

Piano Cleveland celebrates 50 years of CIPC

by Mike Telin



A 50th anniversary is always cause for celebration. But achieving that golden milestone requires hard work, and perhaps most importantly, the willingness to adapt to the ever-changing times.

In 2024 the Cleveland International Piano Competition (CIPC), which is set to take place from July 28 -

August 10, will mark its 50th anniversary with a new approach to the design of the competition. One that encourages unique musical expression and creative artistic vision beyond the competition stage. All that comes with a new tagline — Classical Music, EVOLVED.

During a recent Zoom conversation, Piano Cleveland president Yaron Kohlberg noted that the changes were a result of him, executive director Marissa Moore, and the Piano Cleveland team thinking about the experiences they have accumulated over the past few years. Those included Kohlberg's personal experiences in competitions, observations of other competitions and organizations, and conversations with a lot of pianists.

"We were trying to understand where the business is going and where the piano world is going," Kohlberg said. "We asked ourselves, why are we doing what we are doing? And that's an important question to revisit every once in a while. The two primary answers to that question were to be helpful to today's pianists and to inspire our community. When you look at the piano as a whole, it has so much to offer. It can speak to people in various ways. And we feel it is our responsibility to ensure that audiences, regardless of age and background, will continue to or begin to love the incredible instrument that is the piano. These ideas became the guiding principles of the 2024 competition."

Kohlberg noted that all complete applications submitted by Friday, December 15, 2023 at 11:59 pm EST will be considered for the 2024 Competition. “In the past we’ve had 200 to 300 pianists apply and we think it will be at least that this time. But it’s difficult for the preliminary jury to get an equal impression of all the applicants.”

In an effort to make CIPC more equitable, a Preliminary Jury will be held in January 2024 in order to select between 50 to 60 pianists to perform in the first round, which will take place in March and April of 2024 at two locations: Gamble Auditorium at Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music, and Salle Cortot at École Normale de Musique de Paris.

The first-round jury will select sixteen quarter-finalists to come to Cleveland. In addition, these contestants may be asked to participate in up to two Zoom sessions before the rounds to discuss their career trajectories and areas of needed support. From there, eight contestants will advance to the semi-final and chamber music round, from which four pianists will continue on to the final round.

The final round will consist of two parts. First, the new Salon Round, which will combine performing and speaking to tell the story of the contestants’ recitals. That may include introductions of specific pieces or composers, a personal narrative, or other descriptive language. (English is preferred, though a translator will be provided if needed.) And second, the Concerto Round with The Cleveland Orchestra.

Kohlberg said that Piano Cleveland also wants to create a broader representation of composers. “We included works by three female composers in the repertoire list for the final round with The Cleveland Orchestra.” Another concerto round change is that contestants will submit two concerto choices of contrasting styles, and the jury will choose which concerto each contestant will play. Contestants will be informed of the jury’s choice when they learn if they are a finalist.

“We’re encouraging people to perform works by composers of under-represented backgrounds, and composers from their own countries,” Kohlberg said. “For example in the preliminary round we’re asking for a piece that includes some virtuosity and a movement from a classical sonata. After that they can do what they want. We want people to create their own programs.”

The 2024 CIPC will also include three juries: preliminary, first round, and quarter-final through final jury. All have unique membership and include performing pianists, professors, artist managers, and journalists. Lang Lang will serve as the Honorary Ambassador.

In addition to cash prizes, the 2024 contestants will also have the opportunity to be part of the Artist Development Program, which is open to quarter-finalists, semi-finalists, and finalists. “It’s very difficult to make a living playing the piano,” Kohlberg said. “Artists who are between the ages of 18 and 32 are very focused on practicing many hours every day, and they don’t always know what they want to do later in life. And we wanted to create opportunities for not only the first prize winner, but as many people as possible when they are shaping their future careers.”

Development opportunities include:

- Residencies at Northeast Ohio universities, including the Cleveland Institute of Music and the University of Akron
- Mentorship opportunities with leading pianists, faculty, and innovators in the classical music world
- Performance opportunities, including chamber music collaborations with ChamberFest Cleveland and recitals at International Keyboard Odyssiad® and Festival
- Short courses in personal branding and social media, fundraising, and artist finances offered in partnership with Young Concert Artists
- Workshops on how to build new programming and audience engagement

The 50th anniversary competition will also include new events to inspire the community. “We are planning a special opener for the competition which is going to be a two-piano transcription extravaganza held downtown,” Kohlberg said. And putting a spin on the idea of an audience prize, the audience will be able to vote for their favorite duo.

Click [here](#) for more information about CIPC 2024.

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