

Calgary Organ Festival
Performances reach new peaks

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Review

Calgary International Organ Festival and Competition

Recital Finals, Rounds Two and Three

Vincent Dubois, France

Laszlo Fassang, Hungary

Tomaz Sevsek, Slovenia

Eva Bublova, Czech Republic

It was Gallic charm versus Hungarian fire as the Calgary International Organ Competition continued Saturday with afternoon and evening rounds.

Although all the competitors continue to perform to a very high standard, with the competition now at the midpoint, some peaks and valleys begin to become visible.

Two of those peaks were the performances of France's Vincent Dubois and Laszlo Fassang of Hungary, both of whom displayed a level of achievement nothing less than astonishing.

Opening with the now familiar E-flat St. Anne Prelude and Fugue, Dubois set a new standard for Bach performance, the freedom and accuracy of his playing captivating from start to finish; the tempo relationships judged to perfection.

Even more impressive was the parade of romantic and modern French works that followed. The most impressive was certainly the Prelude, Adagio and Chorale on Veni Creator by Durufle, a large sprawling piece filled with striking and imaginative ideas requiring the utmost in technical command.

Fluency and freedom characterize Dubois's playing in everything he played. Clearly, he is an organist who has long since moved beyond the ranks of the dutiful, well-coached keyboardist to the ranks of those for whom the organ in its widest dimension is an instrument for the conveying of musical ideas in a kaleidoscope of colours.

The applause was long and loud, resulting in an expressively rendered account of Max Reger's moving Benedictus. Considering the consummate mastery of Dubois's playing, which raised the bar of the competition by several notches, nobody expected what came next.

Meeting Dubois' Bach with his own Bach Performance of equal, or perhaps, even higher standard Fassang of Hungary showed this really is a musical horse race.

Fassang's performance of the D major Prelude and Fugue, one of the most treacherous of the major Bach works, was a true marvel, not only for its overall musical and technical discipline, but for its exemplary pedal work.

Once again, the best was yet to come, this time a performance of Liszt's Fantasy and Fugue on Ad nos, ad salutarem undam, a work of unbelievable difficulty.

Putty under his fabulous fingers, Fassang gave the performance of the day, which was talked about in terms of wonderment in the lobby.

A beautiful finishing touch was his encore, an improvisation in the style of Vaughan Williams on the once-popular Ian and Sylvia Tyson tune, Four Strong Winds.

The evening session was on a generally lower level, but had its memorable moments. These included a fine scherzo by Durufle played by Tomaz Sevsek of Slovenia and a joyful Gig fugue by Bach performed by Eva Bublova of the Czech Republic.

Sunday's two rounds complete the recital part of the competition, a final chance to hear organ playing of top drawer quality on the beautiful Carthy Organ.