



ARTS & CULTURE

Park grad student is one of 6 finalists in Van Cliburn piano competition

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JUNE 06, 2017 5:57 PM

On average, Park University graduate student Kenny Broberg practices piano four hours a day. But to prepare for an event like the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, he can sit on the bench for more than six.

Now that preparation — which includes dipping his exhausted hands and forearms into ice water for recovery — is paying off. Broberg is one of six finalists of the prestigious Van Cliburn, held every four years in Fort Worth, Texas. The Cliburn began May 25 with 30 competitors from across the world, chosen from 140 who performed via live video feeds.

Roger Kugler, director of Park University's International Center for Music, compared Broberg's preparation to that of an Olympic athlete's. And Broberg is competing for gold: The winner is named the gold medalist.

"It is an athletic event as well as an artistic endeavor," says Kugler. "Every performer has to have a strict diet, a strong mental approach. It's physically and mentally demanding."

Broberg, 23, has already racked up a number of awards, including the bronze medal at the Wideman International Piano Competition, the silver medal at the Young Texas Artists Music Competition, and first prize in both the New Orleans International Piano Institute Concerto Competition and the MSM Concerto Competition.

The Minnesota native is currently studying under 2001 Cliburn gold medalist Stanislav Ioudenitch at Park University.

#Cliburn2017 Meet the Competitors: Kenneth Broberg (United States)



When Broberg sits in front of the ivory keys, he totally inhabits the space, says Kugler. Broberg’s face contorts and moves with the music, and his entire body communicates the emotions of the piece. His hands pluck the keys with what Kugler calls an “extroverted control.”

Broberg’s technical skills are nearly flawless. For every 100,000 notes played, Kugler would be shocked if he missed three.

Kugler compares his performances to that of an actor reading Shakespeare — many can get the inflections correct, they can act, but they can’t deliver the emotions. Broberg can.

“There are thousands of piano players that can technically perform many of the works that the contestants are performing,” Kugler says. “They set themselves apart on their musical interpretation, and in that regard I would say Kenny is a genius.”

Nancy Weems, who taught Broberg at the University of Houston’s Moores School of Music, says his musical interpretations stem from his sincere interest in every aspect of the piece he’s performing. He studies the composer and reads about the piece’s time period and its cultural context.

Broberg started playing piano when he was 6, and when he was 9, he started taking lessons with Joseph Zins at the Minnesota-based Crocus Hill Studios.

In his 45 years of teaching, Zins says, Broberg was his most talented student. He was “the complete package” — the young boy had an immense natural ability and an unwavering work ethic.

As a child, technical skills came easy to Broberg, but his abilities often outpaced his control.

“I remember telling his mother that his music was both magnificent and horrible as a child,” Zins recalls with a laugh. “All this talent was pouring out of him, but he didn’t know how to direct it.”

Through high school, Zins worked with him on restraining his sometimes chaotic playing — a vital skill in the final round of the Cliburn.

On Wednesday, Broberg will perform chamber music with a quartet, and on Friday, he will perform a concerto with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra.

During the performances, judges will look for Broberg’s ability to collaborate with the other musicians. Kugler compares it to a jazz performance where each instrument is in an active conversation with the other. Broberg has to set himself apart, while also actively supporting the whole. The performances will be broadcast live on the Cliburn’s website, cliburn.org.

“I believe Kenny has a 50/50 chance of being the gold medalist based upon his ability to interpret the music in a way that it transcends just the notes and technique required to perform it,” Kugler says.

The winner will be announced Saturday.

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WEDNESDAY AND FRIDAY

The six Van Cliburn finalists perform twice in the final round. Kenny Broberg will perform a piano quintet at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday with the Brentano String Quartet. He will take the stage with the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra at 7:30 p.m. Friday. The winner will be announced on Saturday. Both performances can be streamed live at cliburn2017.medici.tv/en.

The concerto will also be broadcast Saturday, along with the other concerto performances, at three area movie theaters. Barrywoods 24, Kansas City 18 Cinemas at Ameristar Casino, and Southwind Stadium 12 in Lawrence will begin the broadcast at 11:55 a.m., lasting 5 1/2 hours. Tickets are \$19.52, \$19.82 and \$16.36, respectively, for adults. For more, visit fathomevents.com.