

Piano Cleveland announces summer Virtu(al)oso Competition

by Daniel Hathaway



Having postponed its Cleveland International Piano Competition until 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Piano Cleveland has come up with a clever placeholder

for the summer of 2020 that will allow 30 pianists, ages 18-30, to compete in a worldwide virtual contest while providing participants with across-the-board financial support.

In a recent telephone conversation, Piano Cleveland CEO Yaron Kohlberg said the idea for [Virtu\(al\)oso](#) grew out of the success of their [Quarantine Concerts](#), a quickly-organized series of eight Thursday evening performances that came together only a few days after Governor DeWine's stay-at-home order went into effect. Streamed from Steinway Piano Gallery Cleveland between March 19 and May 7, the concerts featured local artists and gave viewers the opportunity to contribute to a Musicians' Fund.

"It surpassed our goals," Kohlberg said. "We went into the series not knowing really what to expect. We just knew that we wanted to react as quickly as possible and try to support our musicians. People were so kind and generous, and responded so well."

While Piano Cleveland hoped to raise \$15,700 over the course of the series, at last count, online donations totalled \$17,663.

"The idea of a virtual competition was a thought we had when we saw that the online donations plan was working well," Kohlberg said. "The concept motivated me to see what we can do as an organization to support those who need it now. There are so many musicians who solely depend on their income from concerts. Now that all live concerts are cancelled or postponed, there's great uncertainty. We wanted to maintain our identity as a competition while supporting musicians."

So how does a virtual competition work? Online, and asynchronously. After [applying](#) through videos to be screened by a jury, 30 contestants will be chosen to compete in two rounds which will be pre-recorded at five Steinway locations across the globe: Cleveland, New York, London, Hamburg, and Beijing.



Yaron Kohlberg performing in the first Quarantine Concert.

“Each of the rounds will be streamed at local times in Cleveland, London, and Beijing between July 30 and August 8,” Kohlberg said. “The whole idea is to allow people to watch at a convenient hour and make online donations toward artist relief. People can support different performers, or the whole project. Everybody gets a minimum of \$1,000. The top three prize-winners will receive at least \$2,500.”

While the competition jury is still in formation, the screening panel will include Kohlberg, his fellow Cleveland competition medalist Konstantin Soukhovetskiu, and pianists Álvaro Teixeira Lopes and Ursula Oppens. Paul Schenly will act as artistic advisor.

Yaron Kohlberg, who just took the reins of the Cleveland competition in 2018 and presided over the renaming of its parent organization — now Piano Cleveland — expressed his appreciation to everyone who has helped move the competition to next season and develop the new scheme for 2020.

“It’s been complicated moving everything to next year, and our excellent staff worked very diligently to make everything happen. We’re grateful to Ted Good and Catherine Good Brulport of Steinway Piano Gallery Cleveland, who connected us to the CEO of Steinway. He shared our vision for the virtual competition and came on

board with the Steinway locations in Europe and Asia. And thanks to our board of directors for being so supportive of our ideas.”

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