

# The Guide Eastbourne's Young Soloist Competition

## Music Phil Hewitt

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Eastbourne Symphony Orchestra is looking forward to the finals of its annual Young Soloist Competition.

This year's first round, held at the end of January, saw 30 talented musicians aged 23 and under compete in front of a panel of judges led by ESO musical director and one of its founders Graham Jones.

Graham said: "Again, as the audience would agree, we had some tricky decisions to make as the standard was so high. How do you distinguish between top-standard performances on instruments as varied as the double bass and the saxophone and everything in between, and playing music from Bach to Dranishnikova, from Dutilleux to Tchaikovsky?"

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"After the first day, we thought we had some really superb performers for the final. But the second day, which comprised mainly competitors under 18, proved as amazing so we had to revise day one. A stand-out performer was only 12 and, though we were able to give him only a special commendation this time, a member of the audience was so moved that she made a private donation.

"From these junior competitors, the winner was 17-year-old violinist Shlomi Shahaf, who is also one of the finalists. Born in Israel, he moved to Ukraine when he was one year old, starting to play the violin when he was four. He attended a special music school in Kiev from the age of five and first started playing with the Ukrainian National Radio and TV Orchestra when he was 11. In 2019, he moved to Central Music School

in Moscow where he has played concerts in the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he moved to the Purcell School in Hertfordshire. His family still live in Kiev where his parents are doctors."

Shlomi said: "I was looking forward to playing in the first round and practised a lot so that I could give my best performance in front of the judges. All the competitors were of a very high standard so I was thrilled to learn that I had won first place in the under-18 category and even more delighted to win a place in the final."

The competition will take place in the Birley Centre, Eastbourne, BN21 4EF from 2pm to 6pm on Sunday, February 18. £20 entry, on the door only (£18 for ESO Friends).

Shlomi will play a movement from both the Khachaturian and Tchaikovsky violin

concertos and compete alongside senior winners violinist Julia Blachuta, oboist Ewan Millar, flautist Samantha Rowe and pianist Ryan Yip. The requirement for the final is to play two contrasting concertos.

Julia, who is at the Royal College of Music, is playing Korngold's Violin Concerto and Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No 2. Ewan was winner of the woodwind category and grand finalist in the BBC Young Musician 2020, since when he has graduated in music from the University of Oxford and is currently studying at the Royal Academy of Music. In the final, he will be playing Mozart and Strauss. Samantha is currently studying for a masters at the RCM and will play Chaminade and Mozart. Ryan is a graduate of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology and is studying at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama.



Julia Blachuta (MAGDALENA BLACHUTA FOTOGRAFIA)