

Final review

The piano duo competition of the International Pianoduo Society of Japan (IPDA) took place on the 9th and 10th of October 2016 at the Nihon University in Tokyo. It was a great honour and joy for my wife Romana Danhel-Kolb and me to be invited as a German piano duo on this jury. We worked together with colleagues from Japan, Korea and England in the second round of elimination and in the final round. The atmosphere within the jury was very pleasant and the organization of the competition was perfect. The acoustics of the concert hall as well as the tone of the pianos impressed us with their high quality. Under these conditions, we could concentrate undisturbed on the qualities of the performers and enjoy and evaluate the musical contributions. This was thanks to the organization by the chairman, Prof. Sumiko Minemura and Mr. Shinichi Minemura.

We were eagerly awaiting the interpretations of all the piano duos, who had come to Tokyo mainly from Japan, Korea, China, Russia, America and Germany .

The repertoire chosen by the participants for IPDA-Competition proved to be interesting and sometimes unusual.

In the freely selectable repertoire certain special kind of contemporary music and also romantic and impressionistic works played a much larger role than the classics of the piano duo literature such as Mozart and Schubert.

Some pieces rarely heard in Europe were selected several times by the participants: Very popular was, for example, the work "Midare" op.11 by Hisatada Otaka, a piece with some stylistic similarities to music of Maurice Ravel.

Likewise often played were pieces by A. Rosenblatt. His music mainly contains stereotypes of popular or folkloristic music, which are mostly fused by the composer, who also seems to like rhapsodic forms.

From our personal point of view, it was very pleasing that, in addition to the established works of the concert repertoire from Ravel, Debussy, Stravinsky and Lutoslawsky, also rare contemporary repertoire was heard.

This included the work "Figures des Résonances" by H. Dutilleux, performed by the third prizewinners Yaoyue HUANG (USA ~ China) and Scott SHERMAN (USA), or the sophisticated „Prelude and fugue in g-sharp minor

op.29" by S.I. Tanejev, very expressively played by Yoshihiro OTA and Moeko WADA.

Because the IPDA competition alternates each year between composition and performance of four-hands piano-music, and I myself won the first prize with my composition "Three Epigrams" in 2015, this piece became a required piece for all duos in the Final Round on the 10 of October 2016. The first prize-winners Anastasiya Rogaleva and Dmitrii Petrov impressed us very much with their risk-taking attitude when they played my "Three Epigrams" in the final round. In quite an other way the Duo Yoshihiro OTA and Moeko WADA, who received the Kawai special prize gave me a very well-thought-out and precise interpretation with the most accurate realization of the performance notes in my score.

I think every pianist who is working as a piano duo knows it : if you accept the aim of higher musical spontaneity, you thereby take risks in the highly sensitive and delicate synchronisation of play. The other way seems to be the path of absolute metronomic control, including the danger of a loss of liveliness. As a listener and juror, one hopes, of course, for a genuine duo play: the happy fusion of sensitive musicality, stylistically appropriate agogic play of both pianists, combined with perfect synchron play and sophisticated interpretation with optimal sound balance etc. How difficult it is to achieve this!

As a rule, this kind of perfection can only be achieved by two souls relationship and a lot of practising together, usually over many years. Also the weighting of these artistic aspects when working in a jury is, of course, always partially subjective. However, I believe that the most convincing achievements are generally detected and have also found their form of recognition in this competition, whether as a main prize or a special prize.

Since it is impossible to summarize the many impressions of this competition, I would like to mention at least some program contributions and their performers, which have particularly impressed me:

"Polovtsian dances" from "Prince Igor" in very good balance of sound from the first prizewinners Anastasiya Rogaleva and Dmitrii Petrov from Russia. The Japanese sisters Risa and Aya Sakamoto (second prize and Steinway Award) with their very impressively virtuosic version of Igor Stravinsky's "Three movements from Petrouchka".

"Figures des Résonances" by H. Dutilleux, well played by
Yaoyue HUANG and Scott SHERMAN (USA).

Young-Ae KWON and Eunran KIM from Korea impressed with the high
quality level in all their pieces.

I liked the technically and musically very impressive interpretation of M.
Ravels "La Valse" by Naoko KATO, and Miki FUKUSHIMA.

I also liked the very lively and humorous version of "Le boef sur le toit" by
Darius Milhaud, played by Ji Eun PARK and Chae Lin KIM (Germany/ Korea).

And finally, I would like to thank all the duos whom I have not been able to
highlight here and I wish all the best for the future development and career
for them all.

Oliver Kolb