

Quelle surprise!

French player wins the Paris amateur competition

A French pianist has taken first place at the 21st International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs in Paris. Martinique-born Loïc Lafontaine (pictured), assistant manager for Yamaha Artist Services Europe, stole the show with his performance of Bach-Busoni's Toccata and Fugue BWV 565 and Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses*. He won not only the main jury prize, but also the press jury prize and the audience vote. Lafontaine played with authority, musicality and an inner calm, as if he was used to playing in front of an audience.

The standard was exceptionally high at this year's competition, held at the Salle Gaveau in Paris on 11 April. Second prize went to the wonderfully sensitive Michael Cheung, a management consultant from Canada. His Schumann/Liszt *Widmung* was a dream and his Messiaen and Chopin (Scherzo No 3) were equally compelling. If he didn't have the finesse of Lafontaine, he more than made up for it with his instinctive musicality. Both stood high



above the rest, although in my opinion, Olivier Pairoit from Paris, who played a very convincing Berg Sonata, was hard done by for being placed sixth. Third prize went to Daniel Chow (Canada), joint fourth to Peter Hiss (Germany) and Nobue Tokudomi (Japan), with no fifth prize awarded.

Held on a Sunday afternoon in one of the most impressive halls in the centre of Paris, this competition, launched in 1989 by Gérard Bekerman, a professor of economics and a graduate of the Ecole Normale de Musique in Paris, always plays to a packed house. There is a real sense of positive energy in the air in the audience at this competition – it's great to be surrounded by so many piano lovers cheering on these remarkable performers.

I look forward to 2011.

Erica Worth