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September 18, 2014

## IVCI Classical Finals - day one

In 1775 Mozart wrote all five of his violin concertos at age 19. The first two are little more than homages to the "style galant," after Johann Christian Bach. The last three are Mozartean masterpieces, among the finest works the composer had written by then. No. 5 in A. K. 219, is usually regarded as the best of the best, with its strong lyrico/dramatic structure in the final movement's "Turkish" section. In fact, it's easily good enough to tolerate three straight hearings, which it did Wednesday evening by three different IVCI participants. (These three had already chosen their repertoire prior to the competition from among the five of Mozart and one of Haydn.)

Presented at Uindy's Christel DeHaan Fine Arts Center and featuring for the first time the conductorless East Coast Chamber Orchestra (ECCO), the concert began with Jennifer Higdon's short piece simply called "String." The 25 violinists and violists stood (through the entire program), giving us the most clean attacks and precise playing we've heard in any Classical finals to date. "String" is a delightful, five-minute aperitif opening with pizzicato, delving into a rapid triple meter then devolving into a slower duple meter. It's clearly contemporary but employs many common chords.

Tessa Lark, the only U.S. player to make finalist, joined the ECCO strings plus the obligatory pair of horns and oboes (a "minimum" Classical orchestra) to give us one of the two best violin sounds heard from these six in the earlier events. She used different cadenzas than those Mozart supplied--possibly her own?--which is unusual but not unheard of. In both the F-sharp minor and the "Turkish" sections of the finale, Lark could have shared more energy--more "hair." She did give us much beautiful playing in the sublime Adagio.

Lark was followed by Jinjoo Cho, the first of the five S. Korean finalists. Though delivering her predictably thinner, more variable vibrato, she and her ECCO partners gave the work more verve in those two finale sections--as did the orchestra, for that matter. Perhaps having already played it once made a difference . . . or not.

Ji Yoon Lee rounded out the program giving K. 219 a similar shape to that of her preceding countryman. Both Lee and Cho, playing nearly white (vibratoless), nonetheless provided moving accounts of the Adagio; all three players deserve an "A" for that one. And the use of the ECCO for this event ought to continue.

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