

IVCI report: The next-to-last pair of recitals in the semifinal round brings further clarity — and the choice of 6 finalists seals the deal

Monday, September 15, 2014

Once again, I present the names of the six finalists (just announced) without revising my final report:

Tessa Lark

Jinjoo Cho

Ji Yoon Lee

Ji Young Lim

Yoo Jin Jang

Dami Kim

The last two afternoon sessions of the [International Violin Competition of Indianapolis](#)' semifinal round shed further light on the richness of the commissioned piece, Ellen Taaffe Zwilich's "Fantasy for Solo Violin."

The four recitals I heard Sunday and Monday also shed light on participants' personalities and technical aplomb in standard repertoire, of course. But what's become clearest at this point is that the level is so high individual listeners are freer than ever to decide which participants "speak to them" through their performances.

It became a matter of personal appeal as I listened to **Ji Young Lim** and **Kristi Gjezi** on Sunday and **Suyeon Kang** and **Ji-Won Song** on Monday. And I found I liked most everything that Kang did — it spoke to me.

In the Zwilich, she invested a lot of thought and energy in making a cast of characters out of the diverse "voices" that the work presents in succession. Other performers have been convincing coming up with a through-line that linked the disparate elements. That will seem a preferable course to some, but Kang's approach took more chances, and they paid off.

And in Prokofiev's Sonata No. 1 in F minor, op. 80, the first movement made it clear that she thinks like a singer. The bleakness of the sonata is embodied in a series of songs — with a few rough speeches thrown in — and all of it, with the help of Rohan De Silva, spun a compelling narrative in Kang's performance.



Suyeon Kang

It's no surprise, then, that Kang made so much of Franz Waxman's "Carmen Fantasy," which concentrates on various aspects of Carmen's personality (the "fate" music as well as the Seguidilla) even as it folds in plenty of virtuoso display. And her account of Beethoven's Sonata No. 7 in C minor, op. 30, was not only an exemplary match with the piano, but also highlighted the violinist's sheer zest. She got the right feeling of foreboding at the start of the finale and reveled in that movement's cyclonic coda.

Lim also had a good feeling for narrative, particularly in the Zwilich, and made the most of the composer's note

in the score to play with "flexible tempo and imaginative use of color." She was very free in matters of tempo, and took the country-fiddling element in the work to a heightened degree.



Kristi Gjezi

Gjezi's Zwilich was not particularly distinctive, but he applied his dark tone and rock-solid technique well to the same Prokofiev sonata Kang played. The brutality and lyricism of this music had a steady champion in Gjezi — emotionally intense but still on top of the stresses that pull the music this way and that.

His Beethoven sonata — No. 10 in G major, op. 96 (a rare choice) — took a patrician stance amid material that sometimes comes close to salon music, but also suggests the refinement of the late string quartets. That steady control served him well in Saint-Saens' Introduction and Rondo Capriccioso, and called attention to how economically he uses his bow. This is a violinist who could be studied from an efficiency standpoint; there was no wasted motion in his performance.

Finally, something about Song's eloquence as an interpreter of Eugene Ysaye, whose unaccompanied Sonata No. 6 she played vividly: In the early years of the competition we heard a lot of Ysaye, who taught Josef Gingold, the IVCI's founder. Hearing significantly less of him in these semifinals helped make Song's Ysaye more appealing, but I suspect hers would have stood out in a crowd of Ysayes.

Song's Zwilich was one of those that emphasized the work's connections. She was like one of those people who notice family resemblances that kinfolk themselves sometimes overlook. Her Beethoven was characterized by big dynamics and lots of momentum, but nothing slapdash. Of so many of these participants this can perhaps be said, and it certainly can of her: She will have a place in the violin firmament of her generation even if she goes no further than this in this competition.