

James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition announces four winners for 2023

by Daniel Hathaway



The last event on the agenda of the Cleveland International Classical Guitar Festival on Sunday, June 11 at the Cleveland Institute of Music was the final round of the James Stroud Classical Guitar Competition.

Four young guitarists who survived the semifinal round performed on the Mixon Hall stage in front of seven judges (Jonathan Leathwood, Matteo Mela, Lorenzo Micheli, Nigel North, Petra Poláčková, Mari Sato, and Jason Vieaux) and both a live and an online audience, to determine who would take away which of the generous cash prizes.

Founder and donor James Stroud prefaced the proceedings with comments in the printed program.

“This Competition is about much more than winning: it is about learning, becoming a better and more complete person, and lifelong friendships. To this end it is my hope that all our competitors will make the most of this Festival’s exceptional and varied musical offerings, have many wonderful experiences while visiting Cleveland, and leave here having gained a few pearls of wisdom that will enhance their playing and their lives forever.”

The results and winners’ bios:



Kaz Hudson - 1st Prize \$10,000.00

Kaz Hudson, 17, is a senior at Smoky Hill High School in Aurora, Colorado. He began guitar at age ten, studying with Mike Hyland, and later with Jonathan Leathwood at the Lamont School of Music. Kaz began competing in 2022 after attending the guitar institute at the Brevard Music Center Summer Festival run by Adam Holzman. This led to him winning awards in the Denver Guitar Festival Competition and YoungArts Competition, as well as becoming a recipient of the Jack Kent Cooke Young Artist Award in 2022. In addition to classical guitar, Kaz plays trumpet at school and enjoys learning and playing different genres of music.



Preston Hong - 2nd Prize \$5,000.00

Preston Hong, 14, studies guitar with Christopher Mallett at the California Conservatory of Music. He was a prizewinner at the Society of American Musicians Competition, Altamira International Virtual Guitar Competition, United States International Music Competition, and University of Rhode Island Guitar Festival. He has been featured on NPR’s From the Top radio program and performed in a virtual concert with guitarist Bokyoung Byun. In addition to classical guitar, Preston plays the clarinet and represented his school at the 2023 California All-State Junior High Symphonic Band. He is a Boy Scout and enjoys track & field, basketball, and volleyball.



Hilbert Chen - 3rd Prize \$2,500.00

Hilbert Chen, 14, is a freshman at Valley Christian High School and is a Conservatory Honors fellow. He has been playing classical guitar since he was three years old. Hilbert studies with Robert Miller at the California Conservatory of Music. He is a prizewinner in many competitions including The Kithara Project Guitar Competition, The United States International Music Competition, and The Denver Guitar Festival Youth Competition. He has received master class instruction from Manuel Barrueco, Andrew York, Stephen Aron, Ben Verdery, Jonathan Leathwood, Raphaella Smits, and the Montenegrin Duo. In addition to classical guitar, Hilbert enjoys playing baseball.



Emilia Diaz Delgado - 4th Prize \$1,250.00

Emilia Diaz Delgado, 14, was prizewinner in the Guitar Foundation of America's 2022 International Youth Competition. She has been featured on NPR's radio program From The Top five times. She has been a soloist in recitals presented by Austin Classical Guitar, the South Bay Guitar Society, Odeon Guitar Series, and Omni Foundation's Dynamite Guitars series. Emilia studies with Scott Cmiel at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Pre-College. In her free time, Emilia enjoys memorizing Stravinsky pieces and watching arthouse movies. An aspiring filmmaker recognized nationally in top festivals, she studies abstract and experimental filmmaking at San Francisco Art & Film.

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