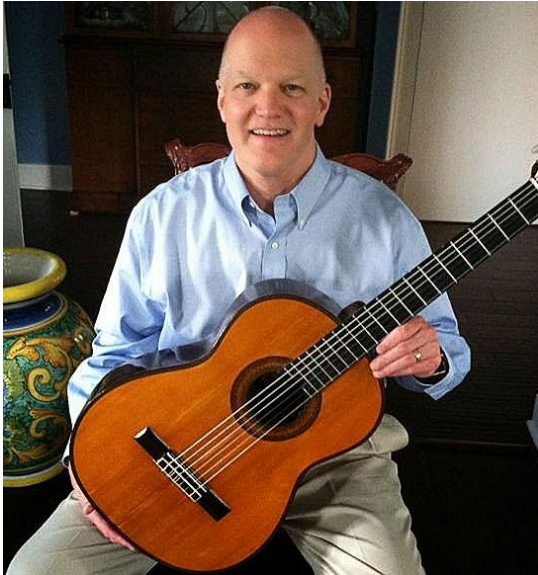


Stroud Classical Guitar Competition: Final Round to go online Friday

by Daniel Hathaway



The Second Annual James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition, like last year's contest, has been conducted entirely online due to the pandemic. The young competitors have submitted videos in lieu of in-person appearances, and the final round, featuring the four remaining guitarists, will go online on Friday, June 18 at 7:30 pm.

Ethan Boyers, 16, from Santa Rosa, California, Jack Davisson, 16, from Palo Alto, California, Patricia Hernandez, 17, from Miami, Florida, and Eric Wang, 17, from San José, California will be competing for cash prizes of \$10,000, \$5,000, \$2,500, and \$1,000.

Hudson resident James Stroud, who launched his competition twenty years ago, decided to change its emphasis beginning last year, focusing on 14-18 year olds and holding it during the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival. In a telephone conversation, he said that although the pandemic has been a disaster for so many musicians' lives and livelihoods, the 2021 competition is looking good.

“We had fewer applicants this year, but the level of playing seemed to be higher,” he said, partly attributing that to the fact that the 2020 competition had intended to bring fifteen semifinalists to Cleveland, but that this year's contest was planned as an online event from the beginning.

In addition to the impressive level of talent this time around, Stroud has also been thrilled by the judges. Seventeen different professionals were involved in adjudicating the three rounds. “They were phenomenal. They came from many different countries, and it was a pleasure — and very illuminating — for me to sit in on the Zoom calls where rankings were determined.”

Stroud put stringent protocols in place to guarantee each juror’s objectivity. “None of the judges could know who the others were voting for.” He also took care to ensure that video performances were recorded uniquely for the final round. “Finals had to be recorded within a week’s time, and the contestants had to state a certain text during the recording to guarantee that their video was a new one.”

The distinguished panel of judges for the final round includes Antonis Hatzinikolaou (Greece), Yolanda Kondonassis (USA), Alexis Muzurakis (Greece), Petra Polácková (Czech Republic), Susanna Prieto (Spain), Meng Su (China), and Jason Vieaux (USA).



Two of this year’s finalists — Patricia Hernandez and Eric Wang — were also finalists in 2020. This year, they joined Ethan Boyers, Jack Davisson, and other hopefuls in learning *Reverie*, a set piece that Stroud commissioned from Cincinnati composer and CIM alumnus Jeremy Collins for the semifinal round. “They received the score 45 days before the deadline,” Stroud said, noting that Collins called for three of the six strings of the guitar to be retune/d, a technique referred to as *scordatura*.

“I really enjoyed learning *Reverie*,” Boyers told me in a telephone conversation. “The tuning made it a challenge to read and play, because what you see in the score doesn’t really match what you’re hearing. But it was a nice way for me to learn a modern piece. I’ll probably keep it in my repertoire.” Hernandez agreed. “I love *Reverie* — it’s a whole journey.”

Boyers participated in 2020, but didn’t advance to the finals. “Last year was my first real competition, so I was surprised to make it to the semi’s. I tried again this year and worked harder,” he said. He found some merit in having to record his performances of music by Tedesco, J.S. Bach, and Albéniz remotely. “That forced me to figure out how to record in my own house and make decisions about mic positions and lighting. In live performance you only have one shot at a piece. Recording is good, but you don’t want to spend four hours perfecting a performance. I did my final take in about 40 minutes on the third day.”

Hernandez, who is preparing for her freshman year at the Frost School of Music at the University of Miami, where she will play in a guitar duo with her twin sister, enjoyed learning more diverse pieces for this year’s competition. “That adds a nice complexity and musicality to my repertoire, although it’s a bit more uncomfortable because it’s new.

I'm very excited to hear the other finalists. They're all amazing. I can't wait to hear some good music on Friday."

Although I wasn't able to catch up with Jack Davisson and Eric Wang for their comments on the 2021 competition, Wang emailed me an update on his activities since our conversation last year. "I've been up to a few things," he wrote. Those include hosting new episodes in his YouTube video series, *Behind the Music*, extending his network of musical friends for future collaborations, and writing a paper on the energy of gravitational waves.

Click [here](#) for links to the contestants' semifinal video submissions, and to view their detailed final round programs.

Watch the final round of the James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition [here](#) on Friday, June 18 at 7:30 pm, and stick around for the announcement of the winners.

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