
2012 Thelonious Monk International Jazz Drums Competition Semifinals Recap

Honesty. According to a story shared during Saturday afternoon's Thelonious Monk International [Jazz Drums Competition](#) semifinals, it is a virtue that can reveal itself as soon as a musician takes the bandstand. It's present in the way they carry themselves. It's present in the way they approach their instruments. It's especially present in the way they deal with the music. And, to take it one step further, it's present in a father's tears when he hugs his son and utters the words "I'm so proud of you" after it is announced that his son, 26 year old Colin Stranahan, has been named one of this year's Monk Competition finalists.

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz, in partnership with Cadillac, hosted its 25th annual competition at the Smithsonian Institution's Baird Auditorium. An international competition that is open to musicians under the age of 30, showcased twelve semi-finalists who competed for the honor of being named a Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition winner. Stranahan (Denver, CO) along with Justin Brown (Richmond, CA) and Jamison Ross (Jacksonville, FL) beat out their fellow contestants and will compete tonight (Sunday, September 23, 2012) for a chance to win the ultimate prize: a \$25,000 scholarship and a recording contract with Concord Music Group. This is only the second time the competition has been open to drummers. The other drumming competition, held in 1992, featured Washington, DC's own Harold Sumney as the first place winner, with Jorge Rossy (Spain) finishing second and Tony Jefferson (Florida) and Alvester Garnett (Virginia) tied for third.

For Saturday afternoon's competition, Thelonious Monk, Jr. and Billy Dee Williams shared the emcee responsibilities while Jon Gordon (saxophones), Geoffrey Keezer (piano) and Rodney Whitaker (bass) served as the competition's band. The junior Monk, 62, held the audience's attention by sharing intimate stories about growing up Monk that served to fill the space between performances. Drummers were required to perform three songs: one Monk composition and two others of their choosing.

The afternoon kicked off with performances by Martin Krümming (Germany), Abe Lagrimas, Jr. (Hawaii), Dustin Kaufman (Texas), Noam Israeli (Israel), Kyle Poole (California) and Kristijan Krajncan (Slovenia). Heading into intermission, the challenge was deciding which of the amazing talents could be considered competition front-runners. Where one competitor may have played it too safe, another may have been decidedly more adventurous; and where one may have performed beautifully original material, others delivered big on compositions written by others. They were all exceptionally talented, but who would get the nod? And then, just when it seemed the competition might be decided by the flip of a coin, the second half of the competition began and turned into something special. Oscar Suchanek (Massachusetts), Dor Herskovits (Israel) and Julian Külpmann (Germany) joined Ross, Stranahan and Brown for the second half of the competition each man seeming to raise the bar set by their competitors. As for the three finalists, Brown and Stranahan both gave extraordinary performances of Monk's "Evidence" with Stranahan going the extra mile and performing two Wayne Shorter tunes as the jazz legend himself sat watching from the middle of the auditorium. Ross closed out the competition with a performance of "Rhythm-a-ning" that brought some members of the crowd to their feet. Competitions such as the Monk Competition have received their fair share of criticism for seemingly placing values on the efforts of those who perform work that is as subjective as improvised art, but there's no denying that the exposure that comes from participating in (not necessarily winning) these types of competitions may be more beneficial than opponents care to realize.

The competition continues tonight as the finalists square-off one last time. They will perform three

additional songs as part of the Finals Competition and All-Star Gala Concert before learning the order of the top three prizes.

show time: 7:30pm (Sunday, September 23, 2012); Eisenhower Theater at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; website: www.kennedy-center.org; tickets: \$50-\$75