

May 6, 2011

Dear Fischhoff musicians,

Please accept my congratulations for being invited to participate in the “live” rounds of the 2011 Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition. A record number of 152 ensembles submitted videos, with musicians from 16 countries. A total of 48 ensembles were invited to come to South Bend, yours among them! I truly hope you will have a great experience and leave South Bend feeling that you benefited from it. The Fischhoff has an excellent track record in identifying the rising stars of the chamber music world. In fact, the last three Grammy Awards given for Chamber Music have been won by groups that entered the Fischhoff as relative unknowns. But....more on that later.

I want to urge you to do all you can to learn as much as you can while you are at the Fischhoff.

We are an organization founded by music educators and have worked hard to keep the goals of the original founders at heart. The Fischhoff organization goes to great lengths to try to make your experience a positive one. Every group is treated fairly and equally, and the jury is selected not only for their musical expertise, but also for their personal integrity. I can assure you that no “back door deals” or any other disreputable activities will be permitted in the process of choosing the prizewinners of this competition. You may end up agreeing with their decisions, or respectfully disagreeing. Because the level of playing is very high, it is unlikely the jury will reach a unanimous decision on the outcome. In addition, because you cannot listen to the entire competition, your basis for having an opinion will be different from those of the jury. Remember too that even within your own ensembles, you do not agree with each other on all decisions.

In addition to written comments, **you are given the opportunity to meet with and speak with the jurors.** This will happen either Saturday night if you are not a finalist, or after the Finals on Sunday. I hope you will take advantage of this opportunity. Many jurors will go into much more depth in discussing your ensembles strengths and weaknesses than they can provide in written comments. Although valuable, written comments are often made while the performance is occurring, and thus cannot really go into much detail. Please remember that you also can listen to other performances. When and how you choose to do that is a personal choice, but **I urge you to listen to other groups while you are here. There is much to be learned from this** including: seeing different approaches to ensemble playing, comparing your opinions to that of the jury, getting a sense of where your ensemble compares to others, and simply hearing great chamber music. I urge you to listen to ensembles in both Senior and Junior Divisions. You also have the opportunity to meet many new people and possibly see old friends who share your interest in the field of chamber music.

If you are eliminated from the competition, please recognize that only a total of three ensembles in each category can win. Every group that enters can perform wonderful concerts, and surely would receive a warm reception from an audience. But, please remember that you have chosen to enter this event, which is a competition in which a small number of people (the jury) are asked to collectively choose a small number of groups to win prizes. As such, although you will likely feel disappointed if you are not a prizewinner, I hope you will remember the context in which your performance occurred.....a competition. Not only that, but it is quite likely that a different set of jurors would come up with a different ranking of the ensembles. And in our field, not only prizes, but also jobs are won and lost in this manner. The more experience you gain performing in this context, the more likely you are to later “win” a competition for either a prize or a job. **Please try to stay and listen to the remaining performances in the semi-final and final rounds if you are eliminated from prize contention.**

A special note to Junior Division Ensembles: if your group is eliminated after the Friday quarter-final round, you will be given the opportunity to play in a master class setting on Saturday morning with one of the Junior Division jurors. **I urge you to take full advantage of this wonderful opportunity.** Although it will mean you are not continuing on to the next round, it is nonetheless a great way to gain insight, ideas and new perspectives from a great musician on your repertoire and performances!

Many of the Fischhoff Grand Prize winners have gone on to successful careers in chamber music. But what about those who don't take the top prizes? Now back to those Grammy Award winners: The Pacifica Quartet, The Parker Quartet and Eighth Blackbird were those Grammy Award winners, yet none of them were winners of the Fischhoff Grand Prize! Not only should this give you a perspective on the nature of competitions in general, but also help you to see that there are many outstanding ensembles that never win any competitions! Talent, hard work, commitment, connections, perseverance, and yes...luck, all have a big role in that success. I hope whether or not you win a prize at this year's Fischhoff, your experience in preparing for it and your time at the competition will prove to be a wonderful one.

I hope to meet many of you at the competition, and wish you all the best.

Most sincerely,
Tom Rosenberg
Artistic Director (since 1981), Fischhoff National Chamber Music Competition