

## **Impressive trio raise the bar**

Organ fest captures attention

*Bob Clark*

Calgary Herald

2002/08/18

### **The world's richest organ competition ended on a triumphant note Saturday for a trio of young performers from Europe.**

As overall winners of the prestigious Royal Bank Calgary International Organ Festival and Competition, the three – Vincent Dubois of France, Laszlo Fassang of Hungary and Clive Driskill-Smith of the United Kingdom – took home the lion's share of more than \$100,000 in prize money.

Taking top honours in the recital, improvisation and concerto categories respectively, Dubois, Fassang and Driskill-Smith each received a gold medal worth 25,000 USD in cash and a trophy - the Swanson Recital, ATCO Improvisation and RBC Concerto respectively - to remain on permanent display at TriumphEnt Foundation, the competition's parent organization.

Each of the gold medal prizes also include three-year management and career development assistance.

Latvia's Iveta Apkalna won the 5,000 USD prize for best performance of a work by J.S. Bach, while gold medal list Driskill-Smith also won the 3,000 USD prize for the best performance of a work by Maurice Durufle (in celebration of the French organist and composer's centenary). Canadian organist Jonathan Oldengarm of Montreal took home two cheques for 3,000 USD - one for the best performance of a Canadian work and the other for the best performance of an encore.

The prizes were presented at a medal awards ceremony at the Hyatt Regency Calgary immediately preceding the closing gala concert at Jack Singer Concert Hall featuring performances by the three winners.

"The standard really has been very high" said Dame Gillian Weir, one of the competition's seven finals jurors. "There's been some terrific playing and I'm extremely impressed."

The eminent British organist's sentiment was echoed by jury chairman Simon Preston. "The level seems to rise each time."

Preston has been the artistic director of the organ festival and competition since its inception in 1990.

Composer and jury member William Bolcom described choosing the winners as "a close call", while juror Richard Bradshaw, general director of the Canadian Opera Company, hailed the calibre of the event as "something to be pretty proud of."

"I think it's extraordinary that suddenly the number one (organ) competition in the world is in Calgary."

For 22-year-old Dubois, "(the win) is the best thing that could happen to me at this moment."

Dubois, who began studies on the organ when he was 11, spoke of his win as bringing him much closer to fulfilling his dream of "performing a lot on very beautiful instruments."

For fellow gold medallist Driskill-Smith too, victory means a substantial career boost - "even more important than the money", the 24-year-old musician said.

Hungary's Laszlo Fassang accompanied a clip from a Buster Keaton movie as part of his winning performance in the finals of the newly instituted improvisation element of the competition.

"It was the first time in my life accompanying a silent film in public," said the 29-year-old performer who admitted being drawn to the entertainment potential of the organ.

Held every four years, the Calgary organ competition runs in conjunction with an 11-day festival celebrating the organ and organ-related instruments through more than 50 events ranging from lectures, recitals and master classes to jazz gigs and concerts by popular artists.

"We've sold more tickets and earned more ticket revenue than in 1998," said Timothy Rendell, president and general manager of TriumphEnt. "Clearly, this wacky marketing initiative of introducing the organ family as a promotional concept has captured public attention."