passion into their busy lives.

Finalists at this year's competition included a British-born patent agent, a New York psychiatrist, a corporate lawyer from Toronto, an equestrian from Oregon and a tennis coach from France. Other contestants came from Argentina, Brazil, Germany, Lithuania and Mexico.

"It's always a thrill to compete," said audience favorite Rebecca Davis, a former Julliard professor who now lives "in the woods of Minnesota with my pet wolf and my old upright piano," while her studio engineer husband commutes between Los Angeles and their country haven.

"I have such passion for playing. It's a time for my life and my soul to soar," she added, noting though that she doesn't like the business of touring professionally.

Davis has been playing since she was 4. "My crib was next to the piano and my older sisters used to play. They tell me that every time they stopped playing, I would start crying. Plus, my mother had a classical station on all the time," she recalled. "Maya, my 2-year-old wolf hybrid, doesn't do anything when I play the piano but she loves to howl when I sing!"

Most of these adult contestants have already won top

awards from other competitions such as the Van Cliburn, Colorado International Amateur Competition and others in Paris, Boston, Berlin and Utah. Many have also been asked to play solos with major orchestras in California, Canada, Germany and France.

Competition began July 16 and ran for five days with local and national judges making the final decisions on Sun., July 20, after final performances at the French Embassy, followed by the announcement of the winners and a celebratory dinner. This was the third year that Mariusz Brymora, head of the Polish Embassy's Culture and Public Affairs Department, served as chair of the jury. The Polish Embassy also presented an award for the best performer of a Chopin piece.

This five-day competition in July was created by Chateau Gardecki of Fairfax, Va., who also founded the Washington International Piano Arts Council (WIPAC) in 2001.

"I just thought that Washington, being an international city, should have such a competition like other important cities around the world," Gardecki explained. "My husband and I need lots of volunteers to make this work each year and it's a wonderful event for anyone who loves music."

For more information, visit www.wipac.org.

From left, recently departed head of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative in Washington Jaushieh Joseph Wu and his wife Caroline Su, Board Chairwoman of the Washington International Piano Arts Council (WIPAC) Chateau Gardecki, and winner of the 2008 Washington International Piano Artists Competition Ricker Choi attend the WIPAC reception held at the French Embassy. Another winner of the competition was Rebecca Davis, a homemaker from Minnesota (front page), who won the Audience Award and Honorable Mention from the press jurors.

Photo: Gail Scott