

Over 30 Years of Chopin Piano Competitions in Darmstadt

Since 1983 the Chopin-Gesellschaft in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland e.V. has been running Chopin piano competitions in Darmstadt which take place every three or four years and which, though organised solely by a handful of committed volunteers, have in the meantime acquired the status of a high-ranking international event. The competition receives its primary financial funding from the city of Darmstadt, the Sparkassenkulturstiftung of Hesse-Thuringia, and the State of Hesse, to whom the Chopin Society is profoundly indebted for the continued success of this event. Since 2009 (with 130 applicants from 30 countries) the Chopin Piano Competition in Darmstadt is regarded by experts as the most prestigious Chopin Competition after Warsaw:

"Of course the Darmstadt Competition is not as renowned as the Chopin in Warsaw, or for that matter the Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, or the Queen Elisabeth in Brussels, but as an international competition specializing in the works of Chopin there are few if any other competitions in the world - and there are many - which could be considered more important, except of course the Warsaw Competition itself. It is for this reason that the competition in Darmstadt attracts the attention of so many young and highly talented pianists from all over the globe." (Kevin Kenner, winner of the prestigious Chopin Competition in Warsaw in 1990)

"The Chopin International Piano Competition in Darmstadt takes a special place in the Music World. Many people know about the famous Chopin Competition in Warsaw and everybody loves the music of Chopin. It doesn't surprise me that there are quite a number of piano competitions around the world dedicated to Chopin. Yet the one in Darmstadt is the most significant one, next to the famous competition in Warsaw." (Gustav Alink, founder of the Alink-Argerich Foundation, offering independent information and support for pianists and competition organisers worldwide.)

The Chopin Competition in Darmstadt has a long and rich tradition not shared by too many other competitions. It dates back to 1983 when, thirteen years after founding the Chopin-Gesellschaft in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, the Polish pianist Maciej Lukaszczyk, who remained its president until 2014, also initiated the First National Chopin Piano Competition in Darmstadt consisting of 2 rounds. Through the Chopin Competitions *"the Chopin-Gesellschaft wishes to honour Chopin and his music, to further young talent, present young pianists at the competitions and to never cease searching for ways leading to the best interpretation of Chopin's music".*

The second competition followed in 1986 and already consisted of 3 rounds. In 1989 the competition, renamed the "European Chopin Piano Competition" was extended to all pianists having studied for two semesters or having completed a one-year course of piano studies in a European country. The age limit was - and still is - 30 years. The first prize, however, had increased from DM 3000 for the first two competitions to DM 9000.

The IV Competition in 1992 witnessed the performance of Chopin's two concertos in the final round for the first time with orchestra - previously they had been performed with piano accompaniment. The venue for this IV competition switched from the Justus-Liebig-Haus to the Akademie für Tonkunst, where it is still held today.

The V European Piano Competition in 1996 had candidates from 21 countries, which increased to 24 countries in 1999 in the VI competition. The VII European Piano Competition in 2002 saw a significant rise in the first prize money from DM 9000 to € 10.000.

The VIII European Competition in 2006 was the last one organised by Irmgard Hörl, one of the founding members of the Chopin Society and to whom much of the long success of the competition must be attributed. This was also the first time the competition had been open to all pianists under 30 world-wide without restriction.

The next competition in 2009 under the direction of Jill Rabenau was consequently renamed the "IX Darmstadt International Chopin Piano Competition", to which more than 130 candidates from 30 countries applied to take part. The subsequent success of so many of the "Darmstadt candidates" at the XVI International Chopin Competition in Warsaw in 2010 found notable recognition in the Polish media.

The X Darmstadt International Chopin Piano Competition" in October 2013 again attracted an abundance of excellent candidates (almost 100 applications from 25 nations) and a high-ranking international jury. Its success creates huge hopes and expectations for the coming edition: October 6 - 16, 2017.

Jill Rabenau

Vice President and Competition Director