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Music

Monk Competition's First String

Lage Lund's Straightforward Jazz Strikes a Chord With Judges

By MIKE JOYCE

Special to The Washington Post

Lage Lund, a 27-year-old Norwegian-born, Brooklyn-based musician, won the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Guitar Competition at the Kennedy Center's Eisenhower Theater on Monday night. All it took was 15 minutes onstage and 15 years of preparation.

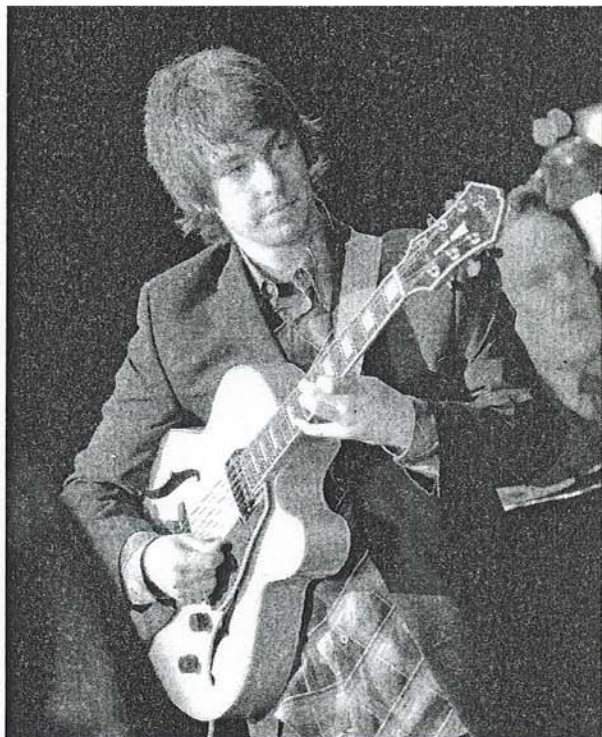
A graduate of the Berklee College of Music and the first guitarist enrolled in the Juilliard Institute for Jazz Studies, Lund was awarded the \$20,000 first prize after being selected from three finalists and 10 semifinalists by a panel of jazz guitar luminaries — Pat Martino, John Pizzarelli, Earl Klugh, Bill Frisell, Stanley Jordan and Russell Malone.

Lund, who turned in poised performances of Billy Strayhorn's "Isfahan" and Wayne Shorter's "Pinocchio" during Monday's finals, said he had a list of priorities for his cash winnings: "Number one is to get my guitar fixed — it's in bad shape."

The annual Monk Institute of Jazz competition, a showcase for aspiring vocalists, pianists, guitarists, saxophonists, bassists and other instrumentalists, has helped launch the careers of several notable jazz artists, including Marcus Roberts, Joshua Redman, Jacky Terrasson and Jane Monheit.

"Some of the players were charismatic and played well enough," Malone explained after the event. "But for my taste there wasn't a whole lot of musicality. Lage (pronounced "lah-GAY") wasn't flashy. He was just all music and all soul — that's what we all agreed upon. Great tone, great interpreter. One of the things I liked about him was that when he played these melodies he didn't embellish them — he was true to them."

Mike Okazaki of Seattle was awarded second prize and \$10,000; New Orleans native David Mooney received third prize and \$5,000. (Deserving medals for endurance were pianist Bob James, bassist James Genus, drummer Terri Lynne Carrington and saxophonist Chris Potter, who accompanied all the entrants.) This year's BMI Jazz Composers Competition winner was Tokyo-born pianist Junko Moriya,



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Lund has plans for his \$20,000 prize: "Number one is to get my guitar fixed."

who performed her delightfully evocative submission "Playground" with guitarist Anthony Wilson and a small ensemble.

Hosted by Herbie Hancock, Billy Dee Williams and Thelonious Monk Jr., the competition was followed by performances from a blue-ribbon array of jazz talent. Guest of honor George Benson, always a sure-fire crowd-pleaser, revived his scat-laced version of "On Broadway" after receiving the Monk Institute's Maria Fisher Founder's Award. He also got a chance to trade choruses with Lund on "How High the Moon." The competition winner later summed up the impromptu collaboration in a word: "Scary."

All the judges performed in one setting or another. Frisell, Martino, pianist Hancock and saxophonist Shorter produced an abstract rendering of "Footprints" (Shorter, who wrote the jazz standard, later

aply dubbed the performance "Footprints From Space"). Klugh and Malone, seated on stools, casually sustained the radiant lyricism inherent in "Stella by Starlight." Singer Dee Dee Bridgewater cooed up to 84-year-old trumpeter Clark Terry on "They Can't Take That Away From Me," though it was hard to tell who was the bigger flirt. Pizzarelli's vibrant swing guitar enlivened their pairing, and Bridgewater later joined Jordan and New Orleans-born trumpeter Terence Blanchard for a bluesy Crescent City salute.

The Monk Institute, based in Washington, conducts educational programs for students throughout the country. Hancock noted that the institute's outreach work on the Hurricane Katrina-battered Gulf Coast will soon resume. Sponsored by General Motors, the competition was taped for an upcoming BET documentary.