

Jay Harvey Upstage

Tuesday, September 11, 2018

Semifinals end with bursts of passion and insight from IVCI participants

It took me longer than it should have to understand what the commissioned piece of the 2018 [International Violin Competition of Indianapolis](#) was all about. I kept getting oriented favorably to William Bolcom's Suite No. 3 for Solo Violin without solving its puzzles.

Fortunately that difficulty was cleared up Monday night, thanks to IVCI director Glen Kwok's courteous gift to me of a score (which I had neglected to notice was among the items for sale at the merchandise table in the Indiana History Center, where the preliminary and semifinal rounds took place Sept. 2-10).

My belated acquaintance threw some retrospective insight over interpretations I encountered earlier, and it certainly made me a better-informed listener when I heard the last two participants give their semifinal recitals Monday night. The work is shot through with improvisatory hurdles and rewards, so that any notions about interpretation go way beyond what a conventionally settled score would mean to each violinist. Resourcefulness and plain daring take on more importance than ever under such demands.

On Sunday evening, **Shannon Lee's** version of the Bolcom featured a personal cleverness and spontaneity that came through even though I was then acquainted with the score. And for imaginative use of quotation that fit into the suggestions the composer makes as jumping-off points, there was something immediately engaging about **Luke Hsu's** use of the start of "Also Sprach Zarathustra" and Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony in a Monday afternoon performance I caught via live-streaming.



Shannon Lee: Personalizing Bolcom

And on Monday night, with the score in front of me, there was something magical about the dashing and poignant episodes alike in **Anna Lee's** performance. (Hsu and both Lees were passed on to the final round, the world learned shortly after Lee's recital ended the semifinals: joining them as finalists are **Ioana Cristina Goicea, Risa Hokamura, and Richard Lin.**)

Her whole semifinal recital that concluded the semifinals was inspired, with the proportion of challenges for the pianist at the extreme: Chih-Yi Chen was a capable partner in sonatas by Saint-Saens and Beethoven as well as the colorful "Fantaisie Brillante" of Jeno Hubay. The last-named treats popular excerpts from Bizet's "Carmen" in a more high-flown, decorative manner than other more often played "Carmen" spectacles by Franz Waxman and Pablo de Sarasate. It begins with the common frame of the Fate motive and ends with the Gypsy Dance; in between the Habanera and a full portrait of Escamillo are set before us.

Earlier Lee had played a marvelous Saint-Saens sonata, whose outsized monumentality, bravura and a touch of sentimentality (in the second movement) seemed to suit her at every turn.

Shannon Lee brought Sunday's recitals to an end, with Akira Eguchi at the keyboard. Her showpiece was Eugene Ysaye's Sonata No. 5 for solo violin, a two-movement descriptive work to which she brought a full palette of colors: those of dawn yielding to the rhythmically varied hues of folk music. Earlier, her bold choice of the thorny, thoroughly idiomatic Sonata No. 2 by Bartok was brought off with aplomb in her and Eguchi's performance.

What else stood out for me from my two evenings of semifinals attendance?

***Mayumi Kanagawa's** haunting, smoothly directed account of Ysaye's Sonata No. 2, its tribute to J.S. Bach definitively overshadowed by an extended treatment of the medieval *Dies irae* chant melody.

***Ji Won Song** bringing the audience one of the semifinals' best Beethoven sonata performances: No. 7 in C minor, op. 30, with Thomas Hoppe at the piano. The duo's rapport was immediately evident. There was lots of oomph in the Allegro con brio, then the kind of lyrical treatment of the *Adagio cantabile* that made Beethoven seem to be as natural a tunesmith as Schubert. The two subsequent movements maintained the illuminating high standard of the first two. I've got a hunch this performance has a chance to receive the competition's Beethoven Sonata award, one of a host of special prizes that will be presented along with the Medalist and Laureate awards on Sunday.