

MUSIC REVIEW

Three Violinists Named Winners of Competition

By ALLAN KOZINN

The audience at Alice Tully Hall milled around and compared notes on Wednesday evening as the jury of the Walter W. Naumburg 2003 International Violin Competition spent 20 minutes deliberating. The three finalists — who were among 50 players in the preliminaries and 12 in the semifinals — had each played a 45-minute set and waited backstage until the judges reached their decision. Just after 10 p.m., Robert Mann, the president of the foundation and the winner of its competition in 1941, announced the winners in reverse order, making his way up to Frank Huang, whose prize includes \$10,000, two recitals at Alice Tully Hall, 20 concerts around the country and the premiere of a new unaccompanied solo sonata by Donald Martino. Ayano Ninomiya won the \$7,500 second prize, and Sharon Roffman won the \$5,000 third prize.

The Naumburg has been in business for 77 years, and it has a fine track record, even if it isn't as glitzy as the other big international contests. (It doesn't, for example, produce a self-promotional television special, as several of the others do.) That much was clear two years ago, when it assembled a starry roster of its former winners for its 75th anniversary concert.

Based on his recital in the finals, which included works by Prokofiev, Beethoven, Schoenberg, Paganini and Sibelius, Mr. Huang is likely to uphold the competition's reputation. But then any of the three players would have. All three have been playing recitals and orchestral dates around the country for the last few seasons, and they have all won other competitions and awards.

Choosing among them could not have been easy, not least because the differences in the programs they played — they had free choice in this round — made direct comparisons virtually impossible.

Ms. Roffman played first, with Anita Pontremoli as her accompanist. The most striking attribute of

her performance was the degree to which she addressed each of the composers on her program with a distinct sound. In a series of sonata movements, she brought a trim, focused Classicism to Beethoven, a purely Gallic intensity to Poulenc and a velvety texture and a rich hue to Brahms. She closed her program with an acidic, plaintive account of the first two movements of Shostakovich's Concerto No. 1.

Ms. Ninomiya played with the greatest intensity of the three and chose works that put that quality of her interpretive style in the spotlight. Especially striking was Kreisler's

At the Naumburg finals, the judges have to compare diverse programs.

sober and involving Recitative and Scherzo (Op. 6) and the "Furies" movement from Ysaÿe's unaccompanied "Obsession" Sonata. But she was no less persuasive in conveying the mystery in a movement from the Janacek Sonata, the fire in the finale of the Schubert Fantasy, and both the wrenching quality and sheer sweetness of sound required in the last movement of the Berg Concerto. Her accompanist was Benjamin Loeb.

Mr. Huang's tone was not as unflinchingly sweet as Ms. Ninomiya's, nor as varied as Ms. Roffman's. What he had in his favor was a virtuosic panache that let him toss off the finger-breaking display in Paganini's "Campanella," from the Second Concerto as if it were a simple bagatelle. He made easy work of Schoenberg's Fantasy (Op. 47) as well. And his account of the opening movement of the Sibelius Concerto was precise, driven with the right measure of energy, and meltingly beautiful. His pianist was Dina Vainstein.