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Bravo Vicki!



Victoria (Vicki) Bragin tied for First Prize with an MIT professor in the Third Van Cliburn International Piano Competition for Outstanding Amateurs held in June at Fort Worth, TX. She also won The Audience Award, the award for Best Performance of a Modern Work, and the award for Best Performance of a Work from the Romantic Era. Part of the first prize package is a concert at the Marion and Gustave Ring Auditorium of the Hirshhorn Museum on October 27 at 4:00 pm. Vicki's program will include: Haydn *Sonata in F* (Hob. XVI:23), a set of Debussy preludes including *Feux d'artifice*, Bartok's Improvisations on *Hungarian Peasant Songs*, and Chopin's *Sonata in B minor*.

Vicki says she was stunned when she made the semifinals. "I went to Fort Worth with the idea of competing with myself more than with others. That is, I would be happy as long as I felt I did the best that I could, irrespective of the outcome." She avoided "seeing the competition" but felt



compelled to watch the last evening of the preliminaries because the semifinalists were to be announced thereafter. "The technical display in the pieces chosen by the competitors that evening made me wonder if my performance was good enough to merit being a semifinalist." In retrospect, she said she probably should have been more confident since her preliminary round performance did get good press reviews, including one which stated, "Chemistry professor Victoria Bragin produced the right chemistry for a performance of Haydn's Sonata ... that was equal in its sensitivity and subtlety to any professional performance of music of that composer that this listener has heard."

As for the final round, Vicki said, "I was very dissatisfied with my performance." Because of the excitement surrounding the semifinal round, she did not sleep for one second and felt very weak going into the final round the next day. "My mental focus was there but I simply did not have much energy and there was really not much I could do but try to conserve whatever energy I had through all 4 movements of the Chopin and hope I would not collapse before the end of the piece." After her performance, when she had to acknowledge the audience applause several times, she thought, "This can't be real!"

Vicki found the IPCOA competitors to be a very fascinating group of people: physicians, scientists, lawyers, a flight attendant, a news anchor, etc., with many having advanced degrees in music as well. "A music critic characterized the group as 'overachievers.' They are indeed a very competitive group of people—an amateur tennis champion, a beauty contest winner, etc.-- and 43% were former IPCOA competitors." Vicki feels she was probably the least competitive in nature as this was her first competition of any kind ever. "What everyone had in common though was a passion for making music on the piano. And, despite the competitiveness there was a lot of camaraderie among the competitors, certainly not something one would most likely encounter in professional competitions. Many are now looking forward to seeing each other in 2004!" Vicki wishes to encourage FMMC pianist members 35 years or older who do not earn a living as a pianist or as a piano teacher to join the competition.

An interview of Vicki by National Public Radio's Performance Today is featured on their website at www.npr.org/programs/pt/features/020611.vancliburnamateurs.html. It includes a recording of Debussy's *Feux d'artifice*, one of the pieces she played for the semifinal round.



Photos top to bottom: Vicki Bragin, official photo while performing, and official photo of Vicki receiving the Audience Award. All photos by Mike Erwin of the Cliburn Foundation