



Norwegian Guitarist Wins Monk Competition

The Thelonious Monk Institute of Jazz's first international guitar competition, in 1995, resulted in a big yawn, as the hopefuls projected hardly any distinguishable personality.

The finals for this year's Monk guitar competition on Sept. 19, held at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater, were far more memorable, as the three finalists exhibited greater potential of becoming singular voices of modern jazz guitar.

The panel of judges—Pat Martino, Bill Frisell, Earl Klugh, Russell Malone and John Pizzarelli—awarded 27-year-old Brooklyn-based Lage Lund of Skein, Norway, the top prize of \$20,000. A modernist, he exhibited an effortless prowess, embroidering Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan" with intricate, beautifully contoured lines, then etching angular phrasing in a burning quintet performance of Wayne Shorter's "Pinocchio."

Lund was a bit of a surprise winner, as runner-up Miles Okazaki from Seattle seemed primed for taking first place. Of the three finalists (David Mooney of New Orleans won third place), he played the evening's riskiest set. He launched into an intrepid take of Thelonious Monk's "Misterioso," on which he stated the melody in a slow, loping manner inside a tricky, rubato rhythmic bed that almost threatened to collapse. As bassist James Genus and drummer Terri Lyne Carrington pushed the momentum forward into restive swing, Okazaki offered a series of clarion, fast-paced single notes that revealed not only substantial technical prowess but a cocksure sense of humor. He was having big fun.

"Everyone played well, but Lage was the most musical," Malone said. "Miles played nice and was charismatic. He had a charisma that got across to the crowd, but he wasn't the most musical."

Junko Moriya's composition "Playground" won her the BMI Composers Award, which carried a \$10,000 prize. At the piano, she guided an ensemble of Carrington, Genus, saxophonist Chris Potter, guitarist Anthony Wilson and trumpeter Don Sickler through her modern bop excursion, noted by shifting meters and dissonant harmonies.

Before the awards were announced, the Monk Institute gave George Benson its Maria Fisher Founder's Award. Benson treated the audience with a funky, backbeat-fueled rendition of "On Broadway," flaunting both his magnetic singing and blues-laden guitar improvisations. Then, after Lund accepted his award, he engaged Benson in a duet on "How High The Moon," displaying admirable poise and respect for the guitar legend.

"That was terrifying," Lund said. "What do you play after George Benson?"

—John Murph