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**DANIEL POLLACK AND THE
FIRST INTERNATIONAL TCHAIKOVSKY COMPETITION**

Daniel Pollack, professor of keyboard studies at the USC Thornton School of Music, reflects on the death of Van Cliburn and their time together at the first International Tchaikovsky Competition of 1958.

LOS ANGELES (March 1, 2013) – In 1958, six months after the Soviet Union had launched its first Sputnik satellite, Van Cliburn traveled to Moscow for the inaugural International Tchaikovsky Competition. The 23-year old Texan’s victory launched the “American Sputnik,” as he was called, into an international career as a celebrated soloist.

Cliburn wasn’t the only American to win an award in Moscow. A 23-year-old pianist from Los Angeles, Daniel Pollack, was also a prize-winner at the competition.

“There were four Americans in the competition,” said Pollack, a professor of keyboard studies at the USC Thornton School of Music. “Van, myself, Norman Shetler, and Jerry Lowenthal. Only Van and I survived into the final round.”

Both had studied at Juilliard with the legendary teacher Rosina Lhévinne. A graduate of the Moscow Conservatory, Mme. Lhévinne was the wife of pianist Josef Lhévinne, who had worked with Safonov. Pollack was used to sharing a stage with Cliburn during high-pressure performances.

“We both attended Madame Lhévinne’s masterclasses at Juilliard, and it was like sitting in Carnegie Hall because everyone was superb,” said Pollack. “Van would always come in late, and bring her something—a box of chocolates, flowers—and excuse himself. After that, I didn’t see him again until Moscow.”

While Pollack was studying in Vienna on a Fulbright Fellowship, a professor brought him a brochure for the Tchaikovsky Competition. It was in German, and since Pollack could not read

it, his professor summarized the requirements and read them to him. Pollack had two months to prepare and worked feverishly to learn the repertoire.

“At dinner on the night I arrived, one of the contestants asked me what I was playing and I said Miaskovsky and Medtner and Shostakovich. He asked me why I was doing all of the Soviet pieces. I thought that’s what was required, and he told me, no, you only had to prepare one of them. I quickly realized that I had prepared the wrong repertoire for the competition.”

Pollack immediately offered to withdraw, but fearing an international incident, the organizers held an emergency meeting led by Dimitri Shostakovich. “Initially, they thought it had been a political move; an American coming to Russia with only music by Soviet-composers. You can imagine my feeling. I was horrified.”

The competition’s jury agreed to allow Pollack to compete with the wrong repertoire he had prepared. When both Cliburn and Pollack reached the final round, Sviatislav Richter proclaimed that it had become a competition between the two Americans.

Cliburn’s historic victory followed, but while he returned to a ticker tape parade in New York and a meeting with President Eisenhower, Pollack remained in the Soviet Union for almost two months, recording two albums and performing across Russia and Ukraine on a tour organized by the Soviet government.

“I performed in the Ukraine because Americans were not allowed to go East,” Pollack said. “In the competition, each contestant was asked to perform a piece from their native country, and I played the Barber Sonata, which Van also played, but not the complete work, only the last movement, the fugue. As such, I guess, my performance of the work was a premiere. Hence, the recording afterwards.”

That initial run of performances has been followed over the years by what is now approaching twenty tours in Russia, and the bond between the pianist and the Russian public has grown.

Pollack traveled to St. Petersburg in 2008 to perform at the 50th Anniversary of the Tchaikovsky Competition, and he continues to feel its influence. “The competition was broadcast and televised through the entire Soviet Union and its sphere of countries: all of Eastern Europe and China,” Pollack said. “Even today, people recognize me across the world who heard the performances.”

The lasting influence of Pollack’s teacher continues as well. From 1971 to 1974, Lhévinne taught a piano masterclass at the University of Southern California, with Pollack as her assistant. Subsequently, he was recruited to join the USC faculty.

“I was very fortunate early on in my associations with the Thornton School to have the chance to perform, in 1972, the Tchaikovsky Trio with both Jascha Heifetz and Gregor Piatigorsky when both were USC faculty. Both of these great artists were, of course, Russian. I value very much that Slavic tradition. It has been a big influence in my own teaching and performances. I, like Van, had the fortune to be a part of that legacy.”

Pollack is still coming to terms with Cliburn's death. "It's hard for me to talk about it because it brings back so many memories, and it's a great loss for us in the world of music," he said. "Van had an enormous career. He had a very engaging personality. He was the kind of person who took over the room when he was around with his entourage. I remember one time in Hartford, we made plans to have dinner together and there were twenty people there. That was typical. He invited everyone into his world. He had a warm personality, and his performances reflected that."

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The USC Thornton School of Music brings together a stellar faculty chosen from a broad spectrum of the music profession and gifted students from around the globe. Founded in 1884 and today the oldest continually operating cultural institution in Los Angeles, the Thornton School consistently ranks among the nation's top music schools and conservatories.

By blending the rigors of a traditional conservatory-style education with the benefits of a leading research university, USC Thornton offers an impressive range of performance opportunities and a curriculum designed to prepare students for successful careers in the 21st century. The Thornton School presents more than 500 concerts each year and is the only music school with a weekly radio broadcast in a major media market featuring student performances.

Located in the heart of Los Angeles, USC Thornton offers students every advantage of studying, performing, and networking in the world's most vibrant music industry hub. Every week, our students engage with leading professionals in all aspects of the music, recording, and entertainment industries, including the Los Angeles Philharmonic, LA Opera, Los Angeles Master Chorale, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the Grammy Foundation®, and The Recording Academy®. Our students also are a constant presence in local classrooms, reaching out to the next generation of musicians. More at usc.edu/music, or call (213) 740-3233.