

## Chilean tech executive wins amateur contest in Paris

Report by Jonathon Brown

The 29th competition for 'Grands Amateurs' took place in Paris during March. Six pianists were selected for the final at the elaborately austere Grand Amphitheatre of the Sorbonne – where the competition's dapper founder, Gérard Bekerman, is Professor of Economics.

This year provided an object lesson in the importance of repertoire in competitions. A superb, mercurial rendering of Schumann's *Abegg Variations* and a Brahms Intermezzo by German computer programmer Johannes

Gaechter placed him third. He trailed behind Beethoven's *Appassionata* in an assuredly relentless account by New York lawyer Roger Luo. The winner, Sebastián Amenábar, a vice-president at South American retail platform Falabella.com, gave a scintillating reading of Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses* and Liszt's sixth *Paganini Study* – an unusual programme in a competition typically infested with *Gaspards* and Liszt sonatas.

Swiss lawyer Jeremy Mätzener perhaps unwisely chose to play the first two movements of Schubert's final piano sonata,

D960: he showed compelling control but suffered a memory lapse and came fourth. Drawing in fifth place were Julien Eyraud, a magistrate, and Hiroshi Oe, Japanese ambassador to the OECD. Eyraud played Chopin's Second Sonata and gave a finely evocative account of the final two movements. It fell to Oe to play first, an already nery duty, but he gave diplomatically controlled renderings of Chopin's sixth Nocturne and the *Polonaise-Fantaisie*, with an impressively conceived climax. The Audience Prize was shared by the Jury's first two, and the Press Prize went to Luo.

The winner will perform Liszt's Second Concerto at a prizewinner's concert on 28 November, joined by the Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine in a typical Bekerman piano-feast. The programme also features prodigy Louis Abraham playing Franck's *Symphonic Variations*, plus Bekerman himself in Ravel's G major concerto.

I spoke with a beaming Amenabar after the final and asked the obvious question: how does a vice-president of a big company have time to keep up the piano to this level? He answered memorably: 'I make time.' [www.pianoamateurs.com](http://www.pianoamateurs.com)