

Fodor: Tied for Silver

THE WASHINGTON POST

Friday, July 5, 1974

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Not Gold

1974

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United Press International

Violinist Eugene Fodor tied with two Russians in the International Tchaikovsky Competition to become the first American so honored.

MOSCOW—Eugene Fodor, an amiable and by all accounts brilliant 24-year-old violinist from Denver, won a silver medal here the other night in the International Tchaikovsky Competition. No gold medal was awarded because the judges, chaired by the world renowned Russian master David Oistrakh, decided no one had performed consistently well enough.

Fodor's friend, Herbert Axelrod, an American musical writer, thinks Oistrakh is wrong and what's more, he thinks the young violinist was the victim of political bias. Out of a possible 25 points, according to Axelrod, a North Vietnamese judge on the panel gave Fodor only five.

"All these people are really good fiddlers," Axelrod said yesterday. And even an average player gets 15 points. "But this kid is terrific. I heard him play the first day and I picked him for a winner."

By Axelrod's calculations, if Fodor had gotten those extra 10 points he would have been an easy winner. Fodor himself doesn't want to talk, at least publicly, about what happened. But he did point out yesterday that while he was playing in the finals the North Vietnamese judge was blowing smoke rings.

As it was, Fodor did better in the contest than any American since Van Cliburn won the piano prize at the first Tchaikovsky Competition in 1958. And even if he didn't get the gold medal.

Fodor was the critical favorite.

"The performance of the American violinist was very profound," wrote Oleg Serdobolski of the Soviet news agency Tass, "with perfect technique." Muscovites, the critic wrote, "who are an exacting audience, for five minutes stormily applauded the American performer."

Fodor has a friendly smile and a hearty handshake. He comes from ranch country and when he's home he jogs four miles every day and rides horses. He likes one horse so much that he carries its picture in his violin case along with snapshots of his cat and his girl friend.

But the girl in the picture is apparently not Fodor's only female admirer. "Right in the middle of the finals the other night," he said, "this girl came up and gave me a rose."

His success in the Tchaikovsky Competition is not Fodor's first victory in international music contests. In 1972, he became the only violinist ever—according to the brochure published by his manager—to win the Paganini Competition in Genoa, Italy, by unanimous decision.

Fodor's interest in the violin began when he was about 7. His father, who is in the construction business, played the instrument as a hobby and his older brother was taking lessons. But Fodor quickly became the best in the family.

At age 12, he won a nationwide contest for young musicians sponsored by the Kiwanis Clubs and performed before 17,500 people at a Kiwanis convention in Atlantic City. Next he won a full scholarship to the Juilliard School of Music in New York and finished high school there.

His advanced training was at the University of Southern California where he studied under Jascha Heifetz, who Fodor believes is the greatest violinist in the world. Since then, he has been travelling in eastern Europe, Latin America and Japan. He has yet to make a New York debut, however.

Fodor has decided to continue as a soloist rather than join an orchestra. "If I wanted to," he said, "I could probably be a concert master (first violinist) almost anywhere, but I prefer to work alone."

The violin, he said, is technically the most difficult instrument there is to play: "You start from nothing. A hollow box with sheep gut and horse hair. To make the sounds you must totally divorce yourself from everything but the purest emotion."

"It's different than the piano," he added. "Anybody can go up and hit a key and it would sound exactly as it would if (Vladimir) Horowitz played it. But the violin is all in yourself."

