

Russian's breathtaking bravura scores top violin prize

Sergei Dogadin takes home the first prize of US\$50,000 in the Singapore International Violin Competition

REVIEW/CONCERT

GRAND FINAL
SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL VIOLIN COMPETITION 2018
Esplanade Concert Hall
Thursday

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After three intense rounds of competition, the second Singapore International Violin Competition reached a climactic high in the Grand Final held at Esplanade Concert Hall.

Three violinists were picked from a vastly talented crop of 29 to perform a concerto with the Singapore Symphony Orchestra conducted by Joshua Tan.

Earlier, each participant had to master two solo recitals (30 and 60 minutes each) and a concerto by Mozart before arriving at the Romantic or 20th-century concerto that was to be the final arbiter.

To be judged by an international jury formed by renowned concert violinists and pedagogues were two performances of Sibelius Violin Concerto In D Minor, sandwiching a sole Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto In D Major.

Lovers of the violin may be excused for having a field day in the glowing company of Chisa Kitagawa (Japan), Sergei Dogadin (Russia/Austria) and Oleksandr Korniev (Ukraine), who performed in that order.

Kitagawa was the youngest of the three, having turned 21 during the competition. Fated to be the first performer in all four rounds (she drew the unenviable slot during the pre-competition lottery), she displayed little or no anxiety in the ethereal opening of the Sibelius, carving out a pure and voluminous sound as the first movement progressed.

Rock-like steadiness and apparent nerves of steel served her well in the cadenzas and climaxes when she could have easily been overwhelmed by the orchestra's unrelenting forces. That she maintained that level of composure all through to the rough-hewn finale was testament to her abilities. Never less than immaculate in deportment and totally without histrionics, she made fine music.

Korniev, who resides in Singapore and is a teaching assistant at the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, displayed no less confidence. How-



Violinist Sergei Dogadin lit up Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto In D Major.
PHOTO: KENNETH CHEONG

ever, his performance of the Sibelius had the feeling of being on edge throughout, possibly a sign of being somewhat less technically secure. There were mild lapses in intonation, but his spirit never flagged, going for broke even if it risked possible collapse. All this made for a

very exciting performance.

Wedged in between was a most extroverted reading of the Tchaikovsky, no less from a full-blooded Russian. Dogadin's solo entry was breathtaking, as if saying to his audience, "You listen to me, and you listen well". Grand in move-

ment and gesture, his playing rose to meet that outward extravagance and the first movement's cadenza sparked, crackled and caught fire, setting the passionate concerto alight.

A master of nuance, he was also capable of much subtlety, as in the

muted central Canzonetta. However, one suspects this was just the much-needed respite before being let off the leash into the most ripping-roaring of finales. Here, natural instincts reigned for a suitably spectacular close, drawing loud cheers from the audience.

For his all-round bravura, Dogadin was awarded the first prize of US\$50,000 (S\$66,600), with Kitagawa and Korniev bagging the second and third prizes (US\$25,000 and US\$15,000) respectively. Dogadin had previously won second prize in the 2011 Tchaikovsky International Violin Competition in Moscow (no first prize was awarded) and this was a vindication of sorts.

The fourth, fifth and sixth prizes went to Laurel Gagnon (United States, US\$6,000), Lisa Yasuda (Japan, US\$5,000) and Shi Xiaoxuan (China, US\$4,000) respectively. Dogadin also won the Goh Soon Tioe Recital Prize (US\$5,000), while Kitagawa received top votes for the Audience Prize (US\$2,000).

For being the best Singaporean violinist, Gabriel Ng was awarded a master bow by bow-maker Pierre Guillaume.

There were also cash prizes for the best performance of the music of Bach, Paganini and the commissioned set-piece Clara-Luna by Singaporean composer Chen Zhangyi (US\$1,000 each).

Organised by the Yong Siew Toh Conservatory, the Singapore International Violin Competition has become the Formula One Grand Prix of music competitions in this region. If the first competition in 2015 had raised ripples of worldwide attention, this edition is likely to make an even longer-lasting impact.

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