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COMMUNICATIONS

REPORTS

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DAVID BREITMAN (Oberlin Conservatory) writes:

The inaugural Westfield International Fortepiano Competition took place between 31 July and 6 August 2011 on the campus of Cornell University in Ithaca, located in the picturesque Finger Lakes region of New York State, about four hours' drive from New York City. The distinguished jury was made up of Penelope Crawford (University of Michigan), Pierre Goy (Conservatoire de Lausanne), Tuija Hakkila (Sibelius-Akatemia), Christopher Hogwood (University of Cambridge and Emeritus Director of the Academy of Ancient Music), Robert Levin (Harvard University), who was president of the jury, György Vashegyi (Director of the Orfeo Orchestra, Budapest) and Andrew Willis (University of North Carolina, Greensboro). Malcolm Bilson, though president of the competition, was not a member of the jury. A week-long Fortepiano Academy, taught by Bart van Oort (The Hague) and myself, followed the competition.

The Westfield Center, founded in 1979 by Lynn Edwards and Edward Pepe, is devoted to promoting historical keyboard instruments and their builders and performance practice. Its activities include conferences and workshops, various publications, including the journal *Keyboard Perspectives*, and educational events such as this competition. (A harpsichord competition will be held next year at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, to be followed by an organ competition.)

Malcolm Bilson's short essay at the front of the competition's programme booklet was prefaced with this quotation from Anton Rubinstein: 'I think that instruments from every period have effects and colours that cannot be reproduced on today's pianos – that compositions were always conceived with the instruments of their time in mind, and only on those can they achieve their full effect; played on today's instruments they sound at a disadvantage'. Rubinstein's must have been a minority opinion in 1892 – and so it remains in today's conventional piano competition circuit. There are an astounding number of contests for all ages and levels of aspiration, but every one takes as its starting-point the opposite position, namely that the Steinway concert grand is the *ne plus ultra* of keyboard instruments, equally suitable for Scarlatti, Schubert and Stockhausen. The Westfield Center seeks to redress that balance. In Bilson's words, 'the thirty young players [twenty-five of them actually made it to Ithaca] who are attending this competition, from as far off as Moscow or Tokyo, represent a new generation [who] don't accept at face value a performing tradition that has come down through the generations … They hope to forge new paths of expression based not only on the [historical] instruments, but on all sources of information that can lead to fresh realizations of these 200-year-old scores.'

No one who has followed Malcolm Bilson's career as the pioneering American exponent of the fortepiano should be surprised that the first American fortepiano competition is being held at Cornell University, Bilson's academic home since 1968. None the less, this large research university remains an unlikely location for such a significant musical event. Although its graduate programmes in musicology and composition are world-renowned, musical performance was never a central focus for Cornell's Music Department. As Bilson explained in his opening remarks, accepting a job at Cornell initially seemed like a big step down from the University of Illinois, where he had been a graduate student and young faculty member. But his perspective soon changed. Early in his career at Cornell he had a chance to borrow a fortepiano for a

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week, and, in his words, 'he was hooked'. Illinois has a big professional music school with many high-level pianists, but Cornell is an institution that prizes the pursuit of new knowledge above all, and it became the perfect base for his ground-breaking activities – including a highly successful DMA programme focused on eighteenth-century performance practice. Walter Cohen, Senior Associate Dean of Cornell's College of Arts and Sciences, and Annette Richards, Professor of Music at Cornell and Executive Director of the Westfield Center, emphasized in their opening remarks that Cornell, with its long tradition of encouraging new generations of students to further the pursuit of knowledge, was thus the ideal location for this competition.

The opening ceremony concluded with Andrew Willis's performance of works by Alberti and Bach on a copy of an Italian piano from 1735. Nothing could have been more fitting. Introducing Willis, Bilson called this the 'cutting edge' of early keyboard performance. The early piano revival began with Mozart and the late eighteenth-century Viennese piano and moved on to the nineteenth century; indeed, the competition's repertoire requirements reflected this history. But the first half of the eighteenth century has been neglected, and instruments in this style have only recently been copied (hardly any have survived in playable condition). Willis's colourful, thoughtful performances were inspiring and revelatory, and they reminded us that there is so much unexplored territory for the historical keyboardist.

In the first round of the competition each contestant had a maximum of thirty minutes in which to perform two works: either a C. P. E. Bach fantasy from the *Kenner und Liebhaber* collections or a set of variations by Mozart and any sonata by Haydn, Mozart, Clementi or Dussek or an early sonata by Beethoven. Two pianos were available for this round: a five-and-a-half-octave Viennese-style piano by McNulty, based on an 1805 Walter, and an English-style piano by Chris Maene, after a 1799 Clementi & Broderip. This round lasted two and a half days.

On Monday we heard the first ten players – five in the morning and five more in the late afternoon. Half of the players elected to play London-school sonatas and played them on the Clementi copy, dividing their thiry-minute recitals between the two pianos, while the other five players restricted themselves to Viennese repertoire and the Viennese piano. It is always interesting to hear someone move from one instrument to another; the difference between the pianos was often less pronounced than the difference between the players. After all, we expect pianists to find their own sound at any (modern) piano they play. But here the players were faced with a challenge more familiar to organists: how to discover and take advantage of the resources offered by a particular instrument in a very specific style. Nevertheless, a few of the contestants did manage to find a totally different sound world when they switched.

Everyone was impressed with the organization of the event. The pianos were in excellent condition, tuned several times each day, and even the replacement of a string and the repair of a broken hammer were attended to without disturbing the schedule. Sage Chapel, where we spent four out of the five days, was a wonderful venue, beautiful both outside and inside, and with a warm, clear acoustic. Some things can't be avoided even with the best planning, however, and one of the day's contestants deserved a special prize: her concentration was put to the test by a bat that circled ever closer to the piano as she performed.

On Tuesday we heard the same pieces performed back-to-back by the first two contestants (Mozart Variations K265 and 613). They focused the mind on a central problem in performance: how much of the performer do we want in the performance? These examples highlighted the pitfalls in each direction: revealing too little, and revealing too much. How much of art consists in finding a balance?

Wednesday saw the performances of five more contestants before the judges made their choice: ten of the original twenty-five advanced to the next round. As Bilson said before announcing the names, the process was much more complex than at a conventional piano competition, since in this arena both the players and the judges have ideological concerns that lead them to value different attributes. One person's idea of highly nuanced rhetoric may seem like mere eccentricity to another. After the announcement, those who were not selected for the second round were invited to receive feedback from the judges.

Thursday was a long day: each of the ten remaining contestants played for forty minutes – a true recital. Ultimately, five were selected for the final round: all men, as some noted with raised eyebrows.

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On Saturday we reached the final round. Each contestant presented a one-hour recital with a free choice of repertoire, but the distinctive feature of this round was the chamber music requirement: each contestant selected one of the Op. 1 Beethoven Trios and had had seventy-five minutes on Friday to rehearse with violinist Elizabeth Field and cellist Stephanie Vial. We heard the G major Trio, Op. 1 No. 2, three times, and the C minor Trio, Op. 1 No. 3, twice. (Seven of the original competitors had selected the E flat Trio, but none of them made it to the finals.) The remaining pieces ranged from J. S. Bach's D major Partita to Chopin's G minor Ballade.

The winner, Anthony Romaniuk, is an Australian who studied modern piano at the Manhattan School of Music in New York, harpsichord and fortepiano in The Hague and fortepiano in Amsterdam. He was especially impressive in his chamber music performance, which in no way betrayed the short preparation time, or the fact that this particular ensemble had never played together before. Their cohesion and unanimity of purpose would have been impressive under any circumstances. Second prize went to Mike Lee, a New Zealander who studied at Yale and Cornell, and the third prize to Shin Hwang, a student at the University of Michigan.

Before the winners were announced, Malcolm Bilson thanked many of the people who had made the competition possible, including his wife (those of us who had followed the preparations over the course of a year knew how much she deserved it). The final surprise was Robert Levin's announcement that the jury had decided, unanimously, to name the top award the 'Malcolm Bilson Prize', as a tribute to the man whose vision and determination over the past forty years made this event possible.

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ALLAN BADLEY (University of Auckland) writes:

The Research Committee of the Association Johann Baptist Wanhal – Allan Badley, Stanislav Bohadlo (Univerzita Hradec Králové), Michaela Freemanova (Akademie věd České republiky) and Marc Niubo (Univerzita Karlova) – met in Prague in June to further the Association's plan to issue a new thematic catalogue of the composer's works.

Owing to a personal agreement between Alexander Weinmann and Paul Bryan to exclude symphonies from Weinmann's *Themen-Verzeichnis der Kompositionen von Johann Baptiste Wanhal* (Vienna: Musikverlag Ludwig Krenn, 1988), no thematic catalogue of Wanhal's complete works has ever been prepared. While the publication of Bryan's excellent 1997 monograph *Johann Wanhal, Viennese Symphonist: His Life and His Musical Environment* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon) included the long-awaited catalogue of the symphonies and their sources, it also highlighted the shortcomings of Weinmann's catalogue of the remaining works. The Association Johann Baptist Wanhal, of which Paul Bryan is a founding member, has set the preparation of a new integrated Wanhal catalogue as a priority.

The Association's initial plan was to issue a revision of Weinmann's catalogue, following the style employed by Bryan in his symphonies catalogue, which would correct many of its errors and omissions and draw on recent Wanhal scholarship in a series of introductory genre-based essays. At the Prague meeting, however, it was agreed that a new numbering system should be devised to replace the overly complex quasi-Linnean system of work classification employed by Weinmann and better to reflect the integration of the two catalogues. I was asked to develop a numbering system for consideration by the committee.

The data to be included in the catalogue entries was also discussed at length. While standardization of the data fields is desirable, these will change according to the requirements of individual genres. The complex transmission of eighteenth-century sacred works, with their multiple texts, flexible multi-movement structures and variable instrumentation, poses particular problems to the cataloguer and will demand the most detailed description of the sources. Whether this extends to the inclusion of copyists and paper types as

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