



Chaoyin Cai  
First Place



Konstantin Soukhovetski  
Second Place



Hsiang Tu  
Third Place



Esther Park  
Fourth Place



Ivan Konev  
Fifth Place



Julia Siciliano  
Sixth Place

## Piano finalists provide drama, buzz with Symphony

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Bruce R. Miller, Sioux City Journal

Showy? Dramatic? Integrated?

Three approaches. Three countries. Two pieces.

At the Iowa Piano Competition Saturday, the three finalists brought different perspectives and different backgrounds.

So who won?

Was it Hsiang Tu, the Taiwan native who said he was hoping to leave an impression of "true beauty"?

Or was it Konstantin Soukhovetski, the Russian who said a musician is like an actor, interpreting the mood of the composer?

Or was it Chaoyin Cai, the Chinese competitor who brought a wealth of experience on a number of instruments?

For the Sioux City Symphony Orchestra audience Saturday night, the competition was a chance to hone their own skills of interpretation and choose a winner - at least in their minds.

The options?

Both Tu and Cai played the same piece - Rachmaninoff's Concerto No. 2 in C minor. Soukhovetski did Tchaikovsky's Concerto No. 1 in B-flat minor.

That alone gave Soukhovetski an edge. Since his piece was different - radically different - it gave him a chance to stand out from the other two. He also was more dramatic, attacking the keyboard like he was in competition with it. He found the high points, seized upon them and emerged with a memorable performance designed to impress. While he didn't always hit every note cleanly (something Cai did), he had the hallmarks of a born showman - something that always comes into play in competitions.

Tu, meanwhile, blended so seamlessly with the orchestra it was frequently difficult to tell if he was the guest artist or a member of the group. In some ways, that was a strength; in a contest like this, however, it put him behind the pack - particularly since Cai was handling the same piece.

Cai had the look and presence of a solo artist. She provided Soukhovetski's sense of drama but knew when to tower and when to disappear.

So who won?

I would have given it to Cai. That wealth of instrumental knowledge enabled her to counter the strings and the brass throughout, making her an asset to any organization.

I suspect others were taken with Soukhovetski's showmanship.

Still, Tu could have slipped under the radar and surprised them all.

The winner: First place: Chaoyin Cai; second place: Konstantin Soukhovetski; third place: Hsiang Tu.

The orchestra, providing a great fanfare to the competition with Shostakovich's Festive Overture, was at its best this year. Conductor Ryan Haskins worked well with the soloists and got the most out of his team.

The upshot? This kind of programming provides excitement, drama and buzz. The only change I'd make - have everyone play the same piece. It evens the playing field and lets the judges compare apples to apples. Apples and oranges don't always leave the same taste.