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## BBC Cardiff Singer of the World, St David's Hall

By Richard Fairman

**A**t last the BBC Cardiff Singer of the World has landed a good catch. For a decade the competition has seemed to trawl empty seas, forever searching among dwindling stocks for winners. People still talk about 1989, when Dmitry Hvorostovsky and Bryn Terfel went head to head and Monica Groop and Hillevi Martinpelto were runners-up.

2005 may not have equalled that, but it seems a fair bet that several of the singers in Sunday's final are here to stay, and one, at least, was worth celebrating - appropriately in the city of Cardiff's centenary year. The winner was Nicole Cabell from the US. At 27, she was the youngest of the five finalists, and already has a faultlessly gleaming soprano, a technique with no loopholes, and bags of confidence. It should not do any harm that she is also tall, slim and glamorous. Not many young singers would have dared to serenade the line-up of judges at this competition with such esoteric fare - a solo from Tippett's *A Child of Our Time*, one of Ilia's heart-stopping arias from Mozart's *Idomeneo* and a nimble Gallic showpiece from Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini*. But whatever this soprano chooses to sing, her voice makes wonderful music with it.



The judges said this was the closest result for years, but Cabell was surely always going to be the winner. Among the other contestants Luis Olivares Sandoval from Chile also created a stir with his beefy tenor and sensitive artistry, though his performances are not yet as polished. England's entry, the tenor Andrew Kennedy, proved an unfailingly skilled musician in a wide-ranging programme from Handel to Strauss; the soprano Daria Masiero offered native Italian passion; and Wendy Dawn Thompson from New Zealand gave notice of a sturdy mezzo-soprano in the making. Altogether, 2005 should go down in the annals as not a

bad vintage at all. â...â...â...â...â

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