

Russian Guitarist Says He Cannot Believe He Won Prestigious World Jazz Competition In US

by Chand Sahkeel
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"This was something mind-blowing and I still do not believe it happened," Pobozhiy told Sputnik on Wednesday.

Pobozhiy on Tuesday night won the 2019 Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz International Guitar Competition at the Kennedy Center in Washington, beating 11 other semi-finalists from seven countries to win the grand prize, which comes with a \$30,000 scholarship and a guaranteed recording contract with Concord Records.

Pobozhiy, a 30-year-old resident of Moscow, confided that playing on the same stage with legendary musicians was an amazing experience for him.

"It was crazy, because all my music heroes from my childhood were there, including the best guitar players on the planet like John Scofield, Stanley Jordan, Russell Malone," he said. "I grew up with their music, and this made me a professional musician. And these guys were listening to me playing and decided that I should be a winner. For me it is just crazy."

The panel of judges, made up of some of the most accomplished jazz artists of the last 40 years, also included Pat Metheny, Lee Ritenour, Lionel Loueke and Chico Pinheiro

The contest winner is required to use at least half of the \$30,000 prize for musical and career development, while the half can be used at the winner's own discretion.

Pobozhiy said he would have no trouble spending the money:¹⁷ "I am a father of two children, so I will find a way," he joked.

He also expressed hope that his victory would help promote guitar schools in Russia, allowing for more young talented players to emerge from the country in the future.

Sharing his near-term plans, Pobozhiy said that after returning to Russia he will perform several concerts in Moscow and begin preparing the album with Concord Records. "A lot of plans for the future," he said.

The Hancock Institute of Jazz, previously known as the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, was rebranded this year in honor of the legendary US jazz musician Herbie Hancock.

Twelve musicians from seven countries made it into the semifinals of the competition. Pobozhiy won after performing "502 Blues" and "Falling Grace." US musicians Max Light and Cecil Alexander took the second and third prizes, respectively.