

Some Thoughts on the 5th International Oboe Competition, Toyko, 1997

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The 5th International Oboe Competition sponsored by the Sony Music Foundation (with the cooperation of Japan Air Lines in collaboration with Japan Double Reed, Inc.) was held at the Tsuda Hall in Tokyo, November 3d to the 9th, 1997. Required repertoire included the following:

For the first stage:

1. Nikos Skalkottas: *Concertino*
2. A. Vivaldi: *Concerto in C Major*, P. 41, F.VII-6 (1st and 2d movements)

Second stage:

1. W. A. Mozart: *Concerto in C Major*, K 314 (285b)
2. and one work from the following:
 - a) A. Pasculli: *Fantasia sopra "I Vespri Siciliani di G. Verdi"*
 - b) B. A. Zimmerman: *Concerto for Oboe* (1952)
 - c) K. Stockhausen: *"In Freundschaft" for solo oboe*
 - d) L. Berio: *Sequenza VII for solo oboe*
3. R. Schumann: *3 Romances for Oboe and Piano*, Op. 94

Final stage:

1. J. S. Bach: *Sonata in G Minor*, BWV 1030b
2. R. Strauss: *Concerto for Oboe*

Members of the jury included: **Hansjorg Schellenberger** (solo oboist of the Berlin Philharmonic), chairman; **Yoichiro Omachi** (conductor and professor at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music); **Yoko Kojima** (oboist of the NHK Symphony Orchestra and lecturer at the Tokyo National University); **Takehiko Nitori** (oboist, former member of the NHK Symphony Orchestra and professor at the Seitoku University junior college section); **Gordon Hunt** (principal oboist of the Philharmonia Orchestra and the London Chamber Orchestra); **Maurice Bourgue** (professor at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris and at the Conservatoire de Musique de Geneve); and **Seizo Maruyama** (oboist and former member of the NHK Symphony Orchestra and professor at the Kunitachi College of Music).

Here are my impressions of the competition. As I arrived on Monday evening, the first stage had already been completed in which some fifty competitors had performed. The fifteen performers in the second stage were, (in the order of performance): **Gildas Prado** (France); **Juan-Manuel Gonzales-Lumbreras** (Spain); **Ikuko Takayama** (Japan); **Frederic Tardy** (France); **Jean-Philippe Marteau** (France); **Katherine Needleman** (USA); **Anne-Catherine Bitsch** (France); **Marianne Legendre** (France); **Anne Regnier** (France); **Eric Speller** (France); **Nora Cisonodi** (France); **Takihiko Kase** (Japan); **Keiko Inoue** (Japan); **Yeon-hee Kwak** (Korea); and **Sebastian Hilden** (Germany).

The five performers in the final stage were: **Marianne Legendre**, **Anne Regnier**, and **Eric Speller** (all of France); **Yeon-hee Kwak** (Korea); and **Sebastian Hilden** (Germany). No first prize was given. Yeon-hee Kwak won the second prize, and the third prize was divided between Anne Regnier and Eric Speller.

Since I am not a musician, I don't feel qualified to speak of the musical quality and feeling of the performances, but I will speak of the organization and spirit of the competition. The organization is on a very high level, all events are perfectly on time, and the competitors are looked after very kindly. The welcome one feels in Tokyo is a very warm one, and the competitors are situated in a very comfortable hotel, the Edmont, where all rooms are paid for by the Sony Music Foundation. Everything is done to make the competitors' experience an easy one, with as little stress as possible.

Rehearsals are carefully organized and scheduled; rehearsal studios are attractive and the accompanists are accomplished and cooperative. I had the impression that every



Yeon-hee Kwak



Anne Regnier



Eric Speller

situation was thought of in advance, and if something unforeseen should happen, the organization would immediately find a solution to any problem. The hotel was well located, only four metro stops from the Tsuda Hall, a very attractive venue. Friends told me that it seemed strange to be awakened in the morning with the Mozart concerto on your left, the Strauss on your right, and Pasculli in the middle! I think it could be far worse!

I have to say a word about the funding of the prizes too. When there are two prizes given, as in this case, two third prizes, each winner received the full prize of 300,000 Yen. (First prize incidentally was 1,500,000 Yen; second prize was 800,000 Yen). In past competitions, when there were two first prize winners, each winner received the full amount.

About the jury, I must say that it seems a very good idea to keep most of the same jury members from one competition to the next, and to occasionally add new ones (in this case, Gordon Hunt). This maintains a tradition, but the addition of a new viewpoint makes good sense to me. After the competition, all the participants can visit with jury members to ask their advice. Rooms and times are scheduled for that purpose. The winners concert, which included performances of the Vivaldi, Mozart and Strauss concerti and then the Carlo Yvon —

Capriccio for Three Oboes — (as performed by jury members Schellenberger, Bourgue, and Hunt) took place on Sunday, November 9. Also participating was the Orchestra di Padova e del Veneto conducted by Hansjorg Schellenberger. A reception for all participants followed the concert, with a buffet and sociability for everyone. After the reception an elegant dinner in a fine restaurant was given by the organizing staff for the jury members and the laureates of the competition. They also invited an oboe maker (me!) and this was very kind of them.

Everything is so well done, and musical matters receive the most careful attention. Everything is professional, very thoughtful and kind, and very generous. I must thank the Sony Music Foundation and the executive chairman of the management committee, Mr. Taisuke Ohnishi, who have made in recent years an international oboe competition at the highest possible level, and so have made a great contribution to the little world of the oboe. ❖

Editor's note: Readers will be interested to know that other US participants (including some oboists studying in the US) were Nathan Hughes, Tong Cui, Shannon Spicciati, Omri Raveh, and Karen Bicch.