

**Report****Cleveland International Piano Competition Conversation:  
Jury Roundtable (August 5)**

by Guytano Parks



“Technical prowess is assumed and expected, but it is not enough by itself,” said HaeSun Paik of Korea, 2013 Cleveland International Piano Competition jury member, regarding competition success at Monday morning's Jury Roundtable, the third "Festival Event" at The Cleveland Museum of Art. This sentiment was echoed unanimously by

all the other jurors: Nelita True, USA; Frank Weinstock, USA; Daejin Kim, Korea; Elinar Steen-Nokleberg, Jury Chairman, Norway; Robert Plano, Italy; Andrzej Jasinski, Poland and Alexander Korsantia, Georgia.

CIPC Executive Director Pierre van der Westhuitzen moderated the discussion which touched on key issues such as what the jurors listen for during performances and how music competitions impact careers. The Roundtable also included refreshing humor as HaeSun Paik led off the provocative conversation with a candid recounting of some of her own experiences as both competitor and juror in several major piano competitions. “You need huge luck to win,” she said of one of the competitions in which she competed, adding, “with 200 competitors, the jury was surely bound to have difficulties remembering you, let alone staying awake!” She also told of the “humiliation of a public displaying of competitors' scores by a jury of 15, mostly Russians,” in one competition in the 1990's, and “having to prepare ten etudes to competition performance calibre, not knowing which two the jurors would choose for you to play until you walked out onto the stage!”

Commenting about an international music competition in Norway, Elinar Steen-Nokleberg added to the humor by jocularly quipping, “having a royal name for a music competition works magic. The queen was present. She fell asleep.” Of course this was all in good fun; competition jurors are under extreme pressure to uphold and maintain high standards of objectivity, responsibility and nobility during long, grueling hours of listening and behind-the-scenes activities. Steen-Nokleberg then turned quite serious, stating with sincerity, “talent, intimate love for the music and a fantastic conveyance of the deep and fiery message of the composer is paramount to the success of a competitor.”

Westhuizen then posed the question, “what is it that jurors look for in competitors?” Again, the response by all was nearly unanimous. Daejin Kim (first place winner in the 1985 Casadesus Competition) said, “originality and of course impeccable technique,” adding, “with today's Internet technology such as Youtube, listening to and viewing performances is readily available to everyone, and unfortunately there is much copying of style and delivery going on in many of the leading competitions.” Roberto Plano (first place winner in the 2001 CIPC) said, “I am impressed by a great gift of communication while remaining reverent to the score...a performance which doesn't become akin to an athletic contest or race.” All were in agreement that too much personality, or overindulgences and idiosyncrasies — a very subjective issue — were deemed to be in poor taste and generally does not fare well in competitions.

Frank Weinstock explained, “a competitor's second-guessing of what the jury wants or expects could be very dooming as they attempt to perform in the assumed tradition (usually erroneously), undoubtedly leading to much less individuality and personal expression.” Plano added, “a contestant's choice of repertoire is also very telling of their individuality.” Alexander Korsantia said, “the contestant must forget that they are competing and must simply go out onto the stage and play their best...there's a narrow passage to one's own truth and to everyone else's truth.”

Paik added, “everything must gel at that one moment, a culmination and balance of head, heart and soul.” She also interestingly likened the interpretation of the notes and symbols of a musical score to a theatrical script. The composer has written down the notes and symbols just as the playwright wrote down the words and punctuation marks. The performer must interpret those notes (words) and clearly express what the composer (playwright) intended with conviction and individuality, without overplaying (overacting) or underplaying (underacting).

Nelita True said that she once attended a play and after having enjoyed it so much, returned to see it again with a friend. One of the actors was replaced by a different actor the second time around, and although the script hadn't changed a bit, she was very surprised to see the interpretation and delivery to be altogether different from one performance to another. A very similar thing occurs with different performances of the same pieces of music. The possibilities seem to be endless.

Time flew by quickly, and the Roundtable barely scratched the surface on the issue of the impact of competitions on careers, leaving us with the feeling that an entire day could have been filled up discussing these intriguing, multi-faceted topics. However, there was time for a few questions from the audience, among them being, “does the process of jury selection in any way flavor the competition (specifically CIPC) in a particular fashion, and what exactly determines the decisions in that process?” Westhuizen appropriately took that question — he and CIPC Artistic Director Paul Schenly are directly responsible for making that determination — stating, “we look for jurors with distinct, personal voices who are remarkable teachers and performers, with great open-mindedness, and despite potentially having vastly different tastes and views, will have great respect for one another.” He also added that potential jurors do not know who else will be serving on the CIPC jury until decisions have been made and then publicized.

*Photo by Guytano Parks.*

*Published on ClevelandClassical.com August 6, 2013*