

Jay Harvey Upstage

Wednesday, September 5, 2018

The charm of the third time: IVCI preliminaries move toward their conclusion

For me, the preliminary round of the [International Violin Competition of Indianapolis](#) ended Tuesday afternoon, though today there are nine more of the 38 participants to be heard. The jury's selection of 16 semifinalists is expected about 8 p.m. today.

Like the rest of the public, I have the option to take advantage of [live-streaming](#) for the remaining prelim recitals. I might check out some of them, but of course there's no substitute for being there. That was driven home to me by the last recital of the day Sept. 4.



Galiya Zharova: Exemplary bow control

The live-streaming experience can provide an excellent perspective on the participants, but I might have missed what stood out most Tuesday afternoon if I'd taken in remotely the prelim recital of **Galiya Zharova** of Kazakhstan. In the course of her performance, I almost put aside "large-picture" artistic considerations. They seemed to be well-served in any case by her exemplary bow control. And that's what I focused on. Her bow arm was beautiful to watch, note after note. I could have admired its steadiness and consistency for longer in another piece of music beyond the scheduled program. Maybe IVCI patrons will get to see for themselves in the semifinals.

It took a while for it to dawn on me. In retrospect, the oft-heard Adagio from Bach's Sonata No. 1 in G minor presented an interpretation that only bowing under precise coordination could have managed: The melodic line was sustained and soaring, while the harmonic underpinning was never scanted in the slightest. (Her performance offered a partial corrective to my full praise of the harmonically understated way Fabiola Kim played the Adagio the day before.)

By the time Zharova got to her Mozart sonata (K. 305 in A major), there was a fitness to every stroke that made everything coalesce, especially the theme-and-variations movement. Short and long strokes alike had the requisite speed and pressure for their contexts. Never stingy about full bowing where appropriate, she didn't waste motion, either. (She could do no wrong at the tip.) Zharova's flexibility and the consistency of her tone meant she could adjust the tempo and phrase weight in the Paganini Caprice No. 17 to make the music speak more eloquently. I hope some student violinists were there, or saw enough of it live-streamed to be inspired and informed by a demonstration of exquisite bow control.

The afternoon started with something distinctive from another participant — neither an advantage nor a drawback: **Hannah Cho's** instrument had a tone I can best describe as "woody." Of course violins are made of wood, but here was a violin that almost got back to the roots of violin sound. It came through immediately in her Paganini caprices, which interpretively were characterized by a too studied approach, especially No. 4, which seemed to sprawl. The idiosyncratic sound lent her Bach (Grave and Fuga from Sonata No. 2 in A minor) a "period" patina. It was a pleasant feature in the first movement of her Mozart sonata (E minor, K. 304) and established an intimate, congenial, almost folksy atmosphere in the minuet finale.

Ji Won Song's Bach (the Adagio and Fugue from G minor sonata, again) was poised and warm in the first movement, but a little too mighty throughout in the fugue. Her encore piece was the rare choice of Sibelius' "Romance," which showed off a lower-range tone that would be the envy of another rarity: a true vocal contralto. Also admirable was her Paganini Caprice No. 21, with its passionate operatic-duet main episode, and, within, lots of nimble, steadily produced *spiccato* (bouncing bow in one direction).

I may have been getting jaundiced by the time **Hiu Sing Fan's** Bach came up, since it was yet another traversal through the Adagio and Fuga from the G minor sonata. The playing became labored before the coda. But it was fun to hear his performance of the frequently chosen No. 11 Paganini Caprice with the yearning melody that opens and closes it given more sentimentality than the norm. A little schmaltz can be welcome if the material seems to suit it.



Shannon Lee: An invitation to the dance

Tuesday afternoon's fourth performer, **Shannon Lee**, displayed a personal style that served her well in each of her four selections. She always seemed to know the effect she wanted, and delivered consistently. Her Paganini No. 3 was an unhackneyed choice with virtuosity to spare, starting with exceptional octaves and trills. The Allemanda and Corrente from Bach's B minor partita, each with its Double sidecar, had a choreographic flair.

Authentic evocation of the dance dependably lifts the spirits during the rigors of the preliminary round — all of which will yield the 10th quadrennial's "sweet sixteen" tonight as the competition enters its second weekend Friday.