

## YOUNGARTS FINALISTS REIMAGINE YOUR FAVORITE SONGS INTO CLASSIC MUSIC



YoungArts Gala Performance

*Pedro Portal/YoungArts*

Initially, the classical music concert held at New World Center on Thursday during YoungArts Week felt a little bit like the most elegant high school recital ever conceived. However, very quickly it became clear that this was no ordinary performance and these were, in fact, extraordinary teenagers.

Every year, thousands of budding artists in multiple disciplines and from all over the country send applications to the National YoungArts Foundation located in Edgewater. YoungArts selects a few hundred winners and awards them cash prizes, mentorships, networking opportunities, and entrance into their renowned programs. The crown jewel of this process is National YoungArts Week where finalists are given the opportunity to shine in front of their peers and the general public in the fields of design, literary, visual, and performing arts.

1/ 11 / 2016

ONLINE | Miami New Times | Arts | Angel Melendez

This year, YoungArts sifted through 12,000 applications, awarded 819 young artists, whittled that number down to 165 finalists, and during the Classical Music Concert, Miami got to see and hear 23 of the country's best young classical musicians.

Despite the room being filled almost entirely with parents, students, and teachers, there was nothing dry or stuffy about the affair. For example, after seeing the same intro video four or five times, the audience, anxious to get the show going, began miming certain parts and singing along to others, setting a celebratory tone that remained throughout the show.

The concert hall at New World Center, home to the New World Symphony, is modern and slick looking, painted all white and allowing for multiple moods to be created with clever lighting. The acoustics absorbed and relayed every cough, every violin plink, every piano note clearly and brightly. It was an ideal setting to listen to these musicians. There were microphones hanging from the ceiling, but there's a good chance they weren't in use and so instead, the audience got to hear each artist and their chosen instrument in their purest, most natural state.

Although the age range of the YoungArts musicians falls somewhere between 15 and 18 years old, they were, in every sense, professionals.

The opening number, "Trio for Oboe, Clarinet, and Piano" by French composer Edouard Desteinay, sounded like a sad warning of doom. The three-piece performing the number, Anastasia Magamedova (piano), Kip Zimmerman (oboe), and Yijin Wang (clarinet), were animated and emphatic in their performance, a trend that continued with each and every performer that followed.

Even when the recorders came out (yes, that instrument we were all forced to purchase and pretend to learn in elementary school), the energy didn't drop. The duo of Martin Bernstein and Laura Michael nailed a soft, but vibrant piece that sounded like two rabbits playfully chasing one another.

And while the early part of the show was lovely, as the program continued, one of the characteristics of the foundation that they seem to pride themselves on, unpredictability, peeked out its head before attacking outright. Both of the pieces prior to the intermission were weird, unexpected treats. The first, an original composition by YoungArts winner Alexander Yakub, was murder music more psychotic than the theme from *Psycho*. Choppy, grating, and unnerving, his Rondo Ghironda for Piano Quintet was a chilling, horror film lullaby composed for the symphony and a cool, unexpected twist of classical traditions.

The subsequent piece, "Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano" by Pierre Jalbert, felt like the sequel to the prior nightmare (although it was conceived in 1998.) Another Hitchcockian nod to film scores, it created a pervasive paranoia. A hatchet wilding madman was liable to spring from the innards of Adria Ye's piano at any moment. The looks on the faces of her partners, violinist Katherine Woo and Cellist Zlatomir Fung were as intense as the music.

1/ 11 / 2016

ONLINE | Miami New Times | Arts | Angel Melendez

After intermission, the second half of the concert's program listed better-known names such as Brahms, Dvorak, and Mozart. It was with perhaps the most famous composer of all time, Mozart, and his "Sonata for 2 Pianos in D Major, K. 448," that we began the final hour. It was a turbulent, whirlwind of a duet that at times felt like a polite battle between pianists Adrian Liao and Hana Mizuta.

There was another interesting, but different, dynamic among the next group. For "Horn Trio in Eb Major, Op. 40," the threesome of violinist Aubree Oliverson, French horn player Elisabeth Pesavento, and pianist Derek Wang were all in sync, but it was Oliverson and Wang that seemed especially infatuated with another. It made for an endearing and powerful performance, brimming with confidence and joy.

The third post-intermission act brought out another duo, Torin Bakke on clarinet and Nicholas Arrendondo. Theirs was a more downtempo piece that then found its groove. Their rendition of Hindemith's "Musikalisches Blumengärtlein und Leyptziger Allerley," exhibited a whimsicality that sounded like a hobbits dangerous journey through Middle Earth or a chase scene from a *Harry Potter* film.

The last official piece, "Trio for Violin, Cello, and Piano, OP. 90," featured Geneva Lewis on violin, Derek Louie on cello, and Everen Ozel on piano. The speed, the ferocity, and the passion they pumped out was exhilarating.

These "kids" embarrass their teenage brethren. The YoungArts Finalists in music showcased how adept they are at capturing moods and expertly finessing both heart and violin strings.

Still, they are teenagers and teenagers like to have fun.

The final example of how YoungArts rigorously helps to prepare these future stars in their respective subjects, yet allows plenty of room for individual personality, came when all 23 performers triumphantly returned to the stage, wearing neon hats and sunglasses, for a surprise encore. Led by Yakub, garbed in a pimp outfit complete with a cane and giant gold necklace, they covered three of the 2015's biggest hits: The Weeknd's "I Can't Feel My Face," Drake's "Hotline Bling," and Mark Ronson's "Uptown Funk." They got the crowd up out of their seats, poised for the eventual standing ovation.