

Notes from Indianapolis: Last semi-finals performances



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How exciting, to be in Indianapolis for the International Violin Competition of Indianapolis (IVCI) and the American Violin Society Convention!

I arrived late Monday, and I was happy to find it rainy and about 55 degrees here -- truly! (Yesterday in my hometown of Pasadena it was 105 degrees!) On the airplane from Los Angeles I discovered Dr. Bill Sloan, whom you remember for his violin, the 1714 "Leonora Jackson" Stradivari, a fiddle [recently celebrated its 300th birthday](#).



He was on his way to the [Violin Society of America's Convention](#), also taking place this week in downtown Indianapolis, in conjunction with the competition. In fact, I saw quite a few people carrying violins at the airport, and checking in to my downtown hotel.

I arrived just in time to catch the last concert of the IVCI semi-finals. As I made my way to the concert on this rainy evening I was working against a wave of Indianapolis Colts football fans, headed for the Lucas Oil Stadium, just a few blocks away -- Monday Night Football! The concert took place in the beautiful Basile Theater at the Indiana History Center downtown.



For the semi-finals, each participant played a Beethoven sonata; Late-Romantic or Modern sonata; a tone poem/concert piece; and the commissioned work: "Fantasy for Solo Violin" by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. For a limited time, all the semi-finalists' performances will be available for viewing [on the IVCI website](#), if you'd like to see how they played for yourself.

I spoke briefly to composer Zwilich, who is also on the jury, during intermission. She said that it has been interesting, seeing how each of the 16 semi-finalists performed her piece, "Fantasy for Solo Violin," which is a virtuoso, blue-grassy piece with plenty of tricks. "I tried to give them room to be individual," she said.

The two performances I saw were by Dami Kim, 25, of South Korea, and Christine Lim, 19, of the U.S.; one made it in to the finals and one did not. Both played beautifully, and this was something that many people who had witnessed the entire competition said to me: whereas in some competition the frontrunners emerge as very obvious choices, this

was not the case in this year's IVCI. In fact, it was very hard to predict who would advance to the finals, because everyone in the semi-finals had played so brilliantly.

Here again is a picture of the finalists, Dami Kim, Ji Young Lim, Yoo Jin Jang, Tessa Lark, Ji Yoon Lee and Jinjoo Cho.



Photo by Denis Kelly DenisKelly.com

They advanced to the finals based on a combined score: 70 percent of their semi-final scores plus 30 percent of their scores in the preliminaries. Some people have questioned competitors whose teachers sit on the jury for this competition. I read over the rules and here is the rule on that: Judges with students in the competition are not permitted to vote on their own students; scores for those students are based only on the scores from the other jury members.

No matter who advanced, every participant has accomplished a great deal. The repertoire for the semi-finals took each participant a little more than an hour to perform. The Beethoven requires a thoughtful collaboration with a pianist; the other sonata requires making a good choice that will showcase the violin. For the commissioned piece, they each had to learn a never-before-played virtuoso piece from scratch. Top it off with a virtuoso piece that requires high-wire technique and agility, and this is quite a lot.

As I watched these violinists perform so well, at such a high level, I thought: for the audience, all of this is a dream. Literally: it's like a dream where you can run forever and never get tired, or stay underwater for long periods of time and never seem to need air.

When someone performs music live for you, you get to experience all that energy, momentum, emotion, feeling -- without having to live it or create it. But let's not forget: someone is up there running the marathon, diving into the deep water without oxygen! As these remarkable young violinists put themselves up for this high level of scrutiny this week and last, let's not forget their accomplishment and its generosity.