

The Minnesota International Piano-e-Competition offers a special opportunity for young pianists worldwide to participate in a competition of the highest artistic quality and integrity. Our artistic vision is to bring young artists, with the promise of lasting and important careers, to the public's attention.

Alexander Braginsky, Founder, President and Artistic Director

Jeffrey Wirth, Founder and CEO

Dr. Stella Sick, Managing Director, Newsletter Editor

## From the Artistic Director

Greetings,

The pace has picked up since our last letter went out. The recording sessions on locations took place without a glitch, and the February 10 - 12 weekend of Virtual Auditions at Sundin Music Hall demonstrated the level of contestants to be in excess of our already high expectations.

62 out of 68 selected pianists from 27 countries came to be recorded on a Disklavier piano and video. Many commented on the efficiency and flawless organization of the auditions. More than one of the seasoned competitors remarked that ours is the best organized event they attended. The credits for this should go to our own Stella Sick; Stan Zielinski, Director of Yamaha Artist Services in NYC, and to the tireless Yamaha technicians. Without actu-

ally being there it is hard to imagine the degree of complexity that goes into orchestrating such an event. Our pianists were protected from all the technicalities; everybody was as comfortable playing piano as is possible in the environment of a competition. Once again, I found myself unable to limit the number invited to twenty-four. Two more were added; two more hours for our International Jury to work in July. It has to stop. Before the next competition I'll go into some soul-hardening treatment!

In my January travels, which included Shanghai, Hamamatsu and the NAAM conference in Los Angeles, I was able to see how rapidly our reputation is growing. This time around nobody needed an explanation; upon introduction, everybody knew where I come from and the event I represent.

Our popularity was reflected in the number of applicants (132 vs. 78 last time) as well as in the number of actually attending the recordings (the usual expected dropout rate is 20 to 30 percent).

Another rapidly expanding aspect of the e-Competition is the visits to our website. In January we had an average of 200 new visitors a day with a total number of just above 5,000. In February the daily average grew to around 300 with the total of about 8,000 visits! We are now in the process of completely redesigning the website. It has to be the coolest one around!

Now we are in the home stretch. The next few months will fly quickly. We will work hard to make sure that the Third Minnesota International Piano-e-Competition lives up to the high expectations created by the first two.



Alexander Braginsky speaking at the Orientation for the Disklavier/Video Recordings in California, January 9, 2006

*Alexander Braginsky*

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## Sixty-Two Contestants Performed at Sundin Music Hall

### UNITED STATES:

Gregory DeTurck,  
Claire Huangci,  
Howard Na,  
Esther Park

### P.R. CHINA:

Chen Cheng,  
Yang Shen,  
Rui Shi

### ISRAEL:

Michael Namirovsky,  
Einav Yarden

### ITALY:

Angelo Arciglione

### MOROCCO/HUNGARY:

Marouan Benabdallah

### NEW ZEALAND:

Henry Wong Doe

### ROMANIA:

Bogdan-Claudiu Dulu

The past few months were filled with excitement. The Disklavier/Video Recordings conducted in January and February went very smoothly. As you may remember, I went to represent the Competition at the New York City and Paris auditions. Although the days were long and exhausting, this was a truly remarkable



Testing the equipment, YCA, California

and gratifying experience. I was in the unique position to hear the performances live at the sites and then to enjoy them again during the Virtual Auditions in St. Paul in February.

The Disklavier/Video Recordings in essence are "time-shifted" performances. Each contestant had only one chance to record, with no "alternate takes" possible. The recordings were open to the public, which helped to create an authentic performance atmosphere.

The technology behind the recording process was beautifully orchestrated by George Litterst, an independent

consultant; Bill Brandom and Shinya Matsumoto of Yamaha Corporation of America. During the orientation sessions they familiarized the contestants with the recording process and demonstrated what exactly the judges would be looking at and listening during the Virtual Auditions.

Sixty-two of the sixty-eight selected contestants made the Disklavier/Video Recordings. The Sundin Music Hall was abuzz with the activity during the weekend of February 10-12th. The Judges (and some very dedicated fans)

listened to the performances for three days from 9am to 10:30pm! These Virtual Auditions were perceived—and treated—by everybody as live performances—no cell phones, no talking, no walking into the hall in the

middle of a piece, etc. It was genuine. Everybody has found themselves drawn into music. The complexities of technology did not overshadow the artistic values. Mr. Pollei of the screening jury commented that he kept thinking about meeting the contestants after their performances, forgetting that the contestants were not physically present in Minnesota! On more than one occasion I found myself saying something like: "Contestant N will be playing tomorrow afternoon."



Orientation session, YASI, New York

The Virtual Auditions were an amazing compellation of wonderful performances. I could not help but feel a bit sad that this portion of the competition was over, and only a third of these young musicians could advance to the next round.

*Stella Sick*

*Photography by James Steeber*

## Twenty-Six Contestants Invited to Minnesota

### Meet the Contestants

The votes are counted and the decisions are made, and now it is time to meet our twenty-six Contestants who are invited to compete in Minnesota in July. The twenty-six Contestants represent sixteen countries, and no country is represented by more than four people. The entire group consists of ten women and sixteen men, and only twelve of the twenty-six contestants reside in the country that they represent. Seven contestants took

part in the previous installments of the Minnesota International Piano-e-Competition: Victoria Korchinskaya-Kogan (2nd Prize, 2002), Edisher Savitski (4th Prize, 2002), Hanna Shybayeva (5th Prize, 2004), Marouan Benabdallah, Konstantin Krasnitski, Esther Park and Serhii Morozov. The age of the competitors ranges from sixteen to thirty-two. For more information about the contestants and their repertoire please visit our website [www.ecompetition.org](http://www.ecompetition.org).

### Become a Host Family!

You have a unique opportunity of being an important part of the Competition and becoming a host family for one of these young artists. Host families are not asked to house the students, instead families are asked to assist one contestant throughout the duration of the competition.

For more information please contact Barb Benn at [pbenn@mn.rr.com](mailto:pbenn@mn.rr.com) or (952) 943-1172.

## Artist Portrait: Jie Chen



The 20 year-old winner of the 2004 Minnesota International Piano-e-Competition Jie Chen has an impressive number of experiences and accomplishments that would fill a lifetime. She possesses a winning combination of a sincere musicality, impressive technique, driven determination and a very warm personality. Her smile lights up a room, her pyrotechnics at the piano leaves one breathless, and her fresh and unpretentious musicality touches one's very soul.

The local audiences remember Jie from her performances during the 2004 e-Competition. Every piece in her Recital Program was executed with genuine conviction. Her rendition of Triana from Iberia by Albeniz (Jie will be reprising her performance of it again at her Concert on April 7) was glorious: a perfect blend of rhythmic vitality and exuberantly luscious sound. Jie's playing earned accolades not just from the audience and the Jury, but from her fellow contestants — perhaps the toughest critics. One

of the Competition's participants has said that for him, "Jie's performance of the Schubert sonata was **the** event of the competition, the most important event!"

Jie's repeat performance of Rachmaninoff's Second Concerto with the Minnesota Orchestra, under the direction of Osmo Vänskä, in September of 2005, was a beautiful and memorable event. With her soulful and sincere interpretation, Jie proved once again that she is not one of the "eager, bright accomplished young virtuosos [who] strive to dazzle, showing how fast and loud they can play. . ." (Mark Anthony, Star Tribune)

In the short span of less than two years since winning the Minnesota International Piano-e-Competition in 2004, Jie participated and was recognized in six major competitions. At the Van Cliburn International Competition she received the Jury Discretionary Award. Jie placed 4th at the Arthur Rubinstein International Masters Competition in Israel, 3rd at the "Paloma O'Shea" Santander International Piano Competition in Spain and 2nd at the Animato Competition in Paris, France, and she won the Washington International Piano and the Young Concert Artist Competitions. The competitions are demanding and exhausting, yet Jie finds that participating in competitions provides significant benefits: performance experience, exposure and meeting new people. Competitions are a catalyst for improvement, Jie says. She has a perpetual thirst for perfection.

Jie practices at least 6 hours a day at her apartment in Philadelphia, where

she lives with her mom. (Jie's father still lives in China; she gets to see him once or twice a year.) She is graduating from Curtis this spring with a Bachelor of Music, and she is looking into Master of Music programs. Besides the extensive classical repertoire, which also features contemporary works by Babajanian, Lutoslavski and Sebastian Currier, Jie explores other styles, such as jazz.

No matter what style Jie undertakes, the most memorable aspect of her playing is her poetic sincerity. She plays piano not for personal glory: it is for the glory of music itself. "I [give] everything inside me to entertain as well as



Jie Chen at the Gala Concert, June 5, 2004

enlighten the listeners with the world's greatest music. And for those who are being exposed to the music perhaps for the first time, I feel an obligation to show them why it matters."

### **RUSSIA:**

Yulianna Avdeeva,  
Tatiana Larionova,  
Mikhail Mordvinov,  
Konstantin Shamray

### **GEORGIA:**

Edisher Savitski

### **CANADA:**

Victoria Korchinskaya-Kogan,  
Ryo Yanagitani,  
Darrett Zusko

### **BELARUS:**

Konstantin Krasnitsky

### **UKRAINE:**

Serhii Morozov

### **SERBIA:**

Marko Pavlovic

### **THE NETHERLANDS:**

Hanna Shybayeva

### **FRANCE:**

Hélène Tysman

Minnesota International Piano-e-Competition is proud to announce the additions of a Solo Recital Debut at Salle Cortot in Paris, France, and a performance with the Salem Chamber Orchestra in 2006-2007 Concert Season to the list of the engagements for the Winner of the 2006 Competition.



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## Upcoming Local Events

### Jie Chen Performs a Benefit Concert



Since winning the 2004 Minnesota International Piano-e-Competition, Jie Chen has been swept up in the whirlwind of activities. With the ever increasing demand on her time, we are thrilled that Ms. Chen does not forget her enthusiastic Minnesota audience who cheered her on during the exciting events of the summer 2004, and her September 2005 performances with the Minnesota Orchestra.

**Ms. Chen will be performing a solo recital on Friday, April 7, 2006 at 8:00pm at the Sundin Music Hall, Hamline University, 1531 Hewitt Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104.**

### Program:

Scarlatti—Three Sonatas  
Schumann—Sonata in G Minor, Op. 22  
Albeniz—"Evocation" and "Triana" from *Iberia*  
Bach/Petri—"Sheep may safely graze"  
Brahms—Variations on a theme by Handel, Op. 24.

Tickets are \$25 (all proceeds will go to the Minnesota International Piano-e-Competition). You may purchase tickets by calling the Hamline Box office at (651) 523-2459 (Credit Cards accepted, Visa and Mastercard only). You may also reserve tickets for pick-up at the door by contacting the Competition's Managing Director, Stella Sick by phone at (763) 416-3256 or by e-mail at piano@ecompetition.org. We are looking forward to seeing you at the concert!