

Press Release

Sunday, September 19, 2004

2nd International Conductors' Competition Sir Georg Solti finale: Two first prizes, one second prize

The **American James Gaffigan (25)** and the **Bulgarian Ivo Venkov (35)** both won first prizes in the 2nd International Conductors' Competition Sir Georg Solti. Second prize was awarded to the **Swede Johannes Gustavsson (29)**.

At the final concert open to the public on Sunday afternoon in the Alte Oper Frankfurt, the three finalists conducted the Frankfurter Museumsorchester (orchestra of the Frankfurt Opera), performing the following pieces of music: James Gaffigan *Till Eulenspiegel* by Richard Strauss, Ivo Venkov *La Mer* by Claude Debussy and Johannes Gustavsson *Dance Suite* by Béla Bartók.

Whereas for the 1st International Conductors' Competition Sir Georg Solti there was no first prize winner, the jury this year decided to award two first prizes. In announcing the decision, the **chairman of the jury Christoph von Dohnányi**, Chief Conductor of the NDR Symphony Orchestra, Hamburg, and former Musical Director of the Frankfurt Opera, said the jury finds it difficult to look accurately into the future. Rather, it checks whether the candidates have achieved what they set out to do. "And here the two first prize winners are equal." "All three," according to von Dohnányi, "will have a good career and a lot of pleasure in music." The other members of the jury were: Paolo Carignani, Musical Director of the Frankfurt Opera; Ingo de Haas, First Concert Director of the Frankfurter Museumsorchester; Helmut Reitze, Director of Hessischer Rundfunk; Karl Rarichs, member of the Management Board of the Frankfurter Museums-Gesellschaft and co-initiator of the competition; as well as Lady Valerie Solti, patroness of the competition and widow of the legendary maestro.

First prize is EUR 15,000 and the invitation to conduct a double concert with the Frankfurter Museumsorchester in the Alte Oper in Frankfurt. The second prize is an award of EUR 10,000. The prize money is made available by the Cultural Foundation of Deutsche Bank.

James Gaffigan (25) received his conductor's training at the American Academy of Conducting, the Aspen Music Festival and School and the Tanglewood Music Center. Here, he was able to work together with conductors such as Kurt Masur and Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos before he received his undergraduate and graduate degrees in conducting from the New England Conservatory and Rice University in Houston. His debut with the Cleveland

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SIR GEORG SOLTI



FRANKFURT AM MAIN
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Orchestra was at the Blossom Music Festival, and a short time later, he was appointed its Assistant Conductor. Concurrently, he became the Music Director of the Cleveland Orchestra Youth Orchestra. Gaffigan has already worked in assisting roles with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic and the Houston Symphony Orchestra.

Ivo Venkov (35), born in Bulgaria, now lives and works in Belgium. His musical education began at the age of four, at seven he gave his first concert. Already while studying at the State Academy of Music and the Performing Arts in Sofia, Venkov had an engagement as the First Concert Director at the Varna State Opera. Additional studies in conducting in Austria led to his numerous appearances with various orchestras in Europe and Asia before he was appointed Chief Conductor of the “Jeugd & Muziek van Antwerpen” (Youth and Music Orchestra of Antwerp). Only four months ago, Venkov won second prize in the first Bamberger Symphoniker Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition.

The Swedish conductor and violist **Johannes Gustavsson** (29) studied at the Norwegian State Academy of Music with Lars-Anders Tomter, Ole-Kristian Ruud and Olav-Anton Thomessen and attended masters’ classes with Simon Steatfeild and Jorma Panula. Besides his work as a conductor, Gustavsson is an orchestra musician with the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra. His previous engagements as conductor have included the symphony orchestras of Helsingborg and Norrköpping, the Oslo Philharmonic and the Norwegian Radio Symphony Orchestra. In 2003, Gustavsson, now 29, won first place in the Swedish Conductors’ Competition.

More than 200 candidates between the ages of 20 and 35 from 45 countries submitted applications to this year’s competition. 24 of them were invited to the two preliminary rounds, during which the three finalists were selected.

We please request publication.

Best regards,

Press Department
ALTE OPER FRANKFURT

The International Conductors’ Competition Sir Georg Solti is a joint project of the Alte Oper Frankfurt, the Frankfurter Museums-Gesellschaft e. V., the Frankfurt Opera and the Cultural Foundation of Deutsche Bank. Media partner: Hessischer Rundfunk.