

Ten stars on stage at the Kennedy Center

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Ten Kennedy Center stars by Patricia Leslie

By The Queen of Free

There they were: ten shining, flawless performers who played with confidence and aplomb far beyond their probable 16 years and under.

All made beautiful music at the 6 p.m. free performance Wednesday at the [Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage](#) in the inaugural [Washington International Piano Festival](#) hosted by the [Catholic University of America](#).

The young pianists were selected from a group of 42 "participants" who came from the U.S., Germany, Russia, and Japan to study piano for a week at CUA. Who would want to judge them? They were all magnificent.



Asuka Matsumoto played Gershwin's Preludes No. 1 and 3/Patricia Leslie

Interestingly, the two Maryland students who made the "final 10" each played Franz Liszt: Richard Choung from Maryland played a difficult composition, Liszt's Paganini Etude No. 6 while Annie Jeng chose Liszt's "La Leggerezza."

Asuka Matsumoto from Japan, dressed in a traditional kimono of many colors, chose George Gershwin's Preludes No. 1 and 3. Her colorful attire helped convey her style and grace. As she approached the piano, she almost danced around the piano bench.

A delightful shift from the more serious selections was Sergey Rachmaninoff's Etude-tableau in E-flat minor, Op. 39 as performed by Yoshio Hamano of Japan.

Connor Mautner from Florida played Sonata No. 2, II movement composed by the less well-known Alexander Scriabin.

When tiny Clara Ngyuen came out on stage, the audience murmured but size has no impact on piano playing, of course, and her output was excellent. She played Frederic Chopin's Waltz in C-sharp minor. Cheng Zhi of Ohio wore tails and skillfully presented Rachmaninoff's 2 Preludes.

A fitting finale to the evening was Maurice Ravel's "La Valse" which Zhao Wang rendered with flourish.

Overall, the male pianists seemed to have extra "sash and dash" at the keyboard for they played with a little more expression and emotion.

Everyone was dressed up and brimming with necessary confidence, and none of the performers showed the least timidity.



Cheng Zhi played Rachmaninoff's 2 Preludes by Patricia Leslie

No one stood out as an audience favorite. Listeners generally seemed lukewarm in applause, but perhaps it was because they were mostly professionals and serious aficionados. The audience sat (many stood) spellbound throughout. No one moved, coughed, or chatted (much). No cell phones rang. Except for three of the ten whose home country was Japan, all the finalists came from the U.S.: Florida and Maryland (two finalists each) and New York, Ohio, and Massachusetts (one each). The composers' count was Liszt (three), Chopin and Rachmaninoff (two each), and Scriabin, Gershwin, and Ravel (one). It was a delightful evening listening to young musicians produce extraordinary sounds from a grand piano in the grand hallway.



Seho Young played Liszt's Nightingale/ Patricia Leslie



Haruko Yoshida played Chopin's Scherzo No. 4 in E major/Patricia Leslie

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