



Nobuyuki Tsujii, 20, of Japan, who is blind, wows the crowd Sunday during screening auditions for the 13th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in Ed Landreth Auditorium at Texas Christian University.

STAR-TELEGRAM/RODGER MALLISON

After playing stops, judges make decisions

By CHRIS SHULL

Special to the Star-Telegram

FORT WORTH — The panel of five judges at the Cliburn screening recitals use non-sense ratings to determine who will advance to the upcoming Van Cliburn Piano Competition. Pianists are not ranked — they're either in, or they're not.

Using a system devised by Richard Rodzinski, president of the Van Cliburn Foundation, a score of 0 = no; 1 = maybe; 2 = yes; and 3 = absolutely.

The scores from each of the five judges — Marcello Abbado; Hung-Kuan Chen; Richard Dyer; Veda Kaplinsky and John Giordano, former music director of the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra — are added, with the top 30 scores advancing to the Cliburn competition in May. Of course, there's discussion and compromise.

The jury has traveled to six cities in China, Europe and the United States to hear recitals by 155 promising pianists. Fort Worth screening recitals at Ed Landreth Auditorium at Texas Christian University conclude Tuesday.

"It is so much more than notes," said Kaplinsky, chairwoman of the piano department at the Juilliard School of Music in New York. Judges evaluate each pianist on technique, musicianship, interpretation and stage presence.

Cliburn screening recitals

- 2 and 7:30 p.m. today and Tuesday at TCU's Ed Landreth Auditorium
- Free; must be at least 12 years old to attend
- 817-738-6536; www.cliburn.org

"It's not just being able to play the piano, it's being able to present artistry on a very high level," Kaplinsky said.

Sunday's best

During Sunday's matinee session, Nobuyuki Tsujii, 20, from Japan wowed the crowd with fantastic fingerwork during his bravura reading of the 12 Etudes, Op. 10 by Chopin. Tsujii is blind.

In the evening, Russian Ilya Yakushev, 27, displayed sensational showmanship on Tchaikovsky's solemn *Dumka* and unbridled virtuosity during Ravel's extra-sensory *La Valse*.

Two pianists from TCU performed. Ang Li, 24, has a promising career: She played a Beethoven concerto with the Fort Worth Symphony a few weeks ago and was a contestant at the 2005 Cliburn competition. On Sunday, her confident performance of three Etudes-Tableaux by Rachmaninoff rang with luminous tones. Jie Yuan, 23, used symphonic coloration during three movements from Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*.

Message of Casa play is elementary

By PUNCH SHAW

Special to the Star-Telegram

FORT WORTH — As Joni Mitchell once opined, you don't know what you've got till it's gone.

That is the hard truth learned by a quartet of very bad children in *Miss Nelson is Missing*, the lesson in basic classroom etiquette being taught at Casa Mañana's Children's Playhouse.

This little comedy-mystery with music introduces us to four of the most miserable brats who have ever poisoned a teacher's apple. These terrible tykes from the Horace B. Smedley Elementary School are played and sung superbly by adult actors Andy Baldwin, Michael Issac, Amanda Passanante and Natalie Weaver. Greg Dulcie, as the school's janitor and a few other characters, serves as an emcee and Greek chorus.

This juvenile wrecking crew's rudeness and recalcitrance in the class of the sweet Miss Nelson (Shannon McGrann) is brought to an abrupt halt when their endlessly patient teacher mysteriously disappears. Her substitute, a Wicked Witch of the West-like Viola Swamp (also McGrann; oh, gosh! did I give too much away?) has quite a different approach to education — better teaching through tyranny.

You will be stunned to learn that the miscreants ultimately see the light and begin to deeply miss Miss Nelson, who returns as mysteriously as she had vanished (there I go spoiling it again).

This show, directed by Valerie Galloway-Chapa, is well-done in every regard. And the little ones attending the Friday morning performance seen for this review seemed to get a kick out of the students' unacceptable behavior and the good-teacher/bad-teacher gambit.

But parents should be aware that this play is not smarter than a fifth-grader. The values championed here are aimed at very young children and are appropriately presented in simple packaging. In keeping with that approach, the script and songs are not as sophisticated as they are in many productions of this type at Casa.