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Higher, Faster, Louder: Representations of the International Music Competition

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ABSTRACT
Competitions have been a visible and controversial part of the classical music world for over a century, yet sociologists have strangely neglected to study their social significance. This article explores the competition's ongoing contest for legitimacy by considering the case of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Through a discourse analysis of publicity materials and media coverage, I reconstruct the symbolic frameworks that guide the construction of the event and the interpretation of competitors' performances. I also trace the critical challenge to the idealized representations of the event, and decode the gender ideologies implied in commonly used metaphors. Demonstrating the centrality of meaning in musical production and reception, I aim to expose the limitations of the production perspective and Bourdieu's model of the artistic field, offering in their place a new approach based on social performance.

KEY WORDS
competition / culture / discourse analysis / gender / mass media / sociology of music / performance / sacred / narrative / sociology of art / critique of Bourdieu.

Introduction

To my surprise, there has been no previous sociological investigation of the classical music competition. This cannot be because they are unusual, obscure, or insignificant. The World Federation of International Music Competitions alone counts 122 members. While this includes the largest and most famous classical music competitions, it represents merely the tip of the

iceberg. Competitions have become standard pedagogical practice. Public schools, conservatories, music festivals, arts philanthropies, and volunteer organizations regularly sponsor and organize competitions for every ability level, every instrument, and every combination of instruments. In both popular and high art musical genres, competition prizes are staples of promotional media, resumes, and biographies of aspiring and professional musicians alike. Aside from their status as a musical institution, competitions are also public and publicized events that capture the interest of the general public. Historically, they have provided an arena for nations to demonstrate cultural superiority through the artistic excellence of their musicians. For that very reason, they have been the site of scandals and controversies covered at length in the major newspapers. Recently, music competitions have become the format of tremendously popular reality television shows, like the Eurovision Song Contest, or American Idol and its imitators. Clearly, this phenomenon deserves sociological investigation.

If it had not escaped the attention of sociologists, the music competition would most likely have been tackled through the 'production perspective' which has dominated the sociology of the arts for the past 30 years. It is easy to imagine how such a study would proceed. Drawing from Bourdieu ([1980]1993, [1983]1993, 1984), Dimaggio (1982), and Peterson (1994), this account would argue that the music competition is a professionalizing institution in the field of cultural production that controls the distribution of symbolic capital (i.e. prestige). The competition acts as a mechanism for elite musicians to fill their own ranks, thereby producing a distinction between consecrated performers (professionals) and lesser musicians ('amateurs' in the derogatory sense). This distinction rests on the illusion that competition winners possess a 'rare talent' that, upon closer inspection, is revealed to be a product of a social background and specialized training. Performers who win competitions would be revealed to be those who demonstrate qualities that represent and preserve the institutional structure. They are rewarded not just with monetary prizes, but 'consecration'; they are invested with the economic and symbolic capital necessary to launch a professional career. Competitions function, therefore, to construct belief in the rarity of talent and create a scarcity of 'great' performers that will sustain a market in which only a few professionals can demand exorbitant fees.

A production perspective study would provide evidence through statistical methods. A measurement would be devised for ranking competitions by prestige. The probability of successful careers would be calculated for winners of competitions at various levels of prestige. A regression model would predict the combination of characteristics most likely to win the most prestigious prizes or produce the best career. An analysis of professional career paths would identify barriers in the career progress of competition losers and describe alternative paths to success. But no production perspective study would be complete without an institutional analysis. The funding sources of music competitions would be investigated, and the composition and structure of organizing committees analysed. Strategies undertaken by competition committees to create and sustain

prestige would be articulated. Ultimately, this analysis would demonstrate the role of music competitions in reproducing cultural capital and distinction for both musical and economic elites.

While this kind of undertaking has its merits, the production perspective could only ever produce a partial and problematic account of the music competition. Its conclusions are so easily predicted because they are logical outcomes of its theoretical presuppositions. Because the production perspective has bracketed meaning, it could only ever see the music competition as an opportunity for status accumulation, whether it was the hopeful competitor or the wealthy patron volunteering to sit on the board. Because the production perspective understands music as a product rather than a process, it would prematurely assume that the music competition is merely a strategic resource for increasing the value of a cultural and commercial commodity. In the end, this reduction would lead to an overly mechanistic view of the competition, blinding us to the ongoing struggles over its legitimacy in the public sphere. Neither would it offer any insight into the structure and meaning of the competition format itself.

The more promising alternative is to adopt a cultural approach where music is understood as a mode of social performance in which 'actors, individually or in concert, display for others the meaning of their social situation' (Alexander, 2004: 529). This theoretical premise resolves many of the problems described above. From a 'performance perspective' (McCormick, 2006), music can be seen as a process of cultural communication. The music competition then becomes a particular context for this musical/social performance. The purpose of this article is to investigate the first element of performance – background systems of collective representations – in this particular context. Through the reconstruction of discourses surrounding the music competition, I will show how collective representations are conjured to construct the context of performance and how these, in turn, guide the interpretation of performances enacted within. By analysing the structure and meaning of the music competition, I hope to demonstrate that the context of musical performance is itself the result of an ongoing process of cultural construction. The upshot of my argument is the fallacy of bracketing meaning. It is only once we grasp the meaning of the music competition that we can begin to understand the structural effects it might have in the musical and social world.

Characteristics of the Music Competition

As an environment for musical performance, the competition features a number of distinguishing characteristics. First, it is an occasion designed to examine and celebrate effective musical performance. It provides a forum for the musical community to regulate and evaluate standards of performance through the identification and rewarding of 'good performers', a designation that implies moral worth as much as musicianship and technical skill. In a setting that closely resembles the recital ritual, the performer is challenged to demonstrate that they are the embodiment of

the performance community's ideals by enacting a multi-layered performance that simultaneously displays different meanings to a fragmented audience. Each segment of this audience – judges, critics, peers, musical public – is differently engaged and differently positioned to interpret competitors' performances. It is perhaps for this reason that it is not unusual for segments of the audience to disagree about which performer is most deserving of first place.

The music competition is also a public and publicized event that unfolds through a series of stages (typically three) in which the performer is presented with a variety of challenges. For example, the most common format in solo instrument competitions is a first round of solo recitals, a second round of solo recitals and chamber music, and for the final round, a concerto with orchestra. A gala concludes the competition with a number of speeches, the presentation of awards, a concert featuring laureates, and a reception. In short, the competition is an extended public event punctuated by three elimination rounds and concluded with a celebration. The tripartite structure of the competition therefore creates a broad framework (with a beginning, middle, and end) within which recital rituals, and narrative construction, take place.

The third distinctive feature of the music competition is that it is an occasion for musical performance where the stakes are unusually high, and yet ultimately it changes very little. Like Geertz's (1973) Balinese cockfight, it is an intensely meaningful focused gathering, a site for deep play. Essentially, I am proposing that we understand the music competition as a cultural framework, a structured context within which musical and social performances are enacted and interpreted. It is not in itself a stand-off, social drama, failed social performance or 'fused' ritual. Rather, it is the context within which all of these can occur.

Case and Method

The case selected for analysis is the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Founded in 1958, the Cliburn is held every four years and is open to pianists between the ages of 18 and 30. Through screening auditions held in five cities around the world, 35 pianists are chosen to participate in the competition in Fort Worth, Texas, where their performances are open to the public and judged by a distinguished international jury. Since its third cycle, the Cliburn has qualified to be a member of the World Federation of International Music Competitions (WFIMC). Having consistently conformed to the WFIMC's standards regarding format, rules, and procedures, it qualifies as a representative case. But in other respects, the Cliburn is better described as an archetype. It is the quintessential competition for the quintessential solo instrument. It is generally perceived to be among the most prestigious awards an aspiring pianist can acquire, and few competitions are as well-known among the classical music community and the general public.[1] As one of the most visible competitions in the public sphere, the Cliburn offers a vivid illustration of dynamics observed in music competitions in general.

To analyze the public discourses surrounding the Cliburn, I examined two sources of data. The first source is published materials and public statements from the Cliburn Foundation, including advertising brochures, competition programme books, film documentaries, press releases, documents posted on the official website, and speeches delivered at public ceremonies. The second source is the media coverage of the Cliburn in newspapers, special interest publications, on the radio, and on the internet from 1977 to 2005 (n = 342).[2]

I analyse two aspects of this discourse. The first is the cultural construction of the *event*, which involves the definition of this musical occasion. I identify two idealized representations of the competition projected by the competition organization, one on the profane and the other on the sacred narrative level. These are contrasted with the realist counter-narrative projected by music critics. As we will see, the expression of idealized meanings, and the emphasis of one narrative level over the other, is never fixed because the competition organization continually responds to its audience's interpretation. In addition to the event, I also examine the cultural construction of the *competitors* who participate in this musical occasion. The narrative framing of performers operates on mundane and mythical levels that correspond to the profane and sacred representations of the event. On the mundane level, the interpretation of musical actors intersects with other forms of social performance, such as gender. On the mythical level, we find the legacies from 19th century romanticism expressed through the recurring motifs of music as a transcendent experience and popular notions of musical genius.

The Cultural Construction of the Competition Event

Idealized Meanings of the Cliburn Competition

Despite the obvious tripartite tournament structure, the meaning of the music competition is neither inherent nor self-evident. Like all social facts, it requires cultural construction. This is accomplished through metaphors and narratives that dramatize the cultural codes that resonate with the performance community. For the organization running the competition, the meaning of the event is a matter of self-presentation. Through various means of symbolic production, the organization projects an idealized image of the competition to its relevant audience which includes aspiring musicians, professional musicians, pedagogues, music critics, the musical public, the general public, government bodies, corporate sponsors, and rival competitions.

Every music competition seeks to make its presence known in the public sphere through various media. The Cliburn, however, has had both the resources and the desire to cultivate the means of symbolic production to a greater extent. In terms of publicity, the Cliburn circulates print materials worldwide and prepares radio programmes for broadcast in North America and Europe. Since the 5th competition in 1977, it has also commissioned a 90-minute documentary which is broadcast on national public television and screened in local film festivals. Like many of its peers, the Cliburn has developed an elaborate website for

posting information about the competition and archiving audio recordings of competitors' performances for download (free of charge) through streaming software. But the Cliburn is perhaps the first to explore other possibilities on the internet, such as hosting an interactive weblog,[3] posting video clips on YouTube, and developing a profile on the social networking website MySpace.com. In terms of expanding the audience for the event, the Cliburn has incorporated a range of media technologies. During the last cycle of the competition, those unable to reserve a seat in the hall could listen to performances on public radio or television; download the performance on the internet; purchase a 'rough cut' recording on CD or DVD format; or watch a live broadcast of the competition projected onto a movie screen that had been installed in a nearby venue (Kennedy, 2005).[4] The Cliburn's cultivation of media forms has not only expanded its profile worldwide; it has also facilitated mediated participation in competition proceedings around the world, whether in real time or after the fact.

Through these various means of symbolic production, the competition organization communicates idealized meanings of the event that operate on two narrative levels. On one level, the competitive aspect is emphasized. Here it is stressed that the event is carefully designed to test skill and endurance by placing extreme demands and intense pressure on the performer. As such, it offers a mechanism for identifying 'the best' – those who possess both extraordinary talent and the stamina to take on an international career. When operating on this narrative level, the Cliburn Foundation describes the competition as an occasion for 'the cream to rise to the top'.[5] This attitude is perfectly in line with the founders' vision of the event as 'a living testament to the tremendous impetus that winning a major competition gives to launching an international career'.[6] After all, the Cliburn is named after the quintessential competition winner, Van Cliburn, the Texan who won the first Tchaikovsky International Competition in Moscow at the height of the Cold War. Van Cliburn enjoyed instant success following his victory: New York threw him a ticker tape parade, Eisenhower invited him to the White House, and his calendar was suddenly crowded with concert engagements with major orchestras.

The Cliburn Foundation hopes to recreate this phenomenon for a new generation of pianists. For this reason, the first prize is carefully designed to include all the ingredients necessary for launching an international career: three seasons of international concert engagements, a contribution towards domestic and international air travel, a new concert wardrobe from an upscale department store, a recording on a respected label that is distributed worldwide, and a substantial cash award.[7] On this narrative level, the ultimate purpose of the event is 'the discovery of the world's finest young pianists'[8] and their introduction to the musical public which includes not only an adoring audience, but respected critics and concert presenters as well. Take, for example, this excerpt from the first page of the jury's handbook:

> While we cannot presume that we will be so fortunate as to discover an artist at each competition, we can hope to identify someone who may someday become an artist. The jury ought to listen for those very special musicians who might bear the seeds of greatness and who are prepared to have a few doors opened for them by

> the competition. It must be remembered that the function of the Van Cliburn Foundation is not to discover a 'star' but to offer opportunities to musicians deemed worthy of the support. The jury is in a unique position of being able to offer someone a powerful helping hand. This is a solemn responsibility while at the same time, we trust, one that will offer the jury a joyful sense of fulfillment.[9]

The competition is an attractive method for identifying those 'worthy of support' because it is believed to be fair and democratic. Rules governing the procedure for application, the choice of repertoire, and voting are devised and enforced. Applicants demonstrate their 'worthiness' not only through their artistry, but also through a personal statement describing what they hope to achieve by entering the competition. Throughout the competition proceedings, there is a sustained and visible effort to maintain the impartiality of the jury. For example, in the 12th competition, a jury member excused herself from the panel when seven of her pupils were selected as competitors. These gestures are essential for the competition's success because they affirm a commitment to fairness. A competition can be democratic only to the extent that competitors advance solely based on the merit demonstrated in their performance at the competition, not on personal connections or past accomplishments. A level playing field and an equal chance of winning does not only create dramatic tension; it also supports the competition's claim to legitimacy.

When operating on this narrative level, a symbol is frequently borrowed from the world of sports: the Olympics. This is an effective metaphor for many reasons. Like the Olympics, music competitions usually operate on four-year cycles, they attract accomplished young musicians from around the world, and they are a high-stakes contest of skill and endurance where competitors strive for perfection in performance. At the Cliburn, the Olympics metaphor is further specified and reinforced through a number of practices: competitors are identified by nationality in the programme and in press releases, flags of the countries represented in the competition adorn the space where the competition is held, and the first, second, and third-place winners are awarded gold, silver, and bronze medals.[10] For the 5th Competition in 1977, the Cliburn Foundation went so far as to use the Olympics metaphor in a literal manner in its print publicity. The official competition poster and programme book featured an image of the winners' medals while the accompanying brochure showed a time-line of legendary Olympic athletes through history – from Jesse Owens in Berlin 1936 to Nadia Comăneci in Montreal 1976 – leading up to the 1977 Cliburn in Fort Worth where the next 'legend' could be found (see Figure 1). The same year, jury member Alberto Ginastera got caught up in the metaphor, declaring to *The New York Times*, 'These young pianists [Cliburn competitors] are the athletes of music; competing is their glory' (Ardoin, 1977: D27).

On the second narrative level, however, the competition organization downplays the competitive aspect, emphasizing instead that the event is an occasion for transcendent musical experience. To introduce the vocabulary of social performance, the competition is portrayed as an occasion for 'fused performance', an 'effective' or 'successful' ritual in which the elements of performance – from script to background representations to actor – become

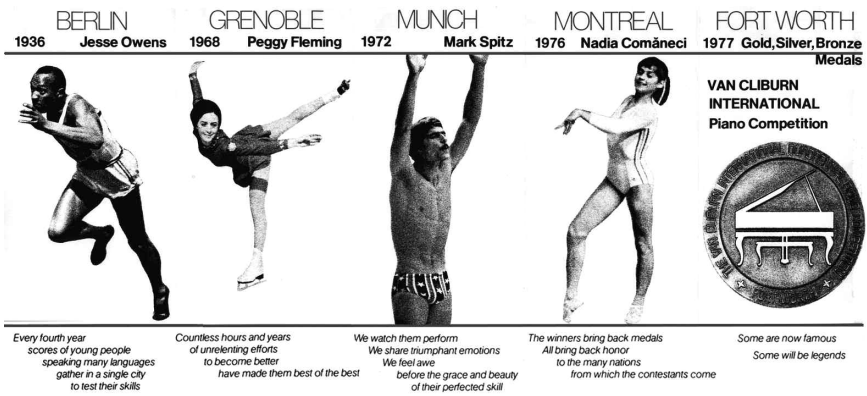

Figure 1

seamlessly connected, and there is cultural extension between performers and the audience. When operating on this narrative level, the Cliburn Foundation claims that the competition is 'centre of the music world' (quoted in Horowitz, 1990: 162). Every four years, it transforms Fort Worth not into the Olympia, but the '"Mecca of the classical music world" where some of today's most promising pianists gather to reveal their immense talents'. Audiences are offered the 'privilege of hearing some of the world's most promising young pianists'. They are promised a 'thrilling' musical experience with performance after performance of 'electrifying piano playing' that is 'always met with thunderous applause and standing ovations'.[11] At this narrative level, the mundane details of the competition fade away. The jury's deliberations no longer count, the memory of previous performances dissolves, and the listener no longer tries to predict the outcome of the competition because it no longer matters. The pleasure of fused musical performance – the elusive transcendental 'musical experience' – takes over. Here the musical performance of a competitor is no longer a demonstration of skill or a question of accurate execution; it becomes an effortless embodiment of musical meaning, a communication so effective that it brings an experience of collective effervescence.

The Counter-Narrative from Within

It is likely that many competition observers accept these idealized meanings, shifting from one narrative level to the other over the course of the event. When operating at the mundane level, they compare the difficulty of performers' repertoire, predict winners, and speculate about the jury's criteria for evaluation. When operating on the mythical level, they rush out to buy a recording of an inspiring performance, and wait anxiously by the stage door to obtain a glimpse or an autograph of an admired performer.

But these idealized meanings are not accepted by everyone in the performance community. In the late 1970s, music critics began publishing virulent

critiques of the competition phenomenon in major papers and specialist trade magazines. As one of the largest and most famous competitions with the most generous prize, the Cliburn was a favourite target. Shortly after the 5th competition in 1977, an article in *The New York Times* headlined 'Triumphs and Turmoil at the Cliburn Competition' declared the first-prize winner a compromise choice who was 'literally played off the stage' by the second-place winner at the gala (Ardoin, 1977: D27). A year later, Harold C. Schonberg (1978) dared to ask if competitions were actually good for music. The criticism built momentum through the 1980s. A feature article in *Clavier*, a trade magazine, warned piano teachers of the dangers of the 'competition syndrome' (Weirich, 1984). At the close of the decade, Bernard Holland (1989) condemned music competitions by comparing them to political campaigns, outlining the five simple rules competitors should follow to successfully 'sway' a jury. The next year Joseph Horowitz (1990) published a book-length critique of the Cliburn competition in which he described competition-bashing as 'such an easy sport that it becomes hard to stop' (1990: 17). By 1994, the climate was such that Edward Rothstein (1994) declared in *The New York Times* that 'winning a music competition has become a liability' (1994: 21). The critical attitude toward competitions has hardly abated. In a recent review of a festival featuring several competition winners, Jeremy Eichler (2005) opened with a cynical, rather than celebratory, tone:

> Competitions are for horses, not artists. That was Bartók's famous opinion on the matter, and he was probably onto something. Debate about musical competitions has been around as long as the modern competition itself. Can something as complex and subtle as a musical performance be judged like a track and field event? And what exactly do we measure when we try? (2005: B9)

The critiques of idealized competition narratives centred on three themes. First, they argued that music competitions were inherently arbitrary and unfair. While an organization like the Cliburn might strive to be democratic, it cannot resolve the problem that jury members never agree on what constitutes artistic excellence. Therefore, the results will always be arbitrary, no matter how careful the deliberations; in any given competition cycle, a different jury would produce a different verdict. In a desire to be fair, jury members often resort to concentrating on objective aspects of performance, such as speed, accuracy, and volume, which can be singled out and tallied quite easily. But these are hardly the qualities of musicianship that matter the most. Artistry is neither quantifiable nor objective, and for that reason, the ranking system used in competitions is meaningless. It implies differences in ability that are really differences in style. Furthermore, the voting procedure frequently fails to reward the most worthy artist. In the yes-no voting system used in the early years of the Cliburn and in many other competitions, risk-taking performers tended to split the jury and get eliminated early. As a result, the performers most likely to win were those who simply generated the fewest objections. It might not have been intentional, but the Cliburn was effectively punishing individuality and rewarding the conventional

players who performed 'unarguable' repertoire in an inoffensive manner. Leon Fleisher described the problem succinctly: at best, major competitions had only helped raise the level of mediocrity (quoted in Weirich, 1984: 26).

Secondly, competitions were criticized for their failure to discover the next generation of great artists. Writing in 1990, Horowitz was moved to emphasize the following statement with italics: '*Not since Krystian Zimerman won the Chopin competition in 1975 has a gold medal launched a major career*.' He pointed to various possible causes: the inferiority of contemporary competitors to their 'celebrated predecessors', the diminishing influence of political rivalries with the end of the Cold War, and the proliferation of competitions (1990: 66). Ten years later, there had been little change. *New York Times* critic Anthony Tommasini (2001) issued the following complaint during the 11th cycle of the Cliburn:

> With striking regularity, Cliburn gold medalists [have been] anointed in Texas with much fanfare and sent on tour amid great promise only to drop from visibility: pianists like Ralph Votapek, Vladimir Viardo and Jose Feghali. Quick, name the winner of the last competition, in 1997. Stumped? It was Jon Nakamatsu. (I had to look it up myself). (2001: 19)

While it might strive to recreate Van Cliburn's meteoric rise after winning the Tchaikovsky, the Cliburn had failed to find his 'successor' and had succeeded only in 'stirring up pseudo-excitement'. But the Cliburn was hardly alone in this respect. With a depressing regularity, major competitions around the world were producing laureates who never became household names.

The third accusation was that competitions had actually done more harm than good. They were bad for performers because sensitive players were likely to crumble under the pressure. Only the more egoistic musicians could play such a Herculean amount of repertoire in such extraordinary circumstances. Competitions could also stunt artistic growth by encouraging 'dishonest' playing and 'freeze-dried expression' (Ardoin, 1977: D27). They also produced an unhealthy obsession with the first place title and with youth. Many expressed concern about the psychological setbacks experienced by non-winners who had to recover from the devastation of 'only' placing second (Schonberg, 1978: D17). Young pianists considered their career over if they had not collected a handful of first place titles before they were 25 years old. In other words, the music competition was not fostering young talent but destroying it, and while it might claim otherwise, it was decidedly not in the service of music. Bernard Holland (1989) described the problem as:

> a vicious circle – one in which a restricted repertory played in much the same way is passed from music schools to competition to the concert world and then back to the same music schools entrusted with preparing the next generation. Musicians do not grow, so neither do audiences. ... The Cliburn and events like it may be – whether they mean to be or not – just one more agent for preserving the old, the familiar and the comfortable. It is for this reason that [renowned piano pedagogue Russell] Sherman calls competitions 'the antichrist' of music. (1989: C21)

Together, these criticisms combined to create a realist counter-narrative that described the competition not as a mechanism for discovering and promoting the next generation of great artists, but as an institution contributing to the mechanization of musical performance. Moreover, competitions were precipitating the decline of classical music by entrenching a system that rewarded empty technique and virtuosity over substance and expression. Competition events did not promote the 'true' musical experience of fused ritual performance; they degraded music by turning it into sport. Through the declaration of an overall winner, competitions were ultimately helping sustain a corrosive commercial reality where concert promoters were only interested in booking champions sure to pack the hall. If this succeeded in attracting a wider audience for classical music, it was for all the wrong reasons. This counter-narrative presented a serious challenge to the competition's idealized meanings because it came from within the performance community. Music critics were a particularly important audience for the competition's self-presentation. Because they share the same cultural codes, they are more likely to be sympathetic with their intentions. They also possess the expert knowledge necessary to evaluate competitors and dispute the deliberations of the jury. But most important, they have an independent means of symbolic production. Needless to say, music critics' evaluation of the competition event is critical in sustaining the competition's legitimacy not only within the performance community, but in the broader public as well.

Like many competitions, the Cliburn underwent a number of significant changes over the 1990s. The strict repertoire list was abandoned completely, leaving nearly all programming choices to the competitors. To reflect a philosophy of equality at the top, all three finalists were awarded similar concert engagements, a recording for the same label, and a cash award of the same amount. The yes-no voting system was replaced with a rationalized voting procedure designed by a mathematician that calibrated scoring scales, thereby protecting controversial competitors. The rules were re-written to allow ties; as many as four gold medals could be awarded in one competition. The Olympics metaphor disappeared from advertising materials, and the flags that had once adorned the concert stage moved to the lobby. The competitive aspect of the competition was downplayed and the mythical level emphasized through the introduction of a new metaphor – the 'festival' – which continues to be the metaphor of choice for competitions around the world. In every brochure and throughout the programme booklet, the Cliburn was touted as a 'celebration' of young talent and a 'joyous festival' of music-making. Competition discourse, now polluted, was also avoided in public speeches during the event. At the awards ceremony for the 10th competition in 1997, the Chairman of the Jury, John Giordano, carefully avoided the word 'competition' in his address despite the fact that he was announcing the ranking of competitors and distributing prizes: 'The jury deliberations were very difficult in every phase of the festival because of the extremely high level of the ... the competitors from the ... the ... the very first stages, the screening stages all the way through the finals'.[12] The Chairman's hesitation mid-sentence is revealing. The metaphor guiding the

interpretation of the competition event must harmonize with the cultural construction of its participants. In this respect, the festival metaphor might offer a favourable substitute for 'competition', but it does not carry a corresponding alternative for 'competitors'. Perhaps it is for this reason that a new metaphor, the 'job interview', was beginning to surface during the 12th competition. If this becomes the predominant metaphor, it would indicate a return to the mundane narrative level and a greater emphasis on the competitive aspect of the event.

The Cultural Construction of Competitors

Musical performance is a mode of cultural communication, a multi-layered form of social performance. In the context of a music competition, a competitor communicates musical as well as other social meanings; their musical performance is at the same time a performance of race, ethnicity, gender and other social characteristics. As mentioned above, these meanings are communicated to a fragmented audience whose segments are differently positioned and differently engaged in the competition event, evoking different cultural frameworks to interpret competitors' performances. This fragmentation is reflected in representations of competitors in media coverage of the competition. Two tiers of media can be identified in this coverage: music critics and general media. Both tiers are engaged in an interpretation of competitors' multi-layered performances and both are printed in the same publications. But while music critics draw primarily from an expert knowledge of music for their interpretations, the general media tends to focus on other symbolic systems, such as meanings communicated visually in musical performance (through physical gestures, facial expressions, and dress) or in social performances off-stage. Like the idealized meanings of the competition event, representations of competitors are constructed on two narrative levels: the mundane and the mythical. On each narrative level, the role of competitors and their social performance are interpreted through a different set of symbols, metaphors, and archetypes.

Musical Champions: The Mundane Narrative

On the mundane narrative level, musicians are portrayed as rivals fighting for their survival in the contest. In both local and international papers, the Cliburn has been referred to as a 'duel in the sun' (G. Brown, 2005), a 'musical shoot-out' (Ward, 2005) where pianists go 'head-to-head' for the top prize. These combat metaphors are not just references to Texas cowboy culture; piano competitions have been referred to as duels at least since Beethoven's time (DeNora, 1995). If not through combat metaphors, the rivalry is portrayed through metaphors from competitive sports. While the Cliburn Foundation might have retreated from any overt equation of music and sports, these metaphors continue to proliferate in media coverage. If the Cliburn is the 'Piano Olympics'

(Greenaway, 2005: B1), a 'pianists' super-bowl', a 'ballgame played on Steinways' (Casstevens, 2005: 4BB), a 'marathon' (Gay, 2005a: 1A), or a 'horse-race' (Madigan, 2005a: 1B), Cliburn pianists are therefore the athletes determined to triumph and obtain the trophy cup. In interviews, they are asked about the gruelling practice regimen they have endured in the months leading up to the competition (Greenaway, 2005) and the personal rituals that help them prepare psychologically for their performance on stage (Goodloe, 2005). Sometimes, the analogy of musicians as athletes is made explicitly:

> Muhammad Ali told his opponents, and the world, 'I'm so bad I make *medicine* sick.' There are only two Greats, he boasted. 'Britain and me.' Believing in oneself does not guarantee success, but beliefs drive behavior and behavior affects performance, whether it's sports or making that journey alone to center. Concert pianists mentally prepare for competition much the same way successful athletes do. They understand the importance of self-confidence. ... Yang, the youngest here, gives herself a pep talk. 'I'm going to play this the way it should be played. I'm going to show how it's done. I have to believe "I'm It".' (Casstevens, 2005: 4BB)

Although music critics are generally critical of this narrative level, they also help construct musicians as athletes when they discuss competitors' repertoire choices as if they were game strategies, pointing out the challenges they present for each individual performer and the possible advantages and disadvantages they could bring. For example, in a section revealingly entitled 'Today's Players', the local paper offered a brief background on each competitor and a summary of their repertoire in the style of the voice-over for televised figure skating or gymnastics meets:

> Rem Urasin, 29, Russia, 1p.m.
>
> **Who he is**: A Kazan native with a dark, dramatic stage presence, Urasin studies with Lev Naumov, the coach of champions, at the Moscow Conservatory.
>
> **His program**: It will move from the sunshine of Bach's *Italian Concerto* to the storms of Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* No. 1. In between, he'll become gradually more dramatic, offering up a pair of Chopin etudes followed by a set of Liszt's transcriptions of Schubert's songs.
>
> **His challenge**: Urasin obviously plans to gradually build drama from Bach to Chopin to Liszt. Massive sound and velocity should be no problem for him in the Liszt; finding equilibrium and clean textures in the Bach will be his hurdle. If he accomplishes his aims, he should emerge as an audience favorite. (FWST, 2005: 4B)

As in sports, physical feats are applauded. At one point in the 12th competition, a journalist measured the speed of pianists' hands in the fastest passages with the same device used to measure the speed of a baseball pitch or a tennis serve (Ward, 2005).

An interesting consequence of sports metaphors is that they invite a particularly gendered interpretation of musical performance. When the music competition is portrayed as a physical contest, it reinforces the tendency for virtuosic

musical performance to be interpreted as a display of masculinity. This is hardly a new phenomenon. According to DeNora (2006), we can trace the cultural equation of pianism with masculinity back to Beethoven. Many women enjoyed active performing careers during Beethoven's lifetime, but few performed his piano repertoire. Women were reluctant to perform his music because it demanded the embodiment of new musical techniques and a visceral approach to the instrument that compromised notions of feminine propriety. As this gender segregation at the keyboard was emerging, Beethoven as composer was being reconfigured through ideas circulating in turn of the century Vienna. Through philosophical discourses about the sublime and popular scientific notions, Beethoven was being constructed as the ultimate heroic figure – a 'master' of music capable of 'mesmerizing' his audience. DeNora argues that Beethoven's body became inscribed in his music, transforming the musical performance of his revolutionary repertoire into an object lesson in agency. But not everyone could be cast as a Beethovenian performer: 'The new forms of musical display [required in Beethoven's piano repertoire], and the agencies they implied, not only excluded women from the heart of the musical canon; they also celebrated a currency of bodily capital (appearance, physique, comportment and temperament) that was differentially distributed to men' (DeNora, 2006: 118).

This legacy is reflected in the history of the Cliburn competition. In the first 11 cycles of the competition – a period spanning nearly 40 years – there were only two female gold medalists, Christina Ortiz of Brazil in 1969 and Olga Kern of Russia in 2001. In Kern's case, however, the gold was shared with a male competitor, Stanislav Ioudenitch. The media coverage of Kern is particularly interesting because it reveals the complex performance demanded of a female pianist: her social performance must conform to standards of femininity, but her musical performance must display the desired level of masculinity. Kern obviously managed to strike this balance. When it came to her musical performance, she was lauded for her athleticism and 'described as one of the fastest, loudest and most powerful players in this competition' (NPR, 2001). Kern herself acknowledged and appreciated that her performance style was described in masculine terms:

> Asked whether she took it as a compliment when people described her playing as mannish, she agreed enthusiastically. 'It is very good for me. I play strong like a man, but I feel like a woman. If I have these two things, it's only the better for me.' (Pfeifer, 2001: C14)

This display of masculine virtuosity was shown in contemporary as well as Romantic piano repertoire. Competitors in the 11th competition were given a choice of five pieces by living American composers for their semi-final recital. But before the scores were distributed, all traces of the composers' identities were removed and replaced with numbers. When discussing how she chose from among the several commissioned contemporary scores, Kern confessed about her final selection:

> When I saw the scores, I think that it must be composer man, not woman, because the music very strong. ... I like the freedom and this type of technique and everything.

> And after that I know that this is woman, I was so surprised, and I think 'Uh-huh. She's like me.' (NPR, 2001)

Here we can see Beethoven's legacy. Even in the 21st century, performers still approach pianism as an object lesson in a particularly masculine form of agency, and it is assumed that the composer's (male) body is inscribed in his compositions.

Kern might have shown masculine strength in virtuoso repertoire, but her femininity was never in question. As one reviewer remarked:

> Kern's musicality radiates off the stage and saturates the hall, and it is joyously alive, immediately communicative, fragrantly sensual, and almost visual in its intensity. Whatever it is – call it star quality – music likes Kern the way the camera liked Garbo.[13]

While both gold medalists that year had returned to compete a second time, Kern's comeback story hinged on favourable changes in her performance of conventional femininity:

> What a difference four years can make. After being eliminated in the preliminary rounds of the 1997 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, Olga Pushechnikova went home to Moscow and underwent a complete makeover. ... Late last month, with a new last name derived from her mother's maiden name, with more musical maturity and competitions notched on her belt, with a new coiffure, a glamorous new wardrobe, and a marriage, a divorce, and the birth of a child, Olga Kern came back to Fort Worth. This time, at the 11th Van Cliburn Competition, things were different. Now a blonde favoring off-the-shoulder gowns, she became an instant audience favorite. ... As for her physical appearance, Kern admits, with giggles, that being a blonde is more fun. When she competed in the 1997 Van Cliburn, her unremarkable coiffure featured medium-length dark hair with bangs parted in the middle. She insists that the black was 'an experiment' ... In addition, Kern says that after the birth of her son she 'changed her figure – I hope in a good way'. Certainly, the red spaghetti-strap and black one-shoulder gowns she wears in competition photos reveal few figure flaws while emphasizing the positive attributes. (Pfeifer, 2001: C14)

Four years later, Kern was still remembered as much for her concert attire as for her aggressive athleticism:

> Kern took chances. She outlasted the men in the traditional gigantic 'boys only' repertoire of Liszt, Barber and Balakirev. She played a little faster. She dressed the part, right down to the famous red jacket she wore in the finals ... Most important, she played better than any of the men. (Gay, 2005c: P9)

In short, Kern succeeded in presenting a complex social performance. The masculinity she displayed in the performance of virtuoso repertoire was balanced by a conventional femininity in every other aspect of her gender performance on and off stage, from her physical appearance and comportment to her sexual orientation. Or, to put the point differently, the conventional femininity communicated visually in Kern's musical performance was neither a substitute nor a distraction from the desired musical meaning.

It is likely that Kern's gender performance drew so much attention because, at the time, female finalists were still very rare. There are signs, however, that the trend of male domination in piano competitions may have come to an end. In the most recent cycle of the Cliburn, more women than men were chosen to compete, more women than men advanced to the semi-finals, and there was an equal gender division among the six finalists. One music critic predicted that this would be 'the last Cliburn competition in which a female majority will be cause for comment' (Gay, 2005b: 3AA). This remark rings true, but not only as an acknowledgement of the competence demonstrated by female pianists. In the 12th competition, gender had been eclipsed by race. As was often remarked in the press, the unprecedented female majority was also predominantly of Asian birth or descent, and for the first time, the largest national contingent was from China. Asian pianists placed well throughout the competition. Half of the 12 semi-finalists were from mainland China, and in the finals, a Chinese woman placed third while the silver medal was awarded to a 19-year-old Korean woman. While some had anticipated the 2005 competition to be 'the year of the woman' where audiences would see the 'softer side of the Cliburn' (Gay, 2005c: P9), it became the year that Russia's domination began to wane and China became cast as the saviour of classical music (DMN, 2005; Gay, 2005b). In this context, the interpretation of Cliburn pianists' musical/social performance was complicated not only by gender but by race, although this cannot be pursued here.[14]

For the most part, musicians resent the mundane level of narrative construction for its frequent portrayal of music as sport. As the gold medalist of the 12th competition remarked in a press conference, 'We're musicians. This shouldn't be like a baseball game' (Bahari, 2005a: 3AA). To make matters worse, these narrative constructions do not fade with the conclusion of the competition. The 2001 co-gold medalist, Ioudenitch, complained that he could never escape athletic representations during the three-year tour that was part of his prize:

> What I fundamentally didn't like about [the tour] was that the presenters were expecting the Van Cliburn winner to be closer to a sportsman; it was how athletically you played that mattered … But this is not a sports competition. I really see this considering the player to be a sportsman as an insult. (Marton, 2005: D1)

For musicians, athletic representations are not only insulting because they degrade the musical ritual to spectacle; they are polluting because they distort the musical ritual. By emphasizing rivalry and physical contest, they reduce musical performance to a physical display and distract the audience from evoking the proper symbolic framework for interpretation – music.

The Artist-Interpreter: The Mythical Narrative Level

Representations of the performer do not always operate on the mundane level of narrative construction. Occasionally, there is a shift to a mythical level where

the results of the competition become trivial and the rivalry dissolves. Here, the musician is no longer portrayed as a contender, but as an artist. Her musical performance is no longer a strategic move in the battle for the top prize, but a cultural communication so effective that the fragmentation of the audience is overcome. The musician is celebrated as a 'great performer' capable of an effortless embodiment of musical meaning; she does not merely 'play' music, she 'lives' it. She is one of the 'chosen' capable of going beyond the mundane details of the score to access the 'eternal truths' contained in timeless masterpieces, thereby transcending the artificial context of the competition (Pressler, 2005: 60–61). Through her artistry, the interpreter conveys these ineffable 'truths' to the audience, thus allowing them to participate in a transcendent, pure musical experience.

One would expect music critics to be the least likely to participate in the mythical construction of Cliburn pianists. The realist counter-narrative framework that guides their experience of the music competition almost precludes the possibility of a fused performance in what they consider a contrived and problematic context. And yet, unqualified celebrations of a charismatic performance still occasionally emerge from this most cynical group in the performance community because, like every other segment of the audience, music critics are seeking a performer who transcends the profane context of the competition and provides an opportunity to abandon profane discourses. Take for example this review of a preliminary round recital:

> There were those soft moments and pauses in her Bach, when everyone in Bass Hall stopped breathing. And there was that moment when she reached back in history and asked, 'Why not take a chance?' and concluded her performance of *Reminiscences de Don Juan* by doing what Liszt would have done: she improvised a new ending. Whether or not she takes a medal at the 2005 Cliburn, Yang showed a glimpse of what we hope piano performance will be like in the 21st century: imaginative, technically brilliant, connected to the audience and historically aware. (Gay, 2005b: 3AA)

This review contains a number of references to fused performance: the power of the performer to captivate the audience (the collective holding of breath), the performer's uncanny embodiment of another composer-performer-genius's performance practices (the improvised ending to a famous virtuoso piece), and the trivialization of the outcome of the competition. Others stress the effortlessness with which the elements of performance are fused: '[she] mak[es] everything she does on stage look almost too easy' (Ahles, 2005: 4BB). A teacher similarly described his student's fusion with pride: 'He lets the music happen. He doesn't force it ... He, the instrument and the music all become one' (Bahari, 2005b: 1A). Others stress the musician's connection to the other-worldly, sometimes in a very literal fashion. For example, in an interview with Arizona public radio, Olga Kern was asked to recount a dream in which she was visited by the late Rachmaninoff and enjoyed an hour-long lesson on a few of his pieces (KNAU, 2005).

On this mythical level, the sports and combat metaphors are replaced by the archetype of the genius or child prodigy. In this narrative framework, the musician's life is re-interpreted through the ideals of the performance community. The narrative itself conforms to a number of conventions.[15] First, there is the attribution of inborn talent, a 'gift' or unusual ability that manifests itself so early in the musician's life that it cannot be the result of instruction. This endowment from nature is identified as the quality that separates the dedicated but ordinary musician from the 'interpreter' or 'true artist'. As Richard Rodzinski, director of the Cliburn competition, explains:

> An aspiring pianist may sit before a score and commit to memory all the instructions the composer has offered in his blueprint, but those notes will mean little if they fall on barren ground. It is not easy to define what that 'ground' is, but less difficult to determine whether that 'ground' exists at all in any given person. There are individuals who are simply born with innate musical aptitude, the fertile ground as it were. (2005: 33–4)

Manifestations of unusual ability or precociousness in infancy are often treated as early premonitions of later greatness. Through these episodes, the prodigy is demonstrated to be one of the few chosen to be born with this transcendent musical gift. For example, anecdotes like the following can be found in the programme biographies and press coverage of every Cliburn finalist:

> When Plano was three, his godparents gave him a toy white-and-red keyboard. He pounded away at it for four years, before the family acquiesced to the inevitable and arranged for lessons. Six months later, his teacher asked to talk to his parents. She told them that their son needed a piano in the home – and a better teacher. (Autrey, 2005: 4BB)

Similarly, the announcement of the gold medalist for the 12th competition printed in newspapers around the world began with these lines:

> When Alexander Kobrin was a toddler in Russia, he played happily with his toys as long as he could hear music. When the radio was turned off, he cried. So his piano-teacher father taught him how to play when Kobrin was about five. (A.K. Brown, 2005)

The second recurring motif is the genius's calling to art as a vocation. Here the artist recognizes that talent is not just a gift, but a responsibility, and that sacrifices must be made for its cultivation. We can see both of these motifs in the promotional biography of the silver medalist of the 12th Cliburn competition:

> The youngest of the Twelfth Cliburn Competition participants, Joyce Yang received her first piano as a birthday present from her aunt when she was four and immediately took to the instrument. After winning several national competitions in Korea, she moved to the USA to begin studies at Juilliard's pre-college division. Her victory at the Philadelphia Orchestra's Greenfield Competition for students led to her debut with that orchestra at the Academy of Music when she was thirteen.[16]

Here Yang is very obviously constructed as the child prodigy, showing an immediate affinity with her instrument, acquiring high-profile concerts at an

unusually young age, and gaining admittance into the Juilliard pre-college division, one of the most prestigious conservatory programmes in the world. These are all attributions of talent and markers of prestige but, at the same time, they imply her dedication to her art. The mention of Yang's studies at Juilliard is especially meaningful in this respect. In the biographies of visual artists, the calling to art as a vocation is provoked by a single encounter with a master or masterwork followed by a period of seclusion and obscurity in which the artist develops his own style. In musical narratives, however, devotion to one's calling involves a prolonged and intimate relationship with a master-teacher who provides the artist with a solid musical foundation while coaxing out individual artistry (see for example Madigan, 2005b). To quote Rodzinski (2005) further:

> For those who possess (or are possessed by?) this gift, however, recognition of their musicality is just a prelude to a lifelong journey. A unique bond is established between the gently guiding music teacher and the student, during which the talent is allowed to unfold. Following the initial honing of basic skills, the voyage turns into an ever more solitary one as the musician begins to plumb the very depths of his soul to listen for a voice, if one exists at all, able to recognize and to communicate something beyond the score. (2005: 33–4)

In other words, the role of the teacher is to guide the artist in finding her own method of accessing the 'eternal truths' in music and to help the artist develop an original voice to communicate these to an audience. These are the sacred aspects of performance to which the teacher orients the artist: '[My teacher] just sort of led the way for me to see that music is what it's all about, not competitions or winning or being famous' (Madigan, 2005b: 4D).

Eventually, the years devoted to cultivating talent come to fruition. This brings us to the third narrative motif, the rise to prominence, where the genius gains public recognition. This could take the form of a medal at a prestigious competition, a string of favourable reviews in the press, a handful of important concert engagements, or the development of an enthusiastic audience that responds to every recital with rapturous applause. Public recognition takes so many forms because each segment of the audience is differently positioned and differently equipped to bestow an acknowledgement that is visible both to other audience members and other audience segments. And while these are not unrelated, the artist rarely enjoys all of them at once. Regardless of how many forms the young artist acquires, however, it is the rise to public prominence that provides the fitting conclusion for the narrative construction of Cliburn pianists. Since they are young musicians at the very beginning stages of a professional career, theirs is only an optimistic and heroic tale of promise and potential. We are spared the inevitable fall from grace that is the next narrative motif in the sequence. Here the artist would be denigrated, suffering through failure and solitude in equal proportion to the success and recognition that was just enjoyed. But in the construction of competition pianists, the ritual structure of the artist's biography, which follows a 'rise and fall' scenario, is effectively cut short. And by omitting the pessimistic phase of denigration, the artist's sacred status is only further enhanced.

Table 1 Sacred and profane narratives of international music competitions

	Sacred (Ritual frame)	*Profane (Game frame)*
Competition event	Occasion for transcendent 'pure' musical experience	Democratic mechanism for identifying 'the best'
Metaphors	Festival, Mecca	Competition, job interview, examination, test
Performer	*Artist* who interprets musical meaning, communicates 'eternal truths' in and through music, embodiment of ideal musician	*Rivals* determined to triumph; *contestants* in top form capable of extraordinary physical feats.
Metaphors, motifs	(Beethovenian) musical genius, former prodigy rising to prominence	Candidates, journeymen
Examples	'…a joyous festival dedicated to music and the discovery of the world's finest young pianists.'	'The competition serves as a living testament to the tremendous impetus that winning a major competition gives to launching an international career.' 'The competition is a rigorous and comprehensive examination of every facet of each contestant's musicianship and technical proficiency.'

Conclusion

Music competitions are surrounded by discourses that can be mapped in a number of ways (see Table 1). These narrative frames reflect the ambivalence that characterizes the event. It is at once game and ritual, following the distinction made by Lévi-Strauss ([1962]1966: 32):

> Games thus appear to have a *disjunctive* effect: they end in the establishment of a difference between individual players or teams where originally there was no indication of inequality. And at the end of the game they are distinguished into winners and losers. Ritual, on the other hand, is the exact inverse; it conjoins, for it brings about a union … between two initially separate groups.

Music competitions are games in that they engender asymmetry through contingent events, chance, and talent. In competitive sports this is achieved through a series of matches, while at music competitions it is a series of recitals. In both cases, the result is the same. From a group of selected candidates who are equal – they are all subject to pre-defined rules and have the same chance of success – an ultimate winner is declared. This engendering of inequality, and its consequences, would be the exclusive focus of a production perspective account. In an important sense, the production approach assumes the terms of

the profane narrative frame, only the zero-sum game it ultimately unveils is one of status accumulation.

But music competitions are not only games. At the same time, they are ritual-like. Classical music concerts display many of the characteristics of ritual in the anthropological sense (Kingsbury, 1988; Small, 1998). They are highly structured environments for cultural communication in which the performers and the audience have a shared understanding of the intention, content, and intrinsic validity of that form of symbolic interaction (Alexander, 2004). Prestigious competitions like the Cliburn strive to recreate the performance conditions of the formal recital because they seek musicians who can create a union with the audience in similar circumstances. From a performance perspective, Lévi-Strauss's 'union' would be described as 'fused performance', that is, when all the elements of performance become seamlessly connected, the fragmentation of the audience is overcome, and cultural extension from audience to performer is achieved.

For Lévi-Strauss, it is the effect of play that determines whether it is a game or a ritual. Even competitive sports can be treated as a ritual. Among his examples are the Gahuku-Gama people of New Guinea who would play as many football matches as necessary for both sides to reach the same score (Lévi-Straus, [1962]1966). By this definition, the status of music competitions should be clear. But as we have seen, they never definitively achieve game status despite their bureaucratically-mandated disjunctive effect. To understand why, we need to bring in a Durkheimian dimension. Simply put, music is infused with notions of the sacred. This is especially true of instrumental classical music, which remains strongly associated with 19th century ideas of the sublime and transcendent experience. A Durkheimian discourse analysis allows us to trace the transfer from the game to the ritual frame, or back again, over the course of a particular music competition because this process involves a discursive shift from profane to sacred narratives.

Discourse analysis also illuminates how narrative frameworks are embraced, rejected, or transformed by different segments of the audience. Among those Adorno would have called 'expert listeners', the game frame inspires ironic commentary and debased metaphor. Music critics in particular have tried to undermine this representation of the event, invoking a polluting discourse to associate the competition with everything that is reviled by the music community. Therein, they describe performers as victims of this evil institution; having been corrupted, they become mechanistic (soul-less technical machines) or strategic performers 'using' repertoire and performing it in a style that might be technically perfect, but calculated to achieve self-serving ends.

For other segments of the audience, the game frame is not profane and pianism as sport is unproblematic. This explains why the Olympics metaphor emerges so consistently in general news coverage of competitions. The fused performance with which the general public identifies is the conquering hero and musical champion, especially if the pianist was acting as representative of their own country. In the case of the Cliburn, the awe-inspiring image is of Van

Cliburn himself, returning triumphant from the Soviet Union and being celebrated in the ticker-tape parade on 5th Avenue. But as we have seen, when this narrative framework employs symbols and tropes from the masculinized realms of sport and combat, it engages gender ideologies in the interpretation of bodily display and musical meaning. This poses a unique problem of performance for female performers who must juggle contradictory cultural expectations regarding musical virtuosity and conventional femininity.

For their part, competitors and the music community are constantly seeking to jettison the game frame because, for them, it is not the competition that creates the musical hero. The fused performance they are seeking is a *musical* one that conjures the sacred and transcends the competition. This is certainly the aim of the performer, who wants to be seen as a sensitive soul capable of interpreting musical meaning and conveying it to their audience in such a compelling manner that it trivializes the context of performance.

In this article, I hope to have shown that meaning is integral to musical production and reception. Under the influence of Bourdieu and the production perspective, the sociology of the arts has tended to assume that high art automatically enjoys legitimacy as a result of its institutionalization. My findings suggest that this is not the case; status and legitimacy are negotiated through ongoing, contingent social processes. A performance perspective offers a promising alternative method for exploring the cultural dimension of this negotiation. In place of Bourdieu's concept of 'consecration', which reduces artistic value to a function of instrumental machinations (e.g. symbolic investment, position-taking) and manipulations (i.e. *illusio*, misrecognition, production of false belief), a performance approach centres on the Durkheimian concept of the 'sacred', which recasts engagement with the arts as ritual and debates over artistic value as endeavours to protect notions of the good. The case of the music competition demonstrates that battles over legitimacy are not restricted to the boundaries of an organization or even the art world. Struggles between contradictory metaphors and tropes, as well as competing commitments to popular appeal and excellence, spill out from the concert hall into the larger public sphere.

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Notes

1 Other competitions of similar notoriety include the Chopin competition in Warsaw, the Leeds, the Busoni, and the Tchaikovsky. A competition's familiarity to the general public will naturally be strongest in its home country.
2 Elsewhere, I investigate the internal discourses and meanings of the competition through ethnographic observation and personal interviews with judges, competitors, audience members, and artistic directors. These are bracketed out of the present study, which focuses purely on the representations and discourses circulating in the public sphere.
3 The Cliburn's experiments with internet technology were successful in attracting a large audience by classical music standards. By the end of the semi-final round of the competition, it was estimated that 10,000 separate users worldwide had registered to watch the competition broadcasts, and over 16,000 had read the blog (Borland, 2005). Two music critics were hired to write the weblog, which attracted a dedicated following. At the climax of the competition, a single posting could provoke as many as 100 responses.
4 This measure was initially introduced to accommodate young children who are not allowed to attend live performances, audience members who could not obtain tickets for sold-out performances, and members of the public who prefer a more casual concert experience. It has since developed into an attraction in itself, with ticket holders sometimes giving up their seats in the hall to take in part of the performance on the big screen. During intermissions, it is common to see audience members trekking back and forth between the two venues.
5 Private conversation with Richard Rodzinski, Director of the Cliburn Competition, 3 June 2005.
6 http: www.cliburn.org/page 116. Consulted May 2005, but no longer available.
7 For the very first Cliburn Competition held in 1962, the first prize was $10,000, then an unprecedented amount for an international music competition. For the 12th cycle of the competition in 2005, the cash award for gold, silver, and crystal winners was $20,000. The jury also distributes a number of discretionary awards.
8 I am drawing phrases commonly used in the competition ticket brochure and competition history, all available on the Cliburn website. Some quotations were drawn specifically from http://www.cliburn.org/page/116, accessed 3 May 2006 but no longer available.
9 The jury handbook is made available for download on the competition website (www.cliburn.org.) It is therefore accessible to the public, demonstrating an effort by the organization to be transparent about its rules and procedures.
10 It was only for the 12th competition that the bronze medal was renamed the 'crystal award'.
11 The Mecca reference is quoted from a *Boston Globe* article on the front page of a brochure advertising ticket subscriptions for the 12th competition, consulted 4 July 2005. http://www.cliburn.org/pdfs///2005%20Brochure%20February%20version.pdf
12 Transcript of 10th cycle proceedings held at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition Archive, Tape 416, p. 4.
13 Ronald Broun of the *Washington Post*, quoted on http://www.cliburn.org (consulted 1 May 2005).

14 In the past, ethnicity was the dominant framework for interpreting musical/social performance at competitions. Musicians were easily identified and classified as representatives of 'national schools' on the basis of technique and style. At the 12th cycle of the Cliburn, however, the discourse surrounding pianists became racialized. For example, candidates representing the USA who were of Chinese heritage were not seen as 'Americans' or even 'Chinese-Americans' but as 'Asian'. It is too early to say whether this is a temporary or permanent development. The ethnicity framework could return through an expanded list of 'national schools' that includes Chinese, Korean, and Japanese schools, but the globalization of music education is more likely to continue eroding these categories until they become an anachronism.

15 In this section, I have drawn from Steve Sherwood's ritual structure of the artist biography that is based on Kris and Kurz (1979). See Sherwood (2006).

16 Excerpt from the Program booklet of the 12th Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, p. 111.

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