



# Twinkling The Ivories

February 2010

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## Harmony at Honens: A Teacher's Perspective of the Honens Festival

Calgary was the site of the sixth Honens event in late October and early November. It has become, as far as I know, the largest piano event in Canada (sadly, one thing Calgary does better than us...ha. It is named after Esther Honens, who donated millions of dollars for an endowment fund.

The Honens piano event was for me a chance to hear many amazing performers and to learn from the free master classes. The pianists were from all over the world. They each gave a solo piano recital and a concert with a violinist. Those who went on to the highest levels performed with a singer, and finally a piano concerto with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra.

There were a few musical elements I really appreciated: the pianists were all assigned to play a brand new piece by a Canadian composer which included moments of improvisation; and the collaborative aspect of playing with a violinist or singer. One of the goals of our group classes is for our students to play collaboratively with other musicians. Our students learn to listen to others while they play, and this connects to what happened at Honens.

Honens is actually an international piano competition, but I would guess the Suzuki teachers, students and parents in attendance were most interested in hearing excellent playing and not so much the competitive element. Normally, the Suzuki method stays away from the idea of competition in music, since there is already plenty of competition in everyday life. Competition by its very nature excludes people. In a competition, the vast majority of performers have the experience of being told "No, you are not good enough." Obviously, to many people, this would be a huge, if not insurmountable disincentive to playing piano. And so, with our goal in Suzuki being that students will keep playing, we do not have competitions. Nevertheless, it was intriguing to see the decisions of the competition judges. I was lucky to hear the first recital of the Russian pianist Georgy Tchaizde, who went on to win the competition. His performance really was very captivating, virtuosic, and astounding.

What makes for an astounding performance? For piano teachers, this is an interesting question, without an easy answer. Georgy seemed to love performing, and smiled lots before and after he played. He seemed very engaged, and his technique was amazing.

Excellent piano playing is much more than playing fast notes easily or slow notes carefully. I was fascinated by the way the performers came onto the stage, and how this compared and contrasted with what we do in Suzuki. Our piano students learn about bowing at their first lesson, and the teachers hope the students look at the audience as a way of connecting to them. But several of the Honens performers rushed onto the stage and did slouchy bows that looked like they were simply scratching their knees; they made no eye contact with the audience. Frankly, this looked really lousy. I was glad that our Suzuki students learn the benefits of a slow bow, and a smile at the audience.

I do believe that is beneficial for all of us --- students, parents, and teachers --- to keep hearing excellent concerts. They can be inspirational, and motivating to keep learning, practicing, and seeking more beautiful music. *And so, for any families feeling a little "stalled" - go see a concert!* The Edmonton Symphony, the University of Alberta and Alberta College have dozens of excellent ones regularly.

The Honens winners each put out CDs. Your piano teachers have many of these in the ESPS library, so you may hear them yourself. Also, the [www.honens.com](http://www.honens.com) website still has concerts available for free listening (see Esther 2.0 on the website). Additionally, the Honens pianists will be touring, so you can look for them playing with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra in the near future (Katherine Chi, who comes to Edmonton regularly, was a Honens laureate). The next Honens will be in the fall of 2012...something to look forward to!

*By Tim Eckert*

## Chopin – 200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

March 1, 2010 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Frederic Chopin, a Romantic era composer from Poland. Chopin began to play the piano at a very young age and is well known both as a player and composer. Chopin was a great musical innovator, inventing forms such as the ballade, and developing new advances in piano sonatas, mazurkas, waltzes, études, impromptus, and préludes.

In honour of this special anniversary, why not listen to some of our ESPS teachers' favourite Chopin pieces?

*Piano Concerto #2 Op 21- Nancy Thornhill & Melanie Bodnar*  
*Fantasia Impromptu (Op. posth. 66) - Tess Brown & Joyce Sipsas*  
*Barcarole in F sharp major, Op. 60 – Eleanor Tsui*  
*Nocturnes, Op. 27, No. 1 – Alla Rekhsen*  
*Ballade #3 Op. 47 – Tim Eckert*

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## An ESPS Student's View of the Honens Piano Competition

The Honens International Piano Competition was a great moment for me and for my experience in piano playing. I saw two great and talented players battling it out with everything they had!

Gilles Vonsattel from Switzerland started the competition with his wide variety of repertoire and his great talent for playing dynamics in his songs. I really loved him because of all the little songs that he played. So every minute I heard him – it was always a very different feeling that I experienced.

Then Soyeon Lee from South Korea came out and performed with her amazing strength a song that lasted about 30 minutes! It was very entertaining to see her arm movements and how her fingers played the song so well.

The most surprising part for me at the competition was the duet that the performers had to do with a singer. Both of them were doing so well with their cooperation, and the best part of them singing was that they were in perfect sync for such a long time!

This experience was surely the best I had so far and I hope I get to have this experience again!

*By Colin Zhou*

**A note to families attending group classes at Suzuki Charter School:** Although parking spaces in the lot are limited, it would be appreciated if all visitors used the lot as much as possible. If there is no more space available in the parking lot when you arrive, then please be respectful of neighbours when parking on the street. Do not block driveways and please do slow down and be cautious of pedestrians.

## January 2010 Graduations

Congratulations to the following students for their hard work and well-deserved graduations:

### Volume 1

Ezra Bialowas  
Levi Bowling  
Nicholas Cummins  
Erika Dyck  
Lauren Hanson  
Margaret Huang  
Sofia Ivanchikov  
Kaelan Jensen  
Mae Macdonald  
Griffin Mackenzie  
Ruby MacMillan  
Sara Visram  
Claudia Wang

### Volume 2

Erin Chow  
Gabriella Poworoznik  
Carina Siu  
Tereza Zitnansky

### Volume 3

Lukas Jenks  
Klaudia Kowalik  
Matthew Lee  
Noah Makar

### Volume 5

Ember Large  
Julie Vo  
Victor Weir

### Volume 7

Daniel Belland