THE BEGINNINGS OF THE COMPETITION
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The aphorism about the acorn and the oak, enunciated by Aesop or Nebuchadnezzar, or whoever it was, still is cogent.

What was the beginning of the Van Cliburn Competition? The story is longer than even the Fort Worth sponsors realize.

It is necessary to tell something of the Fort Worth Piano Teachers Forum, an organization of fifty leading teachers in Fort Worth, Arlington, Hurst and Dallas. As envisioned by its founders, Mrs. Grace Ward Lankford and Mrs. Marian Douglas Martin, the Forum’s mission, in addition to the usual professional objectives, was the exploration of new American teaching materials, an inquiry carried out by George Anson of the Texas Wesleyan College piano faculty.

As the Forum grew in confidence, resources and vision, it thought of establishing a contest for solo playing, with eligibility in five surrounding states and a prize of $1,000.

Now enters Dr. Irl A. Allison, whose National Guild of Piano Teachers had grown from a notation on the margin of a sheet of music while he was teaching at Simmons University in Abilene, Texas, in 1927, into a national institution involving hundreds of teachers in every state and tens of thousands of students.

He had been pondering a revolutionary plan for an international playing competition, and at a dinner given by the Forum after a Fort Worth recital by Van Cliburn he made the astonishing announcement that the Guild was offering for an international competition a prize of $10,000.

Though it would have seemed inevitable that such a grandiose project should be administered from New York, the center of big operations musically, Allison, impressed by the inner force of the organization and its president, Mrs. Lankford, decided to offer his plan to the Fort Worth Piano Teachers Forum.

That was as long ago as 1958, and the intervening time has been none too long to develop the machinery and the connections nationally and internationally necessary to the plan’s operation.

Mrs. Lankford was recognized unquestionably as the executant of the plan. Though she was pioneering, she thought big, far beyond the vision of most of her colleagues.

The prerequisite necessity now was enlisting the cooperation of the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, to undertake the financial undergirding, knowing that a budget of $75,000 would be needed. This was moving in a new direction, but there eventuated complete co-operation by a board of forty-five leading business and cultural leaders.

To provide adequate physical setting the Chamber of Commerce requested Texas Christian University, through Chancellor M. E. Sadler and Dean of Fine Arts Frank Hughes, to make its fine facilities, in auditorium, stage, pianos and practice rooms, available to the enterprise.

The four sponsoring units were now associated, and there came into existence, later to be incorporated, the Van Cliburn International Quadrennial Piano Competition.

Supplementing the $10,000 capital prize, five other prizes to a total of $9,250 and two additional awards worth $1,100, one a grant of $600 by Cliburn himself, were provided.

Over eighteen thousand pieces of mail were dispatched worldwide, warm-hearted hospitality in Fort Worth homes was extended to contestants, resources of publicity were developed by press and radio, and the project was in business.