

Media Release

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The bar keeps getting higher

Michael Hill International Violin Competition

It took the selection panel over twenty very intense hours of listening to select the 2009 semi-finalists. Dmitri Atannasov, Justine Cormack, Vesa-Matti Leppanen, Dene Olding and Wilma Smith judged 90 CDs of Paganini, Bach, and sonatas to determine the eighteen young violinists invited to compete live in the Michael Hill International Violin Competition next June.

New Zealander Wilma Smith, concertmaster of Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and former concertmaster of NZ Symphony Orchestra found "aural and mental exhaustion took over during the grueling process of whittling down ninety mostly highly qualified applicants". Although the applicants are required to submit CVs, photos, letters of recommendation and DVDs to authenticate their recordings, the panel makes its determination solely on the audio recordings and does not know the identities of the applicants until the selection has been complete.

Long-serving panelist Justine Cormack of the NZTrio believes the bar has raised considerably this year. "Each year our job gets harder. It is a real testament to the growth of the competition." Illustrating this is that five former semi-finalists were not re-invited this year.

The applicants, all age 18-28, represented 28 different nationalities.

Jinjoo Cho	Korea
Hyunjoo Choo	Korea
Tessa Frederick	America
Emilie-Anne Gendron	America
Luanne Homzy	Canada

more.../page 2

Yoo Jin Jang	Korea
Yihua Jin	China
Dami Kim	Korea
Hye-Jin Kim	Korea
Jee Won Kim	Korea
Maxim Kosinov	Russia
Shin-Kai Lin	Taiwan
David McCarroll	America
Alexander Read	Canada
Sophie Rosa	UK
Mateusz Smol	Poland
Danbi Um	Korea
Kyoko Yonemoto	Japan

New Zealander, Sarah Buchan, was one of the 6 alternates selected. Originally from Christchurch and recently graduated from The Juilliard School in New York, Sarah is also the winner of the inaugural *NZ Development Prize* - created to offer an intensive development opportunity for a Kiwi violinist to accompany and observe the competition's proceedings, participate in the masterclasses being offered by the international Artist Judges and be acknowledged in the prize-giving. Should Sarah be called upon to compete in the competition, the *NZ Development Prize* will fall to Auckland violinist, Eugene Kim.

The Competition provides the semi-finalists with airfares to New Zealand and accommodation in private homes. The prize pool is very generous: First prize is NZ\$40,000, a CD recording on the Naxos label and a winner's tour in 2010. Second through sixth prizes receive NZ\$10,000 to NZ\$1,000 and a prize of NZ\$2,000 will be awarded to the semi-finalist who has the best performance of New Zealand composer, Gareth Farr's, specially-commissioned work. The *Michael Hill Audience Prize* will be determined by audience texting – a first for the competition. Again, one lucky semi-finalist will be awarded a two year loan of a contemporary Cremonese violin by master craftsman, Riccardo Bergonzi.

The esteemed judges serving on the 2009 international panel are Shmuel Ashkenasi (Israel), Pamela Frank (USA), Philippe Graffin (France), Dong Suk Kang (Korea), Oleh Krysa (Ukraine/USA), Wilma Smith (NZ/Australia) and Radoslaw Szulc (Poland/Germany); they will be chaired by New Zealander Dr Robin Congreve.

The 2009 competition kicks off in Queenstown 4-6 June where all 18 semi-finalists perform demanding programmes of solo and piano-accompanied works. The top six semi-finalists then perform in Auckland 8-9 June with cellist Ashley Brown and pianist Michael Houstoun with the three finalists advancing to compete in the final round on Saturday 11 June in the Auckland Town Hall accompanied by the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra.

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Further information: www.violincompetition.co.nz

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