The Arts

Marimba player takes top honors at 2018 YTA

From the Community

The 34th annual Young Texas Artists Music Competition culminated on Saturday, March 10, with the always popular and exciting Finalists’ Concert & Awards at Conroe’s Crighton Theatre, which had a full house for the event.

The three-day competition leading up to the concert and awards event saw musicians aged 18 to 32 who are Texas residents or students enrolled in a Texas college, university or music school competing in one of four divisions: Voice; Piano; Strings; and Winds, Brass, Percussion, Harp and Guitar. Finalists in each division vie for the opportunity to compete for a share of $20,000 in monetary prizes and performance opportunities.

Immediately following the annual Bach, Beethoven & Barbecue benefit gala, co-chaired by Emmett and Garlaine Kelly, and Alan “Barb” and Mimi Sadler, the Finalists’ Concert & Awards was led by master of ceremonies Eric Skelly, classical music and opera reviewer for the Houston Chronicle.

Susie Pokorski, president and CEO of Young Texas Artists, acknowledged the invaluable service Emelyne Bingham provides as the competition’s artistic director. “Emelyne is an internationally known conductor, musician, lecturer and music professor at Vanderbilt University,” said Pokorski. “Her professionalism and dedication continue to move YTA to new levels of excellence each year.”

This year’s competition once again featured many international musicians attending Texas colleges, universities or music schools from countries far and wide including Canada, China, South Korea, Venezuela, Hungary, Spain, Taiwan, Italy and Japan. In addition, many Texans studying outside the state at Eastman School of Music, Manhattan School of Music, Michigan State University, University of California at Santa Barbara and New England Conservatory, came “home” to be a part of the event.

The 2018 Grand Prize winner was U.S. percussionist Justin Douté, 29, who took home the Gold Medal in the Winds, Brass, Percussion, Harp and Guitar Division with his performance on marimba of “Prism Rhapsody For Marimba and Orchestra” by Keiko Abe. Douté earned his Bachelor of Music Performance from the University of Northern Florida in 2016. Currently on a full scholarship to Rice University’s Shepherd School of Music, he is working toward his Master of Music Performance. Douté has won numerous awards, including the Shepherd School of Music Concerto Competition in 2017.

In addition to cash prizes, Douté was presented with a Texas flag provided by Texas State Sen. Brandon Creighton. The flag was flown over the state Capitol building on March 2, 2018, Texas Independence Day.

Pianist Dongni Xie, 28, was named the Gold winner in the Piano division with her performance of “Piano Concerto in F” by George Gershwin. Xie received her Bachelor of Music in 2012 from Shanghai Conservatory of Music, her Master of Music from Peabody Institute of The Johns Hopkins University, and is currently working toward her Doctor of Music at the University of North Texas.

Soprano Sydney Anderson’s performances of “Take Me Back” by Ned Rorem and “Je veux vivre” from Roméo et Juliette by Charles Gounod earned her the Gold in the Voice division. Anderson, 27, received a Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance/Music Education in 2014 from The Hartt School, a founding institution of University of Hartford. She is currently studying for her Master of Music in Voice Performance at the University of Houston’s Moores School of Music.

The Strings division Gold Medal went to violinist Yena Lee, 27, who performed “Violin Concerto No. 1 in A minor, Op. 77” by Dmitri Shostakovich. Lee, who is from South Korea, made her orchestra debut at age 14. She earned her Performer’s Certificate in 2007 at Vancouver Academy of Music, and she received her Master of Music in 2015 and her Master of Musical Arts in 2016 at Yale School of Music. Lee plays a violin made by Nicolaus Gagliano in 1769, and uses a French bow made by Pierre Simon. She is presently attending Shepherd School of Music at Rice University earning a Doctor of Musical Arts.

Silver medals went to: Hyunsuk Kim, 28, Piano division, University of North Texas; Jae-Hyun Ryoo, 23, saxophone, Winds, Brass, Percussion, Harp & Guitar division, University of Texas; Jacqueline Audas, 22, violin, Strings division, Rice University; and soprano Catherine Goode, 26, Voice division, University of Houston, who delighted the audience with her performance of “Guinse alfin il momento...Deh vieni, non tardar” from Le Nozze di Figaro by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and “Glitter and Be Gay” from Candide by Leonard Bernstein, earning her the Audience Choice Award.

Each Gold medalist received $3,000, Silver medalists received $1,000, the 2018 YTA Grand Prize winner received an additional $3,000, and the winner of the Audience Choice Award received an additional $1,000. In addition to the monetary award, finalists may be invited to perform with other Texas arts organizations, including the Allen Philharmonic, Conroe Symphony Orchestra, the Montgomery County Choral Society, The Woodlands Symphony, the annual Rising Stars & Legends of Texas event in downtown Conroe.

The difficult challenge of selecting the winners from 60 incredibly talented musicians throughout the three-day competition, was tasked to a panel of esteemed judges composed of: Daniel Cataneo, who is on the faculty at Juilliard and an international clinician in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, which teaches concepts of rhythm, structure and musical expression through movement; John Ellis, associate dean and faculty member at University of Michigan, piano soloist, lecture-recitalist and collaborative artist; and Hugon Hall in New York to the University of Helsinki; Larry Hutchinson, double bass performer who recently retired from the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and in 2001 was named Michigan String Teacher of the Year; Brian Luce, a professor of flute at The University of Arizona and a Yamaha Performing Artist who has performed as soloist and with orchestras around the world; and Roger Pines, dramaturg-literary advisor – for Lyric Opera of Chicago, a judge in more than 20 cities for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

For more information about Young Texas Artists and sponsorship or volunteer opportunities contact Susie Pokorski at susiepokorski@gmail.com or 936-756-7017.

About the Young Texas Artists Music Competition

An official music competition of the State of Texas, Young Texas Artists has, since its founding in 1983, encouraged excellence in young musicians, inspired their audiences and helped further the careers of thousands of classical musicians. It is one of the few competitions in the country that features four divisions: Voice; Piano; Strings; and Winds, Brass, Percussion, Harp and Guitar. This Texas competition for Texas artists has helped produce many distinguished professionals who have gone on to join orchestras, opera companies, universities and music schools around the world. The Young Texas Artists Music Competition is a member of the Greater Conroe Arts Alliance and the Conroe/Lake Conroe Chamber of Commerce, YoungTexasArtists.org.