



The Australian Concerto & Vocal Competition Open Instrumental Finals Concert for 2016 was opened and welcomed by President Bob Haynes who introduced a number of sponsors and councillors from the Townsville City Council. It was a pleasure to have the remarkable Mr Piers Lance AO in attendance, after he recently concluded the Sydney International Piano Competition. Mr Haynes also welcomed our adjudicator, Mr Spiros Rantos and Ms Ivy Wu as his assistant.

The preliminary rounds leading to the finals showed the immense talent of so many young performers, with each required to perform a complete work composed for a solo instrument and orchestra. It was a delight to see so many performers from the competition present tonight at the concluding Finals Concert, from the School Ensemble section right through to the Young Performers, showing their support to the three finalists.

The winner of tonight's performance will also be welcomed back to Townsville in partnership with our very own Barrier Reef Orchestra to feature as a soloist as part of their performance dates. This is such an immensely exciting collaboration, as it not only gives the featured artist an opportunity to perform their work with an orchestra as the composer had originally intended, but also gives our Barrier Reef Orchestra the opportunity to perform with such talented musicians.

Our first performance was by **Jack Bailey** from Scone, currently studying in Manchester, UK. Bailey performed **Sinfonia Concertante by Prokofiev**.

For a long time, the Concerto was considered unplayable. Even though many cellists today are now able to play it, it still remains a formidable challenge for any musician; however, when reading through the program notes for tonight's performance, it seems a natural fit for Bailey, considering his past accomplishments. Bailey exuded a quiet confidence from the moment he took the stage. From the opening notes of this work, it was obvious how incredibly high the calibre of playing would be; Bailey soared through the incredibly difficult andante movement, which personified the 'unplayable' description,



without issue. As he began the second movement, Bailey brought to life the erratic yet rhythmic melody. His playful phrasing and stretching of time reminded us of why we come to watch live music, especially of such a high level from someone so young. Bailey was clearly enjoying his performance with Robert Manley on piano with just expressive facial expressions and body language and lovely mimicking between the cello and piano. Bailey led us through an accelerando while playing semiquavers to a quad-stop pizzicato ending. The andante con moto began with a grand expressive opening with very sparse accompaniment. The subtle and sensitive vivace led to aggressive pizzicato sections with interspersed arco playing. To end the concerto, semiquavers led into a turbulent whirlwind, filled with double stops and altissimo harmonics.

Charismatic cello playing at its best.

The second performer tonight was **James Dong** from Sydney performing **Brahms' Violin Concerto in D**.

The opening section of the first movement, played by accompanist Rhodri Clarke, is gorgeously executed and virtuosic in its own right, as playing a condensed orchestration is no easy task. Dong seemed nervous initially, but once he hit the expressive triplets leading into the first cadenza, he really hit his stride, making the first dolce section sing with incredible intonation. Dong played the almost percussive offbeat chromatic section with sensitivity, maturity and confidence. The tranquillo cadenza was an unexpected change of mood. Awaiting the final familiar theme, all the harmonic nuances could be heard ringing throughout the space. After the final note, the audience could not help but break concert etiquette and applaud Dong's incredible efforts. The adagio had a significantly different change of mood which was expertly captured by Clarke, and with beautiful interplay between the piano, Dong commanded the audience's attention while performing at an almost pianissimo volume, concluding the movement on a bittersweet F. The audience took an audible breath once the final harmonics faded into nothing. In a complete change of style and pace, Dong really showed his virtuosic ability in the final movement, playing what seemed to be an unending stream of impossibly difficult semiquavers runs. The lyrical melody returns could be heard before building towards the final cadenza, ending in the presto section.



The resounding applause matched what this musician deserved.



After the interval, 16 year-old **Yebin Yoo** was the final performer to take the stage, bringing to life **Sibelius' Concerto in D Minor** with her accompanist, Rhodri Clarke.

From the opening phrase, it is obvious Yoo's sweet and expressive tone is much more mature than her years. She performed through the opening sections with confidence and charisma, synonymous with Sibelius' compositions. She eased through the technically demanding phrases seemingly unaffected by the skill required to play such repertoire. Clarke once again outdid himself by performing a complicated orchestral reduction with ease, leading Yoo into a percussive yet expressive cadenza. Without skipping a beat, Yoo launched across the incredible range of the instrument, showing complete technical control. The deep, lush tones she pulls out through the pesante section was remarkable, rich and vibrant, in total contrast to the restrained dynamics she showed in the altissimo grace note minims section. Moving into the second movement, the violin seems to be an extension of Yoo herself as she performs the adagio with sensitivity and expression. Such emotional playing gives us a sense of the bittersweet yearning Sibelius

aimed to convey. Yoo soared through the difficult semiquaver triplets, playfully performing the syncopated slurs to accompany the melody heard on the piano. Dashing through the dotted rhythms of the opening to the third movement, Yoo performed these difficult harmonic phrases with ease and confidence, demonstrating double stop octaves with perfect intonation before flying to the abrupt final notes, ending the concerto.

While awaiting the incredibly arduous task of choosing a winner of tonight's performance, Councillor Kurt Rehbein spoke on behalf of the Mayor Jenny Hill, acknowledging the performers and accompanists, and saying that Townsville is as culturally rich as any other city in the world, and the Australian Concerto & Vocal Competition is one of the highlights of the season. Mr Rehbein also mentioned that very few regional centres can boast a competition of this calibre, and the audience enthusiastically agreed.

Before announcing the winners of tonight's performance, the adjudicator Mr Rantos noted that his decision was made extremely difficult with such outstanding performances by all 18 preliminary performers. Each finalist performed the most difficult repertoire on their respective instruments; Bailey's sophistication, Yoo's raw emotion and Dong's restrained romance. He announced 3rd place to Yoo, 2nd place to Bailey and 1st place to Dong.

Mr Rantos' final words sum up the evening's impact – *in troubled times, this youth restores our faith in humanity.*



Review by
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