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American Protege Presents Its Summer Gala Concert at Carnegie Hall

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Dr. Roberta E. Zlokower

June 30, 2016

Tonight was an exceptional and expansive program of young, gifted musicians, all past winners of the American Protégé prizes, performing mostly on piano, even four-hand piano, plus voice, violin, guitar, and jinghu (Chinese bowed, string instrument). The young artists ranged in age from five to their twenties. Many highlights ensued, with promising virtuosos taking the stage. A most memorable highlight was French pianist, Blandine Waldmann, who courageously took the stage late in the evening, after waiting for her number thirty-three turn, of the thirty-four performers. Wearing a long, mauve gown that miraculously matched the stage roses, she was well worth the wait. I was riveted to her interpretation of Rachmaninoff's *Étude – Tableau Op. 39 No. 1*. The composer's 1917, nine *Études-Tableaux* was his last major work, published while still in Russia, prior to his move to America.

I wrote the praiseworthy term, dervish, during Ms. Waldmann's performance, as this young, poised artist tore into the music with poise, pulse, and passion. Her musicality exuded imploding momentum and professional mastery, beyond her years. Ms. Waldmann is already a winner of numerous, international piano competitions, including the American Protégé International Competition of New York, the International Competition Eurorchestra da Camera "Nuovi Interpreti" di Bari, Italy, and First Prize of the International Competition "Erik Satie" of Lecce, Italy.

Among the other thirty-two young performers, there were many serendipitous moments that showcased what may be child or young adult prodigies. Too numerous to list, I'll spotlight a few lasting impressions. The earlier evening works, mostly Chopin, were also sprinkled with Beethoven and Mozart. These included Meagan Lee's Chopin *Nocturne No. 20 in C sharp minor*, where she took time to absorb the music, rhythm, and exotic tones, Yoko Mukai's Chopin *Waltz Op. 64 No. 2*, where she added balletic ambiance and romantic flourish, Jeff Bao's powerful Beethoven *Moonlight Sonata No. 2, III Mvt Op. 27*, and Celena Ho's Ginastera *Sonata No. 1, I Mvt*, where she brought out its percussive, danceable refrains.

As the evening progressed, composers like Rachmaninoff, Mozart, Paganini, and Gluck were prominent. Memorable moments here were Michael Robinson's vocal performance of the Mozart, *Marriage of Figaro* "Voi Che Sapete", with poise, gesture, and a pre-adolescent high range of song, Joe MacDonald's violin performance of the Paganini "Cantabile", with unusually profound mastery, Diandian Wu's jinghu performance of "Night Thoughts" (Beijing opera tune), with his instrument evoking tones of Chinese theater-ballet, Melodey Soong's piano performance of the Schumann-Liszt *Dedication (Widmung)*, with her yearning, mellow, lilting phrases, Melvyn Gnai Zhi Yong's guitar performance of Kotaro Oshio's "Ready Go", as he slaps the electric guitar for extra percussion, and Michelle Stern's violin performance of the Sarasate *Caprice Basque Op. 24*, with its lyrical dance momentum.

Among the final performers, in addition to the stunning, must-see-hear-again pianist, Blandine Waldmann, I left with memories of Gwyneth Campbell's operatic performance of the Rossini *Il Signor Bruschino*, "Ah! donate il caro sposo", with impressive coloratura vocal range and stage presence, Maarij Bashir, on piano, with the Ravel *Le Tombeau de Couperin, No. 4: Rigaudon*, in a gorgeous interpretation, Joshua Ross, on piano, with the Ravel *Jeux d'eau*, playing eloquently as if on glass harmonica, and Haeshin Shin's piano finale, a stormy and soulful *Années de pèlerinage, Orage*, by Liszt.

Kudos to all the past and recent winners of the American Protégé Competitions, tonight's glowing, Gala performers, and kudos, especially, to Blandine Waldmann, whose extraordinary, spellbinding performance of the Rachmaninoff *Étude-Tableau Op. 39 No. 1* left me wanting to experience this rising artist performing again soon.



**Blandine Waldmann, Performing at Carnegie Hall
American Protégé Summer Gala Concert
Courtesy of Brian Hatton**



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For more information, contact Dr. Roberta E. Zlokower at zlokower@bestweb.net

