

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**YOUNG VIOLIST AND VIOLINIST WIN SPHINX COMPETITION**

**Laureates to solo with orchestras nationwide, earn scholarships and prizes**

*Concert broadcast on Sunday Feb. 27 at 4:30PM on Detroit Public Television, 56.1*

(Detroit, MI) With a sold out crowd looking on, three young musicians of the Sphinx Competition Junior Division showcased their musical excellence and competed with one another at Sunday's Sphinx Competition Finals Concert. The performances at Orchestra Hall were the exciting culmination of the [14<sup>th</sup> Annual Sphinx Competition](#) presented by the [DTE Energy Foundation](#).

It was only one musician who could be named Junior Division First Place Laureate and it was **Alexandra Switala**, a 16-year old violinist from Grapevine, Texas. Her performance of the first movement of Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 in A Major won her the top honors and a cash prize of \$5,000.

Second and Third Place went to **Xavier Foley** and **Annelle Gregory** respectively. Foley, 16, a bassist from Marietta, Georgia, won a prize of \$3,500 and Gregory, 15, a violinist from San Diego, California won a prize of \$2,500. Karla Hall, Vice President of the [DTE Energy Foundation](#) presented trophies to both Switala and Foley on stage.

Senior Division 1<sup>st</sup> Place Laureate, **Paul Laraia** also performed Walton's Concerto for Viola. Laraia, 21, is studying at the New England Conservatory of Music and won the top prize of \$10,000 as well as solo performances with orchestras across the country during the next year. Also a violist, **Michael Casimir**, 19, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania received the Gold Achievement Award in the Senior Division and a prize of \$3,500.

All 18 Sphinx Competition semi-finalists receive Sphinx Music Assistance Fund scholarships to help support their musical development, and are eligible for full scholarships to summer and higher education programs.

The Finals Concert also featured the unique all Black and Latino Sphinx Symphony Orchestra with special guest artists the [Catalyst Quartet](#), a Sphinx Ensemble. The Catalyst Quartet [hailed by The New York Times](#), comprises top Laureates and Alumni from the Sphinx Competition. The [Catalyst Quartet](#) seeks to inspire new and young audiences with dynamic performances of cutting-edge repertoire by a wide range of composers.

The Sphinx Symphony Orchestra, which includes professional musicians from around the country, performed under the direction of prominent conductor and music director of the Oakland East Bay Symphony, Michael Morgan. The Sphinx Symphony also performed Roberto Sierra's *Sinfonia No.4*, the inaugural work from the Sphinx Commissioning Consortium at the Finals Concert.

The Finals Concert was recorded by Detroit Public Television for broadcast in HD, sponsored by **Fifth Third Bank**. The Concert will air on DPTV Channel 56.1 on **Sunday February 27, at 4:30PM** and again on **Thursday, March 3, at 10PM**. Hear the concert in Detroit on **WRCJ 90.9 FM Radio** on **Saturday, February 26 at 6PM**.

The annual Sphinx Competition presented by the [DTE Energy Foundation](#) for young Black and Latino string players has identified, rewarded, and promoted talented young musicians for the past 14 years, awarding more than \$1,000,000 in prizes and scholarships. Alumni of the competition have performed as soloists with many of the nation's top orchestras including the Detroit Symphony, New York Philharmonic, New World Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Atlanta Symphony, and numerous others.

"This afternoon's concert was a thrilling conclusion to the competition. Sphinx has brought the sound of change to classical music where diversity plays a crucial role and fosters a culture that makes classical music accessible for everyone," said Aaron Dworkin, founder and president of the Sphinx Organization.

During the competition, participants are offered educational and professional development activities with renowned musicians and music professionals, and benefit from mentoring by Sphinx's prestigious jury and Sphinx Symphony Orchestra members. The jury panel for the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Sphinx Competition Presented by DTE Energy Foundation was comprised of esteemed professional musicians from around the country including Richard Aaron, Kazem Abdullah, Sanford Allen, Sphinx Alumna Danielle Belen, Pamela Frank, Michael Tree, and Astrid Schween.

The [DTE Energy Foundation](#) is the philanthropic arm of DTE Energy, continuing the legacy of community support and involvement of its principal operating subsidiaries, Detroit Edison and MichCon. The Foundation directs its contributions and involvement to support initiatives dedicated to developing the human and economic potential of the communities it serves. Grants are awarded under the foundation's "LEAD" guidelines: leadership, education, environment, achievement, development and diversity in the DTE Energy service territory, which includes southeast, western and northern Michigan. The DTE Energy Foundation is fully funded by the shareholders of DTE Energy.

The [Sphinx Organization](#) is the national non-profit organization committed to building diversity in classical music through year-round programming in arts education, awareness and presentation. Learn more at [www.SphinxMusic.org](http://www.SphinxMusic.org)

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