

“Jaeden Izik-Dzurko” Paradise of Music ~ The Other Side of Canada 30th edition

Introduction

Hello to all those who support Japan-Canada relations and to all music fans.



So, this time's music column called "Paradise of Music" is Jaeden Izik-Dzurko, a young pianist that Canada is proud of. In fact, Jaeden is not yet well known in the sense of name recognition. However, he won two international music competitions in 2024. The Montreal International Musical Competition in May and the Leeds International Piano Competition in September. He is a pianist whose future is very exciting.

2024 - The Competition Killer's Face

In the past, "Paradise of Music" has featured many Canadian musicians. In particular, when it comes to pianists, Canada is a treasure trove of geniuses and prodigies, starting with classical pianist Glenn Gould and jazz pianist Oscar Peterson. In the 23rd column, we looked at the young master Jan Lisiecki, who is from Calgary. Jan rose to prominence at a young age and is said to be "a pianist who didn't need to enter a competition." On the other hand, Jaeden, who we will be looking this time, is at the opposite end of the spectrum and should be called a "competition killer" pianist.

Let's take a look at Jaeden's performance in 2024, which has made his name known in one fell swoop.

The 21st Montreal International Musical Competition Piano Division was held in Montreal from May 5th to 16th. Jaeden played Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2 in the final and won the

championship. In fact, even though the competition is held in Canada, there has never been a Canadian winner until now, making Jaeden the first Canadian to win the competition.



Photo from Concours musical international de Montréal (CMIM) Facebook

The Montreal International Musical Competition is a relatively new competition, launched in 2002, but the total prize money, including the first prize, the recital given as a bonus, and the opportunity to record, is 140,000 Canadian dollars. Jaeden also won the Best Canadian Artist award (5,000 Canadian dollars), the best performance of a Sonata Award in the semi-final award (3,000 Canadian dollars), the Canadian Composer Award, and the New Piece Award (2,500 Canadian dollars). Music cannot be measured by prize money, but the total prize money of the Montreal International Musical Competition is currently the highest among many international competitions. The Montreal Symphony Orchestra, known as a prestigious orchestra, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation are among the sponsors. This is also why it is increasing its presence as a new international competition.

In fact, Jaeden had already passed the first round of the Leeds International Piano Competition at this stage, and was set to compete in the main competition of the Leeds International Piano Competition in September. Classical piano competitions are similar to marathons in athletics, and competitors do not usually participate in major competitions consecutively. This is because even in one competition, from the preliminary round to the final, many pieces must be judged over a long period of time. This requires strong mental strength and concentration. In order to win the world's highest level of competition, it is essential to master a large number of repertoires and be in good condition. Moreover, if you win one of the competitions, but do not achieve results in the other, it may have a negative impact on your reputation and career. Therefore, competing in both Montreal and Leeds is

also a sign of Jaeden's confidence. Behind his confidence is careful preparation.



After winning Montreal, Jaeden traveled to Leeds, a city in northern England. The second round of the 21st Leeds International Piano Competition began on September 11th. After passing the second round, the semi-finals were held from the 15th to the 17th. The five finalists who made it through there advanced to the finals. The final took place over two days, Friday, September 20th and Saturday, September 21st. Jaeden competed with Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2, which he also played in the Montreal final. He won first place. Jaeden's reputation soared as he won the Leeds competition right after winning in Montreal.

The Leeds International Piano Competition was founded in 1961. Since 1963, it has been held every three years. It can be said to be a prestigious piano competition comparable to the International Chopin Piano Competition, which is held once every five years. The contestants are all extremely talented and the competition is tough. Notable winners include Radu Lupu in 1969 and Murray Perahia in 1972. In 1975, Japan's pride and joy, Mitsuko Uchida, came in second, and András Schiff came in third. The future of Leeds winners is extremely bright.

Salmon Arm Prodigy

Jaeden Izik-Dzurko was born in Salmon Arm, British Columbia in 1999. It is a beautiful town of about 17,000 people, surrounded by forests and lakes, located about 470 km northeast of Vancouver, across the Fraser Valley, at the entrance to the Okanagan region. Both of his parents are piano players, and Jaeden's father started teaching him when he was about 5 years old. At the age of 13, he began participating in various music events in BC. Audiences who happened to hear young Jaeden perform were amazed by his incredible skills. Then, in 2014, he participated in a music competition in Kamloops, the major urban area near his hometown of Salmon Arm, and won the piano category. At the age of 15, he made his

orchestra debut, performing with the Kamloops Symphony Orchestra. For a prodigy from a region with a population of less than 20,000, winning a competition is a very strategic and practical way to get a foot in the door. On the other hand, for the organizers of the competition, discovering unknown talent is the most important mission.

And so, in 2017, young Jaeden entered the Juilliard School in New York. He showed his talent.

The appearance of the competition killer

I will only record the main competitions Jaeden participated in after entering Juilliard.

I can see a young, not well-known player boldly challenging himself, relying only on his own skills, in search of an international stage to shine.

In 2019, he won the Juilliard's Gina Bachauer Piano Competition.

In 2020, he won the International Cochran Piano Competition in Warsaw, Poland.

In 2022, he won the following three competitions.

- The Santander Paloma O'Shea International Piano Competition held in Cantabria, Spain.
- The Maria Canals International Music Competition for young musicians held in Barcelona, Spain.
- Hilton Head International Piano Competition held in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, USA.

These three consecutive victories in competitions at the age of 22 are a testament to Jaedens's determination, confidence, ambition, and enormous musical talent. It's amazing. This leads to his remarkable achievements in 2024 and in 2023 he made his first visit to Japan.

2023: Visit to Japan

Jaeden appeared at the 41st Yokohama International Piano Concert held at Yokohama Minato Mirai Hall in November 2023. He performed piano solo pieces such as Scriabin's Piano Sonata No. 4, Ravel's "Miroirs", and Chopin's "Scherzo".

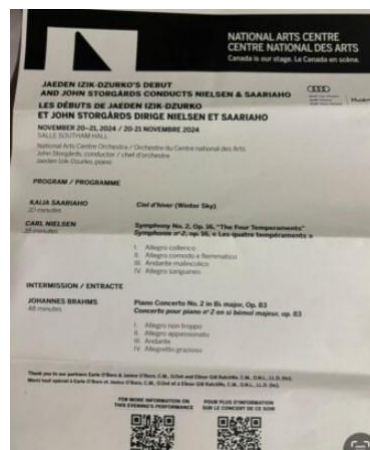
He also participated in an exchange event with local elementary and junior high school students studying piano. NHK Yokohama Broadcasting Station reported on the event (<https://www.nhk.or.jp/shutoken/yokohama/article/016/98/>). At this stage, Jaeden had no CD releases and was almost unknown. It's very interesting to get a glimpse of the true face of this future giant.

"I love the piano, but when it comes to practicing for competitions, I don't like it as much. What can I do to make myself like it?" I think Jaeden's next answer to a precocious question from a junior high school pianist is very sincere.

"I've had a similar experience. I think it's important to forget about the competition and think about how much you love music itself."

November 20, 2024: National Arts Centre

I was blessed with the opportunity to see Jaeden's performance.



In fact, until this moment, I had never heard of the pianist Jaeden Izik-Dzurko. I didn't even know how to pronounce the name Jaeden Izik-Dzurko in the pamphlet. The performance that night was originally scheduled to be performed by Grammy Award-winning American violinist Hilary Hahn, who would play Brahms' Violin Concerto.

However, a week before the performance, she was forced to cancel the performance due to an injury. Classical music is show business. The show must go on. The National Arts Centre, the organizer of the evening's performance, quickly searched for a replacement. The performer had to be as skilled and talented as the famous Hilary and they did not want to change the program. With only a week until the performance, rehearsals and schedule

adjustments must have been extremely difficult.

As a result, Jaeden's performance was decided. The program was Brahms' Piano Concerto No. 2. It was a change from the originally planned Brahms Violin Concerto, but it was the same Brahms, and for him, it was his specialty, which won him the Montreal and Leeds competitions. Moreover, it was his Ottawa debut.

This concerto begins with the introduction of the horn at the beginning of the first movement, and the piano appears, and develops dramatically in dialogue with the orchestra. From here, Jaeden's powerful piano immediately leads the piece. With his overwhelming centripetal force, he leads the orchestra members and captivates the audience.

This piano concerto is imprinted with the impressions of Brahms' first visit to Italy. It is a masterpiece from the mature period of Brahms' life at the age of 48, which took three years from conception to completion. It has a solid four-movement structure like a symphony. He was so confident in the work that he premiered it playing the piano himself. Moreover, it is the most difficult and most outstanding piece among the many piano concertos throughout history. For the 25-year-old genius who suddenly stepped in as a substitute, there was no piece that better demonstrated his abilities. The piano music of the mature Brahms is reproduced by a young, truly courageous talent. This is the true joy of classical music.

The excitement of the audience as the fourth movement came to a climax was incredible. He was called out many times for a standing ovation. It was the moment a new star was born.

After the performance, I had a chance to visit him in his dressing room and we had a short chat. He was a fine young man with a friendly smile and a very humble attitude, the opposite of his serious demeanour on stage. He told me that his performance in Japan, including his interaction with the children, was a very good experience for him. At the end, he said "Thank you" in beautiful Japanese.



Conclusion

When listening to classical music, especially on CDs and other recordings, we often hear accomplished masters' works. However, it is rare to be able to experience the moment when a future master takes off. I am really looking forward to the future of this talented young man born in a small town in BC, Canada.

"Paradise of Music – The Other Side of Canada"