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Young musicians playing for keeps

Piano, strings competition runs through Sunday

By Mike Baird Caller-Times

February 21, 2004

Adrienne Hochman's parents witness their usually shy, soft-spoken 14-year-old transform into a passionate and expressive musician when she places her violin beneath her chin.

It was that same teen who hobbled with a brace cinched around her sprained ankle into the patio room at Del Mar College less than an hour before her performance Friday at the 34th annual International Concerto Competition for Piano and Strings.



Photo by Randy Zane

Adrienne Hochman, of Houston, Texas, plays a violin piece in the first round of the string division concerto contest on Friday in Wolfe Recital Hall at Del Mar College.

"I was so excited to be selected," said Adrienne, clutching the violin case strapped over her shoulder. "I'm hoping to make it past the first round, and would love to win as the audience favorite."

Adrienne dedicates at least 30 hours weekly to violin, and her parents notice a change in her when she plays.

"She's real intense when she plays," said her father, Roger Hochman.

The competition continues today and Sunday, when the finalists will compete. A group of about 35 retired music educators, professional musicians and patrons of the arts are orchestrating the world-class piano and string competition - and it has had some challenges.

One judge was late because of scheduling confusion, a couple of pianists were too sick to compete, and one girl was delayed in Newark, N.J., because of airport security concerns.

Airport confusion on Friday prompted a day of suspense for former Channel 10 newsman Walter Furley, he said. Furley helped greet and transport some of the 50 competitors who were selected from more than 200 applicants between ages 14 and 26.

When three teenage cellists arrived together, Furley didn't have enough room in the back of his station wagon for all of their luggage and instruments.

"These three were pinned in the back seat together with instruments extending between their ears from the back," Furley said. "One girl's cello was also lying across all their laps; a sudden stop would have been disastrous."

One of the girls told him: "This is the price we pay for our art."

The competition is being heard and critiqued by six renowned instrumentalists. It features competitors from 29 U.S. states and 21 countries who represent 39 colleges, universities and conservatories.

"I'm looking for a sense of wonder," said Bryce Morrison, one of three piano competition judges. Morrison is a professor of keyboard literature at The Royal Academy of Music in London. "Thousands of people play piano, but few have a fidelity to the composer and conjure that individual sense of wonder."

Jason Peterson, 22, trotted quickly through the Richardson Auditorium and into the lobby shaking his hands after being the first pianist to compete for the \$5,000 Mary Hope Brenneke Award.

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"My Prokofiev piece was rough," said Peterson, of Wisconsin, who has played piano since he was 5. "My hands were cold. I could have done better."

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34th annual International Concerto Competition

Strings

Del Mar College's Wolfe Recital Hall

9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. today

Piano

Del Mar College's Richardson Auditorium

9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. today

Finals begin at 1:30 p.m. Sunday in Richardson Auditorium

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