

The 22nd International Chopin Piano Competition in ASIA – Final Round

Concerto B Category

I do totally understand and appreciate the idea of the Competition Organisers, who ensure that one of the main aims of the Competition is to provide pedagogical assistance to young pianists.

Of course, it is much more difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to express one's impressions or suggestions in a fully responsible manner, when one does not have the opportunity to have direct contact with the talent and artistic personality of the young pianist. That is why I decided to write these few general sentences of my thoughts, which concern practically all groups-categories that are part of the Competition Chopin in ASIA.

One of my frequent impressions when listening to Competition recordings was the impression of poorly defined or even non-existent artistic personalities of some pianists. On the other hand, a strong concentration on the exact execution of all the notes and the pedagogue's instructions is often evident. Unfortunately, we often do not hear a free, flexible, creative transmission of the pianist's interpretation. Then, we hear only an accurate but unfortunately often very mechanical realization of the text of the piece, too often subjected to the pressure of the rhythmic, metronomic tempo. Such a way of playing and music understanding guarantees limited development of the artistic personality of a young pianist and development of his musical imagination and a deep understanding of music.

What is completely different is the playing of a young pianist during everyday practice. Then an important source of information - but only information - may be the metronome. However, it is a complete misunderstanding if during a concert or a recording, instead of a narrative phrase we feel and hear... a metronome! We hear all the notes, pauses, accents etc. written in the score, but we do not hear the understanding of their role in the whole musical narration of the piece. Such mechanical execution of the score are particularly irritating in the interpretation of deeply narrative Chopin's works.

Of course I understand perfectly well the fundamental differences in problems that the youngest pianists have, different from pianists from secondary schools and those who are already students of music universities. But in each of these groups - while maintaining obvious differences in the level of skills - the freedom of natural, creative expression and the joy of contact with music should be audible and visible! I particularly underline the term "natural transmission", and not a transmission based on artificially learned external, sometimes even theatrical gestures and movements, which are supposed to suggest understanding of the musical narrative.

Another, quite common problem is the proper understanding of what is the so-called expression in music and passion in playing. Unfortunately, very often we encounter interpretations of young pianists, whose performer understands and conveys to the audience the suggestion that expression is closely related to the fast tempo and dynamics of playing!

In my opinion, this is one of the fundamental musical errors and interpretive misunderstandings! I believe that tempo and dynamics **are not the source** of musical expression - on the contrary, the source of expression is and should be our mind, truly deep imagination and the artistic personality of the pianist, while the tempo and dynamics of interpretation **are only the result** of an extremely necessary imagination.

Finally, it is artistic imagination and the ability to communicate it to the audience - such an understanding of pianistic problems, which allows us to distinguish even good pianists from truly creative great artists.

And I wish to all our young pianists to look for and to use such an understanding of music and problems of interpretation!

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Have courage to play spontaneously and to show your individual interpretation. Chopin's rubato and improvising style are very difficult to feel but they are necessary. Look for poetic expression full of romantic elations and personal intimate moods. Forceful or heavy sound doesn't correspond with Chopin's music. The virtuoso parts need brilliant technique, but also a musical content and flexibility. Plan and execute a dynamic process - use flexible dynamics with nuances. Large pieces need awareness of the form integrity and emotional development.

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The level in this category I rate as average, of course with some exceptions.

Chopin's piano concertos cause participants many problems, both aesthetic and technical and performance.

I see a problem on agogic issues, especially rubato, which is too violent. I also noticed too much freedom in the implementation of the notation which relates to the dynamics, articulation, rhythmic values, phrasing, pedaling, and the balance between the melody and the accompaniment.

Chopin's music, though sublime on the one hand, requires a high naturalness of narration and simplicity of expression.

Excessive rubato and constantly changing tempos cause the narrative to be jerked and the whole thing to be broken into small fragments.

I would also pay attention to better balance between the melody and the accompaniment. Unfortunately, the left hand part was often too heavy in relation to the melody line.

Regarding the phrasing, you could often hear accents at the ends of the slurs and an overly intense and long pedal.