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Piano Cleveland Announces 2026 Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists

CLEVELAND, OH – Piano Cleveland will once again present the Cleveland International Piano Competition (CIPC) for Young Artists in 2026. The youth competition, which has been a part of Piano Cleveland's larger cycle of competitions and festivals since 2012, is seen as a proving ground for artist development and emerging talent in the classical piano world. As a leader in the competition space, Piano Cleveland has been able to secure guest artists from all over the world, including famed pianist, Jean-Yves Thibaudet.

"Our goal with the Young Artists competition is to provide a world-class experience that prepares our young pianists for the performance landscape," says Piano Cleveland Artistic Director Yaron Kohlberg. The CIPC for Young Artists has identified the pianists who become recognized names in the classical music world. Most notably, the 2018 CIPC for Young Artists marked pianist Yunchan Lim's first-ever competition. After placing second in the CIPC for Young Artists and taking home the Chopin Special Award, Lim went on to be the youngest gold medalist of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition in 2022, establishing him as one of the world's most sought-after pianists.

The CIPC for Young Artists is also known for previewing the artists who will return to Cleveland for Piano Cleveland's flagship event, the Cleveland International Piano Competition, once they are of age. For example, two past Young Artist competitors, Evren Ozel and Maxim Lando, competed in last year's competition, placing second and third respectively. "Over and over again, we see pianists' careers take root in Cleveland," says Kohlberg.

Competition Structure

The CIPC for Young Artists is currently open to applications in three divisions: Rising Star (ages 10-12), Junior (ages 13-15), and Senior (ages 16-18). After the window for applications closes in December of this year, a preliminary jury will select 50 contestants for the First Round. During the First Round, contestants will record performances at one of three locations around the world to be broadcast live on Piano Cleveland's website and YouTube channel. From the 50 preliminary contestants, thirteen young artists will be invited to Cleveland for the Semi-Final and Final rounds from July 24 – August 1: three contestants from the Rising Star Division and five pianists from each of the Junior and Senior Divisions.

All Semi-Finalists will have the unique opportunity to perform solo recitals as well as collaborate with professional chamber musicians, including 2024 CIPC laureate Khanh Nhi Luong and faculty from the Encore Chamber Music Institute. The winner of the Rising Stars Division will be named following the chamber music round while three pianists from the Junior Division and three from the Senior Division will go on to participate in the Final Round.

Masterclass Round with Jean-Yves Thibaudet

The final round of the competition for the Junior and Senior Divisions will consist of two parts: a final concerto movement with The Canton Symphony Orchestra conducted by Steven Byess and a new masterclass round wherein competitors receive feedback from famed pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet. As with Yunchan Lim, Cleveland plays an important role in Thibaudet's career. Early in his performing life, Thibaudet medaled in the Cleveland competition (then known as the Robert Casadesus International Piano Competition).



Kohlberg says the Masterclass Round is a first-of-its-kind innovation for the competition world. “Only in Cleveland will audiences see how a pianist interprets and responds to feedback from Jean-Yves Thibaudet as part of a competition,” he says. “We have a history of making history.”

Jury Members

Each of the three stages of the competition has its own jury with the final jury chaired by Van Cliburn gold medalist Olga Kern. Each of the jurors was selected for their expertise in fostering young talent and recognizing potential. In total, 18 career piano professionals will comprise the three juries representing a breadth of geography.

More information about the application process, juries, competition structure, prizes, and biographies for guest artists including Jean-Yves Thibaudet, visit pianocleveland.org.

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About Piano Cleveland

Piano Cleveland promotes Cleveland as a premier piano destination by presenting world-class programming, community engagement, and education initiatives. The organization’s four major programs and events include the Cleveland International Piano Competition, the CIPC for Young Artists, a mixed-genre piano festival, and year-round education and community engagement programming.