

# CLASSICAL

## Classical Notes

Dick O'Riordan



## Budding stars are keyed up for top piano competition

**T**here's a whopping prize of €15,000 awaiting the winner of the tenth Dublin International Piano Competition, which has begun its sorting-out process of 63 young hopefuls from 18 countries around the world.

That's a lot of dough, particularly for emerging talents; and, as Sean O'Casey once said, money isn't everything, but a few bob in the pocket is good for the nerves. This is especially so if you are an emerging piano star trying to forge

an international career by winning competitions abroad.

John O'Connor is an eminent musician, and has been long regarded as one of the world's greatest players and scholars – particularly of Beethoven and Mozart. But even he had to face unexpected realities when he first hit the headlines way back in 1973, after being unanimously awarded first prize at the International Beethoven Piano Competition in Vienna.

After receiving his trophy and cheque, that was it. Naturally he felt the euphoria of winning – and he received an enormous welcome home in Dublin – but soon he felt he had been set adrift with no signposts as to what to do or where to go with his career.



Nikolay Khozyainov from Russia was the winner of the 2012 Dublin International Piano Competition

He needed help and guidance. And that was a factor very much to the fore when he and a group of friends set up the first Dublin International Piano Competition as a triennial event in 1988.

They decided that not only would they have a significant winning prize and trophy, but also a back-up agenda that would support and further the career of the winner through organised concerts in Ireland and abroad (such as the NCH in Dublin, the Wigmore Hall in London and Carnegie Hall in New York); access to important agents and contacts in the music business; and also complimentary 'hosting' of foreign competitors by music lovers while they were in

the country.

One can easily gauge the foresight of this policy by the fact that there were 158 applications from abroad for the upcoming event, with ten from Ireland – a terrific response even by international standards.

These were whittled down at the application stage, leaving 63 competitors to battle it out every day this week in the Royal Dublin Society concert hall for inclusion in the semi-finals (May 23 and 24) and final (May 26) at the National Concert Hall.

The quality of playing at this year's Irish selections was considered so good that the jury decided to increase the number of Irish

participants from five to six. This reflects the growing standards of piano teaching and competency in Ireland and the work of the competition over the last 25 years.

The total prize fund is €50,000. The main awards are €15,000; €10,000; €7,000 and €5,000. Eight prizes of €1,000 will be awarded to remaining semi-finalists.

The winning trophy will be presented by President Michael D Higgins.

*Ticket prices: RDS preliminaries, €4 per day at the door (today-May 21). NCH semi-finals on May 23 and 24, €7-€12 per session; NCH final May 26, €20-€45. Call 01-4170000*