

Cooper International Competition Invites 19 Pianists to Oberlin

by Mike Telin



Next week the Cooper International Competition turns its attention to the piano for the first time since 2018. “It’s been five years, so it’s good to be back,” Oberlin Conservatory professor and Competition director Robert Shannon said during a recent telephone conversation.

This year, 19 pianists between the ages of 13 and 18 who have advanced through the preliminaries of submitted videos will participate in live rounds in Oberlin’s Warner Concert Hall from July 31 to August 2. Click [here](#) to view their biographies and repertoire lists.

The 19, who represent 7 countries and 4 U.S. states, are vying for the opportunity to play full concertos in a final round with The Cleveland Orchestra under the direction of David Robertson at Severance Music Center on Friday, August 4 at 7:30 pm — and the \$20,000 first prize. Tickets are available [online](#).

The 19 were selected from a pool of 138 from around the world. The field of young musicians represented 15 countries — Australia, Austria, Canada, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, Spain, Taiwan, Thailand, the United States, and Vietnam — and fourteen states from across the U.S. “All the applicants played at a very high level,” Shannon said.

Unlike previous competitions, this year all the participants will perform 40-minute recitals during the first round. “This allows everybody to play their complete repertoire,” Shannon said. “I think it’s a very clean, fair way to do it.” First round recitals will take

place on Monday July 31 at 9 am, 2 pm, and 7 pm and on Tuesday, August 1 at 9 am and 2 pm in Warner Concert Hall.

At the conclusion of the first round, six pianists will be selected to play full concertos with piano accompaniment on Wednesday, August 2 at 2 pm and 7 pm in Warner, after which three finalists will move on to perform their concertos with The Cleveland Orchestra on August 4.

“We’ve been fortunate to have The Cleveland Orchestra be part of the competition from the beginning, and David Robertson is a great conductor. I have to say that the Orchestra has always been fantastic with the kids. They’re so supportive, and want them to play their best.”

This year all sessions will be live-streamed, including the Finals at Severance Music Center. “The Orchestra is letting us use their platform to capture the video complete with multiple camera angles, and that will be routed to Oberlin’s website. I think that’s a big deal for us,” Shannon said. The live streams can be accessed [here](#).

Shannon said it’s impressive that so many laureates of this competition have gone on to achieve success. “George Li won the first competition in 2010 and went on to win second place in the 2015 Tchaikovsky Competition and an Avery Fisher Career Grant.”

Shannon noted that the 2012 first prize winner, Leonardo Colafelice, went on to place second in the 2016 Cleveland competition. And the 2012 Cooper second prize winner, Bruce Liu, went on to win the 2021 Chopin Competition. The 2018 Cooper second prize winner, Kai-Min Chang, won the first Ljubljana Festival International Piano Competition this past March. And this year, Cooper laureate Evren Ozel was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant. “There’s a lot to be happy about,” Shannon said.

If you follow piano competitions for young artists and are wondering why they all seem to be happening at the same time, Shannon said that is because of individual competition cycles. “This is a freak year because all the major youth competitions just happened to line up in a row — Hilton Head, Van Cliburn, Cleveland, and us. That has never happened before and it probably won’t happen again.”

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