

Jay Harvey Upstage

Sunday, September 16, 2018

International Violin Competition of Indianapolis: Final concerto performances and announcement of the finalists' award positions



2018 Laureates: Anna Lee, Shannon Lee, Ioana Cristina Goicea, Luke Hsu, Risa Hokamura, Richard Lin

It was no sure thing to guess ahead of time how the jury would rank the six finalists in the 10th Quadrennial [International Violin Competition of Indianapolis](#). Personal impressions gathered of the young finalists at each stage are incomplete, as my attendance this year amounted to less than half of the performances, though I heard just over half of the 38 participants from Sept. 2 through last night.

I will focus here only on the three finalists who performed concertos at Hilbert Circle Theatre Sept. 15 with the [Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra](#) under the baton of Leonard Slatkin, who is probably the hands-down elder statesman of American maestros.

Slatkin's firm, unflashy control had much to do with what made bronze medalist **Luke Hsu's** performance of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D major acceptable. This is a great work by a favorite composer of many, but one to whom I'm largely unsympathetic. So, fortunately, Hsu's performance was riveting, but partly for the wrong reason: It was quite headstrong. There was tempo-pushing from him that a lesser maestro than Slatkin might have had trouble with. The excitement thus generated was somewhat unnerving.

Allowing for that, Hsu launched the work attractively. The depth of tone in the soloist's opening statement, plus an overall gravitas in Hsu's manner, evoked favorably the legacy of David Oistrakh. The first-movement cadenza was cleanly articulated, though maybe a little too dogged. The second movement brought forth a rich, loamy lyricism, the rise and fall of Hsu's phrasing sounding quite natural. But the finale confirmed the impression that Hsu was a little too much on his own track to be an entirely convincing concerto soloist.

A much different impression was created by **Anna Lee** (fourth-place laureate) in the Mendelssohn Concerto in E minor, op. 64. She wrung all the passion out of the music — a quality it can be easy to short-change in Mendelssohn. More important, she was a fine partner with the orchestra in a piece that must be counted the perfect violin concerto: It has no empty display, yet the writing for the solo instrument is never diffident and always speaks with authority. The wind chords in the background of the soloist's suspenseful conclusion of the slow movement amounted to a great illustration of this concerto's' unflinching balance of forces.

Exemplary partnership was also exhibited in sixth-place laureate **Shannon Lee's** performance of William Walton's Violin Concerto. The work puts a premium on seamless dialogue between violin and orchestra. In the first movement, for example, any conspicuous orchestral challenge to the soloist is reserved for martial rambunctiousness near the end. Across three movements, the music takes in a wide variety of tempos, textures, and emotional terrain. It is nonetheless among the more soft-spoken violin concertos, and that quality suited Lee's temperament. Her playing sounded a little undernourished overall, but the interpretive approach seemed unerring and sympathetic to her style.

The other three finalists, and their positions, are **Richard Lin**, gold medal; **Risa Hokamura**, silver medal, and **Ioana Cristina Goicea**, fifth-place laureate. Their awards and various special prizes will be presented starting at 5 p.m. today at Scottish Rite Cathedral.