

Experience the 'key' to victory in piano competition

Sioux City (IA) – March 12, 2017
Ty Rushing, Sioux City Journal



Mackenzie Melemed
First Place



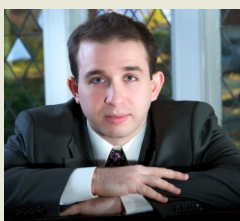
Tzu-Yin Huang
Second Place



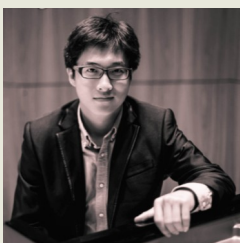
Youkyoung Kim
Third Place



Alan Woo
Fourth Place



Daniel Baer
Fifth Place



Shichao Zhang
Sixth Place

SIoux CITY — Mackenzie Melemed's experience was key to his victory in the 2017 Iowa Piano Competition, an intense three-day contest for pianists held at the Orpheum Theatre in downtown Sioux City.

Although he is only 22, Melemed has played in concert nearly 700 times and is in the midst of earning his bachelor's and master's degrees in piano performance from The Juilliard School, a New York-based performing arts conservatory.

"The competition was really amazing," he said. "It was a really unique experience for me — especially having host families and never having been in Iowa before — so it was a really unique experience, I didn't know what to expect, but the Mayne family really took good care of me and I really appreciate the kindness and hospitality of everyone in this competition."

Melemed beat out Tzu-Yin Huang of Taiwan and Youkyoung Kim of South Korea on Sunday to take home the \$7,500 prize. He is the first American to win the competition since Michael Mizarhi won the initial contest in 2005.

The Massachusetts native first developed a taste for tinkling the ivories when he was 3 after his grandfather bought him a keyboard.

"I started lessons when I was 4, but I didn't start classical training until I was 10," Melemed said.

Melemed isn't sure what drew him to the piano, but he remembers that his stepfather was reading their local newspaper when he saw an ad for "Music for Little Mozarts," a musical teaching program tailored to younger children.

Those initial lessons laid a foundation for Melemed to eventually be accepted into the Juilliard program, which has a less than 8 percent acceptance rate and requires applicants to undergo an audition process.

"It was a very nerve-wracking process to apply — I applied to seven or eight schools — but after having the first Juilliard audition of that audition year it was very exciting and nerve-wracking at the same time," he said.

At Juilliard, Melemed studies under Robert McDonald, a Council Bluffs, Iowa, native and famed accompanist whose presence on the faculty sold him on attending the renowned creative arts school.

Despite his extensive history with live performance — he's toured the Czech Republic and played in China, Finland and countless venues domestically — Melemed noted the Iowa Piano Competition offered a unique opportunity for him and other pianists.

Finalists got the opportunity to play alongside the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra, which hosts the biennial event open to pianists between 18 and 35.

"It's exhilarating to play with orchestras because pianists, no matter how famous we are, we don't get that opportunity as youngsters to play with orchestra especially in a big venue," he said. "This is probably one of the biggest venues I've played in."

The panel of judges which oversaw all three rounds of the competition included:

Pavel Nersessian
Boston University

Robert Roux
Rice University,
The Shepherd School of Music

Haewon Song
Oberlin Conservatory

The Iowa Piano Competition is an intensive three-day competition hosted by the [Sioux City Symphony Orchestra](#) in Sioux City, Iowa. For more information visit the Symphony website or call 712.277.2111.