



For several years I have been fortunate enough to be on to the press jury of France's unique piano competition, the International Competition for Outstanding Piano Amateurs. I've seen many interesting pianists win, among them Rupert Egerton-Smith, a finalist in *Pianist's* own amateur competition in 2005. However, this year's final (the 22nd), which was held at Paris's Sorbonne University theatre on 2 April, was the most exhilarating yet. For once, all members of the jury and all member of the press agreed on the winner! And not just one winner either – it was a tie between two young men: Robin Stephenson, a French PhD mathematics student, and Simon Grisdale, a Japanese-English translator of British nationality.

Here were two very different talents. Grisdale cannot use the piano's pedals, as he is wheelchair bound, so he cleverly opted for Baroque/Classical repertoire. His 12 variations on Mozart's *Ah, vous dirais-je Maman* were played like precious pearls, all beautifully strung together. His whole programme was musical, refined and absorbing. By contrast, the more flamboyant Stephenson chose to play Ravel, Chopin and Kapustin – the 'Scarbo' from Ravel's *Gaspard* blew everyone's socks off (with some cool and relaxed jazzy Kapustin to follow... perfect).

The winners will be invited to play concertos with the Orchestre de la Garde Républicaine at the Salle Gaveau in October. Grisdale will play a Mozart concerto and Stephenson the Rachmaninov Concerto No 3.

As well as a performance prize, the winner received 3,000 euros. Jury members Germaine Devèze and Sabine Lacoarret generously and spontaneously offered another 3,000 euros, so that the two winners didn't have to split the prize money. Such a warm-hearted gesture basically summed up the spirit of the event.

Erica Worth