

Jay Harvey Upstage

Thursday, September 13, 2018

IVCI finals: Bright prospects emerge immediately in Mozart and Kreisler performances

Why not open the next phase of the [International Violin Competition of Indianapolis](#) with a little splash, some celebratory sounds independent of the strivings of youthful fiddlers? And so it was.

The upbeat first movement of Tchaikovsky's Serenade for Strings, dashed off winningly by the [East Coast Chamber Orchestra](#), provided the perfect introduction to the start of the Classical Finals at one of the city's best concert halls, the Schrott Center for the Performing Arts at Butler University.

ECCO is the accompanying ensemble for the second time at the Classical Finals, where one of Mozart's violin concertos or the Haydn No. 1 in C major must be chosen. A bonbon added to these performances is the choice of one of several Fritz Kreisler encore pieces, with string-orchestra accompaniments arranged by Jaakko Kuusisto. The conductorless ensemble's playing was consistently lithe and well-coordinated.



Ioana Cristina Goicea at the semifinals, with Chih-Yi Chen at the piano.

The six finalists show their mettle in this repertoire over the course of two evenings. On Wednesday, we heard their performances of the same concerto — Mozart's No. 5 in A major, K. 219. This lack of variety, whatever the delights it provided with the opportunity for minute comparisons, was an accident of the IVCI's policy to preserve the performance order that was decided by a random drawing at the beginning of the month. As participants are eliminated, juxtaposed survivors sometimes present the same pieces in their programs.

I expected to be receiving the third performance of the same work a little dully by the time Ioana Cristina Goicea of Romania took the stage after intermission. Surprisingly, everything about her performance was refreshing and kept my

attention alive. What made this possible built upon my impressions of the previous interpretations by Richard Lin and Risa Hokamura, which also had welcome aspects of individuality in addition to their thorough technical preparation.



Richard Lin: Attractive stage presence

Lin, a 27-year-old Taiwanese-American with a distinct charisma that should serve him well whatever further success he has in this competition, went first. He presented a stylish version, with some personal inflections applied to repeated figures in the second movement and perky iterations of the third-movement Rondeau theme. He also individualized the episodes, making the overall result directly appealing. The same manner, with a touch of humor, made his Kreisler piece, *Tambourin Chinois*, the best of the evening's encore pieces.

Hokamura is a diminutive Japanese with the distinction of being younger (17) than Mozart was (19) when he wrote five violin concertos in 1775 during his Salzburg years. She had a startling abundance of firm glow in her sound. Her playing was powerful and reflective of the music's reaching out in youthful vigor; the first movement cadenza was both sweet and steely.

After a bobble early in the second movement, she quickly resumed her customary panache. With the orchestra's help, Hokamura had a captivating way of rounding off cadenzas and fermatas in reintroducing the tutti. Yet it might have been that momentary slip and her self-assurance in going back to her high standard that checked my admiration of her performance.

Suddenly, her charm seemed studied and a little bit too much in the groove as the concerto moved toward its conclusion. I began to think the question guiding her was something like: "How beautiful can I



Risa Hokamura made the most of tonal beauty.

make my violin sound in this music?" Brava to a developing musician who might need a little more seasoning to bring more out of the music as she advances.

Goicea, on the other hand, seemed to be asking, "What does this music mean to me?" As a listener, hearing a solo instrumentalist focused on something more than beautiful sounds is always more thrilling. Goicea went tastefully to the edge of romanticism in the slow introduction (before the *Allegro aperto*). Her cadenza was thoughtfully played — more than a shining byway off the main road. Phrases similar to each other were played slightly differently in the second movement, but I didn't detect any affectation. The variegated finale was fully engaged with: the long episode sometimes identified as "Turkish" had a wildness that is probably more accurately considered Hungarian — music near to Goicea's roots.

The recurrent accented tutti, which I sometimes enjoy hearing with cellos and basses adding a percussive effect with the wood of their bows, had no "col legno" touch in any of ECCO's accompaniments Wednesday evening. Goicea's performance could have used this complement to the freewheeling spirit she displayed.

Apparently the *col legno* indication can be traced back to the composer, but editors have suppressed that indication in most editions until recent times, according to Michael Steinberg's "The Concerto." I wonder if it was ruled out by the competition to avoid even the slightest overshadowing of the soloist. In any case, Goicea's free spirit in the Mozart was confirmed further in her encore-piece choice, "La Gitana" (The Gypsy), and the untrammelled manner she brought to it.