



THOMAS BERTRAND
LUTHIER

Press release

International Competition of the Violin Society of America

Gold medal for Brussels violin maker Thomas Bertrand

It was by a unanimous vote of the jury (of violin makers and cellists) that Thomas Bertrand from Brussels was recently awarded a gold medal for one of his cellos, at the 17th International Competition of the Violin Society of America, which was held in Baltimore from 6 to 12 November 2006 (cellos had been entered by 48 of the violin makers taking part). A first for a Belgian violin maker!

Thomas Bertrand

Born in Brussels in 1963, Thomas Bertrand trained in Cremona and in Germany. Since 1991 he has had his own workshop in Brussels, where he makes top-quality violins, violas, and cellos and also carries out sound optimisation of instruments. An amateur cellist, he devotes his talent to the service of musicians, working to make life easier – and, if possible, richer – for them.

International violin making competitions

Of its nature, this is a solitary craft. International competitions offer a unique opportunity for emulation, making it possible to see how one's work measures up at an international level. Evaluation by experienced colleagues and musicians is of immense benefit to someone willing to constantly question and review his own work. For musicians, violin makers, and enthusiasts alike, the exhibition of instruments made by participants offers a unique opportunity to make comparisons at the highest level.

What is special about this competition?

The international competition organised by the Violin Society of America is one of the most interesting and highly regarded, both for its spirit of openness and the way it lives up to its declared aim of fostering contemporary violin making.

The violin makers and bow makers who take part hand over their instruments and bows to the jury (made up of violin makers, bow makers, and musicians) on the eve of the competition, in strict anonymity. The members of the jury examine them over three rounds in each category (violins, violas, cellos and double basses, quartets, and bows).

Throughout the week, while the jury is carrying out its work, a series of talks and exchanges takes place, interspersed with concerts, on a variety of subjects: new methods of examining old instruments using scanners or lasers, varnishes, glues, marketing, the methods used to position F-holes in the violins of Guarneri del Gesù, etc.

The competition is one of the few at which it is possible to handle and play the instruments during the final exhibition. Other competitions, such as those of Paris or Cremona, do not allow this.

Evaluation criteria

The jury of violin makers takes into account the drawing of the model from both the aesthetic and functional points of view, the level of technical execution in all parts of the instrument, its character, the consistency of the different parts with each other and the overall artistic impression, the choice of materials, the quality of the varnish, the assembly, and stability over time.

The jury of musicians looks at ease of playing, at the balance and homogeneity of timbre and power between the strings, and at the richness and the potential for modulation of tone.

The prize-winning cello

The winning cello was inspired by one by Matteo Goffriller (Venice, 1720), which is currently played by Valentin Erben of the Alban Berg Quartet. Thomas Bertrand has had very fruitful exchanges with this cellist over many years.

It was commissioned by a foundation, the *Nationaal Musiekinstrumenten Fonds* in Amsterdam, which acquires top-quality instruments in order to lend them to talented young musicians.

To see the prize-winning cello and to find out more about how Thomas Bertrand goes about his work:

www.bertrand-violins.com

For further information:

Thomas Bertrand
Rue d'Écosse, 65
B-1060 Brussels
Tel. & Fax: +32 2 534 11 62
Mobile: +32 498 527 841
www.bertrand-violins.com
th.bertrand.luthier@skynet.be