

and creativity backed up by assured musicianship. In a leaner year, they might well have walked off with the main prizes. That is good news for the guitar, if not much consolation to the guitarists. They must persevere until they are lucky enough to have their talents recognised in an environment less demanding, and where the jury does not have the severe difficulty of choosing between many near-equal talents. In other words, it was a close-run thing, and another jury might well have come to a different decision. That element of uncertainty in a music competition has to be faced by all who take part in them (including the jury, who, well aware of their responsibilities, do not make their decisions lightly).

Nicolas Papin pleased everybody with his rendering of the obligatory piece, Ivor Mairants's *Rhapsody for Raney*. He infused a good jazz feeling, free and relaxed, into his fine classical style, a successful blending of two styles that the composer must surely have approved of. Irina Kulikova, too, managed this difficult feat, though her main strengths lay in other directions. In a remarkably well-defined performance of two of the twelve *Studies* of Villa-Lobos, No.7 had a pleasing crisp lightness that disguised the technical nature of the scale passages, often played so heavily with a self-conscious virtuosity; and in No.8 she built up an atmosphere of compelling quality that I shall not easily forget. This ability to invest an old favourite with new meaning was observed again and again throughout the day, and was one of the most rewarding features of the 2006 event.

Orestis Kalampalikis, who won the third prize and could so easily have won the first, did exceptionally well in Sérgio Assad's *Aquarelle*, from which he played Valseana and Prelude and Toccatina: music that can yield a lot once you overcome the technical difficulties. Kalampalikis did just that, approaching Valseana in a straightforward manner yet making music at the same time. This is another young musician with a high potential, and I shall be looking out for his name again.

Some of the 13 different interpretations of *Rhapsody for Raney*, Ivor Mairants's tribute to Jimmy Raney, were very different indeed. The dotted rhythms of Raney's period are not in the printed score, but it is necessary to know them and when to use them. It was good to hear that so many of the contestants knew exactly what to do and could make so much of this not-very-complex music. Own-choice offerings included Egberto Gismonti's *Central Guitar*, which dates from the mid-seventies

and sounds like it: wide intervals, golpeando and string bending gave it a strong period flavour. Koshkin's *Kyparriso* (Cyprus) was another choice; and one contestant played his own composition. Other selections were José's *Sonata* (first movement), *Invocation et Danse* (Rodrigo), Brouwer's *Sonata* (first movement), *Fantasia Sevilla* (Turina), *Usher Waltz* (Koshkin), *Elogio de la Danza* (Brouwer), *Due Canzone Lidie* (D'Angelo) and *Hommage à Villa-Lobos* (movements 1, 3 and 4, Dyens).

The prizes in 2006 had a value of £5,000 and included the Worshipful Company's award of £1,000 to be used for tuition in the field of jazz-influenced contemporary composition, a £1,500 Amalio Burguet guitar from the Ivor Mairants Musiccentre in London, £300 worth of music from Chanterelle Publications, and the complete

Ediciones Joaquín Rodrigo guitar works. Additional prizes were donated by: the D'Addario Foundation for the Performing Arts; Mel Bay Publications Inc.; Manuel Rodriguez Guitars; Intellitouch Tuners; and Classical Guitar Magazine. The first-prize winner is also invited to audition for the Maisie Lewis concerts held by the Worshipful Company of Musicians at the Wigmore Hall, London, in 2007.

In the sheer quality of the musical talent displayed, the Ivor Mairants Guitar Award reached a new peak in 2006. Long experience tells me it will not necessarily happen again in 2007, and that guitar competitions tend to follow a pattern familiar to those who work on the land, in which an abundant year is followed by a lean year. It would be wonderful to be proved wrong.

Colin Cooper

MAGGIE TEYTE COMPETITION 2007

The furrows on the brows of the jury at the auditions for this year's Maggie Teyte Prize were etched rather more deeply than usual. Yvonne Kenny, William Lyne, Mark Packwood, Graham Johnson (chair) and myself agonised long. For this year, the good and the bad seemed to spread rather more evenly throughout the 20 candidates. Those who were natural prize-winning material did not always give of their best; though, in the end, that spark of communication will out – that fusion of vocal technique, character and projection which makes the listener not only capable of imagining the singer in a full-length recital, but also inspires one to look forward to it.

The singer who possessed these qualities in the most convincing and rewarding package was the 25-year-old New Zealand soprano Anna Leese. Her Mozart recitative and aria (courageously, 'Per pietà' from *Così fan tutte* immediately revealed the range of colour and expressive vitality which makes her voice already so distinctive. And her French song – the most important testing ground for this award – was word-lively, with accomplished legato singing containing vividly imagined pictures. Her long vowels were eloquent in Debussy's *Extase Langoureuse*; and Fauré's *Clair de lune* had real lunar beauty. Leese was awarded the £2,000 of the Maggie Teyte Prize, a Miriam Licette

scholarship of £3,000 for study and a lunchtime recital at the Royal Opera House on 21 May.

The soprano Sophie Bevan (23) and the mezzo Catherine Hopper (27) were also strong contenders, and were awarded Licette scholarships of £2000 and £1500 respectively. Bevan is a born communicator: animated and focused, she conveys real delight in everything she sings. A broadening of the vocal palette and a stronger idiomatic sense will doubtless rapidly develop from an already fast-burgeoning talent. Hopper impressed the jury with the sheer naturalness and simple truthfulness of her performance. Although her French is not as polished as it could be, the clarity and sheer expressive quality of her words enables the story to be told: her Debussy and Bizet were particularly compelling.

For the rest, we lamented rather too often this year the inadequate French, the ragged technique and the missed direction of many of the candidates. Teacher beware: potentially valuable material is in your hands and the responsibility is daunting. It was easier for us to come to a decision on the recipient of the Megan Foster Prize for accompanists. Alisdair Hogarth and

Joseph Middleton were both praised; but the sheer accomplishment and musicality of 27-year-old Mikhail Shilyaev was in a class of its own.
Hilary Finch