

## **Spotless craftsmanship**

*Tom Janssens*

### **Who?**

Like Sihao He, Brannon Cho is a pupil of Hans Jensen. Yesterday he saw a chance of revenge on his classmate, who triumphed over him four years ago at the Cassadó Competition. Since then, Cho has developed deep roots, as evidenced by a semi-final recital spreading in all directions with a fresh Bach, a roaring Prokofiev and a ticklish Rossini.

### **Nuance level?**

The difference with He was immediately clear in the opening melody of the duty work. Cho started out more subtly, letting the music come from scratch and produced finer gray and grit tones. Unfortunately, his slender tone was too light for the relief music. In vain, the naked ear searched for the chattering bows, fleshy resonances and ridiculous effects that He had heard. Although Cho played the nicer ending, his gaze after the final measure told only one thing: 'glad this is over.'

### **Depth weight?**

It was to be feared that Cho's sound would be a little too slim for Shostakovich. Fear unfounded: the American put down a beautifully sonorous, clearly controlled and supreme rendition. Paces were perfect, nuances worked together smoothly, colors were carefully selected. There's no doubt about Cho's craftsmanship: his left hand danced virtuosically over the fingerboard and the tip of his bow possessed enough power to push a nail gently into the floor.

### **Eerie moment?**

The bald, vibrato-less tone just before the secondary melody in the slow part. Cho opted for slowing without nagging and groaning without wailing. Certainly, with this music you can cut and sharpen, cut and sob sharply. But Cho's serene and stark approach proved that you can play Shostakovich without involving Stalin and the Soviet terror in your story.

### **Concert potential?**

A lot. To the enthusiastic applause to mark, the audience also believed that Cho was the better musician. Let's keep our heads cool anyway: one cello does not make spring. This is the first excellent Shostakovich of the competition. If the five that follow are equally successful, it can still be nice this week.