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WIPAC 2017 Piano Competition Final: “Making Music Flourish”

by [Lisa McFarren-Polgar](#) • August 12, 2017

“Music is the oxygen of the human soul.” These few words, expressed by the Ambassador of Malta Pierreclive Agius during the WIPAC Award Ceremony could not have more succinctly captured the spirit of the 15th Washington International Piano Artists Competition. From the 23 initial contestants to the final first prize winner, all gave meaning to those words with their inspiring performances of piano works spanning centuries of the classical music tradition.

In the elegant and gold leaf trimmed setting of the Cosmos Club in Washington, DC, the air of suspense was clear as the audience awaited the judges’ decision on the winners of the WIPAC 2017 Competition. The six finalists competed in the last round for first, second and third place, and for a series of special awards.

The audience was hosted by WIPAC to cocktails and hors d’oeuvres as the judges deliberated. Finally, the winners were announced to great enthusiasm followed by a gourmet celebratory dinner.

First prize was awarded to pianist Hiroaki Taniguchi of Japan who captured everyone’s attention from the preliminary rounds with exciting performances of works by Edward Grieg, Dmitry Kabalevsky, Chopin, Brahms, Liszt and Messiaen. Mr. Tanaguchi built a musical architectural structure in his selection of pieces that culminated in the finals. Commenting to an audience member who complimented him on his preliminary and semi-final performances, Mr. Taniguchi responded with a twinkle in his eye, “Wait until you hear the final.”

And indeed, it must have been the last piece of his performance of Alberto Ginastera’s “Danzas Argentinas Opus 2,” that sealed the judges’ decision to select him as first place

winner. His performance reflected his virtuosity as well as the spontaneity and excitement that he was able to generate.

Mr. Ferdy Talan was chosen as second place winner. A pianist of immense talent, Mr. Talan is an innovator in his choice of most original programming. He is a champion of the music of new composers as well as lesser known pieces from the standard repertoire of well-known composers. Mr. Talan's performances of works by Bach, York Bowen, Edward Grieg, Franz Liszt and Nicolai Kapustin were mesmerizing, as the pianist is endowed with a music personality that captured the audience's attention from beginning to end.

Third prize was awarded to Mr. Andy Liao whose interpretive skills enthralled the audience throughout the competition with works by Schubert, Debussy, Abram Chasins, Rachmaninoff, Haydn and Franz Liszt. The Hungarian Rhapsody No. 12 of Franz Liszt was Andy Liao's "finale" which left a lasting impression of his vast palette of musical poetic expression. His performance must have made it more difficult for the judges to choose the order of the three finalist pianists.

Special Awards were presented in the following categories: MOST IMAGINATIVE PROGRAMMING, Ferdy Talan; ROMANTIC PERIOD, **Simon Finlow, Schumann Novelette in F Major**; BAROQUE PERIOD, **Joseph Lipare, Scarlatti Sonata**; CLASSICAL PERIOD, **Andy Liao, Haydn Sonata in B Minor**; COMTEMPORARY PERIOD, **Alexandra Nica, Enescu & Ciortea: Gypsy Dance & Prelude**; BACH PERFORMANCE, **I-wen Tseng, Tocatta in E Minor**; BEETHOVEN PERFORMANCE, **Simon Finlow, Sonata, Op. 10, No. 3**; CHOPIN PERFORMANCE, **Ferdy Talan, Tarantella**; LISZT PERFORMANCE, **Hiroaki Taniguchi, St. Francis Walking on the Waves**; RAVEL PERFORMANCE, Kotomi Suzuki, Tombeau de Couperin Selections.

The PRESS JURY AWARD as well as the AUDIENCE AWARD went to **Hiroaki Taniguchi**.

Michael Davidson, Chairman of the WIPAC jury, announced the winners and hoped that the competition organizers had succeeded in their goal to contribute to the artistic growth of the performers beyond the confines of the competition.

Several of the contestants expressed appreciation for the warm welcome that they received, and praised the organizers, Board Co-Chairs and Founders, Chateau Gardecki and John Gardecki for the recognition they gave to all the participants.

President of WIPAC, Clayton Eisinger, acknowledged the years long contribution of Austin Hay as the First Prize Award donor. The Second prize was co-sponsored by Joyce Hagel-Silverman, Dr. James and Dr. Wanda Trefil. Third Prize co-sponsors were Linda and Wayne Sharp as well as the Panamerican-Panafrican Association in memory of pianist Robert Pritchard.

This year, the competition increased its monetary awards upon the recommendation of the Competition Co-Chair, Dr. Wanda Trefil, who graciously presented the awards to the contestants. The distinguished jury included Raymond Jackson, Frank Conlon, Haskell Small, Janice Weber, Thomas Pandolfi, Laurence Berman. Participating as the Press Jury were Jan Duplain and Henri Polgar.

