

13th Unisa International Piano Competition

Closing Ceremony Message: Prof MS Makhanya

Charles T Clark, the Rotarian once wrote:

“Competition is in the genes of all living things. Watch a flower compete for its share of sunlight or watch the goldfish in your aquarium. Infants and small children compete without knowing it. Remember how the queen bee wins? Competition is the spice of life and the soul of progress. How else can quality rise to the top?”

Ladies and gentlemen, invited guests, colleagues and participants, I could not have summed up the importance of competitions more succinctly. Over the past two weeks, the piano has literally and figuratively taken centre stage at Unisa ! Three years ago when the World Federation of International Music Competitions unanimously agreed to approve Unisa’s hosting of the very first dual category jazz and classical international piano competition within the Federation, we knew we were taking a bold leap forward that could forever impact the field of piano competitions across the world. We also accepted that taking such a bold step forward would require meticulous planning and preparation in order for us to adhere to the strict guidelines and statutes of the World Federation of International Competitions and to ensure the success and quality for which Unisa is renowned. Tonight I would like to declare...mission accomplished!

We have successfully hosted the world’s first dual category international piano competition for jazz and classical pianists. More importantly, we have accomplished this without sacrificing the high standards by which our international piano competition has come to be recognised. Unisa is proud to have its name associated with this ground-breaking event. As a University that is internationally recognised as a leader and pioneer in several fields, we are thrilled to add music to that list.

Competitions are never easy. It requires months - if not years - of preparation, physical dexterity and emotional stability to deliver a world class performance in front of one’s peers. Music competitions are unique in that a delicate balance has to be struck between the physical, psychological and emotional responses, to a degree which is not necessarily the norm for other kinds of competitions. Any imbalance results in a mechanical performance that is not emotional or a highly emotional performance lacking technique. This is a difficult concept for us non-musicians to comprehend yet is vital to, and discernible in, any musical performance. This situation is compounded when one considers that it is near impossible to rehearse or practice one’s emotions, which are aroused spontaneously during a performance.

I have been informed by the Artistic Director that the level of performance throughout the entire competition has been of an exceptionally high level, in both categories. Several of our jury members have also indicated that the competitors at this competition were amongst

the best they have encountered internationally. This is an incredible compliment given that many of our jury members have served on the juries of several other international competitions. It is also a testament to the caliber of pianists that were attracted to this competition.

To all competitors who participated in this competition - whether you were a finalist or eliminated in the second round: you can take pride in the fact that you have competed with some of your best contemporaries in the world. I commend you on having the courage to expose your abilities – your skills, your strengths and your weaknesses - to our international jury and to your contemporaries. Your efforts have most certainly not been in vain; you will be walking away from this competition with greater knowledge, insight and experience that will serve you well as you continue on your journey as an artist. Your name will forever be attached to the Unisa International Piano Competition. We are grateful to you for choosing to compete in this competition and for making the journey to our wonderful country to share your talents.

It is common knowledge that a competition is only as strong as its jury. For this competition, we are fortunate to have one of the most diverse juries we have ever invited. This jury for this competition is diversified by age, gender, ethnicity and country of origin thereby introducing a plethora of unique perspectives and insights into the adjudication process. In fact, the only non-diverse aspects of this jury are that they all internationally recognised performers and teachers with extensive experience, having served on the jury panels of other international competitions. It is a testament to their professionalism and commitment that our jurors were able to conduct their duties in a manner that upheld the high ethical standards by which our piano competition has come to be identified internationally.

Hosting successful international competitions requires high levels of collaboration. We are fortunate at Unisa to have had the talent of outstanding departments such as Corporate Communications and Marketing, Sound and Video, Facilities and Unisa Graphics working side-by-side with our corporate partners at SAMRO, MNET and the Tshwane Municipality to ensure that the competition was a success. To these colleagues I say: “Your combined efforts have ensured that our competition represents the finest possible effort that our institution and our country can put forward in hosting such a world-class event, and we are proud and thankful for your contributions.”

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to everyone who has been involved in this competition - from our conductor Maestro Daniel Boico and the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra and rhythm section with March Duby and Kevin Gibson, to our highly skilled jury, support staff and all competitors and host parents. You have ensured that this competition is a resounding success - one that I hope will be recorded in the historical timeline of international piano competitions.

I thank you.