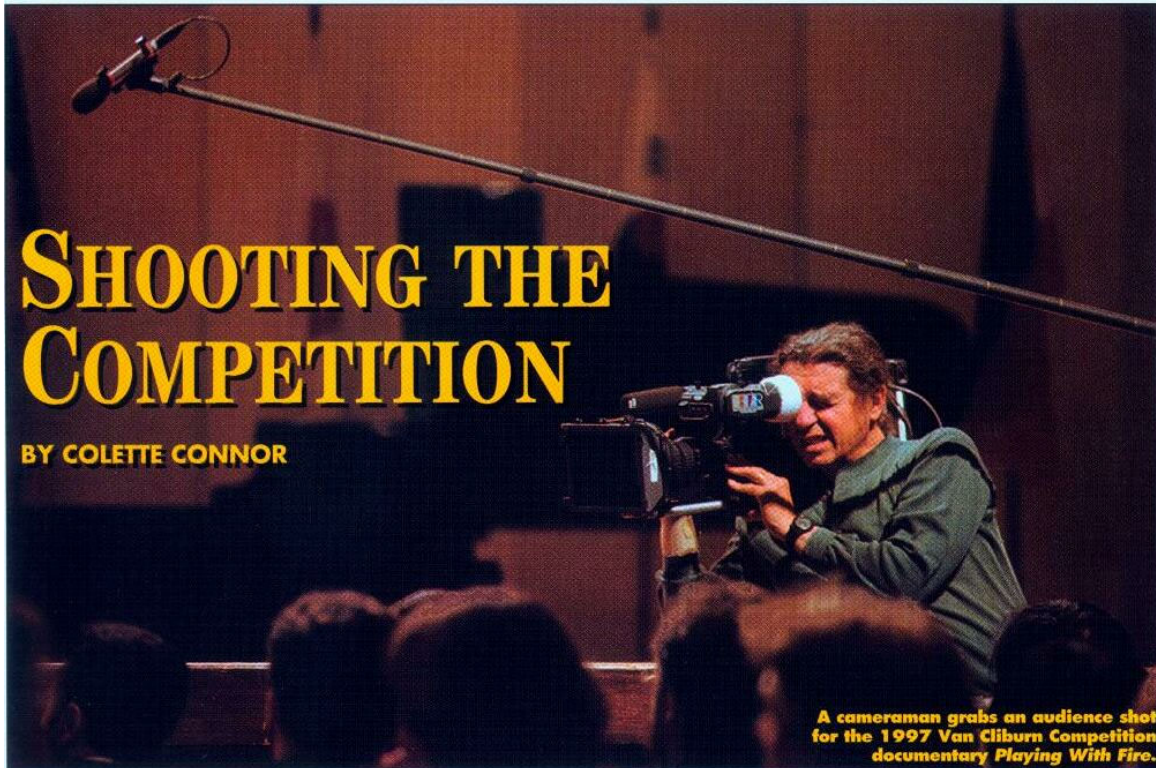


FEATURE

PRODUCTION RESOURCES

# SHOOTING THE COMPETITION

BY COLETTE CONNOR



A cameraman grabs an audience shot for the 1997 Van Cliburn Competition documentary *Playing With Fire*.

In late May and early June, Broadcast Video Rentals (BVR), New York, supplied the equipment to document one of the most prestigious events in the music world: the Tenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Held every four years in Fort Worth TX, the Competition introduces 35 of the world's finest young pianists, who compete for the prize:

\$20,000 cash, two years of concert engagements with free management services, and the Van Cliburn gold medal.

Funded by Mobil Oil and Tandy (among other corporate sponsors) and the city of Fort Worth, the Competition selects a different production company to cover the quadrennial event. This year, New York-based Tatge/Lasseur Productions—whose many credits include the 1993 New York City Ballet/Macaulay Culkin movie *The Nutcracker* and *American Masters* specials for PBS—won the contract. Producer Dominique Lasseur and producer/director Catherine Tatge

evaluated rental suppliers for the massive task of setting up the operations center to cover every performer in all rounds of the Competition, and provide ENG packages to capture the backstage nerves and nuances, and record interviews.

"In the past, documentaries on the Van Cliburn would usually use a truck just for the finals, but we wanted to do it differently," Lasseur offers. "We wanted to set up a multicamera shoot and a kind of a pick-up operation. And we looked around to see what company had the most experience and was the best equipped: BVR was both, and offered us the best deal."

According to Lasseur, the production, *Playing With Fire*, focuses "not so much on the horse race. We wanted to focus on the passion of making music," he explains, "and how the pianists meet with conductor James Conlon, and with the Tokyo String Quartet, and then with the orchestra—how they

learn to collaborate and be a musician with other musicians."

"We used Ikegami HL-59s—the new generation—and a Fujinon 66X lens, two Canon 33X lenses, and Fujinon 20X handheld lenses," reports Assistant Engineer Augie Yuson, a BVR staffer who went to Fort Worth as part of the crew. "We used all Ikegami TA-553 camera backs and base stations, with OCP remote controls. My main job was helping to build the control room. Most of the color monitors were Sonys: the lighting director had a station of monitors, and there was a videotape operations area where all the footage was recorded on Sony BVW-50s. The director's set-up had black and white Ikegami PM9-5 monitors. And our engineer's monitors—which is the color reference that we use—was an Ikegami TM14-20HR, the newest generation high res monitors." For audio recording, Tom Lazarus, president of Classic Sound Inc., supplied all his own equipment.

"There was a total of eight cameras," Bob Zahn, president of BVR explains, adding that there were thousands of pieces of equipment totaling 78 shipping cases. "We shipped five Ikegami DSP systems cameras, tied into a chain on triax camera control for recording the concert, and three ENG packages for the documentary work. The key here is the MCP-57 master set-up control panel that uses EEPROM memory cards. That allows a camera set-up—actually lots of camera set-ups—to be stored in a memory card, and selected, inputted, and recalled in seconds, from camera to camera, reducing the time and facilitating the set-up by Tim Cereste, the EIC [engineer in charge]."

"With the new Ikegamis, I was able to set up all these different scene files." Cereste reports. "Keith Buresh, the lighting director, had set up all the different looks—for the Tokyo String Quartet, the preliminary solos, the semi-finals, the finals, which were different for the solos or with orchestra—everything had a different look, but I had to be able to stay up with them. So when it was time for Buresh to change a look, he'd ask his board operator to change it, and I had to be able to change it equally as quick. I utilized the cards and everything that BVR was nice enough to send along so that I could change the scenes as fast as he was changing the scenes, so it was never waiting on me. It takes a lot of pressure off the director, who should be able think about creative things rather than worrying if engineering can turn it around fast enough."

BVR also provided two Sony 600s and one Sony 400 as ENG packages, at the request of director of photography Joel Shapiro.

"I have never seen a better looking set-up chip than the one BVR did for me," says Shapiro. "I told them I liked very warm lush images, and when I say *warm* I mean toward the orange. They set up a chip to conform to my vision of the way things should look. Understand, I'd never worked

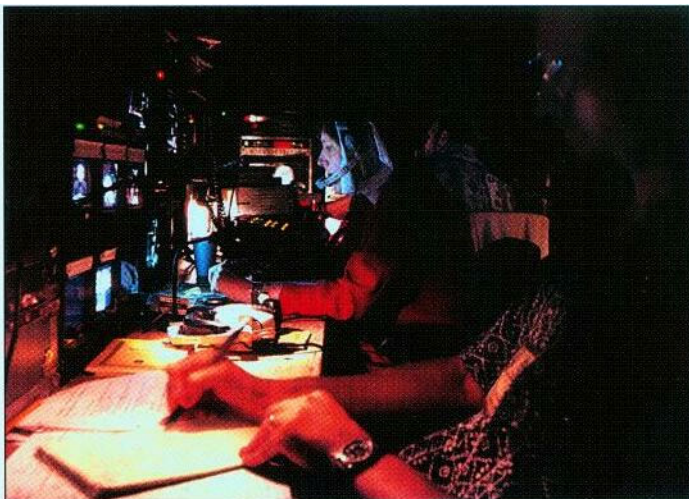
20:1 lens."

"Everything was recorded live, all within one take," Yuson adds. "We did two weeks in one location and then moved everything for the last week, for the finals. After the semifinals, the 14 jury members deliberated and we had to wait for them to finish, until 2 A.M., to wrap out and pack up. It's always done in the middle of the night, isn't it? The next day we had to be on the new

location by 8 A.M. to set up the cameras, rebuild, run all the cables, and make sure everything powered up. That's the most nerve-wracking moment; you hope when you turn that switch, everything comes on."

Once everything was set up and running, Yuson doubled as tape op. He reports they rolled about 350 hours of Sony Betacam SP tape in all. The preliminaries were the most arduous, averaging 50 hours of taping per day, with five cameras covering nine competitors each day.

Zahn visited the production for the finals, a personal touch that proved to be very worthwhile. "I flew down Thursday June 5, in time to see the first two finalists perform. As the evening wore on Cereste mentioned there were glitches in the video occurring every hour on the half-hour. he also noted there was a power drop during that time and suggested power conditioners for the next night. On Friday morning I started a search for power conditioners or UPS (uninterrupted power supplies). At the same time we spoke to the manager of the Tarrant County Convention Center and he did a conference call with a gentleman from Texas Electric. When I mentioned the power



When the control room noticed electricity fluctuations, Texas Electric responded to BVR president Bob Zahn's call for help.

with BVR before. I spoke to them on the phone and I told them the kind of stuff I liked, the way I like things to look, and they *really* customized it. I got a very lush, rich chip. They were gracious enough afterwards to allow me to dump it onto my chip, which I now carry, and no matter what camera I use, I use their setup. So I'm very, very grateful to them and I'm very pleased with their outfit.

"I like the Sonys better [for documentary work]: they're faster," Shapiro offers. "I shoot under extremely low light levels and I light for low light levels. By the way, the Ikegamis are gorgeous. They're a more elegant looking picture. But for raw documentary stuff—for that look—I prefer the Sony 600, with a

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conditioning changes on the half-hour equipment on a two-day job in New York, he did not ask any other questions. He said he would take care of this. That evening we noticed a power drop at 4:30 in the afternoon, but none other for the entire night. I think they take their power grid down—from the heat and the high intensity levels of a business workday—in levels, and I believe that they adjusted their power distribution the next night accordingly. I'm not privy to exactly what they did—it's just my thoughts—but apparently the situation was taken care of by the folks at Texas Electric and we thank them for that."

Zahn reports that BVR received brand new equipment for the production, delivered from Ikegami. To make sure that everything was working "up to snuff in our backyard," Zahn booked the

equipment on a two-day job in New York, It was returned at one A.M. on May 20th and shipped out to Fort Worth at two P.M. the same day.

"We had a company-wide effort to ship it," Zahn recalls. "This was a plum of a job: The Van Cliburn's a wonderful event that allows us to experiment with new emerging technologies that benefit the client. If we say we're only as good as our last job, this is a good job to move on from." Zahn notes that BVR's latest project is providing *Martha Stewart Living* with remote studio facilities, including component SEG, Betacam SP, and Digital Betacam equipment with complete engineering, monitoring, audio, and communications. Cameras are not provided by BVR.

*Playing With Fire* is scheduled to air nationally October 8, on PBS.

Producer Lasseur reports that the show is offlinmg on an Avid 1000, and an online facility has yet to be chosen. Asked—what with the moving, the electrical fluctuations, and the entire logistics of a live venue—if there was one particular moment of great anxiety or crisis, Lasseur laughed:

"The whole thing was great anxiety! To be told you have to move a ton of equipment by eight the next morning...but Tim would just agree and say, 'Okay. No problem.' The crew was terrific, everything worked, and Tim and Augie were just wonderful; they put the whole thing together."

For the record, the winner of the 1997 Van Cliburn is Jon Nakamatsu, of Sunnyvale CA, the third American to win the competition, which was first held in 1962.