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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Piano Cleveland announces the thirteen Semi-Finalists of the 2026 Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists

CLEVELAND, OH — Piano Cleveland, host of the Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists, has announced the thirteen Semi-Finalists who will play in Cleveland during the July 24 – August 1 competition. The Semi-Finalists are divided into three age categories: Rising Stars (10–12), Juniors (13–15), and Seniors (16–18). The three Rising Stars, five Juniors, and five Seniors were selected from 47 First Round contestants who played a solo repertoire in either Cleveland, Hamburg, or Beijing earlier this spring.

Over two weeks in July and August, the contestants will deliver free public performances, play a variety of repertoire at the ticketed competition events, and ultimately compete for the First Prize in their respective age division. All Semi-Finalists will have the unique opportunity to perform solo recitals. The Junior and Senior divisions will collaborate with violinist Jinjoo Cho and cellist Max Geissler from ENCORE Chamber Music Institute, while the Rising Stars will perform with 2024 Cleveland International Piano Competition laureate Khanh Nhi Luong.

The Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists holds a prestigious place in the classical piano world with past competitions acting as early identifiers of talent. “The superstars of today started in Cleveland,” says Piano Cleveland Artistic Director Yaron Kohlberg. “You look at pianists like Yunchan Lim or Eva Gevorgyan or Ryan Wang and they all medaled in our competition. Our competition winners go on to shape classical music.” Kohlberg also notes that past youth competitors have also later competed as adults in the Cleveland International Piano Competition. “Two of our youth competitors from 2015, Evren Ozel and Maxim Lando, came back to compete—and medal—in the 2024 competition.”

According to Kohlberg, Piano Cleveland’s push for innovation attracts the world’s most promising pianists. “Our competitions are designed to see pianists as whole artists,” he says. “In the Semi-Final Round we see them play solo and as part of a trio during the Chamber Round. But with these young artists, we also wanted a component in the competition to show us their potential for growth, which is why we are doing something a little different with our Final Round.”



In addition to the hallmark Final Concerto Round with the Canton Symphony Orchestra conducted by Steven Byess for the Junior and Senior Divisions, the 2026 competition is introducing a Final Masterclass Round, led by Jean-Yves Thibaudet. The new Masterclass Round, according to Kohlberg, is unlike anything else currently being offered in the competition world: "For a young artist, the ability to continually absorb feedback and apply direction is key to their development—especially when the feedback and direction comes from one of the piano world's giants."

Jean-Yves Thibaudet, a living legend in the classical piano world, is a laureate of the 1979 Cleveland piano competition and will play a rare solo recital of the complete Debussy *Préludes* as part of this year's competition festivities.

"Forty-Seven years ago, a very young Jean-Yves Thibaudet stepped out on a stage in Cleveland and cemented his place in classical piano history," says Kohlberg. "I can't help but wonder which young pianists we'll see this summer who will become the superstars of tomorrow."

The 2026 Cleveland International Piano Competition for Young Artists Semi-Finalists are (name, age, home country/region):

Rising Star Division

Wilson Liu, 12, United States; Ethan Wang, 11, Canada; Khloe Wu, 11, Canada;

Junior Division

Ryan Huang, 15, Canada/United States; Jueon Lee, 14, South Korea; Yusuke Nagayoshi, 14, Japan; Yixin Shen, 15, China; Eva Wang, 15, Austria;

Senior Division

Chenxu Han, 17, China; Guillermo Hernández Barrocal, 18, Spain; Yurim Kim, 17, South Korea; Yuqin Lu, 17, China; Deva Mira Sperandio, 18, Spain.

Tickets are now on sale for all competition events. Information about each session, as well as contestant biographical information, repertoire, and a full timeline of the Semi-Final and Final Rounds taking place from July 24 – August 1, in Cleveland, Ohio, is available on 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.