



FIRST PLACE: Robert Biswas, 19, a University of Windsor student, is an award winning pianist. *Star photo: Dan Janisse*

Pianist takes top honours

BY DON LAJOIE
STAR STAFF REPORTER

Bent over the piano keyboard, University of Windsor student Robert Biswas was unaware he had just given a "world-class performance" until the audience in a Calgary concert hall rose for a standing ovation.

Only then did the 19-year-old biochemistry student begin to realize what he might have just accomplished. But it wasn't until an hour later, near midnight, that Biswas learned the jury had awarded him first place in the Canadian Federation of Music Teachers Association's national 24-and-under piano competition. He shared the honours with a music student from British Columbia.

"It was really amazing," he said in an interview at the grand piano that dominates his family's South Windsor home. "It was the best feeling I've ever had."

His victory last week was a first for the University of Windsor and all the

more remarkable, said piano teacher Prof. Greg Butler, because Biswas is not a music major. He said the son of Niharendu and Molly Biswas accomplished a feat every bit as impressive as being selected "first in the NHL entry draft." Of the nine provincial representatives in Calgary, seven were music majors.

"I believe he could excel and is capable of world-class achievement in music," said Butler.

Well prepared

"It's his complete thoroughness. He prepares so well. He has the kind of mind that captures all the details. When you do this well at the national level, it is always world class."

Biswas said he practised six hours a day leading up to the Calgary competition after advancing as Ontario champion last summer. Still, the nerves were there as he waited in the wings for his turn on stage.

"Before performing, a million things

go through your head," he said. "What if I make a mistake, what if the audience doesn't like the music? Once I'm on the bench I take a deep breath and shut everything out but the music, as though I'm playing at home on my own piano. I just get into the music."

Biswas also prepared by touring as Ontario winner, playing concerts in eight cities. The experience helped with his poise performing for an audience. He played the music he had selected, Ravel, Chopin, Bach and pieces by Canadian composers "over and over."

He had to perform for up to 45 minutes and when it was over, he had won \$5,800 in scholarships.

Butler said his student, who has taken private lessons with him for six years, could undoubtedly make music his profession. But, he doesn't have to. He is an honours student in science and winner of international competitions.

"He's one of those rare kids," said Butler. "He will be phenomenal in whatever endeavour he pursues."