

## Cleveland International Piano Competition kicks off 2019 Concert Series with Jeremy Denk

by Mike Telin



If you've ever wondered what the [Cleveland International Piano Competition](#) does during the gap years between its signature event, the answer is a lot. Last spring CIPC hosted its Young Artist Competition, and from January through May will present five [free concerts](#) at the Beachwood Community Center. And on Saturday, January 19 the Competition will kick off the 2019 Concert Series with an 8:00 pm recital by Jeremy Denk at the Cleveland Institute of Music's Mixon Hall.

Denk, an Oberlin alum and winner of a MacArthur "Genius" Fellowship, will perform Beethoven's *Five Variations on "Rule Britannia" in D* and *An die ferne Geliebte*, Op. 98/S. 469 (transc. Liszt), Adams' *I Still Play*, Bizet's *Variations chromatiques*, Mendelssohn's *Variations sérieuses in d*, Op. 54, and Schumann's *Fantasy in C*, Op. 1. Tickets are available [online](#).

"We're very happy Jeremy is coming," CIPC President & CEO Yaron Kohlberg said during a telephone conversation. "He's one of the major pianists in the United States right now. He'll be presenting a wonderful program and I look forward to a beautiful concert."

This Saturday's concert also marks one of Kohlberg's first public events since he began his tenure with the Competition this past fall. Kohlberg, the second prize

winner at the 2007 CIPC, is uniquely qualified for the job. He has spent the last few years performing concerts and presenting master classes and workshops around the world. He was also one-half of the highly successful Duo Amal, where he teamed up with friend and fellow pianist Bishara Haroni.

What are his plans for CIPC? “I think I’ve played in over 40 countries, and what has become my passion is engaging the community with piano music,” he said. “The world is changing very fast and not all people have the patience to sit through a half-hour Beethoven sonata or a 45-minute Brahms concerto. These days it’s important to know who your audience is and what they require. As a performer, the greatest compliment I received was from people who told me that they had discovered a new world. So here at CIPC we are going to try to reach the people who did not have the opportunity to be properly introduced to classical piano music — we need to create programs and events that are going to be approachable.”



Kohlberg realizes that Cleveland is a city with many different communities. “We want to find the connecting points and involve everybody in our events and in the organization.”

When asked about CIPC’s signature event, the Senior Competition, Kohlberg said that it was extremely important to preserve all that has been accomplished in the past. “I have great memories about being in the competition, not only because I won a prize, but because the people involved in the organization and the community were

wonderful. My goal is to maintain what has been achieved by Karen Knowlton, Pierre van der Westhuizen, and the Board.”

Kohlberg noted that he personally experienced the worldwide reputation of CIPC when he applied for an A-class visa to China. “The Cleveland International Piano Competition was one of ten names of competitions on the Chinese Government website. And only if you had been a winner at one of those competitions could you obtain an A-class visa.”

In developing plans for the future, Kohlberg will tap into his experience as a competition participant and concert performer. “Because that is a relatively recent experience for me, I know what the contestants are going through.”

He is also considering ways for the contestants and the audience to get to know each other more. “We want to make the two weeks of the competition as memorable as possible for the contestants and for the audience. There are so many piano competitions and music competitions in general. I feel that we need to think about where classical music is going, and what is the role of a piano competition in the world today and in the future. I would like the Cleveland competition to continue to have a leading role in that.”

Why did Kohlberg want to take on the challenge of running a piano competition? “In today’s world, unless you are a pianist who has 300 concerts a year — and these days those people are very few — musicians have to have extra abilities. They need to learn how to manage themselves. Over time I learned how to manage my own career and that of Duo Amal. Of course, we worked with different managers, but what I realized is that I’m interested in music beyond only being on the stage. I’ve always wanted to have the opportunity to run an organization where I would be able to put what I learned from being in the music business into play. I’m very grateful that I have the opportunity to do that with CIPC, which has been close to my heart since 2007. I think this was meant to be.”

CIPC is already adding programs to their schedule, the most recent being a 2019 Summer Camp which Kohlberg described as a competition preparation. “This is coordinated by Emily Shelley, who is the director of our ArtsConnect program. Our hope is to bring in children ages 12 to 17 from abroad, nationally, and locally to work with some wonderful people, including several CIPC winners.”

Kohlberg admitted that there is a lot to learn but said it has been a wonderful few months. “I have a great staff and wonderful support from the Board of Directors and

all the people involved in the organization, whether they are donors, foundations and corporate sponsors, or friends of CIPC.”

The Concert Series, which runs through the 2019 calendar year, will continue on Saturday, March 2 at 8:00 pm in the Cleveland Museum of Art’s Gartner Auditorium. 2018 Young Artists Winners Xiaoxuan Li and Eva Gevorgyan will perform works by Saint-Saëns, Chopin, Rachmaninoff, and Liszt. “I was on the jury when they won their prizes, so I know them very well,” Kohlberg said. “They are both outstanding pianists and their program is very attractive.”

Angela Hewitt, a 1979 competition laureate, will return to Cleveland on Saturday, May 19. The 8:00 pm all-Bach program in Gamble Auditorium at Baldwin Wallace University will include the *English Suites* Nos. 1 and 2, the *Suite in f*, BWV 823, and the *Prelude and Fugue in a*, BWV 894. “Angela’s created a nice career for herself especially playing the music of Bach, and it’s great to have her back.”

Roberto Plano, the 2001 CIPC first prize winner, returns on Saturday, June 8 at 8:00 pm in CIM’s Kulas Hall. Plano will be joined by the Omni Quartet (Amy Lee and Alicia Koelz, violins, Joanna Zakany, viola, and Tanya Ell, cello) for Brahms’ *Quintet*, Op. 34.

Shai Wosner and Orion Weiss close out the series on Saturday, September 14 at 8:00 pm in Reinberger Chamber Hall at Severance Hall. Their program will feature works for two pianos and piano duo by Lang, Schubert, and Brahms.

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