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WIPAC's Festival of Music Brings the World Closer Together

by [H and L Polgar](#) • August 9, 2018

"Somewhere in the world, someone is practicing for another WIPAC event." As the Washington International Piano Artists Competition was drawing to a close with the announcement of the winners, those words by its President, Michael Davidson, attest to the international stature that the competition has gained as a premier classical music event over 16 years.

And so it was that in the magnificent gilded hall of the Cosmos Club in Washington DC, the pianists who had travelled from Japan, Peru, China, Macedonia, the Dominican Republic, South Korea, France and the US, awaited the results. After an intensive four days of performances by 24 pianists, 6 finalists emerged to compete on Sunday to determine the first, second and third prize winners as well as the winners of a series of repertoire awards.

And the winners were: first prize, Yiran Wang of China; second prize, Jeni Kong of South Korea; and third prize, Jeannie Craig of the USA. Honorable mention awards were given to Joseph Lipare, Simon Finlow, and Anqi Wang.

Yiran Wang dominated the landscape from the early start with his pianistic prowess. His stylistic mastery of the instrument was very conducive for the ideal piano competition competitor. Especially, his performance of the Liszt *Après une lecture de Dante, Fantasia quasi Sonata S.161/7* was phenomenal, making the most difficult pieces look relatively easy to play. His performance the previous day of the Scriabin *Fantasia Opus 28*, and the Ginastera *Danzas Argentinas, Opus 2* were also remarkable.

Jeni Kong was a pianist of great refinement and strength. Her keen interpretation of the *Prelude No 12 of the Feux d'Artifice* of Debussy, and the Chopin *Ballade No 1 G minor, Op 23* together with a polished stage presence, were memorable.

One of the highlights of the finals was the performance of pianist Jeannie Craig, whose remarkable artistry left the listeners with a desire to hear her play again. She embodied that unknown quality of a performer that draws the audience to listen to her intently. The performance of the Bach *Prelude and Fugue in G-sharp minor WTC 1*, and the Haydn *Sonata in E flat major 1st movement*, and the Chopin *Ballade No.1 in G minor* reveals a musician with an intangible performance quality.

Mr. Jerome Barry, Director of the noted Embassy Series, acted as Master of Ceremonies and introduced the contestants with graciousness and flair.

Donning her signature chapeau, WIPAC Founder Chateau Gardecki presided over the event in her inimitable way, expressing appreciation for the pianists' hard work. Mr. Michael Davidson

acknowledged the contributions and efforts of the WIPAC donors and volunteers. He and his wife, Portia Davidson, have been longtime supporters of WIPAC.

Davidson thanked the Committee Co-Chairpersons, Diane Merriam and Suzanne Finney, as well as Committee-member Jean Wigham. and of course, WIPAC founders Chateau and John Gardecki. Mr. Davidson also paid tribute to the jurors. Dr. Raymond Jackson, Professor Frank Conlon, Laurence Berman, Thomas Pandolfi, Eric Himy, Janice Weber and Matthew Palumbo. He especially acknowledged that Dr. Jackson and Professor Conlon have presided as jurors at every WIPAC competition event since its inception in 2001. Mr. Davidson also thanked Co-Chairs of the Jury Dr. Pascal Salomon and Mr. Georges Mihaies for presiding over the jury.

WIPAC was graced with the presence of the Ambassador of Malta, H.E. Pierreclive Agius, who expressed appreciation for being invited to WIPAC events....."you promote the skill of the arts and the prince of musical instruments, the piano." Sadly, the Ambassador announced that he is leaving Washington, although "retaining friends who inspire us at the end of the day. We want to remember evenings together and moments we have shared."

Also present was the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Argentina, Mr. Gerardo and Mrs. Diaz Bartolome, who announced that the Argentine Embassy will be hosting WIPAC's next gala event, with "Argentine cuisine and Malbec, and the Tango." He expressed his pleasure that pianists Yiran Wang, Josphe Lipare and Martin Gallegos, chose to perform works by two of Argentina's most distinguished composers, Alberto Ginastera and Astor Piazzolla.

The generosity of WIPAC volunteers and supporters is remarkable, as year after year, they offer substantial contributions to the special pianist awards. The contributors include Austin Hay for the First Prize Award; Joyce Silverman-Hagel and Dr. James Trefil and Wanda O'Brien-Trefil for the Second Prize and DeLeon Khanna Family Grant for the Third prize.

The ceramic piano art piece given to the First Prize winner was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Leonid Kelner.

Chateau Gardecki gave special recognition to Mrs. Lola Reinsch, of the Reinsch Foundation and Benefactor of the 2018 Festival of Music.

Following are the repertoire related awards:

Best performance of Bach work awarded to Jeannie Craig, donated by Portia Davidson.

Best Performance of a Beethoven piece awarded to Jeni Kong, donated by Dr. Joyce Silverman-Hagel.

Best performance of a Chopin work awarded to Yiran Wang, donated by Dr. Wanda O'Brien-Trefil.

Best performance of a Latin American Composer awarded to Joseph Lipare, donated by Erik and Alix Sundquist.

Best performance of a Liszt work awarded to Yiran Wang, donated by Judith Ramage.

Best performance of a Ravel work awarded to Keiko Kircher, donated by Michael Davidson.

Best performance of Contemporary period awarded to Martin Gallegos, donated in memoriam of Col. Raymond Shreckengost.

Best performance of a Baroque work awarded to Martin Gallegos, donated by Nicole d'Amecourt and Wendy Graham.

Best performance of a classical piece awarded to Jeannie Craig, donated by Clayton and Suzanne Eisinger.

Best performance of a Romantic work awarded to Yiran Wang, donated by Dr. Wayne and Linda Sharp.

Best imaginative program awarded to Paul Kosak, donated in memory of William S. Harris..

The Press Jury award was given to Jeni Kong, and the Audience Award was given to Yiran Wang, donated by the Panamerican-Panafrican Association in memoriam to the late pianist, Dr. Robert Pritchard. These awardees were also presented with the historic 1962 recording by pianist Pritchard, the first African American pianist to make a classical piano music recording. The recording has been added to the Smithsonian Folkways collection.

This year, the special "Spencer Huffman Award" was given for the World Premiere performance of a Spencer Huffman work performed by Toshe Temelkov and given by Huffman's widow, Priscilla Huffman.

Renowned pianists and WIPAC judges, Thomas Pandolfi and Janice Weber shared their insights on piano performance in two very well received Master Classes.

Inarguably, listening to the many talented performers with varied interpretations of works by diverse composers, has a transformative effect in refining the sensibilities of the listener. WIPAC's yearly Festival of Music creates a greater appreciation for the energy and hard work that the musicians invest in the "art of piano performance."

Mark your calendars for WIPAC's Annual Fundraising Gala "A Night of Tango" at the Embassy of Argentina on November 16.

(A special thank you to Irene Lipare for her photo contributions to this article)











