



MAKER'S BENCH

Competitions

by John Waddle

International Violin Competition of Indianapolis (IVCI)

The International Violin Competition of Indianapolis (IVCI) was held in September of this year. The competition takes place every four years. The IVCI received 179 applications from 31 countries for this year's contest. Applicants had to submit a DVD, which included one Paganini Caprice, two contrasting movements of Bach, and the first movement of a concerto selected from the Finals List of 17. The DVDs were screened by Artistic Director and Jury President—Jaime Laredo, Malcolm Lowe—Concertmaster of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and former IVCI Jury Member, and Ivan Chan—1990 Bronze Medalist and Senior Lecturer at The Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts. The minimum age for application is 16 and the maximum is 29. This year's accepted participants came from 12 countries with Korea being the most represented.

Each violinist must prepare over three hours of repertoire with the hopes of successfully completing four rounds of the Competition. Although there is a set list of pieces from which the violinists must choose, the possibilities are enormous. For instance, they may assemble programs chosen from 24 Paganini Caprices, 9 Beethoven Sonatas, 23 additional sonatas or major violin and piano works, 23 encore works, 27 show pieces and 17 concertos. The only compulsory work is the commissioned work, *Fantasy for Solo Violin* by Ellen Taaffe Zwilich. The breadth of the repertoire shows the depth of their musical knowledge and readiness for a concert career.

These violinists competed for more than \$250,000 in prizes, international concert engagements, four-year career and concert management and use of the 1683 "ex-Gingold" Stradivarius. The Gold Medalist was awarded \$30,000 and a Carnegie Hall recital debut in Stern Auditorium. The entire process could be watched via live streaming through the IVCI website www.violin.org.

Violin Society of America Competition (VSA)

This year, for the first time, the Violin Society of America (VSA) also met and held its convention and competition in the same city, at the same time. The VSA was founded in 1973, and has held competitions, starting in 1975. The VSA meets every year, but holds a competition every two years. Anyone can join the VSA by paying the membership fee and then paying yearly dues.

The VSA conventions are usually a week long, and consist of social events and lecture presentations, some panel discussions on various aspects of making, and a vendor area with wood, supplies, accessories and tools. If someone is interested in pursuing lutherie as a profession, the VSA convention is a great place to find out about the profession. Also, if a musician is interested in learning more about instruments and bows, and how they are made and who the people are who currently make them, the VSA convention is the place to be.

Only members of the VSA can enter the competition. Prizes in the VSA competition may include Gold Medals, Silver Medals and

Certificates of Merit. There are two sets of judges, the workmanship judges (acknowledged experts who are usually also luthiers), and players (often a string quartet).

Gold Medals are awarded to instruments or bows which both the workmanship judges and the musician judges agree on as being the best. A Silver Medal or a Certificate of Merit may be awarded for an instrument or bow for either workmanship or tone. The judging takes place in a large room in the hotel, and no one but the judges is allowed in the room until the judging is completed. Results are posted on the VSA's website.

A luthier or bow maker who wins a gold medal in three VSA competitions is declared "Hors Concours," and is not allowed to compete in any more competitions. Minnesota has three such distinguished people, David Folland (luthier), of Northfield, Matt Wehling (bow maker), also of Northfield, and William Scott (luthier), of Minneapolis. Bill Scott has judged competitions before, and David Folland and Matt Wehling were chosen to be judges this year at VSA. Congratulations to all of them!

This year, of the total number of luthiers entering the competition, from 26 countries, 150 of them are from the United States, followed by 69 from China, 16 from France, 15 from Italy, and 14 from Canada, with some countries having only one representative.

Each instrument maker may enter at most one (1) violin, one (1) viola, one (1) cello, and/or one (1) bass in the Competition. Makers may also enter a string quartet for the quartet Competition. If a quartet is entered, one (1) violin (to be designated by the competitor—not necessarily the first violin), along with the viola and cello from the quartet must also be entered into the Competition. In addition, the first and second violins must be clearly identified. If a quartet is entered, the fees for one violin, the viola and the cello will be paid. Bow makers may enter at most one (1) violin bow, one (1) viola bow, one (1) cello bow, and one (1) bass bow in the Competition. Baroque instruments, baroque and pre-modern bows may not be entered in the Competition. Two or more makers ("co-makers") may together enter one instrument, bow or quartet, but if so, none of the co-makers may also enter an instrument or bow of the same type on their own. Instruments and bows may not be entered in the VSA competition if they have already won prizes in other competitions. Instruments and bows must be completed after November of 2012. Instruments and bows must be kept anonymous to the judges. Instruments must either not have labels or have the labels covered up so they can't be seen. Bows must be either left unstamped, or have the stamp covered.

All instruments and bows must have a label, brand, or stamped mark. This is so that the maker may be positively identified, if necessary, at the conclusion of the Competition after the judging has taken place. In an effort to insure impartiality, the identity of the makers of the instruments and bows is withheld from the judges during the Competition. To prevent the judges from identifying the maker by looking at the instrument's label, brand, or stamped

mark, *it is the responsibility of the contestant to make sure that all such labels, brands, or stamped marks are covered or otherwise concealed at the time of entry.*

In this year's VSA competition, there were expected to be over 200 violins, over 100 violas, over 70 cellos and over 10 basses. There were also expected to be over 30 violin bows, over 20 viola bows, over 20 cello bows and over 10 bass bows. Also expected were over 30 Quartets that will have four instruments each. Winning at VSA can be a boost for an instruments maker's reputation, and confidence. For some, it might be the encouragement they need to keep going.

Anyone can enter the VSA competition as long as they are a member of the VSA. There is no age limit. A maker could enter their very first instrument or bow that they have made. There is also no pre-screening process leading up to the convention. The judges will examine each instrument and bow entered in the first round, but then will spend more time evaluating instruments considered to be finalists. In some years, it has happened that no gold medals were awarded in a particular category, and in other years, it has happened that as many as three gold medals have been awarded in a category.

There are other competitions worldwide for both violin players, and luthiers, but Indiana and VSA are two of the biggest. For a violinist, winning a competition can be a big step toward the launching of their career. Winning at VSA can also help the career of a young luthier. It can also be a good way for a maker or player to compare their work and progress with others.

I attended the VSA/Indiana meeting in September and presented some of the work I have been doing with Steve Sirr and

Steve Rossow, involving Computed Tomology (CT)—scanning of old and valuable instruments and what can be measured using CT. I belong to both the AFVBM and the VSA, and have attended both meetings for many years. It's always good to re-connect with old friends and meet new people. I also enjoy seeing the instruments and bows in the competition.

American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers (AFVBM)

There are two major organizations that involve luthiers (people who make stringed instruments), in the US. One is the American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers (AFVBM), which meets every two years, and the other is the VSA.

To become a member of the AFVBM, a maker must be a professional, and is required to meet certain requirements (years of training and experience; years of working on their own; must be recommended by three members; must make an instrument or bow, which must be approved by the board of governors, and then must receive at least a 2/3 vote by the members at the general meeting). Membership is maintained by paying yearly dues. The AFVBM does not hold competitions, and many of the members also belong to the VSA, some have entered and won VSA competitions.

John R. Waddle is a violin maker, dealer, and restorer whose shop is in St. Paul, Minnesota. He is a 1981 graduate of The Violin Making School of America in Salt Lake City, Utah, and has had his own shop in St. Paul since 1986. John is a member of both The American Federation of Violin and Bow Makers, and the Violin Society of America. †