

Cooper International Piano Competition welcomes 21 Young Pianists to Oberlin

by Mike Telin



“This year we had 190 applicants,” Robert Shannon, director of the Cooper International Piano Competition, said during a recent telephone conversation. “I listened to them all and I can tell you that the level of playing has never been higher.”

This weekend the Cooper International Competition will welcome 21 pianists between

the ages of 13 and 18 who have advanced through the preliminaries of submitted videos to participate in live rounds in Oberlin’s Warner Concert Hall from July 20 to 23.

The 21, who represent eight countries, are vying for the opportunity to play full concertos in a final round with The Cleveland Orchestra under the direction of Samy Rachid at Severance Music Center on Thursday, July 24 at 7:30 pm — and for the \$20,000 first prize. Tickets are available [online](#). Click [here](#) to view a complete schedule.

Each of the participants will perform a 40-minute recital during the semi-final rounds on Sunday, July 20 at 9 am, 2 pm, and 7 pm, and on Monday, July 21 at 9 am and 2 pm in Warner Concert Hall. Click [here](#) to view repertoire requirements.

At the conclusion of the semi-final rounds, six pianists will be selected to play full concertos with piano accompaniment on Tuesday, July 22 at 2 pm and 7 pm in Warner, after which three finalists will move on to perform their concertos with The Cleveland Orchestra at Severance Music Center at 7:30 pm on July 24. The 4th through 6th prizes,

and Audience Prize will also be announced. All rounds will be video-streamed live on oberlin.edu.



“We’ve been fortunate to have The Cleveland Orchestra be in partnership with the competition from the beginning, and I have to say that they have always been fantastic with the kids,” Shannon said. “They’re so supportive, and want them to play their best. And Samy Rachid is a wonderful conductor who is in his second year as the assistant conductor of

the Boston Symphony Orchestra.”

In addition to Shannon and his Oberlin faculty colleagues, Angela Cheng, Alvin Chow, and Haewon Song, the jury includes Douglas Humpherys, Yong Hi Moon, Aljoša Jurinić, and André Gremillet.

Shannon noted that Douglas Humpherys is the artistic director and jury chair of the Gina Bachauer International Piano Competition in Salt Lake City. “He’s beloved throughout the piano world.” Yong Hi Moon, who recently retired from Peabody, was one of the judges for the first Oberlin Summer Competition in 1995, and Croatian pianist Aljoša Jurinić won the 2012 International Robert Schumann Competition, and was a laureate at the 2016 Queen Elisabeth Piano Competition and the 2018 Leeds International Piano Competition, as well as a finalist at the 2015 International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw.

“I’m looking forward to having André Gremillet join us for the final round. Many know him as president & CEO of The Cleveland Orchestra, but he’s also a conservatory-trained pianist,” Shannon said. “He was one of our jury members for the most recent Oberlin Conservatory Concerto Competition. He enjoyed doing that and mentioned that he would be interested in being part of the Cooper jury, so I invited him.”

Ever since the first Thomas and Evon Cooper International Piano Competition was held in 2010 it has played an important role in identifying future stars in the piano world. “George Li (*pictured above by Roger Mastroianni*) won that year and he’s gone on to be a recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant and was the silver medalist at the 2015 International Tchaikovsky Competition,” Shannon said.

Cooper Competition laureates Bruce Liu went on to win the First Prize at the 18th Chopin International Piano Competition in Warsaw and Yunchan Lim became the

youngest person to win the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition at 18 years old in 2022.

“You’ve got three heavy hitters right there,” Shannon said, “but there are so many young pianists who have taken part in the Cooper and gone on to do great things in the piano world.”

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