



Taking a look back at the 2017 competition...

Sebastian Heindl wins Northern Ireland International Organ Competition 2017



Sebastian Heindl, aged 19 and a student of Martin Schmeding at the University of Music and Theatre, Leipzig, has won the Senior section of the Northern Ireland International Organ Competition (NIIOC), which took place on Monday 21 August on the Walker organ in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh.

The competition is for organists aged 21 and under, who must be of diploma standard to enter the senior category. Applications to take part were received from Hong Kong, China, France, Germany, Poland, Budapest, Slovakia, Lithuania, Canada, UK and Ireland. As a result of the exceptional standard, the shortlist was increased to from 12 to 15 competitors, representing eight countries. The competition jury was chaired by the internationally-renowned recitalist Thomas Trotter, city organist of Birmingham. He was joined for the Senior category by David Hill, former organist of Westminster Cathedral, Winchester Cathedral and St John's College Cambridge and until this month chief conductor of the BBC Singers; and for all three categories by organist, harpsichordist and pianist Malcolm Proud, organist of St Canice Cathedral, Kilkenny.



As first prize winner, Sebastian Heindl wins £1,000, a £650 New York flight subsidy and six public recitals, hosted by venues including St Thomas Fifth Avenue, New York; Westminster Abbey, London, and Trinity College, Cambridge, in addition to a trophy. The first prize package is sponsored by an anonymous donor.



Heindl is a former chorister of St Thomas Church in Leipzig, where J S Bach was organist. He is currently studying for a degree in church music, which includes liturgy, conducting, singing and jazz as well as organ performance. Heindl's NIIOC recital programme included his own transcription of the 'Fanfare pour précéder La Péri' by Paul Dukas, and concluded with the virtuosic Etude Héroïque by the contemporary Canadian composer Rachel Laurin.



'I have very much enjoyed taking part in the NIIOC,' he said. 'It is the third competition I have entered and this has been my biggest success. It is good for me to get to know this kind of organ which is quite different from the instruments we have in Germany, especially because of the shape of the pedalboard. Luckily I knew my programme from memory because I spent most of the time looking at my feet! It also has some very different sounds. I liked the tuba stop, and used it a lot in my programme.'



The second prize of £500 and a hosted recital at Southwark Cathedral, London, sponsored by Wells-Kennedy Organ Partnership, Lisburn, went to Tom Rioult, 20, a student at the Conservatoire of Music, Dance and Theatre in Caen, France. Third prize of £200 and a hosted recital at St Michael's Church, Cornhill, London, sponsored by Cormont Music, went to Donal McCann of Belfast, who also won the Bach prize of £100 and a Bach recital at St John's, Smith Square, London. McCann is a former pupil of Methodist College, Belfast and former chorister of St Peter's Roman Catholic Cathedral, Belfast; he has spent the past two years at Eton College and is about to take up an organ scholarship at King's College, Cambridge.

Joshua Roebuck, 20, and Ashley Wagner, 21, both students of Henry Fairs at Birmingham Conservatoire, were highly commended

Five players took part in the Intermediate Category of the competition. It was won by Jan-Aurel Dawidiuk, 16, from Hannover, Germany, who played Vierne's Carillon de Westminster Op. 54 No 6 and Evocation II by Thierry Escaich. He receives £300 and a recital at St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh. Second prize went to Thomas Maxwell, 16, from the Republic of Ireland. Third prize went to Sophie Dudley, 17, from the UK, and Neil Barrett, 18, and James Osborne, 15 were commended.

The Junior category was won by Michael Nevin, 11, from Carryduff, County Down and a chorister of St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast, who receives £200. Michael has won a music scholarship to the Pilgrims School, Winchester, and will take up a quirstership at Winchester College Chapel in September.

Commenting on the competition results and his experience of chairing the jury, Thomas Trotter said: 'I think this is a great competition as an entry point for organists who want to dip their toes in the competition experience. The players can choose their own repertoire and they play for 20 minutes, so the task is very contained and easily achievable by an 18-20-year-old.'



'There was quite a range of standards among this year's entrants: there were people who would not have been out of place in one of the bigger competitions for experienced players, and there were a few who obviously found it quite a challenge, but nobody disgraced themselves.



'Sebastian Heindl stood out because of his well-balanced, unusual programme as well as his excellent playing. We were impressed that he included one of his own arrangements, which was very enterprising and meant there was a little bit more of him in the programme. Every competition programme needs a killer piece – the showstopper that, if it is played well, we can say “that was the outstanding performance of the competition”. Sebastian did just that with the Rachel Laurin piece, which I didn't know. I always like to be surprised when I'm listening to a recital, and I also like to hear players performing contemporary music, so Sebastian scored highly for that. The second prize-winner, Tom Rioult, gave a wonderful performance of the Durufle Toccata and we were very impressed by Donal McCann's performance of the Bach Trio Sonata in G Major BWV 530.'

Richard Yarr, founder and artistic director of the competition, said: 'The atmosphere at this year's competition has been very special. While achieving the highest possible standards, an international mix of competitors have celebrated with each other, learnt from each other and socialised together. They have forged connections which will no doubt last throughout their careers. That was my vision when I established NIIOC in 2011 and those are the qualities we are excited to build on.'

The competitors' programmes can be found on the NIIOC website www.niic.com/competition.

The Northern Ireland International Organ Competition is for organists under the age of 21. It offers substantial monetary prizes, prestigious recital opportunities and masterclasses with leading organists across the globe. Founded in 2011, from the outset it has attracted exceptionally gifted young players; early winners Ben Comeau, Ben Bloor, Richard Gowers and Andrew Forbes are already establishing successful careers. Last year saw the first winner from outside the British Isles, Mona Rozdestvenskyte from Russia.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

The Northern Ireland International Organ Competition was established in 2011 to provide talented young organists, aged 21 and under, with major recital engagements, financial support and recording opportunities. It is now recognised as the world's leading international competition for young organists and is officially partnered with the St. Albans International Organ Festival. Since NIIOC began recital venues have included St. Thomas Fifth Avenue New York, Westminster Abbey,

Southwark Cathedral, Christ Church Cathedral Dublin, St. Columb's Cathedral Londonderry, Trinity College Cambridge, Canongate Kirk Edinburgh, St. Peter Mancroft Norwich, St. Peter's Cathedral Belfast, Worcester Cathedral and St. Michael's Cornhill London.

International jurors have included Thierry Mechler (France), Kimberly Marshall (USA), Mattias Wager (Sweden), Frédéric Blanc (France), Erwan le Prado (France) and Martin Jean (USA).

David Hill, Chief Conductor of the BBC Singers and former Organist and Director of Music of Westminster Cathedral, Winchester Cathedral and St John's College Cambridge, is a patron of the competition and has been a jury member every year since its inception. The other patrons are Mark Duley, Organist of St Nicholas Cathedral, Galway; James O'Donnell, Organist and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey; and Dame Gillian Weir.

Partners include the Charles Wood Festival and Summer School, Armagh (which runs concurrently with the organ competition); Pipeworks Organ Festival, Dublin; the Arts Council of Northern Ireland; and St Albans International Organ Festival.



NIIOC is organised in three categories:

The Senior Category for Post-Grade 8 players took place on Monday 21 August in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh. Entrants must perform a balanced 20-minute programme, consisting of at least three pieces and including a major work of J S Bach. The First Prize package includes £1,000, a £650 New York flight subsidy, and six public recitals hosted by St Thomas Fifth Avenue, New York; Westminster Abbey; Trinity College Chapel, Cambridge; Manchester cathedral; St Patrick's College, Maynooth (Ireland); and a Royal College of Organists 'Raise Your Game' recital, together with significant media opportunities. Second and Third Prizes offer £500 and £200 and recitals at Southwark Cathedral, London and St Michael's Cornhill, London, respectively. There is also a £100 Bach Prize for the most outstanding performance of Bach in this category.

Entry is limited to 12 competitors, chosen on the basis of CD or MP3 recordings which must be submitted with application forms.

The Intermediate Category for players of Grades 6-8 standard took place on Tuesday 22 August in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Cathedral, Armagh.

Applicants should not have gained an organ diploma. There is a free choice of repertoire for recitals which must consist of two or three pieces, lasting in total no more than 12 minutes. There is one prize of £300 and a performance opportunity hosted by St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast.

The Junior Category for players of Grades 4-5 standard took place on Tuesday 22 August in St Malachy's Church, Armagh. Applicants must not have Grade 6 organ or above. There is a free choice of repertoire for recitals which must consist of two or three pieces, lasting in total no more than eight minutes. There is one prize of £200 and a performance hosted by St Peter's Cathedral, Belfast. A new partnership between NIIOC and the St Albans International Organ Competition was established in 2016, with the aim of creating both competitive and performance opportunities for organists aged under 21 (NIIOC) and under 33 (St Albans).

The 2017 Judges

Thomas Trotter is one of the UK's most widely admired musicians. He has been Birmingham City Organist since 1983. He is also Organist at St. Margaret's Church, Westminster Abbey, in London and Visiting Fellow in Organ Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music. Earlier in his career he was organ scholar at King's College, Cambridge, and he later continued his studies with Marie-Claire Alain in Paris where he took the Prix de Virtuosit  in her class.

Thomas was awarded the Royal Philharmonic Society's prestigious Instrumentalist Award, International Performer of the Year Award for 2012 by the New York City Chapter of the American Guild of Organists and, in 2016, the Royal College of Organists Medal. The excellence of his musicianship has also long been recognised internationally in his musical partnerships. Thomas was consultant for the Marcussen organ in Manchester's newly-built Bridgewater Hall as well as for the new Klais organ in Symphony Hall, Birmingham. He has given the opening recital on new or restored organs in places such as Cleveland's Severance Hall (Ohio), Princeton University Chapel (New Jersey), the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, London's Royal Festival Hall and at St David's Hall in Cardiff alongside being regularly asked to perform on major historic instruments. He also performs with leading orchestras across the world. He became a recording artist for Decca in 1989 and amongst numerous awards he received a Grand Prix du Disque for his recording of music by Liszt.

David Hill is widely known as one of the leading choral directors in the UK. He has just concluded ten years as Chief Conductor of The BBC Singers and is Musical Director of The Bach Choir, Music Director of the Southern Sinfonia, Music Director of the Leeds Philharmonic Society, Associate Guest Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, Principal Conductor of Yale Schola Cantorum. He is also artistic director of the Charles Wood Festival and Summer School, Armagh, Northern Ireland. Born in Carlisle and educated at Chetham's School of Music, of which he is now a Governor, he was made a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists aged 17. Having been Organ Scholar at St John's College, Cambridge, he returned to hold the post of Director of Music from 2004-2007. Other appointments have included Master of the Music at Winchester Cathedral, Master of the Music at Westminster Cathedral and Artistic Director of the Philharmonia Chorus. He holds an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Southampton for Services to Music. David has a broad-ranging discography covering repertoire from Thomas Tallis to a number of world premiere recordings. As well as achieving prestigious Grammy and Gramophone Awards, many of his discs have been recommended as Critic's Choices. His ongoing series of English choral music for Naxos has received particular acclaim. He is also well known as an orchestral conductor in the UK and beyond.

Malcolm Proud won first prize at the Edinburgh International Harpsichord Competition in 1982. He has performed at all the major Irish festivals and has toured Finland, Denmark, Holland, U.K., Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, U.S.A., Japan, Canada, Estonia, Latvia, Belgium, Austria and Portugal. In 2016 he gave harpsichord recitals at the National Concert Hall in Dublin, at Fenton House in London playing the Queen's 1612 Ruckers instrument, at the Cobbe Collection of Historical Keyboard Instruments in Hatchlands, Surrey, and at Handel House in London. In 2010 Malcolm played all six of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos with Sir John Eliot Gardiner's English Baroque Soloists at the London Proms and the Schleswig-Holstein Festival in Germany. He is co-founder with Swiss violinist Maya Homburger of Camerata Kilkenny and has performed concertos with the Academy of Ancient Music and the European Union Baroque Orchestra. He has recorded Bach's 5th Brandenburg Concerto with both the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and the English Baroque Soloists. His most recent recording – J.S. Bach's Six Partitas for Harpsichord on the Maya Recordings Label – has been critically acclaimed. He is organist of St. Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny www.malcolmproud.ie

<https://www.niic.com/2017comp>

