

For the First Time, a Woman Wins D.C. Piano Competition

By Cecelia Porter
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[Yugoslavia](#)-born public relations specialist Jelena Vladikovic took first place in the fifth annual Washington International Piano Arts Council Competition at the French Embassy Sunday, becoming the first woman to win the contest since it was founded. Monika Mockovcakova, a diplomat's wife from [Slovakia](#), came second, and Russian housewife Gala Gurinovich won third place.

Robert Finley, a telecom engineer and native of [England](#), placed fourth, followed by Jee Ean Kim, a Korean graduate student at the [University of Illinois](#). Their performances made for an impressive evening of music, in which Jerome Barry, director of the area's Embassy Series, acted as master of ceremonies.

Unlike "professional" music competitions -- where the ante can be high in terms of financial awards and future performance opportunities -- an infectious strain of congeniality reigns above combativeness in WIPAC's events.

These amateur pianists have taken music seriously since childhood, studying it intensely even through the conservatory level, but have chosen professions outside of music.

For Sunday's finale, Vladikovic played a brief suite from "Platform" by Vojislav Vuckovic as well as [Beethoven](#)'s "Appassionata" Sonata, Op. 57, No. 23, demonstrating strong command and focus, along with an impassioned approach. Mockovcakova's sensitive approach was evident in both Chopin's Etude in C-sharp Minor, Op. 25, No. 7, and [Prokofiev](#)'s "Ten Pieces From 'Romeo and Juliet,' " Op. 75.

Husband and wife John and Chateau Gardecki created this competition after John had played in several amateur competitions in [Paris](#) and [Fort Worth](#).

Since WIPAC's inception, many embassies here have offered WIPAC support, including those of [France](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Poland](#), [Mexico](#) and [Iceland](#). During the year, WIPAC presents an annual piano series here at Anderson House, along with master classes, workshops, piano recitals and piano marathons -- all free and open to the public.

A surprise announcement made at the competition's close by Roland Celette, cultural director of the French Embassy, reinforced WIPAC's global bent.

In the near future, he said, his embassy will join WIPAC in sponsoring performances in its concert hall by winners of amateur pianist competitions worldwide.

