FORUM

# MUSIC COMPETITIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Transcription of a panel discussion led by John Allison with the participation of representatives of leading international music competitions:
Peter Paul Kainrath (Busoni)
Jacques Marquis (Van Cliburn)
Michel-Etienne Van Neste (Queen Elisabeth)
Artur Szklener (Chopin)
Richard Rodzinski

*This Forum is based on a panel discussion held in Warsaw on 22 October 2015 at the Chopin Institute's conference on 'The Competition, or Music Put to the Test'. An audience of approximately fifty people was present; some of the comments transcribed here were made from the floor rather than by panellists. This account of the 90-minute discussion has been streamlined and edited to remove redundant repetition and conversational filler.*

**John Allison:** I think we should start with a few introductions. At the end [of the table] we have Jacques Marquis from the Van Cliburn, who also helped to establish the Montreal Competition in his native Canada. Then we have Peter Paul Kainrath, who is not only the chief of the Busoni Competition, but a veteran himself of playing in and indeed winning competitions. I think Artur Szklener needs no introduction here, just a huge round of applause for a very successful [Chopin] competition. And then we have Michel-Etienne Van Neste, from the Queen Elisabeth in Brussels, and Richard Rodzinski, who was nearly a quarter of a century at Van Cliburn and more recently at the Tchaikovsky and much else besides.

Bartók famously, or perhaps I should say notoriously, said that competitions are for horses. But I'd like to think that competitions are also for musicians, which, of course, is why we have all gathered here in Warsaw. And now, with exciting results behind us, I think it's time to reflect a little on the nature of competitions.

I think we need to start by thinking what competitions have to do with music itself, to what extent competitions are good for promoting music. Perhaps we should start with Artur Szklener, simply because the national excitement generated here by the Chopin Competition, I'm sure everyone will agree, has done absolutely no harm to music.

**Artur Szklener:** Thank you very much for those kind words. I certainly shouldn't be the only one with the applause, but thank you. There is no doubt that a competition, especially one as well recognised as ours, is a powerful tool for promoting classical music and all the values it embodies, and those two aspects were very important for us. One was internal: we wanted to use this as a tool to show classical music to people who are not musically educated and who do not have access to such music or even don't think about accessing it. We still don't have the official statistics, but from the signals we've received, we are very optimistic about that. It worked. We have had very strong feedback that people who are generally not interested in classical music started following us, discussing the competition and, above all, listening to the music. Our goal now is to build a community based on those people who wanted to be active partners or members of this event, who had to register and create accounts.

So one basic goal was first to present the competition, then bring the listeners on board, make the competition attractive and keep that for the future.

The second goal was to promote Polish culture internationally and to remind people abroad that something like the Chopin Competition and Chopin's music exist.

**John Allison:** I realise that the Chopin Competition has had a long history of being a national event, one that's been followed very closely – obviously social media and all the rest has opened that up even more – but I wonder about looking at a different culture. We've got two North Americans on the panel here. Richard first: in your day, to what extent do you think the Cliburn actually promoted music? It had a very strong local following, but what about nationally?

**Richard Rodzinski:** Nationally it had an enormous following, more and more because of the internet. Basically I think audiences – as Dr Szklener was talking about – are fascinated by the competitive

aspects. They like youth – the discovery of youth. That of course is true in film, in television, in ballet. People like fresh, young talent. But the competitive element is something that wraps in audiences that have never before been that interested in classical music, and we've had enormous success. We asked many of the people to send us emails, to then be presented to our sponsors, to show what it meant to them. And these booklets that we created – the audience response was phenomenal. They were saying: 'this restores our faith in young people', or 'I cancelled my vacation to stay on the internet', or 'I think I'll be fired from my job because I have my computer on under the table all the time'. This brought in passionate followers, and I think we did a tremendous amount to promote classical music.

John Allison: Jacques, do you feel similarly? Is there any difference, in your experience of the promotional aspect of competitions, between Canada and the United States, where you are now?

Jacques Marquis: Obviously, we're not in Europe. I think a competition is interesting in that it's a moment in time, and people like this 'festival' atmosphere. If you're an orchestra or an opera and you have a season, it's not so easy to bring all the people to your events. I agree with Richard: everybody likes the competitive aspect, because there's always a human interest. And the young kids, as I've realised over the years now, are such exceptional human beings – interesting, and over-achievers. They're not only pianists, but they have an international perspective on a lot of things, and it's fascinating to share these people with the public. Not only the music, but also the international culture.

John Allison: Michel-Etienne, what about you? What do you feel about this nowadays? With so many aspects to the media, do you think that competitions are in a sense swallowed up by the competition of other things, by other distractions, or is it something that you find attracts attention? Are we talking about competitions vying for attention with other media or do you find that everything works together? And I don't mean just piano competitions, because you look after other competitions as well.

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: Probably everything works together. I would say that everything is more and more globalised. We live in a very international world. In music competitions, especially with the piano, it is fascinating to see the [types of] evaluation in Asia. There the competitive aspect is perhaps a little more important than in our Western culture, as is shown in the results of the leading competitions today, where you have more and more young Asians. The media are indeed a great tool and help to make Western classical music popular. So besides the promotion of young talents, you have also the opportunity to expand knowledge of the heritage of Western classical music, which is very important and which was behind the founding of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in 1937, after the ideas of Eugène Ysaÿe.

John Allison: Peter Paul, we see the phenomenon of people establishing careers these days through media such as YouTube and other popular platforms. Do you feel that competitions are just as important as ever, more important, or are they losing ground as a way of establishing new careers?

Peter Paul Kainrath: Nice question! I see a danger in this, because of course we are trying to merge virtual reality with live concert experience. I see on the one hand that people are looking for live experiences, so audiences are becoming bigger. We were commenting on this yesterday with Richard: in the Chopin Competition, the presence of the media, of TV, is very strong. I don't think that is the right direction for us. We should be very specific about separating live concert performance and experience. And also how the young artists deal with that is totally different from the digital, virtual reality. I don't know if it is

the right direction to increase our audience with all this live streaming, downloading and so on.

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: Today, the new media and technology probably takes too much attention and too much investment from our organisations. I don't know the part we need to invest, each of us, in communication, but it's become extremely important in comparison with twenty years ago, when we could focus on other aspects like having a good concert hall, very good orchestras, very good conductors... So perhaps that can be a little dangerous.

Richard Rodzinski: I think one of the critical things to try to emphasise is: great, look at it on your screens, but this is not the concert hall experience; you must come to the concert hall. And this is very true obviously for piano recitals; it's incredibly true for opera. What you see on the little tube has nothing to do with the opera experience.

John Allison: Yes, but – to jump to opera for a moment – everybody knows that the Met[ropolitan Opera in New York] is to a certain extent cannibalising its audience with the telecasts. But here at least most of the late rounds of the competition looked pretty sold out. So surely you are not jeopardising your audience: you are increasing it.

Richard Rodzinski: Yes, but the subtext has always got to be: do come to the concert hall, because that's where you really experience it. I think that was one of the dangers yesterday, where I was a little bit concerned about whether we are being more a concert hall or a television studio, because some of the cameras were beginning to seriously interfere with the experience. And one has to be very conscious that it's primarily the concert hall; television comes later.

Artur Szklener: I would like to stress that here in Warsaw we've had endless discussions about that: whether the price we have to pay for promotion is not too high. In Poland, where the general public is not very well educated in music – in comparison with Britain, for example – there's a huge difference. I think that this price is not too high, but at the same time we are constantly trying to send the message that it is completely different, that personal experience cannot be substituted with anything else. And there's another point, which is obviously very difficult, because it concerns huge investment in terms of the cities or even the countries... We are arguing here in Warsaw that there isn't a proper concert hall for such an event as the Chopin Competition, because a year and a half before the competition, for instance, we sold all the tickets, and we could have sold several times more. All these elements show the potential value of the competition.

Jacques Marquis: My favourite story is about an owner of the Chicago Blackhawks hockey team. People were saying to him: 'We have to put the games on television.' And he said: 'No! People won't come to the arena if you put the game on television.' Until he sold the club, he remained against the idea. The new owner put the games on television, more people came more to the hall, people bought Chicago Blackhawks stuff and the franchise went ballistic moneywise, because people were coming. Perhaps I'm being idealistic with regard to classical music, but I think we could apply that kind of rule: the content always has to be excellent, and the point is to bring people to the hall. We have to use this magnificent tool to get the listeners in and also knowledgeable of what we're doing, because there are many people who think that classical music, and especially piano, is not for them, that it's an elite thing. But actually, when we put the piano outside and have pianists playing there, suddenly they say: 'Hey, this is fun!' They are afraid of the hall, as well as the 'classical world'. So we have to go to them and present the music to them.

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: I think it's our duty as a competition to help make classical music accessible. However, I would like to mention that during the competition in Brussels, we also had the chance, like the Chopin, to have great media exposure and live broadcasts on TV and radio. The jury members are sometimes very disturbed, because they listen to the concert in the concert hall, but when they go back to the hotel, during the night, they can listen to it again. And they have totally different opinions when they watch on television or the internet. So that's a very important aspect.

Peter Paul Kainrath: There is another aspect. If we are collaborating with TV broadcasting companies, how much scope are we giving them to influence our time structure and the conditions in the hall? It was very noisy here, and the cameras were constantly moving. It's not a criticism, but I can imagine that artists like Zimerman or Sokolov would never accept such conditions. We had also the experience some years ago that we were asked by the TV company not to put contemporary music in the final round, because it wasn't suitable for a huge audience. So it's a tough compromise that we need to make with them.

John Allison: We've talked about concert hall versus television studio. A moment ago Richard raised an interesting point [in discussion] with me, saying: 'Are we in a concert or a university exam?' The format of these recitals, when somebody plays for an hour without any sort of interaction with the audience… Artur, do you feel that it's an old-fashioned way of doing things? Should it change? Would applause distract the players or would it encourage them? Would they feel that they're giving a live performance as opposed to a university exam? It feels quite sterile sitting for an hour without any interaction.

Artur Szklener: There was some discussion about that, whether it would disturb the artist or give him or her some feedback that would help. I don't know the answer. We had discussions with former participants after the competition, asking about all these disturbing elements. They were constantly repeating that they didn't notice anything, and nothing disturbed them, that it was such an important moment in their life that only those with one hundred per cent concentration could have played to their potential. That, with the addition of considerable stress, made them completely impervious to any disturbance.

In the future we hope to be much stronger over making arrangements with television and with the camera crew. We have had some success in these negotiations. In 2010, there was a big 'arm' moving above the audience. We succeeded in removing that and in not adding other cameras, but the camera in front of the audience was very difficult to get removed. Yet I think this competition was also a lesson, and I don't think it's necessary to have this camera, and so we will be very strong about not having it.

John Allison: The level of applause is a very important human thing, and it can seem a little bit solemn without it. It reminds me of *Parsifal* in Germany in the old days, which was treated as an almost religious experiment with no applause until the end of the whole opera.

Richard Rodzinski: At the Cliburn, when we welcomed all the competitors – the orientation session – I said there are three rules that you have to all observe: one is – don't play for the jury; number two – don't play for the jury; and number three – don't play for the jury. In other words, go out as if you are giving a concert and feel as relaxed as you possibly can; this is your natural medium. And these are not young students. Look at Mr Cho, for instance, who's already performed with Gergiev all over the place. These are young professionals. If they feel that they're actually giving a concert, that is their natural habitat, and I think that makes them much more comfortable.

John Allison: We keep on talking about young artists, and I think we would all acknowledge that competitions are important for young people's careers. All competitions seem to be about new talent. And I wonder for a moment whether this is ageist. If the purpose of competition is to spot talent, what does age matter?

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: Probably it's just an option. Of course, you will be more popular as a competition with young talent. I'm not sure a competition can do something for a person of forty years of age, who might not have the profile to compete.

John Allison: You mean they would have had a slightly problematic career before, which has held them back?

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: It happens a lot with voice competitions, for example.

Jacques Marquis: When you think of age, since the mandate of all these competitions is to launch a career or help to enhance it, then naturally under-eighteen is not an option, because you also have to send the mother on tour as well. But just to come back to applause: this is not a test. Interaction with the public and the pianist, as well as new media… I think the attraction for young people today in following competitions is that they can post their impressions. When you listen, you can interact with people all around and say: 'What do you think of him?' 'Hm, not bad!' And if you want to bring young kids to the concert hall, that's an interesting way to do it.

John Allison: Obviously there has to be an age limit if we're talking about young artists, but I wonder what the optimum age would be, because, as Richard has just said, a lot of people, particularly in a big, established, famous competition like this, are already young professionals. Yet there's the question of emotional maturity: a lot of artists haven't lived in a way that might deepen their interpretations. Is there an optimum age? Would anybody here like to see a higher age limit on competitions, or even lower, or do most competitions have it about right?

Artur Szklener: I might say a word, because we've just changed our age range for this competition. We allowed younger people. It was seventeen, but we changed it to sixteen. Jury members, especially during the preliminary round, were not so enthusiastic about this change. Probably seventeen is a better borderline. The argument was that our competition is organised only every five years, and that is a huge lapse of time. So if somebody is sixteen and their career is developing well, it might be that at the age of twenty-one they are not interested anymore in the competition.

John Allison: Could I ask what the age limits of your respective competitions are?

Jacques Marquis: 18–30.

Peter Paul Kainrath: 16–30.

Artur Szklener: 16–30.

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: 18–30. And we changed it. Actually we did the opposite to what was done in the Chopin: we made the lower limit higher than it was before.

John Allison: And for singers as well as instrumentalists?

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: Yes, the same age.

Richard Rodzinski: At the Tchaikovsky, I also wanted to keep 18 to 30, but Gergiev was insisting on 16–30, because he said Sokolov, who was one of the greatest winners, won at sixteen. I thought, because again I don't think they have emotional maturity, and if competitions are to help launch careers right away, sixteen is too young, with or without the mothers going along. But then, very interestingly, when the results came in, Gergiev turned to me and said: 'Look, Mr Cho was seventeen when he won the bronze medal. He would not have won had we had eighteen.'

John Allison: Speaking of such tender young ages, some people have wise parents or teachers, and others don't. And I wonder, as competition directors, whether you welcome the fact that competitions are an

integral part of the calendar of agents and managers and indeed record companies these days. Is it a necessary part of the promotion? Or would you rather see in some cases an intermediary stage? I'm thinking, for example, of Honens, in Canada, where people actually manage the early careers. Do young winners need protecting from the rough and tumble of the music industry?

Jacques Marquis: Yes, they do. We have a huge responsibility to these winners to manage their early career, which we do at the Cliburn. Because they're flavour of the month, suddenly everybody will want the gold medallist to play, but especially when you're that young – and I'm talking about eighteen to thirty – you have to manage your time, your practice, learning new repertoire. Then what happens is we have a lot of engagements the first year, fewer the second year and fewer the third, or a switch to an agent. But actually it should be the reverse: it should begin slowly. When Radu Lupu won the Cliburn, in 1966, the ladies of Fort Worth told him: 'Okay, now we'll do concerts with you.' And he said: 'No, no, no, I'm going back to Moscow to practise.' He built his career very slowly. And I think this is the path. We should be very keen for young artists to take their time. Naturally they would love to have the money, yet we have to tell them... Sometimes they listen, sometimes not.

John Allison: Like it or not, we all are part of the so-called music industry. Do you feel that it's a dangerous place?

Richard Rodzinski: Yes. It is absolutely dangerous, and as Jacques was saying, one has to carefully manage. I feel some remorse at not having held back some people earlier in the competition who should been held back and should have been more tightly managed, because they started too early and bad things happened.

Artur Szklener: We try to help them and protect them from the industry for as long as we can and as long as they actually want to be independent. We've done a great deal to change the situation for this competition. We are preparing ourselves for the next competition, to do it even more precisely, looking for places that would be beneficial for them, to promote them, but without any potential harm, and also to protect them from signing any premature contracts. Just to clarify the nature of the contract we now have with Deutsche Grammophon: the CD recording from the competition doesn't bind them in any sense. We were very anxious that Deutsche Grammophon only promotes them, and they still have all their freedom. So it's as if we had released this record, but obviously this relationship helps with promotion. So I think that it's crucial for young winners to have such protection. As a public institution, our mission does not demand any commercial results, and we're going to use that possibility to promote not only the young artists who are not on the level of winning the competition, but also the winners.

John Allison: Peter Paul, I assume that you think the value outweighs the danger?

Peter Paul Kainrath: We don't have the financial means that you need to establish real, professional management. Instead, we are looking to guide them, and arrange possible meetings with decision-makers. This is more important for us than improvising a role as management or developing a management tool.

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: We all share a responsibility. In the Queen Elisabeth Competition, there are several options. We don't want to be too protective, because the world is very hard: it has become extremely competitive, and we believe that the jury selects all-round musicians who are supposed to be ready for an international career. With all the people visiting the Queen Elisabeth, the media exposure, and the presence of agents and concert organisers, we try to encourage the candidates with guidance, contacts and

informal conversations; we encourage them to be in the world, in reality. Of course, there are sometimes risks, but that's the game.

Richard Rodzinski: I completely agree with Michel-Etienne, because in my opinion many of the competitors have had considerable experience. They are mature enough, they are able to handle it, and they are using the competition as a springboard to a career. At that point you want to give them everything you possibly can: yes, go out there and don't do two hundred concerts a year, do perhaps seventy or something and have a good recording contract. But … certainly at the Cliburn, they are young professionals ready for a career.

Peter Paul Kainrath: Perhaps instead of protection, guided exposure, because we are all looking to expose them to musical life, and not protect them.

Artur Szklener: Such discussions are important, because during the last few years we have observed pianists, winners of major competitions, who have then made some serious misjudgements. Obviously that's their decision – if they've taken it already and have a contract or something like that, we can't stop them, and we wouldn't dream of it; but I think it's very important to help them at the start.

John Allison: I'm interested to see how unnatural everybody thinks the competition environment is. I think what we seem to be agreeing is that it's not all that different from the pressures of another high-profile performance. I'm sorry to come back to television or indeed internet, but that's something which you don't normally get in an average concert, not as a young artist. Do you think that the TV exposure does add pressure, add to nerves, or is it an extension of the concert hall and an example of the pressure that people have to get used to if they're going to make it to the top?

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: Definitely so. The pressure is huge; the exposure, the responsibility for those who put them in front of the media, is huge. And I'm sure that the musicians are very aware of that and can be daunted by it.

Jacques Marquis: At the same time, it's part of what's coming to them. It's part of managing the concerts, the public, the media afterwards, the sponsors… It's what they're going to do for the rest of their lives. It's in real time, a first interview experience. It's hard, but life is hard as well after that.

Artur Szklener: We conducted some research after the last competition among the participants, and most of them were of the same opinion. First of all, they considered that having this real-life experience showed them what was in front of them, what was good for them. And they were very mature in their approach: that obviously life is very difficult and they know that it's something they'll have to go through all the time. They knew that it was part of their skill-set that would be judged anyway, because they've got to be a concert artist to win the competition. That's the first element. Secondly, most of them indicated that the most stressful moment for them was not the October competition with all the cameras and streaming and so on, but the qualification round, without the cameras. This year we had the cameras [at the preliminary stage], but not in 2010. So the most stressful thing for them was the psychological aspect, because they knew that if they failed to pass the qualification round, they should look for another job. If they got to the competition, they were already 'winners'. That's something they've already proven to themselves. It gives them more peace of mind. In our competition, that's something we've observed.

John Allison: There is, I hope, an obvious answer to this question, but nevertheless I'm interested to know how you would persuade juries to look at it. What makes an ideal winner? Should it be a well-rounded artist or an impressive virtuoso? It would be good if it was both, but obviously virtuosity

is slightly easier to quantify than well-rounded artistry. How do you make the distinction? How do competitions make the distinction?

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: Probably the type of jury members you invite is a key factor. Some competitions invite lots of pedagogues, while others accept only professionals of the same discipline. Others will include agents or music critics. Presumably that will make a big difference. I think most of the competitions here around the table, besides the fact that some focus on the heritage of Chopin or Busoni, look for rounded musicians.

John Allison: I find it fascinating that the Chopin Competition jury is made up of past laureates, mostly at any rate. And that must be unique, because all the jurors are capable of playing everything that they're hearing and know the music intimately. But I wonder if this is good (and I'm assuming it is). Or whether we think that, as has just been said, sometimes juries should be drawn from across the profession to give the widest possible view. Then there is quite a thorny issue about teachers on juries. Peter Paul, am I right in thinking that Busoni excludes teachers, or is that not true?

Peter Paul Kainrath: We don't exclude them, because there are many artists who also teach, but our objective is not to be too close to the academic world, because that opens up lots of other problems. I think the presence of active artists in the jury gives another kind of value. But this question regarding juries is of constant concern, because you can hire the jury, you know the biographies, but then still an unresolved problem for me is how to create a common sense of what they are looking for. They are together, here in Warsaw, for three weeks, and perhaps it is a bit easier, because the objective is so clear: there's the Chopin style of playing, the tradition. In other competitions, including the Busoni, it's not so clear. I have found from experience that very often artists are not conscious of their own artistic, aesthetic position. So what do they do? They listen to the candidates and gauge how close they are to their own position. All this together brings you to the mathematical average of the judgement. This is for me a very problematic aspect, and I don't have a conclusive answer to it.

Jacques Marquis: Over the years, I've had teachers on the jury, and naturally their knowledge of the piano, of the repertoire, is fantastic. They are fantastic sources of knowledge regarding piano playing. I have never seen a teacher trying to influence anything. Obviously, all the scoring systems prevent a teacher voting for his or her student. But the problem is one of perception. Naturally, if I'm John Doe and I go to the hall and I see – 'Oh, Richard Rodzinski, the teacher is Peter Paul; oh, Peter Paul is on the jury, and Richard is in the final. Naturally!' This is the perception. It's crazy. We have to be very careful with this perception among the public and journalists. That's what they see. As I said, it's a shame, because when we don't have those resources, we're lacking a lot of knowledge, and we have to find pianists in their careers who know the repertoire as well, and we have to take them from their career for three weeks, and that is not easy to find.

Artur Szklener: I think many aspects were touched upon at the same time. Referring to the relationship between the type of jury and the verdict, we've obviously had this change in the type of jury in the history of the Chopin Competition. When there were more professional piano teachers from Poland, then the goal of this jury was to find a statistically ideal model for performing Chopin's works. That was, as I understand it, one of the reasons why, at some of the competitions, there wasn't a winner at all. This time, there was probably the maximum possible number of Chopin Competition laureates in the jury, but, because they are artists, I observed a slightly different

approach and a different outcome to the final, because all the finalists had slightly different personalities. So the jury members, because they are artists, were not looking for the statistically ideal performance. They were looking for a convincing artist who could play Chopin's music. That's something that helps in our competition – that we've got this one common element: the programme. At the same time, I think that the balance shifted towards a more general observing and judging of the pianists. As we have one of the jury members here, I think we can ask Professor John Rink about his perspective. Especially when you touched on another point: common criteria. A general view is one aspect, but another one is whether the jury members are actually judging the same thing when giving their marks. And in fact we never know, because we can't put that into the rules.

John Rink [in the audience]: This discussion is fascinating, not only in general, but with recent experience fresh in mind. When I started as a member of the jury, three weeks ago, I immediately sought advice from the chair and from a few other colleagues who had extensive experience whether we would use a set of developed criteria beyond what is in the rules in general terms, and the impression I immediately formed was that we would be left to our own devices; in other words, that we were not going to have the well-developed, well-defined criteria that are used in assessing examinations in a university context. When I examine at the Royal College of Music or the Guildhall School of Music, there are very specific criteria in terms of technical command, the manner of presentation, and so forth. And examiners are expected to use those criteria. Here the common criterion is really: can they play Chopin? And because of the breadth of the membership of the jury and the fact that we do have different life experiences with Chopin, that will be answered in different ways by each person. What I think worked extremely well in this jury was a shared understanding beyond that simple – of course very complex, but simple – point. Although we were strongly encouraged, as we were forming our judgements, to keep our views to ourselves, so that we didn't influence each other adversely, there was plenty of opportunity to compare notes as the process unfolded. After we'd handed in scores, we were free to discuss and share our perspectives, and I was very impressed by the degree to which our views were similar. Of course, there were some different opinions: there were candidates who divided the jury (you can see that from the scores that will be published in due course) – but there was also a very strong sense of solidarity, which I found refreshing. If I were to make recommendations to the competition organisers, I would not go so far as to say that there should be clearly defined common criteria, but what I would say is that the marking scale that we were required to use, up to 25 points, might usefully be broken into categories, so that, say, point 10 to point 13 would be poor, 14 to 17 would be good, 18 to 21 very good, and so on. That kind of division would help to build into jury members' minds a clear understanding of where a particular mark stood in the pecking order. As it happened in this case, we were proceeding largely on the basis of yes and no votes. That was the essential factor that determined the outcome. The mathematical averages could be made more robust if the marking scale itself was clearly defined, even if the criteria used to determine where a mark fell were left open.

John Allison: Thank you. One of your most important responsibilities [addressing the panel] is selecting the jury. Do you ever feel there is a danger of so-called professional jurors going from one competition to another? Does that lend experience and continuity or does it homogenise everything? Is that a problem for any of you?

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: So far, at the Queen Elisabeth Competition, we've never experienced any kind of problem. I am also present, and I know exactly what points are given during the process, under the control of the ministerial official. Perhaps it's better not to invite leading figures in piano education onto your jury of a piano competition. And of course you must have some well-prepared rules.

I wanted to go back to what Mr Rink was saying about defining quality descriptors for the different scores. We had that in the past, and we finally decided not to do it anymore, because for one person seventy is very good, and for another, if you're speaking of a scale of one hundred, eighty is perhaps just adequate, so it didn't mean a lot; it didn't add anything.

I would say that it's important with regard to the presence of teachers in the jury that you cannot punish the potential candidates. It would be terrible if some students could not attend because their teacher was in the jury. Our aim in Brussels is to not communicate the names of the jury members beforehand. We just give the names two days before the start of the competition, and during the pre-selection round on DVD, there is a presentation of the jury members who were on the jury of the DVDs; when candidates get the results of the DVDs, they know who was on the jury.

John Allison: John Rink mentioned marking schemes, or the way of scoring. Obviously we all know that each competition does it differently from the others – but Richard, I believe you've had a secret mathematical formula at Cliburn that you took to Moscow. Is this true? And what was the formula?

Richard Rodzinski: True... If I may, however, go back for one second, because I wanted to make a couple of comments about the selection of jurors. Professional jurors are very dangerous, because they have a lot of foreknowledge. They've heard competitors many times before, and I think to have a really good competition you need to have a level playing field, so everybody is hearing the participants in the same sequence for the first time. If they've heard them over and over, they bring baggage with them. Secondly, as far as teachers are concerned, Fanny Waterman once said to me: 'a good teacher, a really good teacher is able to bring out many more interpretations from a pianist than a professional pianist, who may have much more of a single view as to how a piece could go'. So she said a good teacher can be ideal. Thirdly, one thing that's very important in selecting jury members – probably it's not the case for the Chopin – is to know the jury members very well and speak with them beforehand about the kind of aesthetic that they have. Because sometimes you can have jury members who are from the Boulez, Stockhausen, Berg or Elliott Carter school, who will have a completely different approach from somebody who is part of the romantic tradition.

John Allison: Is it good to have a mix?

Richard Rodzinski: No! If you have a mix, you have a split. Then you end up with a common denominator, with a compromise. What you really want to know is what kind of a musician this competition goes in for.

John Allison: Are you saying that a competition should impose its own aesthetic?

Richard Rodzinski: Absolutely. I think the director of a competition should have a view. Are we a competition that is going to encourage serialism and Stockhausen, Berg, whatever? Or are we a competition more in the line of the Rachmaninoffs, Tchaikovskys, and so forth? I have experienced this before, where we had wonderful jury members, but we ended up having a compromise solution, which neither side really wanted.

John Allison: Because this is such an unscientific business, are you going to tell us what your secret formula is?

**Richard Rodzinski:** The secret formula began, I think, with Arie Vardi at the Rubinstein Competition and then was developed for a violin competition in the United States. And it's based on normalisation and equalisation. It's a tricky thing, but essentially it's a form of ranking and showing the difference: what you like, how much you would prefer number 2 to number 3, or number 3 to number 4. So it maximises the amount of expression that any jury member is trying to convey in his votes.

**John Allison:** Are jury members up to doing the maths?

**Richard Rodzinski:** It's all based on a standard deviation curve, which is used in much industry and in voting in complicated elections. No, in Russia they weren't up to it at all!

**Jacques Marquis:** Regarding the scoring, there are many systems in use. And the first thing, as CEO of the organisation, is that you have to feel right with your scoring system, because you have to explain it to jury members, you have to explain it to the journalists and to the audience, and the candidates have to be clear about it. For me, it's very important that everybody understands. And then with esteemed colleagues we have very different views on scoring systems, and that doesn't mean it's good or bad. Personally, you have to believe strongly in yours. I am a big believer in the yes or no process, because I think this process is 'tell me whom you want to listen to in the next stage'. And I like this view. It's simple, easily translated into Chinese or any other language. And also, it's about the concert experience, since we're managing or launching concert careers: 'Do you want to listen to this person once again, in the next round?' It's like: 'Do you want to buy a ticket to listen to this concert?'

**John Allison:** Yes, as a critic, that's the first thing I think of. Do I want to hear them again? What did I like about it?

**Artur Szklener:** I wanted to mention one thing. If the jury members are fair, and if the rules are clear and correct, without any serious errors, then even for a competition like ours, where everybody has a slightly different opinion on what proper Chopin rubato is, for instance, the finalists, the laureates, had one hundred percent [of the jury backing them], all three of them, and they were very close together after the third round. So one hundred percent of the jury members had the same opinion about them. When there are competitors who are controversial, who have some strong points and some weak points, there is scope for discussion. But as for the winners, if the rules are fit for purpose and if the jury members are fair, the winners are seen from the very beginning.

**Richard Rodzinski:** I would like to back that up, because I found that playing around with different systems at the same competition, whether it was a points system or a yes/no system or whatever, the top never changed. The top is clear.

**Peter Paul Kainrath:** To add to this discussion about professional jury members: I believe that the competition is a very special artistic moment in one's musical life. Having professional jury members, a small group travelling around the world over three or four years listening to more or less the same group of young pianists and artists – I find that cynical. This is one of my arguments against professional jury members. I see jury members as people who are giving a gift to us as organisers, and a gift to the young artists – to pay attention to them over two or three weeks. We know that we pay [jury members] only a small fee, which they could raise in half a recital. [What they are doing] is a kind of gift to the young generation. So this speaks against professional jury members. And another aspect also: teachers are not decision-makers in musical life. For me it's very important also to have in the jury some very experienced decision-makers from musical life.

Gustav Alink [in the audience]: May I add just a few comments to draw these opinions together. Jacques almost said it: if you make the adjudication system too sophisticated, it goes the wrong way. It has happened several times at competitions, where a very sophisticated system was used and then the jury members themselves did not understand the results anymore. It was fifty years ago, and it was like an experiment, you could say, at the ARD Competition in Munich, where they thought of splitting up the scores. The jury members had to give a separate score for technical performance, style and personal interpretation. And they combined all these scores. But in a perfect situation, you would have great musicians on the jury, and these are artists, not mathematicians, so they also have to understand the system. I believe – and Richard can say more precisely – that the computer system which was used several times was then copied by other competitions – yours and in Cleveland. But I believe now they are moving away from it again, because it became too complicated to understand. So it's a delicate matter and very difficult to find out what is the best way.

John Allison: Thank you. A different numbers question... I was struck by the size of the jury here this year. It's one of the biggest juries I've seen. Do any of you have strong views about the optimal size of the jury? Does a bigger jury mean a bigger range of opinions, but it's just as easy to come to the final result? Did any of you think the jury was too big?

Artur Szklener: For us, I think that a bigger jury gives you a bigger margin. So if somebody makes a mistake, as a jury member – I mean not that he or she has a different opinion, but that the person has lost focus for a moment, so there's an error – it won't be very important for the verdict. But definitely there is an optimum. This jury was definitely one of the biggest.

Jacques Marquis: Once again, I think it's the choice of the artistic director or CEO or whatever. You have to feel good with it. And if I could come back to what Richard said before, when I choose a jury member, I'm looking for a kind of chamber music ensemble, not an orchestra. You meet your jury members before, you talk with them, you see how they address the music and how they address the career of young kids, and [you determine that] they will not be frightened by the competitors (because some of them are pretty good). When you understand their approach, you build the jury in the sense that you then find the number you need.

John Allison: In recent Chopin Competition history there were two consecutive editions where no first prize was awarded. And we were having a discussion before about whether there is a question to be asked here: a first prize or not? What sort of signal does it send out if no first prize is awarded? Should we always be looking to award a first prize?

Richard Rodzinski: I feel very strongly about this. I was present [some years ago] when the Minister of Culture of Poland came into the jury room here and shouted at the jury: 'You have destroyed the Chopin Competition by not giving a first prize!' It was a very controversial and very interesting moment. The chairman of the jury defended his position, but... Basically, for whom do we do the competitions? Are we doing it for the young people? And if we are doing it for the young people, then by not giving a first prize we are saying: 'You're all lousy. None of you is good enough.' And what are we judging? Are we judging against some memory – 'Oh yes, that's the way Radu Lupu played in 1966 and this didn't match that standard'? Nonsense! People don't have an absolute memory.

John Allison: Would you say that, in a competition like this, Argerich and Zimerman, for example, have set a standard that always has to be upheld? Or do you have to look at each edition separately?

**Richard Rodzinski:** If we remember the way they really played… I once asked Radu Lupu, 'Now, you were obviously a clear winner. How did it feel?' He said: 'I wasn't very good.' People will think: 'Oh yes, when Radu Lupu won, that was great'. Not so! It becomes so arbitrary in your memory what a standard is. Basically what we're here to do is to say: 'This is the one we preferred more than anybody else, and therefore [he or] she got first prize.' That's how I feel.

**Artur Szklener:** There's a completely different message that the jury wants to send when they don't give the first prize, compared to the message that is understood by the public. The jury wants to send the message that there wasn't a person good enough to achieve the quality of this competition. And the public understands that the jury was not prepared or not good enough to choose the right person to win. I think that, especially for the monographic competitions, when there are, in the background, standards of some kind, it is very important to understand that, as we judge the performances – not the person, but the performance that we are listening to – we are judging *this* competition. I think it's a disaster for every competition not to give the first prize. And just one note: I had a serious conversation with the person who had second prize from one of the competitions that didn't give a winner. After a couple of decades, he still had this feeling that he wasn't good enough to achieve the first prize. That was really very disturbing for him, a very bad thing that happened to him – to the pianist who was actually the winner.

**John Allison:** I can understand that. Have any of you had recent editions of competitions where no first prize was awarded? No! There's one particularly famous Polish pianist today who made a career by not being in a competition, or rather walking out of a competition. I'm thinking of Anderszewski at Leeds. I just want to mention his name and also ask how you feel when you see that some of today's finest pianists, or musicians generally, were runners-up in a competition, that they've gone on to stardom, whereas the winners of the competitions have disappeared. I mean this is human nature, it's human error, but when you look back, do you think that competitions have made mistakes, selected the wrong person, or is that just life?

**Jacques Marquis:** A few years ago, Richard and I were sitting on the board of the World Federation of Competitions. And Richard gave the best example, that a competition is naturally a moment in time, and, like wine, it will evolve over time. And for me it's a result at that time, and you never know how these young kids will develop over time. Our mandate with the Cliburn is to support them as well as we can, and after that some of them will blossom more than others. And that's fine. We did what we had to do: we give them a stage and a presence.

**Michele-Etienne Van Neste:** Besides the picture, I think some jury members also keep in mind the potential. And I think that's part of the responsibility of the jury. Also to think: 'Is this person ready for a career? Can he or she be exposed immediately?'

**John Allison:** I wonder how you all feel when you look at the proliferation of other competitions today. Is that a good thing? Should there be as many competitions as there is room for? Or is it really, generally speaking, the old ones with long historic traditions that matter?

**Michel-Etienne Van Neste:** It's good for everybody to contribute, probably for the young musicians to have more opportunities to perform, to get experience, to work on different repertoires, to be well prepared, to have stage experience; and on the other hand it can help bring people to classical music, make them listen more to classical music. So it can be positive.

**Jacques Marquis:** I agree. With orchestras, you have the first-tier orchestras, second-tier orchestras, third-tier orchestras… We

have the same thing in competitions. When I was chairing the Montreal Competition, I knew that my winner would not be content with that, because it was a stepping stone to get to Chopin or Cliburn or Leeds or Queen Elisabeth. So we all have a mandate. You have to have a unique mandate in your competition: what you want to do, what you want to achieve. But I agree, it's a stepping stone to get to the big ones. And yesterday, when I met Charles Richard-Hamelin, the first thing he said was: 'I'm done with the Cliburn; I won second prize at Chopin'. So he won't come, because when you get to the big ones, after that you stop.

John Allison: Since we're sitting in Warsaw at the end of a wonderful competition, I wonder if we could chat about what it is that has given the Chopin Competition its record as the most successful in the world in selecting those winners who've gone on to famous careers. I'd like to consider in a moment its monographic nature. To return to our earlier question about the way in which competitions are scored and that judging is such an inexact science, I'm wondering whether the monographic focus here helps in finding what you might call the 'right winners'. Other competitions have to compare unlike with unlike. I'm not thinking just of repertoire, but in singing competitions, for example, we're putting coloratura sopranos against basses. Here we're just putting pianists against pianists. And not only that: Chopinists against Chopinists. Of course, if you play Chopin well, you can play a great range of the repertoire well. Am I answering my own question about what has made the Chopin Competition?

Artur Szklener: I think the answer is quite simple. Chopin's music is one of the most demanding and one of the most difficult for the pianist. So you first have to be a very good pianist even to start thinking about playing Chopin. And then, on top of all the technical and stylistic issues, and also aspects of form and the many skills that pianists have to be aware of, you've got all those elements from Polish culture, which make it even more demanding. So if somebody surmounts all those difficulties and finally wins, that's a natural way of selecting the best. Obviously the only problem would be if serious pianists were not interested. But I think it's self-perpetuating because there are such great artists from the past, so new generations are attracted to participate, and we've got great finalists, and so on. For me, the possibility of making an error – that not such a good artist wins the competition – is very small. Not because there is some magic here, but because of the inherent features of Chopin's music.

Peter Paul Kainrath: This monographic character underlines for me one very important aspect related to the competition: that you go to play there not to be better than the other candidates, but to be deeper and closer to the musical idea that is at the centre of this project. And this is my question also: how the Busoni Competition can be a platform for translating the intellectual musical world of Busoni to our present and to the future.

John Allison: Busoni excepted – and obviously you can't make it monographic – have any of you ever wished you could adopt a composer in the same way, or is this something absolutely unique?

Peter Paul Kainrath: It would be a disaster – a monographic Busoni piano competition. He was a very open-minded personality, but to translate that personality – as a conductor, teacher, intellectual writer, all these things – can be a very important contribution to the cultural life of today.

John Allison: Are we agreed that there could be no other monographic competition – at least for pianists?

Peter Paul Kainrath: The Vienna Beethoven Competition?

John Allison: Yes, but that isn't quite the same somehow. I mean, being able to play those composers wonderfully doesn't

necessarily give you quite the range that being able to play Chopin does. Or am I wrong about that?

Richard Rodzinski: You're right!

John Allison: Okay! Now I don't mean to be indulgent and talk about the role of music critics in competitions, but this is something I sometimes wonder about. Some juries include critics; others have separate juries of critics. But I think that we are all – as administrators or juries or audiences or critics – ultimately looking for the same thing. At least I hope we are. I know this is the sort of criterion I apply when I go to things. How do you feel about the role of critics in competitions? Do you prefer to have them commenting? And how useful is that, or does it go against the juries?

Jacques Marquis: I would not have critics in my jury for sure. They would be so happy to be there. Critics are there [at the competition] – that's fine. It's part of the young pianists' future, and sometimes in competitions the critics are pretty harsh on these young kids, but that's part of life. We have the privilege to have one critic in our region who is very bad, but you know as a pianist that's going to happen to you everywhere you go after that. It's part of the competition as well.

Richard Rodzinski: We experimented, when we started at the Cliburn, with having the international piano competition for outstanding amateurs. I thought that was a good opportunity to have a jury made up of critics in addition to the regular jury, and it was fascinating, because I especially hired those jury members who were most against competitions. They thought it didn't work; but, through participation, we made more converts, because they realised: 'Hey, you know, it really does kind of work!' And the fraternity that we then developed between the two juries, especially when they agreed, was wonderful.

John Allison: That's very resourceful of you, but I think in Bolzano you have a separate critical jury?

Peter Paul Kainrath: In 2004, we created an independent press jury, and I'm sure that people from the press look for different things than very experienced experts in relation to pianistic knowledge. Before, people from the press often attacked decisions from the jury. Now, as an element of the whole structure, it's a bit different. So they underline perhaps [the need for] polyphony...

John Allison: So this is purely tactical?

Peter Paul Kainrath: Yes! Strategic – and political, of course. But not only that, because I respect that there are amazing people in the media, in the press. It's also a value added to the judgement of the main jury, lending their expertise to the impressions and knowledge that the main jury has. And to be part of the press jury, they are forced to follow the competition from the first step to the last. Then it's not only judging the final, when everyone from the press normally comes.

John Allison: I'm fascinated, because I know some of you have had careers in music journalism or do music journalism and write about music. But ultimately I think that criticism is there to mediate between the art form and the public. It's not really to write negative school reports. It's to open a discussion. I'm still curious about why you would have a separate press jury except for political reasons. It doesn't necessarily make much sense. I acknowledge that otherwise if you had critics sitting out they might be more likely to criticise the jury. But beyond that, isn't it better just to have a bigger discussion and more opinions?

Richard Rodzinski: In a way, it's like having an audience vote.

John Allison: Yes, absolutely. Now speaking of the audience vote, I wonder whether we should open the floor to more questions. I'd hate it if some burning issues went undiscussed.

[Unidentified person in the audience]: I was wondering if there was a competition between the competitions. How do you

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approach the prizes, the amount of money involved – whether you feel like you sometimes take competitors from each other, or do you all – also as a federation – work together?

Michel-Etienne Van Neste: There is no rivalry. And it's not by giving more money that you'll attract better candidates. I've been asked this many times, and I've never felt any kind of competition between the competitions.

John Allison: Do you all ensure that there's no clash?

Michael-Etienne Van Neste: There can be some clashes if one competition organises its cycle differently, but I think it can also be positive in a way. Why does that personality choose to participate in Chopin and not Van Cliburn or Queen Elisabeth? Perhaps it says something about the musicians.

Richard Parncutt [in the audience]: The result of a competition often depends on the order in which the people play the pieces or the way the programme is drawn up. And there are different ways of deciding the order of the people in the different parts of the competition. I'd be interested in your opinions on that.

Michael-Etienne Van Neste: What can we do to make it as fair as possible or less unfair? I think most competitions organise a system by drawing lots. It's the case with all of us – so far. But I think we can work on that. We did in Brussels. We tried to change the order, for example, in the semi-finals, where the candidates need to perform twice, once in a recital and once with a concerto. So we mix it up and we have two different sequences, and so those who appeared first appear at a different moment in the second stage. I think none of us could find a solution to that problem.

Artur Szklener: We had an experiment in 2010: the sequence of the participants was chosen by lots. So it was completely random. And we had so many questions from the public: people were getting lost, although we were announcing who was playing. So this time we did it in the usual way, just by drawing lots for the first candidate, and nobody complained. But definitely there is a serious issue, and some research suggests that the last one to go has the best chance. But that's the game.

Michael-Etienne Van Neste: It's the same for university examinations.

Jacques Marquis: What we've been doing in Montreal and now at the Cliburn is that we have the schedule, and when we pick the name of a candidate he or she can choose when to play. Some people like to play in the evening or in the afternoon. And unfortunately the last one [to be picked] will usually have the first slot and will be the first to play, and I always say to him afterwards – everybody remembers the first one in the competition. Enjoy!

John Allison: Canadian democracy!

Gustav Alink: Just a few things about monographic competitions. There are a few other ones: there's a Beethoven Competition in Vienna, which is also totally monographic, and the Liszt Competition in Utrecht – both piano competitions, of course. Bach in Leipzig is not only Bach, but in Wurzburg – yes! There are a few examples.

John Allison: Yes, I meant the really big ones, but absolutely, yes.

Gustav Alink It's very interesting about the possibility of having an audience prize or a critics' prize. I have just received an email from the Beethoven Competition in Bonn, and they were asking me if they would be the very first to use this idea in the next competition. They would have a webcast of the competition, and then people could watch it, of course, and then vote online. I was thinking – that's not new, it has been done with other competitions. Then I read the email more carefully, and I could see what they want to do: that this result of the online vote would mean that one of the participants, who would be cast out by the jury vote, would have a kind

of wild card to go through. I don't think I'm much in favour of this, but they are considering it. It's something new. One important issue which I would like to add to the discussions has to do with teachers on juries, which can be fine, but the difficulty is having students of these jury members in the same competition. And I would always say 'try to avoid it', because you are asking for complications. Even if it is totally fair, rumours may occur, and it's very difficult to kill rumours. So stay away from it. I would always say it is better to have a rule in the competition not to allow students of jury members to compete in the same competition.

Jacques Marquis: An important thing for any competition, and I know that we all do the same, is the screening process. The process to get from four hundred to the last thirty or twenty-four or whatever is so important. And that's the main thing that we have to do as competitions: sifting out the best ones. After that, the job here is easier for the jury members.

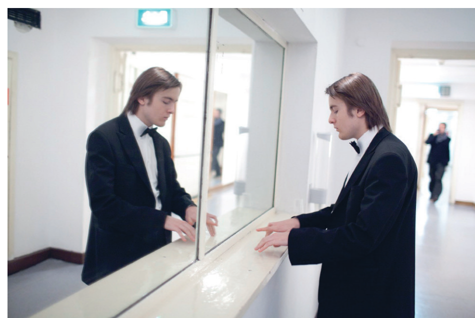
John Rink: I wanted to go back to another of the points raised very early on in the discussion about the live experience versus the streamed, recorded performances that are available online. I wondered whether, across the panel, there was experience of the jury's credibility being undermined because of the distinction between the live experience, which of course jury members are having, and the streamed or recorded version. What I have in mind is a number of performances in our own competition where there was definitely, say, a balance problem with the orchestra, and we couldn't hear the pianists, but in the streamed or recorded version the balance problem did not exist, and so someone out there might think it was a marvellous performance whereas the jury might say: 'No, this really isn't successful.' Or issues to do with sound or appearance, because of course the cameras are trained on the keyboard or the performer in close proximity, in a way that is not available to jury members. What I'm getting at is that the opening up of competitions through the media is great in terms of building international participation, but is there the possibility that the jury's decisions will seem inappropriate [to remote audiences], because the experience out there, which is filtered through blogs and comments and so forth, is so fundamentally different from the one we're having [on the jury]? I wondered what colleagues' experiences have been in that respect.

Richard Rodzinski: Yes, extensive experience with that. That's why we have to emphasise over and over that what you're hearing over the media is not what is being heard by the jury members in the concert hall. And therefore you cannot argue one way or the other that they made a mistake or voted differently or whatever, because it is a totally different experience. And second to that: come to the hall yourself, to hear what the jury members heard.

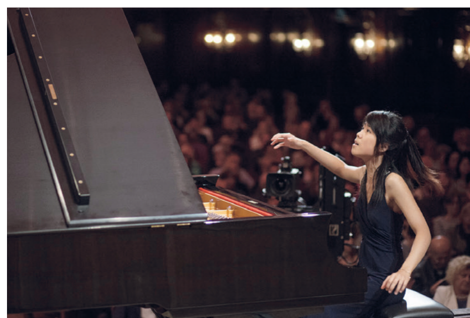
Artur Szklener: That applies to some concert halls in particular. Here in Warsaw, for instance, you can have really different experiences in different parts of the hall. For most of the public, it's incomprehensible. It is really an issue that somebody sitting in a different place can have a different experience, especially as far as balance or timbre is concerned. So the jury's verdict is that of people who are in this specific place.

John Allison: You very neatly brought this back to music, and music being put to the test. We've mostly been talking about competitors being put to the test. So I am grateful to you. It was an honour to share the platform with such a distinguished panel. Thank you all very much indeed.

Lukas Geniušas, winner of joint Second Prize in the 16th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition (2010). Photo by Bartek Sadowski, NIFC.

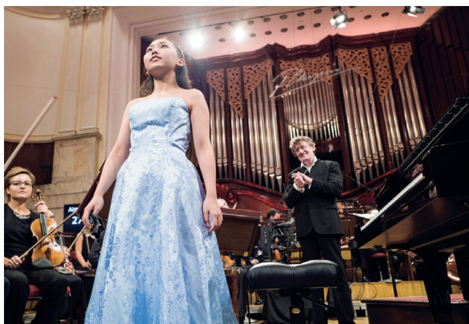


Daniil Trifonov, winner of Third Prize in the 16th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition (2010). Photo by Bartek Sadowski, NIFC.

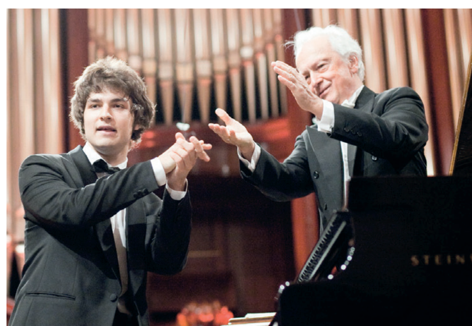


Kate Liu, winner of Third Prize in the 17th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition (2015). Photo by Bartek Sadowski, NIFC.

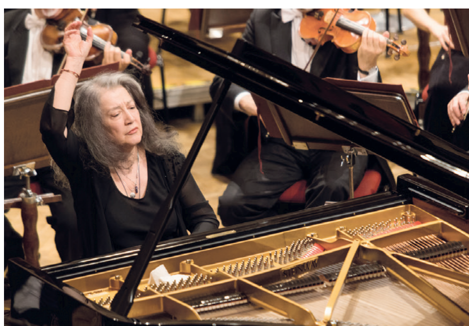
Yulianna Avdeeva, winner of First Prize in the 16th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition (2010). Photo by Wojciech Grzędziński, NIFC.



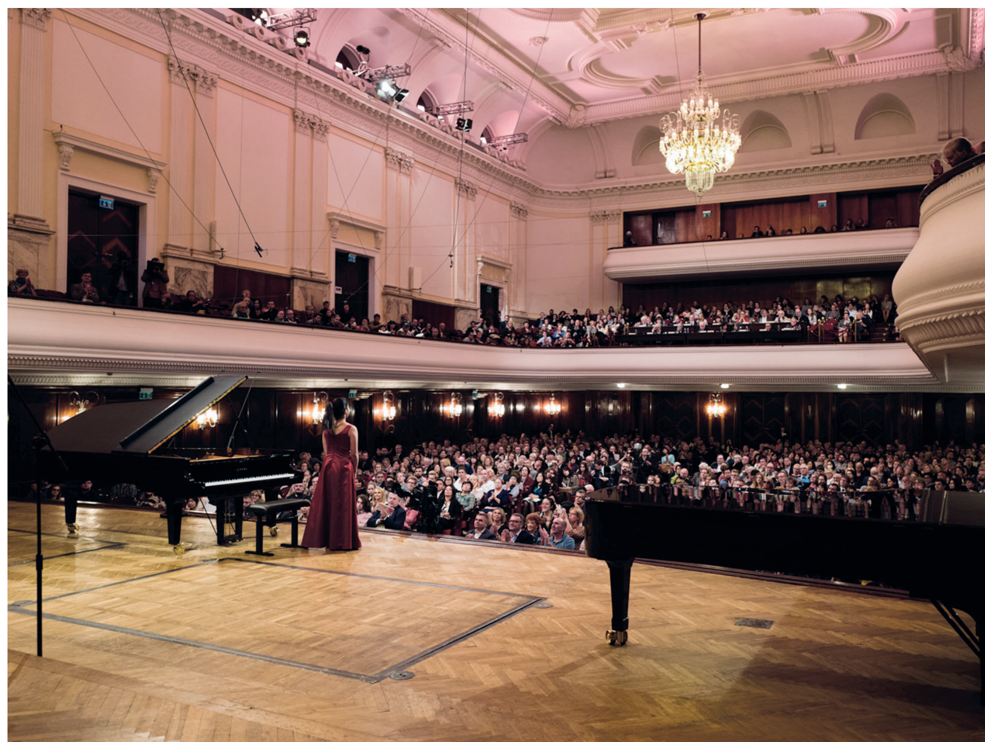
Aimi Kobayashi, finalist in the 17th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition (2015). Photo by Wojciech Grzędziński, NIFC.



Lukas Geniušas, winner of joint Second Prize in the 16th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition (2010). Photo by Wojciech Grzędziński, NIFC.



Martha Argerich during the inaugural concert of the 17th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition (2015). Photo by Wojciech Grzędziński, NIFC.



Annie Zhou during the 17th International Fryderyk Chopin Piano Competition (2015).
Photo by Wojciech Grzędziński, NIFC.