

## Cooper International Violin Competition Moves from Summer to January

By Mike Telin



Now that the new calendar year is upon us, it's interesting to see which of the area's classical music organizations are going to be leading the way into 2025.

When it comes to competitions, that honor goes to Oberlin's Thomas and Evon Cooper International Competition, which alternates annually

between piano and violin.

Usually held in August, due to construction at the Conservatory this year's violin competition needed to find an alternative time period. "We wanted the competition to happen so we moved it to January as a one-time thing," competition director and jury chair Sibbi Bernhardsson said during a telephone conversation.

On January 6 and 7 the nineteen participants between the ages of 13 and 18 representing Canada, China, Greece, Korea, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United States, will give 30-minute recitals with piano in Warner Concert Hall. The field narrows to six on January 8, when each musician will perform a 45-minute program, again with piano. On January 10, three violinists will perform full concertos in Finney Chapel with the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra under the direction of Norman Huynha.

An Honors Recital on January 9 will feature outstanding performances selected from the first three days of the competition. All rounds are free and open to the public and will

also be streamed live on [oberlin.edu](http://oberlin.edu) and [The Violin Channel](#). Click [here](#) for a complete schedule and [here](#) to view the participants.

Bernhardsson said he was “pleasantly surprised that the change of date had absolutely zero effect on the number of applications. And the quality, which was always very high, was even higher this time.” He added that an important mission of the Competition is to make sure that everyone who is accepted is able to participate. “We offer travel stipends that are aligned with where you’re flying from, and we offer lodging and meals even if you are eliminated — you are welcome to stay on.”

When asked about the competition repertoire, Bernhardsson said that the contestants are given a range of options, but their first round program must include a J. S. Bach fugue movement from one of the unaccompanied violin sonatas — No. 1 in g, No. 2 in a, or No. 3 in C – as well as a Paganini caprice and a Kreisler encore piece with piano accompaniment.

“One piece that everybody in the second round is required to play is Jessie Montgomery’s *Second Rhapsody*. She is one of the better known composers right now but she’s also a very accomplished violinist. The *Second Rhapsody* is actually a great competition piece, because it’s quite virtuosic in its writing, but it also leaves room for interpretive freedom. So I think it’s going to teach us a lot about the contestants who make it to the second round.”



Bernhardsson, who also serves on the Oberlin Conservatory faculty, said that the Competition is excited to be working with the ProMusica Chamber Orchestra for many reasons, beginning with violinist Vadim Gluzman, who is ProMusica’s creative partner and principal guest artist. “He’s a friend and somebody who is an important part of our field. And one of their missions of ProMusica is to promote education. So their mission and the mission of the Cooper Competition perfectly aligns. Gluzman will be mentoring the first prize winner, who will also be invited to perform at his and Angela Yoffe’s North Shore Chamber Music Festival.

In addition to Bernhardsson, the jury will include Catherine Cho, Francesca dePasquale, Peter Herresthal, Xie Nan, and William van der Sloot.

“Xie Nan is a wonderful violinist who teaches at the Central Conservatory of Music, which is one of the great conservatories in the world. So we’re extremely pleased that she will be with us for the first time. Then we have Catherine Cho who is on the faculty at Juilliard and is one of the most important teachers in the United States right now.

“Peter Herresthal teaches at the Oslo Academy and at the Royal College of Music in London. This is his second time serving on the jury. He’s not only one of the important teachers from Europe, he’s also premiered a couple dozen violin concertos, so he’s worked with many of the leading composers of our time.

“And then we have my two wonderful colleagues from the Oberlin Conservatory, Bill van der Sloot and Francesca dePasquale. I’m excited to have these wonderfully dedicated musicians who are also people of integrity.”

Bernhardsson said that John Zion, managing director of MKI Artists, will be joining the jury for the final round. “Part of the winner’s prize package is that they will be working with the agency and with John specifically, booking concerts and offering career advice and mentoring — educating them about what it takes to be a soloist in the 21st century. So we’re very happy to have him back.”

In addition to the \$20,000 cash prize, engagements with [ProMusica Chamber Orchestra](#) and the [North Shore Chamber Music Festival](#), and mentorship with [MKI Artists](#), the winner will also be invited to perform at the [Bar Harbor Music Festival](#). And that’s not all, Bernhardsson said. “The prize package also includes the use of a rare Italian violin loaned by [Jonathan Solars Fine Violins](#) of New York. The winner will receive it as soon as the competition is over.”

Bernhardsson noted that although the Cooper is “obviously a competition,” given the age of the contestants, it also needs to provide a positive educational opportunity. “That’s why it’s very important to us that we offer a number of masterclasses and mentoring opportunities. This will not be the last time they do this, so we want the Cooper to prepare them for future competitions.

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