



**musical
america**
SPECIAL REPORTS

May 2012

COMPETITIONS

An In-Depth Look

Behind the Scenes with Judges ■ Managers ■ Presenters ■ Contestants

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Each article in this issue also may be found on our website, MusicalAmerica.com, in the [Special Reports](#) section.

Susan Elliott has been news editor of MusicalAmerica.com since shortly after its inception in 1998 and has received an ASCAP Deems-Taylor award for her efforts. She is also a freelance journalist and critic whose articles have appeared in The New York Times, The Atlanta-Journal Constitution, and BBC Music, among others. Previously she was chief classical music critic for The New York Post.

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of the Musical America *Special Reports*, this one focusing on Competitions and meant to ask (and answer) everything you ever wanted to know about competitions and then some.



So . . . do competitions matter? Should you enter one? Which one? What can you do to prepare? Are some more worth the effort than others? What do judges look for? Will you be more attractive to presenters if you have a win on your résumé? What about to potential artist managers—is having a competition win or experience a factor in choosing an artist to represent?

We decided to put these questions (and quite a few more) to the experts:

- Sarah Bryan Miller, music critic for the Saint Louis *Post-Dispatch* and a former professional mezzo-soprano talks with seven judges in all, who have collectively served on 25 different panels, so they know of what they speak.
- George Loomis, classical music freelance writer, including for MusicalAmerica.com, interviews three top artist managers from Opus 3 Artists, Zemsky Green Artists Management, and Harrison Parrott, to get their take on the importance of competitions.
- Brian Wise, editor and producer at classical radio station WXQR in New York, addresses a cross-section of presenters on the issue of whether competition wins make a difference when hiring an artist.
- Former longtime IMG Artists Managing Director Edna Landau, now a consultant to the field and author of the widely read weekly Musical America.com column [Ask Edna](#), offers a guide to evaluating competitions to ascertain whether they are the right fit for you.
- Flutist, author, and television journalist Eugenia Zukerman talks with Emanuel Ax, Carol Wincenc, Joshua Weilerstein, Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg, and Christine Goerke about their competition experience and how much of a difference winning made to their careers.

Finally, we have put together a chart listing 30 competitions whose application deadlines fall between May 15 of this year and May 15 of 2013.

We sincerely hope all of this information will be useful to you now or later in your career.

Susan Elliott
Editor
Special Reports



Untitled (Cliburn Competition) by Ed Ruscha, 2011.

Ed Ruscha 2011

Fourteenth Van Cliburn International Piano Competition

May 24 - June 9, 2013
Fort Worth, Texas USA

Applications due October 15, 2012

WWW.CLIBURN.ORG | 817.738.6536



VAN CLIBURN
FOUNDATION

WINNERS TELL THEIR Stories

By Eugenia Zukerman

Winning a major competition can catapult an artist into the spotlight. We asked six competition winners who have major careers—or are well on their way—to tell us their personal stories. What made them enter in the first place? Was it nerve-wracking? Did it make a big difference in their lives?

Three of the interviews appear below:

- **Joshua Weilerstein**, violinist/conductor. Winner 2009 International Malko Competition for Young Conductors, Copenhagen, Denmark.
- **Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg**, violinist. Winner 1983 Walter W. Naumburg International Violin Competition, New York, NY.
- **Christine Goerke**, soprano. Recipient of the 2001 Richard Tucker Award, New York, NY.

Three interviews are on MusicalAmerica.com:

- **Nigel Armstrong**, violinist. Winner Best Performance of a Commissioned Work and Fourth Place, 2011 Tchaikovsky International Competition, St. Petersburg and Moscow, Russia.
- **Carol Wincenc**, flutist. Winner 1978 Walter W. Naumburg International Flute Competition, New York, NY.
- **Emanuel Ax**, pianist. Winner 1974 Arthur Rubinstein International Competition, Tel Aviv, Israel.



Joshua Weilerstein

Violinist/Conductor

Winner 2009 International Malko Competition for Young Conductors Copenhagen, Denmark

What was the atmosphere at the Competition?

Copenhagen is a great city, and the Danish Radio Symphony was extremely supportive of all the conductors. We were all rooting

Eugenia Zukerman, flutist, is also a writer, arts administrator, TV journalist, educator, and Internet entrepreneur (ClassicalGenie.com). In demand worldwide as a soloist with orchestras, as a recitalist, and as a chamber music player, she has recorded more than 20 CDs. As a writer, she has published two novels and two non-fiction books, and from 1998 to 2010 she was the artistic director of the Vail Valley Music Festival in Vail, Colorado. In the summer of 2011 she performed at the Verbier Festival in Switzerland, where she also created Eugenia Zukerman's [Verbier Vlog](#) for MusicalAmerica.com.

for each other. My philosophy was that if it went well, OK, but of course I had no control over the judges' opinions. I just wanted to do my best and have fun. I got to know all of the contestants and I'm close friends now with several of them. When we got to the final round, the three of us looked at each other and were amazed that we'd all gotten that far. I never allowed myself to think I'd win. It was such a whirlwind and in a lot of ways I still haven't absorbed the experience.

How did winning impact your career?

I had never conducted a professional orchestra before I got to the Competition. The prize gave me the chance to conduct all of the important orchestras in Scandinavia. There are 16 of them, and what's been wonderful is how open-minded and friendly these orchestras are. I was doing most of the pieces for the first time and the players were OK with me screwing up in rehearsal. After the Competition I got management, and I was accepted to the American Academy of Conducting at the Aspen Music Festival and School, where I won another prize (the [Robert J. Harth Conductor Prize](#)). In May 2011, I was named assistant conductor of the New York Philharmonic. The [Malko Competition](#) launched my career.

"I had never conducted a professional orchestra before I got to the competition."

Why did you enter the Competition?

I saw a posting on a website for career gigs and competitions and saw the Malko Competition and I thought, "Why not?" No application fee, just upload a video. It seemed extremely easy. They were accepting 30 people to participate, and I never thought I'd be one of them. I applied in October and got an email in January saying I'd been accepted. It was a big surprise. There were to be four rounds. The repertoire list was enormous, and I'd have a chance to conduct the Danish Radio Symphony. At 21, having only recently begun studying conducting, I was really excited.

How did you prepare?

I studied like crazy. Each round involved conducting three different works. I had lessons with everyone I knew, I got an orchestra together to run through pieces, I worked with a few pianists on scores. I only had two months, and I just worked like mad.

What are your thoughts today about competitions?

The Malko prize really changed my whole musical trajectory. I'm still a violinist and I practice as much as possible. The violin and conducting are totally interconnected for me. They're two sides of the same coin. In a way, however, things are a little stressful. It's all happened so fast. But I'm working with my management to be able to consolidate repertoire, to make the right choices, so that I can be prepared and really do my best.

"The Malko prize really changed my whole musical trajectory."

COMPETITION DEADLINE:

December 1, 2012

COMPETITION REQUIREMENTS:

women, any age, any nationality, non-published works, SATB chorus with organ accompaniment, small ensemble or a cappella

3 winners will receive:

1. New York City Premiere with the critically acclaimed professional chorus, Voices of Ascension, conducted by Dennis Keene
2. Hotel and Travel to New York
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Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg

Violinist

Winner 1983 Walter W. Naumburg
International Violin Competition
New York, NY

Photo: Christian Steiner



What was the atmosphere at the Competition? Did just being there help your career?

When the [Competition](#) started, I came out of my cocoon and realized there were other people involved. I think the atmosphere was competitive and collegial. There were three rounds. I made it to the finals. I was so relieved, because that had been my goal, and I achieved it. My journey was done. I got out of my gown and went to lunch and had a beer. But then I thought, "What if there are recalls?" And I flipped out. But back

at Carnegie Hall, the contestants and audience were told that for the first time there would not be a Second or Third Prize. At that point I was just hoping maybe I'd get "Miss Congeniality" or something, and when my name was called as the First Prize winner I was shocked, absolutely shocked.

Then very quickly the world was in living color again, and I was overwhelmed with this sudden desire to go farther with my career. Even if I hadn't won, I think I would have stuck with the instrument.

How did winning impact your career?

I was fortunate because the prize winnings were not overwhelming and I was not thrown into the frenzy of the solo world. I was given one recording and about five good concerts,

so I was able to go back to school and also play those concerts. It allowed me to grow and adjust to pressure. My management was wise, and my fee went up incrementally each season, but not a lot, and I was constantly working. I'm proud of the longevity of my career. As they say, you have to keep reinventing yourself.

Why did you enter the Competition?

It was a time for me to decide what I wanted to do with my life. For about seven months prior to entering that Competition I would go into my lessons with Dorothy DeLay without my violin. I was quite

lost and Dorothy helped me through that period. I was 20 years old, asking myself, "Do you want to be a violinist and what kind of violinist do you want to be or can you be?" It was a last-ditch effort to decide my future. If I got to the finals I figured it would confirm that I should stay in the business.

How did you prepare?

I hadn't played the violin in months. I looked at the list of repertoire, most of which I didn't know, and I only had three months to prepare. I went into a mode of focus I've never duplicated since. I was like a hermit. I practiced ten to 12 hours a day. I wore the same clothes every day, I didn't do laundry. All I ate was fried sausage, every day. This was a journey for my salvation.

What are your thoughts today about competitions?

What's good about a competition is it's like boot camp. The training is tough. In other ways it's horrible to be judged when you have only a teeny amount of time to play, to prove who you are musically, to assert yourself as an individual. But the training and the prep are phenomenal. In that sense competitions are fantastic because if you can do that, you can do anything.

"I made it to the finals. I was so relieved, I got out of my gown and went to lunch and had a beer. But then I thought, 'What if there are recalls?' And I flipped out."

"I only had three months to prepare. I went into a mode of focus I've never duplicated since. I was like a hermit. I practiced ten to 12 hours a day."



Christine Goerke

Soprano

Recipient of the 2001 Richard Tucker Award, New York, NY

NOTE:
Christine Goerke
was 32 when she
received the Tucker
Award

What was the atmosphere at the Competition? Did just being there help your career?

There are different award levels at Tucker. For study and career grants, auditions are required. I auditioned for and won the Richard Tucker Career Grant in 1997, and then won the “big” one four years later. The atmosphere for the auditions was so collegial and encouraging. The [Tucker Foundation](#) is very proud of its winners, keeps in touch with them, and makes them feel they’re a part of “the family.” In my fledgling years, competitions helped my career in a financial way. My winnings helped pay for lessons, coachings, and concert gowns.

How did winning impact your career?

It’s a surprise to win the Tucker—it’s the big one. You are nominated by people in the business, and by colleagues who say you’re worthy of it. When Barry Tucker called me to say I’d won the Tucker Award, I blurted, “Holy shit!” He and I still laugh about it. I didn’t even know I was nominated. It was a great honor and it did a lot for my career.


Why did you enter the Competition?

The Tucker Award is in a league of its own. It’s conferred, not won through competing. I had been through a number of competitions previously, to which teachers had told me I should apply. Whether or not you feel ready for a competition doesn’t mean that you are. As a singer you rely on the ears in front of you, and I had a great support team—great teachers and coaches. I would pick up the *Musical America Directory* and look up vocal competitions. If I was eligible I’d send in an application. I did that for a couple of years, and once you start winning, people get wind of you.

How did you prepare?

I relied on teachers who helped me find the right arias to sing, who made sure my languages were proficient. In a competition you have to do well with all aspects. The judges are looking at your stage presence, listening to your diction, the qualities of your voice. It’s different from a concert or opera. You have to get out there and show them in ten minutes what you have two hours to demonstrate in an opera. I remember being told not to be so friendly at the auditions, but I felt that these people should see who I am. I think you need to be yourself because if you’re not distinctive then you have no chance.

What are your thoughts today about competitions?

Even if you walk away without a check in your hand, you will have performed for people who are part and parcel of the music world, who have contacts. Absolutely, I would advise young singers to go the competitions route. I would say, “Turn to *Musical America* and apply!” 

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November 2012

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Peter Schreier (tenor/conductor)
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Arnold Alons (casting Opera Santiago de Chile
& Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse)
Peter de Caluwe (intendant La Monnaie Brussels)
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Amsterdam | intendant Aalto-Musiktheater
Essen as of 2013)

Prize money: € 45,000 and engagements

Preliminary Rounds:
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17 - 19 September 2012 • 's-Hertogenbosch
The Netherlands
Auditions also via YouTube

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By Sarah Bryan Miller

What do judges look for as they decide who's the "best" artist in a competition? Technical perfection at the expense of interpretive distinction? How much does stage presence matter? Do they argue? Fight for their candidate? Are the votes confidential or do they talk openly about their decision? Does it have to be unanimous? What if they know someone who is competing, or someone is a student of a boosting colleague?

We asked some of the country's busiest musical adjudicators for the lowdown on the panels they've served on. Their responses vary, but most seem to be looking for the polished performer with something distinctive to say. It is the latter part of that equation that is often the hardest to judge and always the hardest to agree upon.

T H E J U D G E S



Anthony Freud

General Director

Lyric Opera of Chicago

Judge for: [BBC Cardiff Singer of the World](#), 1995-2005 (chair); [Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers](#) (chair); [Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing](#)

[Competition](#); [Neue Stimmen International Singing Competition](#); [Francisco Viñas International Singing Competition](#); [The Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions](#) (semifinals and finals); [Ryan Opera Center auditions](#), Lyric Opera of Chicago (finals).

What gets my vote?

Emotional communication. I obviously take into account a whole variety of qualities—vocalism, diction, imagination, musicality, energy—but ultimately what they all add up to is an ability to communicate emotionally. I want to be moved by what I hear. If you distill everything down to that one issue, you can truly compare a bass with a light soprano.

Are competitions a good idea?

For young singers to come out better prepared for their careers—whether they win or not—seems to be the point.

Barry Schiffman

Artistic Director

Banff Centre Summer Music Programs

Executive Director

Banff International String Quartet Competition

Judge for: [Tchaikovsky International Competition](#); [Geneva International Music Competition](#); [Banff International String Quartet Competition](#); [Lyon International Chamber Music Competition](#); [Wigmore Hall International String Quartet Competition](#)



What gets my vote?

I look for the ability to transcend, to make me as a listener experience something that is new, that convinces me that the music they're presenting to me is the greatest thing ever written. I want to be convinced.

The other thing is that we're looking for concert performers. There is the need to own the stage, and have a personality that engages the listener. It doesn't mean antics on stage, just ownership of the experience.

Are competitions a good idea?

There are no perfect results; you have to know going in that it's an imperfect process. In some ways the idea of a classical music competition is absurd; it's so subjective. But it attracts interest to the art form, and gives a huge shot in the arm to the emerging artist. I guess I'd say, "Do no harm"—whether a person wins or loses, he or she should have a positive experience.

Sarah Bryan Miller, a former professional mezzo-soprano, is the classical music critic of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and has been involved in competitions both as contestant and judge.



Timothy O'Leary

General Director

Opera Theatre of Saint Louis

Judge for: Denver Lyric Opera Guild;

[The Metropolitan Opera National](#)

[Council Auditions](#) (preliminary rounds)

What gets my vote?

I have a good amount of knowledge about technique, style, sound, and so on. At the same time, I'm looking for somebody who will really move an audience, and audience response does affect my judgment of singers. It's not just applause; you can feel the response during the singing. If the audience is affected and paying attention, you can feel the electricity.

The Met auditions are about finding both finished performers and those with great potential. There's this real and very important question: Do we evaluate singers based on where they are or out of a sense of their future potential? For rarer kinds of voices, are you playing closer attention, making sure that that person advances? That young Verdi baritone has a ways to go, but that's a voice we need, and we have to encourage him.

Are competitions a good idea?

We have a huge obligation to talk to (the competitors) afterwards. You have got to offer constructive feedback. Artists are putting themselves in a position of such vulnerability, and there's a lot in the decisions that is the result of subjective opinion.

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Jury and Patronage

Jonathan Nott Principal Conductor of the Bamberg Symphony Orchestra - Bavarian State Philharmonic and President of the Jury

Marina Mahler Gustav Mahler's granddaughter, Patronesse

Repertoire

Gustav Mahler Symphony no. 1 D major »The Titan« (1st movement)
Symphony no. 6 A minor »Tragic Symphony« (2nd and 3rd movement)

Gustav Mahler Songs of a Wayfarer
»Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen«

Joseph Haydn Symphony No. 92 G major »Oxford«

Alban Berg Lyric Suite (1928 - 3 movements)

György Ligeti Melodien (Melodies)

Rolf Wallin Act

Applications starting soon

www.bambersymphony.com/competition

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300 applications

60 nations

12 candidates

4 rounds

1 winner

»Bamberg all around was simply amazing. Every competition is a kind of door: regardless of how you place, I feel you pass through that door and behind it lies an entirely new world. I am eternally thankful that the professional perfection, musical integrity and special kind of human warmth that makes the Bamberg Symphony a truly unique ensemble helped me to pass that threshold.«

Gustavo Dudamel

Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra and winner of the first Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition in 2004

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Timothy O'Leary: Make the Aria Your Own

I remember at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, a young baritone who sang the *Largo* from *The Barber of Seville* (that's the one with "Figaro, Figaro, Figaro..."). If ever there's an operatic aria that we've all heard a thousand times, it's that one. But it's a virtuoso piece and this young baritone achieved that mysterious accomplishment of making something so familiar seem new.

This can happen if a singer has paid such close attention to the text that it actually inspires the music making, as if no one had ever sung that song before. There are a lot of words in the *Largo*, but in this performance, they all meant something—this was Figaro the barber coming up with the song in the moment, as he went along, and doing so gave him joy. It was the barber singing suddenly pianissimo, suddenly forte, allowing us all a glimpse of why he is such a captivating personality.

When an aria like that works, the joy is infectious. Every feat of vocalism adds to this joy. Secure technique is necessary, since we can't be infected with joy if we're worried that the singer won't get through a passage. But technique can't create joy—only meaningful delivery of text can do that. You've got to have all the technique *and* you've got to have something to say with it. It's always wonderful as a judge to have a joyful experience—it reminds you why you care so much about music in the first place.

Richard Dyer**Retired Chief Music Critic***The Boston Globe*

Judge for: [The Van Cliburn International Piano Competition](#); [Cleveland International Piano Competition](#); [Toronto International Piano Competition](#), assorted amateur contests

What gets my vote?

It's important to listen to the performance, and what it is offering. That's the whole point. Each person is recreating the music in collaboration with the composer, the score, and even the audience. That area is subjective, and that's where you've really got to be prepared to be surprised.

Also, you have to know whether something is currently accepted as a correct style. You have to know if the composer's tempo markings are being observed, along with accuracy, responsibility to the score, knowledge of the period and style.

Are competitions a good idea?

Every blade of grass knows the truth of competitions: You've got to get sun and water, or you won't be grass. Competitions put kids into the world they're going to have to live in.

**Sarah Walker****CBE*****Mezzo-Soprano**

*Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

Judge for: 2011 [Wigmore Hall International Song Competition](#), among others

What gets my vote?

In no particular order but in equal measure: musicianship, communication, diction, personality, imagination, quality of voice rather than quantity, and technical expertise facilitating the greatest possible range of vocal dynamics and colors.

Are competitions a good idea?

They can be a valuable source of performance experience, networking, and sometimes cash!



Laurence Lesser

Cellist

President Emeritus of the New England Conservatory
Prize-Winner in the 1966 Tchaikovsky International Competition

Judge for: [The Walter W. Naumburg International Violin Competition](#); [Tchaikovsky International Competition](#); [Paulo International Cello Competition](#); [Gaspar Cassado International Violoncello Competition](#); [Grand Prix Emanuel Feuermann](#); [André Navarra International Cello Contest](#); and others

What gets my vote?

I look for capacity and talent. It's hard to give a top prize to an artistic talent that is not ready for major concerts; but often giving it to the 'perfect' player hurts when that person is a kind of machine. Sometimes in that case the jury may decide no first prize. I have been struck by the fact that often someone who wins a prize, but not the top one, later turns out to have an important career while the first-prize winner is sometimes forgotten.

Are competitions a good idea?

They provide an important goal for emerging talents and a chance for those people to learn from one another. They also engage the interest of the public.

HOW ARE COMPETITORS GRADED?

As explained to us by our expert judges

Banff International String Quartet Competition
A complex set of algorithms

The Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions
A panel chooses [unanimously] the three or four singers who will advance. It sometimes means a big debate.

BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition
At each round, every member of the jury arranges the names of the singers in order of preference, from 1 to 5. A scorer adds them up, and the person with the most positions is the winner.

WHO GETS TO DECIDE?

As explained to us by our expert judges

BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition
Four major singers, three general or artistic directors, and a separate jury of seven for the Song Competition

Eleanor McCollum Competition for Young Singers
Three panelists, including a music director and a seasoned singer

Neue Stimmen International Singing Competition
Mix of singers and general directors

Joel Smirnoff

President

Cleveland Institute of Music
former Juilliard String Quartet
first violinist



Judge for: [The Walter W. Naumburg International Violin Competition](#); [International Violin Competition of Indianapolis](#); Kennedy Center Friedheim Award Competition

What gets my vote?

One considers artistry, basic musical techniques, instrumental techniques, but more than anything else, it is the ability to hear music well, a comprehension of music. Someone who can hear in the midst of music performance and has coordinated the ability to make fast adjustments in the moment. I also look for depth of person, necessary to truly grasp the profundity of great works.

Are competitions a good idea?

The job of the competition is to make us aware of a potential talent and to have that person heard in many places. The real competition then follows: Is one re-engaged and can one build a lasting career? Time usually tells, and a consensus of presenters makes the final judgment.

Because of the complications of numerical judging, it is possible that there will be vast disagreement on a candidate [very high scores, very low scores] and agreement on someone in the middle level. So the middle level will come out ahead of a more provocative and controversial candidate.

MANAGERS: do COMPETITIONS matter? [OR NOT]

By George Loomis

If being on the roster of an artist management firm is key to having a successful career, then how important is it to a manager that an artist be a competition winner? Would it be the deciding factor in whether to sign someone? Three different managers specializing in three different kinds of artists—instrumentalists, vocalists, and conductors—discuss the importance (or not) of competing, especially for younger artists.

Patricia Winter

Senior Vice President

Opus 3 Artists

SPECIALTY: Instrumentalists

Musical America: Pianist Daniil Trifonov is on the Opus 3 roster. Is that because he won the 2011 Tchaikovsky Competition?

Patricia Winter: No, we'd been following him from before and were already very impressed by him. It wasn't as if no one knew who he was, but when he won he leapt to people's attention. [Trifonov was MusicalAmerica.com's [New Artist of the Month](#) last August.]

We had also been following the cello winner, Narek Hakhnazaryan, and when he won we wanted to take him on.

MA: Does that mean you would sign someone on the basis of a competition win?

Winter: A competition win is just one factor. Very recently we took on Haochen Zhang, not so much because he was one of two gold medalists at the Cliburn in 2009, but because he convinced us musically and we wanted to further his career.

"It's not just the top winners who get all the attention. Lots of people who don't win can receive big career boosts."

MA: Have you ever recommended to someone that s/he enter a competition?

Winter: It was obvious from the time she was 14 that Joyce Yang was a major talent. You couldn't exactly say she was stagnating five years later, but I thought the Cliburn might be good for her then, and her teacher said she had already been thinking of it.

MA: She won the Silver at the 2005 Cliburn, as I recall.

Winter: Right, plus she was the most popular pianist at the Competition. It's not just the top winners who get all the attention. Lots of people who don't win can receive big career boosts.

MA: What factors should a young artist consider in deciding whether to enter a competition?

Winter: Stakes are high and they need to think carefully about what is involved in preparing for it. Is the competition's repertoire appealing? Competitors have to work really, really hard to prepare.

MA: Is it important for young artists to have a competition win on their résumés?

Winter: Not really. There are tons who haven't won competitions. Among our artists, Yo-Yo Ma, Sarah Chang, Midori, Jonathan Biss, and Alisa Weilerstein immediately come to mind.

MA: How impressed are presenters by competition winners?

Winter: It depends on the presenter and the series. Some like to promote winners—it can be a great marketing tool. But among those who really know, competitions aren't that important. The Philadelphia Orchestra is not going to engage someone just because he or she won a competition.

"A competition win can be a great marketing tool."

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George Loomis has more than 25 years' experience writing about music in the U.S. and abroad, with a focus on Russia. In addition to MusicalAmerica.com, his articles have appeared in The International Herald Tribune, The Financial Times, Opera News, The New York Times, The Moscow Times, and The St. Petersburg Times, among others. A former lawyer, he is a graduate of the University of Michigan School of Music and its Law School and holds a Ph.D. in music history from Yale University.



THE 2012 - 2013 PROLIANCE ENERGY
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**ANNOUNCING THE FINALISTS FOR A
PRIZE VALUED MORE THAN \$100,000!**

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The Finalists were announced during a media event at Steinway Hall on April 24 in New York City. This event can be heard via a simultaneous broadcast on WQXR (105.9 FM) and on WFYI (90.1 FM) Indianapolis on May 16, 2012 at 9 PM.

The mission of the American Pianists Association is to discover, promote and advance the careers of young, American, world-class, jazz and classical pianists.



Scan to learn more about this
national piano competition

continued from p. 12



Bruce Zemsky

President

Zemsky Green Artists Management

SPECIALTY: Vocalists

Musical America: When is the best time for an artist to enter a competition?

Bruce Zemsky: Competitions can be very helpful at the very beginning of a career. Timing is important. When you're just starting out, there's no real downside because nobody knows you.

MA: That implies that there's a downside. . . ?

Zemsky: For singers who have already sung around and have reputations, a poor showing could work against them. Exposure can be great—the [BBC Cardiff Singer of the World](#) is televised for a whole week—but the flipside is you might not be in good voice.

MA: Let's say I'm just starting out and thinking about entering a competition. How do I choose one over another?

Zemsky: You should consider the composition of the jury—it's very important.

MA: Meaning. . . ?

Zemsky: Meaning you want a good cross-section of people who are significant players in the field.

MA: Is that something I can find out in advance?

Zemsky: Yes. Most competitions will let you know up front who is on the panel. It can be crucial in getting exposure and confidence, apart from the prizes.

"When you're just starting out, there's no real downside to entering a competition, because nobody knows you."

MA: What would you say to a singer who doesn't come in first?

Zemsky: Don't be disappointed. So many factors enter into the decision. Think of the 1999 [Operalia Competition](#). Rolando Villazón, Joseph Calleja, and Giuseppe Filianoti all competed, but the first prize went to Orlin Anastassov, a bass. They've all had wonderful careers.

MA: If one of your artists wins a competition does that make it easier to book him or her?

Zemsky: Maybe a little, but I can't think of a theater that would hire just on the basis of a competition.

MA: So on what basis *do* they hire?

Zemsky: For singers, auditions are more often the determining factor than for instrumentalists.

MA: So is entering a competition good practice for auditions?

Zemsky: Performing, auditioning, and entering competitions require three different skill sets.

MA: How much does personality matter in a competition?

Zemsky: It matters. A really great personality can capture the affection of the public. The [Francisco Viñas International Singing Competition](#) in Barcelona and the [Operalia Competition](#) give awards determined by the public.

MA: If you could change one thing about competitions, what would it be?

Zemsky: I'd like to see prizes going to people who really need them, to be awarded at the right time in a singer's career when he or she can benefit from the positive support of winning and also the cash. It's so expensive for young singers to launch careers because they need to travel to auditions and pay teachers and coaches.

"The composition of the jury is very important."



Linda Marks
Co-Managing Director

Harrison Parrott
London

SPECIALTY: Conductors

Musical America: I gather you're not too keen on conducting competitions. Why?

Linda Marks: Competitions are a very difficult way to judge people and very artificial. Compared to instrumental or vocal competitions, conducting competitions give a less complete picture of the qualities an artist needs. And they are relative—someone may win but not be exceptional.

MA: So how *do* you evaluate a conductor, if not through competitions?

Marks: It's better to follow them in rehearsals and concerts. Watching young conductors take over something on relatively short notice can be very telling and show their ability to work with people. Where they studied, with whom, their experience, what instruments they play—these are important too.

MA: Would you ever recommend to a young conductor that s/he enter a competition?

Marks: I never have. I'd rather have them do master classes with a great teacher. But sometimes it's the only way to get going. It can be a way to progress. There are some good competitions—the [Besançon Competition](#) and the [Sibelius Competition](#). Interestingly, we manage several Finnish conductors, but many Finns don't go in for the Sibelius. It's better for them to study with Jorma Panula.

"I can't remember taking on anyone just because of a competition, but I wouldn't rule it out."

MA: How important is personality?

Marks: It's very important.

A conductor can be terribly musical and have a great technique, but orchestras won't like it if he talks too much. Conductors need to be good with people.

MA: Can you judge that from watching a competition performance?

Marks: Personality can come through in a competition. But there are so many attributes a conductor must have that a competition *can't* reveal—authority, charm, humility, exceptional musicality, an ability to communicate, motivate, inspire, and excite.

MA: What about physical appearance?

Marks: Also important. Good hands, elegance and fluidity of movement. And they need to look natural, young ones are often rather stiff.

MA: Would you ever sign someone just on the basis of a competition win?

Marks: I can't remember taking on anyone just because of a competition, but I wouldn't rule it out. We have taken on a number of competition winners but not immediately. We like to follow them around for a while first.

MA: I take it you don't regard a competition win as essential to advancement for a young conductor.

Marks: Most of our conductors actually haven't been competition winners. There's no substitute for good teaching and mentoring.



MINUTES

with... 4 PRESENTERS

WIN a contest, get a GIG?

By Brian Wise

We asked four presenters some quick questions to find out: *Does winning a competition automatically translate into a booking?*



Michael Kondziolka

Director of Programming

University Musical Society
Ann Arbor, MI

Does the University Musical Society book artists based on their competition wins?

It's a road we've never gone down. A lot of presenters used to book the winner of the [Van Cliburn International Piano Competition](#). I don't know if they still do but for us it's too much of a one-dimensional approach to making a programming decision.

Are there any competitions you look to for guidance on booking artists?

A certain set of presenting organizations will basically buy into the brand of a competition and create a platform for its winners. I think that's certainly true with the Van Cliburn Competition. Even the violin competition in Indianapolis will translate into performances. For me, it's something I'll look at and think about, but it's not the sole determining factor. It's one of many.

How much does a competition win matter to your audiences? Do you put it in your marketing materials?

Well sure, we'll put that in copy but I don't consider it a driver. It would be easy for me, if I wanted to say we would present the

winner of a certain major competition every year and sort of regularize that into our audience's programming expectations. And over time I do believe that promoting the competition would drive audiences to hear the winner. But we're not committed to competitions in that way.

What is the appeal of competitions to concert presenters or audiences? How much do they matter today?

If you had asked me that question ten or 15 years ago, I would have said that competitions felt a little bit antique. But not now. In the last five years we've seen them re-emerge as a form of popular entertainment. They have an inherent, built-in theatrical arc, the joy of winning and the agony of defeat. They're like a sporting event; some even have a participatory aspect, where not only the "authorities" weigh in, but also the audience.

And regardless of whether or not they're popular, they're important because they focus on young musicians and they create stressful contexts within which one has to perform at a very high level. That's frankly all part of the training.

Competitions sometimes get a bad rap about conflicts of interest and bias.

Yeah, you do hear all kinds of weird stories about relationships between certain jurors having certain relationships with students. There are biases built into the whole system.


Really?

You know why I say that? Because there are biases built into life. People are given breaks or opportunities for all sorts of reasons

Brian Wise is an editor at WQXR Radio where he covers classical music for WQXR.org, produces a music-industry podcast, and oversees an online video performance series. He also writes about classical music for Listen magazine, The Strad, and BBC Music.

The University Musical Society, affiliated with the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, presents about 75 performances of classical artists and orchestras, as well as dance, jazz, world music, and other artforms. It uses several campus venues, the largest of which is the 3,538-seat Hill Auditorium.

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Vadim Repin

Photo: © Kassara/DG

“Simply the best, the most perfect violinist I have ever heard.”

—Yehudi Menuhin

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beyond merit every day and in every facet of life. So I don't spend a lot of time worrying about it.

The other data point that's interesting is, look at a major management's roster today and look at how many artists on that roster have won a competition. You may be surprised at the answer.

Is the publicity and hype generated by competitions ephemeral? Would you consider booking a competition winner five years after he or she won?

That's another downside of competitions: They create a lot of opportunity. Some of it is real and concrete, and a lot of it is ephemeral. That

can be a real crisis for a performer. When the buzz wears off, you're the person who won the competition in 2005. You're back to relying on your artistry and your ability to communicate with an audience.

So why compete?

The real question is, what other systems and mechanisms do we have in place to vet talent and create a place for it to prosper and be recognized? Do competitions fulfill that role? They're certainly still part of the mix. My suspicion is, there are really great things about competitions and there are real downsides. For me it all boils down to the very basic drama of winning and losing.

Jennifer Taylor

**Artistic Producer and
General Manager**
Music Toronto



I have just recently agreed to present the [Van Cliburn](#) winner. We've never signed up with them before. But they have a very open-ended process so that you say you are willing to present the winner, but it's mainly willing to be interested in him or her. My board of directors was wildly excited at that idea.

Does a competition win matter to you when booking an artist?

Yes and no. Usually there will be an artist I already know, and I discover in the bio that they've won, or there's a very recent announcement of a competition win. But I don't seek out competition winners, per se.

Does it depend on the brand of the competition?

I guess so. But I don't think I've ever hired anybody on the sole strength of a competition win. It's just a factor. There are the major competitions and then there are the many others. We present a series of string quartets and there are about four competitions I would think about, including [Osaka](#) [International Music Competition] and the [Banff](#) [International String Quartet Competition].

Does a competition win matter to your audience? Would you use it in your marketing materials?

Well, it's interesting. I do use it if it's recent and it was in any way major—an artist who's won the [Tchaikovsky](#), for instance.

Which competitions might stand out for your audience?

Because I'm in Canada, my audience will be interested if a quartet wins the Banff Competition. It's very hard to say. I have a very specialized, knowledgeable audience; they'll take my word for it until they've heard somebody. And then they'll let me know what they think—one way or the other.

I think there are too many competitions. You hear regularly that so-and-so won this and so-and-so won that but you don't know that much about the competitions. There is just a handful that I really would pay attention to.

What about the theory that competitions are more like horse races and don't always highlight the most interesting artists?

Yes, there's some feeling of that. When I get competition news, I try and get behind the scenes and see what the press reaction is, if there are any jurors who are commenting, and then I want to listen to people [perform]. The competition I'm most familiar with is Banff. [I agreed with the choice of] the most recent winner,



but in the past, I've often liked the second or third more. A lot of it is a matter of who was on the jury and what they seemed to be interested in.

A few years ago we actually did a Banff series and it wasn't always the winner [that we presented]. In at least one case, it was a group that had placed third but had gone on to have a career.

Do audiences buy into competitions because they are like reality shows such as *American Idol* or *X Factor*?

I don't have much experience of that; we have a small hall and a very knowledgeable audience, so in string quartets, we're going to be presenting at the very top level. In piano, isn't going to be Lang Lang and Yundi Li, it's going to be Arnold Cohen and Marc-André Hamelin.

You mentioned the Van Cliburn. Do you go out of your way to build relationships with competitions—to have them as a source of talent that you can turn to?

One of the reasons I signed up with the Van Cliburn is that I like the way it approaches presenters. You can take the winner or any of the first five winners. And you can take them at any point over three years. They will tell you who the laureates are and then you make your decision [about who and when], rather than a "you get number one on this date" sort of thing. It's a good way to do it because sometimes audiences have particular tastes; [the presenter will] know what winner might or might not do well with his audience.

Music Toronto has an annual season of chamber concerts at the Jane Mallett Theatre at the St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts in Toronto. Founded in 1971, it today presents string quartets, pianists, and contemporary music groups.



Debra Kraft
Executive Director
 The Choral Arts Society of Washington

Would you be more willing to book a singer if he or she had a competition win on their résumé?

Yes, absolutely. They can certainly help [presenters] gain perspective on where talent may lie. I also think it's essential to have all the incentives possible to open doors for the young, undiscovered person. If we don't have those avenues, how else will they get noticed?

You always look at the full picture of the individual—what competitions they've won, where are they in their careers, what sort of apprenticeship programs they've been in. Sometimes, if you're just looking at a bio, it can really help define someone.

One of your colleagues defined competitions as being a spectators' sport.

I do think audiences are engaged by them. I know when the [Met Competition](#) is in Washington, D.C., at the Terrace Theater [at the Kennedy Center], it's always sold out. It's exciting—people want

to be able to hear the next great discovery. Or they want to feel like they have discovered somebody themselves. I do think competitions heighten the whole art form.

Do you include a competition win in your marketing materials?

We do. People like to be around the young, exciting new artist who's chomping at the bit. Certainly winning a Met Competition is something people get excited about. If they don't know the name or the voice, they certainly know the Met. It's like the *Good Housekeeping* "Seal of Approval." They think, "Oh, it must be good. We'll go."

That's probably true of any of the big-name competitions.

Yes, the brand helps.

Competitions are sometimes criticized for favoring performers who know how to win but aren't the most interesting artists. What's your take?

That's always possible, but a competition is just the beginning. The performers are and aren't going to have a lot of career behind them or roles that they've sung. I certainly don't think winning is a drawback. If somebody's in his/her 40s and still is entering

competitions, then, yes, that would be a problem. But for an emerging artist, winning more competitions means getting more roles.

What other factors beyond competition wins do you consider when booking an artist?

If we don't know an artist, everything is on their voice sample [recording]. So you listen and then you try to make a fit. Again, if they have a Met win behind them, you're going to pay a little bit

more attention. If you have five people and they're all unknown and they sound equal, you might give more attention to the competition winner, because he or she has been vetted out a bit more.

The Choral Arts Society of Washington is a symphonic chorus of 180 volunteers that was founded in 1965 by Norman Scribner, who retires as artistic director in August. The chorus performs with the National Symphony and has its own series of subscription concerts.

John Forestner

Trustee

Fort Worth Chamber Music Society

Your series seems to draw very heavily on competitors from the Van Cliburn Competition. What is the Cliburn's impact on your organization and how much do use it as a source for bookings?

Our founder, Leon Brachman, who just passed away recently, was also very involved in helping to develop parts of the [Cliburn](#). Leon was of the opinion that this was a piano town; if you headline every chamber music concert with a pianist—usually someone from among Cliburn competitors or winners—it would draw a crowd.

As a result, we seldom if ever just had a straight string quartet program and were a little bit soft on what is really the cornerstone of the chamber music repertory. Now, we still do four concerts a year with pianists as headliners but we're also trying to bring in some winds and string quartets.

How intertwined is the Chamber Society with the Cliburn on a business level?

Many of our board members, me included, are also members of the Cliburn board. It's a fairly tight musical community here. But the Cliburn has done nothing but good for the Chamber Music Society

The Chamber Music Society of Fort Worth focuses on chamber artists with a connection to Fort Worth. For much of its 21-year history, it has presented Van Cliburn Competition winners, and its concerts take place in the Modern Art Museum in Fort Worth (pictured).




by supplying us with ready access to some of their competitors as they establish their careers.

Do audiences in Fort Worth follow the careers of the Cliburn competitors?

Some of the finalists have quite a following here. They do come back to perform. It is also interesting to see that when we have one of the former Cliburn competitors back in town, their host family and the people who live on the block with the host family will generally show up for the concerts and sometimes in substantial numbers.

What is the Cliburn's influence on presenters outside of Fort Worth? Do others see it as highly as the Fort Worth Chamber Music Society does?

People argue that the Cliburn doesn't pick out people who will have brilliant careers, and they tend to denigrate the post-Competition careers of some of the competitors. One thing that hurts the Cliburn's reputation in that regard is that I don't think anyone who comes and wins the Competition is guaranteed to have a splendid career. Some of them may stay in academia; some of them may lose interest in music. There's no guarantee. All it says is they showed up, they played well for the Competition, and they won.

However, if a pianist is a finalist in the Cliburn and has been an unknown quantity, I think it tends to assure [presenters] that the artist has the seal of approval and it should count for something. We are always comfortable with former Cliburn competitors playing with the Chamber Music Society here because they do such a splendid job. 

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Choosing the BEST COMPETITION for YOU

By Edna Landau

Exhilarating. Stressful. Rewarding. Nerve-wracking.

These are just a few of the descriptions frequently used by artists, judges, and managers to characterize competitions. But regardless of how you feel about them, entering competitions can be greatly beneficial to your career and your growth as a performing artist—as long as you choose the ones that are right for you.

Why Enter Competitions?

Your reasons for deciding to compete might be personal and different from those of other artists. It's critical to understand your motivations and potential rewards before traveling this exciting and demanding road. Though generally only one top prize is awarded in any competition, there are many advantages to participating. Here are some:

- Raise your performance level and increase your self-confidence
- Expand your repertoire
- Gain experience as a performer in pressurized environments
- Win cash prizes and career development awards
- Gain media exposure, possibly including live streaming or delayed broadcasts of your performance. These may significantly enhance your name recognition and lead to increased career opportunities, including management
- Network with and receive feedback from a wider circle of listeners, including invited guests, journalists, the jury, and audience members.

Where to Find Information about Competitions

The world of music competitions is much wider than you may realize. Your best resource for information will be your teacher, who will undoubtedly possess extensive knowledge and may even have firsthand experience serving on juries. There are also comprehensive sources such as [The World Federation of International Music Competitions](#), which provides the most detailed information for all member competitions.

Edna Landau has become a household name in the world of artist management. After completing a 23-year tenure as managing director of IMG Artists, she has chosen to share her considerable career insight by venturing into institutional and individual consulting and writing a widely read weekly column for [MusicalAmerica.com](#) entitled [Ask Edna](#).

Listings can also be found at [www.musicalchairs.info](#), which includes competitions that are not members of the Federation. The [Alink Argerich Foundation](#) primarily addresses piano competitions. In addition to offering much of the above information, it lists the results of recent competitions, as well as interim results for those already in progress. Another well-known source is [MusicalAmerica.com](#), which lists the details for over 400 U.S. and international competitions.

How to Evaluate Competitions and Make Choices

Before jumping in, assess your goals. Then look at all aspects of how the prospective competition is organized and what it offers you. Fortunately, there are enough of them to fit whatever stage of development you may be in. Here are some things to think about as you evaluate:

- Dates and location
- Eligibility: In addition to age limits, some competitions, such as the [Honens](#), exclude performers who already have commercial management in a major territory
- Amount of required repertoire and flexibility within it; make sure you can be heard to your best advantage
- Nature and number of prizes; concert opportunities are particularly attractive
- Expenses: Some competitions will pay for travel and lodging
- Composition of the jury, which ideally will consist of recognized performers, pedagogues, and industry professionals from a variety of geographical locations. (The jury is usually, but not always, announced in advance.)
- The judging system, if you can find out. Some of the most respected competitions preclude jury members from discussing any of the performances until their votes are in
- The competition's intention and capacity to broadly publicize the outcome
- Previous winners and their backgrounds; this can provide a clue as to the level of the competition

There are times when you might choose a competition that only meets a few of these criteria, but it might be perfect for you. I'll give you an example. Have you ever heard of the [Meg Quigley Vivaldi Competition](#)? Probably not, unless you are a bassoonist. I learned of it from Alex Zdanis, a student in my career development class at the Colburn Conservatory of Music, a few years ago. The Competition

is open to female bassoonists in the Americas. Its website states: “By providing an experience for women to develop and hone their talent at a younger age, the Competition hopes to build confidence and create a vehicle towards professional performance careers.”

I was fascinated by this mission statement, because it seems to emphasize **building** over **winning**. I was also very pleased to see the “Audience Engagement Component” of the Competition, which requires all finalists to speak to the audience about the works they are performing. Alex entered the first time because many of her friends were entering competitions and she was curious to see what it was like. She made it to the semi-final round. She entered again two years later because she wanted to learn more about herself and reflect on her growth in the interim. She won Third Prize!

The First Competition Experience

Before you start fantasizing about having a few gold medals on your résumé, start small. Very small. Find out how your nerves hold up under pressure. Check into local and/or community orchestra competitions that only require a limited amount of repertoire. For a violinist, the next step up might be [The Irving M. Klein International String Competition](#). Violinist Francesca dePasquale made her first foray into the world of competitions with this one, at age 20. She felt that the repertoire was just right for her and liked the idea of learning a commissioned work on which she could put her own personal stamp.

Another plus was that the grand prize included a variety of opportunities, including solo dates with orchestra, recitals, chamber music, and community engagement events. She went on to win it, and now feels the competition’s nurturing environment greatly contributed to her success. Encouraged by that experience, she recently entered the [Queen Elisabeth Competition](#) and was accepted as a quarterfinalist.

The Calidore String Quartet met while students at the Colburn School and decided to enter the [Fischhoff Competition](#), even though they had only played together for one year. They walked away with the 2011 Grand Prize and Gold Medal (together worth \$10,500), a Midwestern tour of the U.S., and appearances at the 2012 Emilia Romagna Festival in Italy. This gave them the confidence to proceed down the path of becoming a professional ensemble. Now they continue to enter competitions, to strengthen themselves as artists, and gain additional exposure. (The group recently won the Gold Medal in the 2012 [Chesapeake Chamber Music Competition](#).)

Higher Stakes Competitions

The generous cash prizes, concert engagements, and international media exposure offered by the [Van Cliburn](#), [Queen Elisabeth](#), and [Tchaikovsky](#) Competitions lend them undeniable prestige. However, they are not for everyone. The Queen Elisabeth Competition clearly states that it is for “musicians who have completed their training and who are ready to embark upon an international career.” This is designed to ensure that participants have time to properly prepare the extensive repertoire, fulfill the pre-arranged concert commitments, and withstand the media spotlight, while having hopefully begun to develop an artistic voice of their own.

Just as runners probably would not choose to make the New York marathon their first long-distance experience, you might want to take a look at other high-level competitions



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that offer an impressive array of prizes and performances but that are not accompanied by the same level of media hype, thereby helping you learn from the experience and possibly prepare for that top tier.

[One caveat, speaking of marathons: While there are many people who enter them just to see how far they can get, this may not be advisable in a music competition. One participant in a well-known music competition had to disqualify himself from the Final round because he never expected to get that far and hadn't learned the required concerto in its entirety.]

Here are two slightly less famous high-level competitions: [Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition](#)

(Hannover, Germany; October 2012)

- First Prize of 50,000 euros
- A Guaragnini violin on loan for three years
- A CD recording with Naxos
- A small number of concert engagements for the First Prize winner
- All rounds streamed on the Internet
- Finalists to play with the Munich Chamber Orchestra. Gala concert with the NDR Radio Philharmonic

[Queen Sonja International Music Competition](#)

(For Voice; Norway, August 2013)

- First Prize of 20,000 euros
- Highly distinguished international jury
- Concert engagements for the top three winners with leading Norwegian orchestras

If you are a clarinetist, you probably already have your eye on the 2013 [Carl Nielsen International Clarinet Competition](#), whose top prizewinner is given worldwide representation for two years with Nordic Artists Management. If you are a conductor ready to compete in the international arena, you will want to look at the 2013 [International Gustav Mahler Conducting Competition](#) in Bamberg, Germany, whose very first winner was Gustavo Dudamel!

When Prizes Include Career Enrichment

Most competition winners still need considerable guidance and help with the practical aspects of their careers. The Van Cliburn Competition has been offering this to its top winners for many years, but it is the Canadians who have found particularly creative

ways to build meaningful career training into the competition experience. Each of the following has added a career development package that is custom-designed for the top winner. The package includes concert opportunities which may be strategically arranged to include markets where the winner might need exposure.

- [The Honens International Piano Competition](#)
(First Prize of \$100,000)
- [The Montreal International Musical Competition](#)
(First Prize of \$30,000)
- [The Banff International String Quartet Competition](#)
(First Prize of \$25,000)

The Honens Competition also provides its top winner with access to professional mentors such as Emanuel Ax, Stephen Hough, and Angela Hewitt. The Banff Competition invites the winning quartet to make a recording with the expert team in the Banff Centre's Music and Sound program. The Montreal Competition's package has included a photo or video shoot, website development, media training, and a fashion consult. Hopefully, more competitions will follow these fine examples and make such opportunities available to more than the top prizewinner.

Competitions in a Class All Their Own

No article on competitions would be complete without mention of three organizations dedicated to developing the careers of young artists and preparing them for commercial management: [Young Concert Artists](#), [Concert Artists Guild](#), and [Astral Artists](#). All three identify the artists for their roster through a competitive process. While they only take a very small number of those who apply, they are worth considering if you are a serious artist or ensemble ready to enter the profession. In addition to career advice, each provides professional engagements, outreach training, collaborative projects with composers, and possible recording opportunities at reduced or no commission.

While the artistic quality of your audition will be the primary consideration for the jury, its members will be impressed if you've already done some thinking about the place(s) you feel you might occupy in the performance world. Working on your communication skills, especially as they relate to working with diverse audiences, will also be seen as a plus. For young Black or Latino string players residing in the U.S., the [Sphinx Competition](#), is worth serious consideration. It offers cash prizes, concerts, career opportunities

and significant publicity to its top prizewinners, some of whom have already embarked on major careers.

Is There a Downside to Entering a Competition?


For the most part, competitions are wonderful opportunities to get a wider glimpse of the performing arts world and to develop the discipline we all need in order to get ahead. But you and your teacher must be in agreement that you are ready. The distinguished clarinet teacher Yehuda Gilad told me that it is detrimental for young performers to enter competitions at a time when they still need to address technical shortcomings or elements of their musical growth, as it can distract them from a critical phase of their development.

For the more experienced artist already concertizing, there is always the risk of not performing at your best in a competition. These days, the world truly is watching—especially via live feeds on the Internet. Perhaps you do not need to go this route at all.

Happily, it has become universal practice for competitions to add categories such as “audience favorite” or “best performance of a commissioned work,” thereby enabling more people to return home as winners. There also are opportunities during some competitions to attend career workshops and master classes, and for finalists and semi-finalists to perform special concerts during

and after the competition. It is rare that anyone returns home truly empty-handed. Plus you can win new fans, gain exposure through performances streamed on the Internet, collect useful business cards, meet colleagues with whom you might collaborate in the future, and receive valuable jury feedback.

If you don’t capture a top prize, you should not view it as a failure. There are many aspects of competitions that are beyond your control. As Professor Gilad said: “Whatever you can control, do something about it; whatever you can’t control, don’t worry about it.” You may go on to win top honors in the next competition you enter, or captivate audience members and viewers to such a degree that you go on to a major career without the benefit of a top prize. If you have your heart set on winning a position in an orchestra, perhaps even becoming a concertmaster, the competition experience will help to build your confidence in auditions and enhance your leadership skills.

The eminent violin pedagogue, Robert Lipsett, shared the following advice with me: “The competition experience is about learning, which is more important than winning. If you don’t do well in one competition, there is always another one to enter. If you do win, it is a badge of honor for you in your chosen profession. If you decide to compete in the bigger competitions, enter two or three, rather than putting all your eggs in one basket. In the end, the most important thing is to do one’s best. That is the greatest reward.” 

A Random Sampling of Competitions For all Categories of Musicians Deadlines between May 15, 2012 and May 15, 2013

Competition	Location	Age Limit	Entry Fee	Application Due	Top Prize	Email	Frequency
Van Cliburn International Piano Competition	United States	18 to 30	\$100	15-Oct-12	\$50,000 plus concert tours & career mgt	clstaff@cliburn.org	Quadrennial
Cleveland International Piano Competition	United States	18 to 30	\$150	1-Dec-12	\$50,000; two years of professional engagement, and a debut recital at Zankel Hall at Carnegie Hall, New York	info@ClevelandPiano.org	Annual
Paderewski International Piano Competition	Poland	16 to 32	100€ (\$130)	31-Mar-13	30,000€ (\$39,700)	info@paderewskicompetition.pl	Annual
Parnassós Concurso Internacional de Piano	Mexico	21 to 36	\$125	15-Aug-12	\$25,000	parnasos@intercable.net	Annual
Helsinki International Maj Lind Piano Competition	Finland	35+	None	15-May-12	25,000€ (\$33,000+)	anna.krohn@siba.fi	Quinquennial
Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition	Belgium	30 or younger	55€ (\$70)	15-Jan-13	25,000€ (\$33,000+)	info@qeimc.be	Triennial: Piano (2013), voice (2014), violin (2015)



Competition	Location	Age Limit	Entry Fee	Application Due	Top Prize	Email	Frequency
The International Organ Festival at St. Albans	England	33	£45 (\$75) for one competition; £80 (\$125) for both	Mar-13	Interpretation: £6,000 (\$9,500), recital engagements, a solo recording, and artistic representation for one season. Improvisation: £6,000 plus recital engagements	info@organfestival.com	Biennial
Mikael Tariverdiev International Organ Competition	Russia	Born after 1-Jan-76	\$65 (Kansas); 50€ (Hamburg, Moscow)	Regional auditions: 15-Feb-13 (Kansas), 15-Mar-13 (Hamburg), and 15-Apr-13 (Moscow and Astana)	\$5,000	tariverdi@mail.ru	Biennial

Competition	Location	Age Limit	Entry Fee	Application Due	Top Prize	Email	Frequency
Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions*	United States	20 to 30	\$30	Varies according to district	\$15,000 to Grand Finals Award winners	ncouncil@metopera.org	Annual
BBC Cardiff Singer of the World	Wales	18 to 32	None	Spring 2013; selection restricted to 20 singers	£15,000 cash, BBC engagement, trophy	anna.williams47@btconnect.com	Biennial
Internationaler Wettbewerb für Liedkunst, Stuttgart	Germany	No older than 32 years	100€ (\$130)	Oct-12; duo of singer and pianist performing lieder	35,000€ (\$46,300)	wettbewerb@ihwa.de	Annual
Francisco Viñas International Singing Contest	Spain	Women 18 to 32, men 20 to 35	100€ (\$130)	Oct-12	15,000€ (\$19,800)	francisco.vinas@liceubarcelona.cat	Annual
Seoul International Music Competition	Korea	16 to 30	\$100 for those selected to participate in the first stage of the competition	Jan-13	\$50,000	seoulcompetition@donga.com	Annual: Voice (2013), piano (2014)
International Vocal Competition 's-Hertogenbosch	Holland	Women no older than 31; men no older than 34	60€	Jul-12	10,000€	info@internationalvocalcompetition.com	Biennial
Lotte Lenya Competition	United States	19 to 30	None	31-Jan-13	\$15,000.00	kwfinfo@kwf.org	Annual

*Open to all nationalities but foreign applicants must provide proof of one-year residence in the U.S. or Canada and/or full-time enrollment in a college or university therein.

Competition	Location	Age Limit	Entry Fee	Application Due	Top Prize	Email	Frequency
Manuel Valcárcel International Piano Composition Competition	Spain	No limit	None	31-Jan-13: Each composition will be original, for piano solo, will not have been published nor performed in public, and will have a minimum duration of ten minutes	12,000€ (\$15,800)	csm@fundacionbotin.org	Biennial
Barlow Prize	United States	Open to any composer of new music	None	1-Jun-12	\$12,000 commission and 2014 premiere by a consortium of BBC Singers (London), Latvian Radio Choir (Latvia), and Volti (San Francisco)	barlowendowment@byu.edu	Annual: Emphasis alternates each year among choral, large and small chamber, orchestral, and others; 2012 competition is for composition of 10- to 12-minute work for an a cappella choir
Queen Elisabeth International Music Competition	Belgium	40 or younger; 10-minute work for piano accompanied by a symphony orchestra	55€ (\$70)	31-Oct-12	10,000€ (\$13,200) and 12 performances broadcast live on radio, television, and Internet and a CD and/or DVD release	info@qeimc.be	Triennial: Piano and composition (2013), voice (2014), violin (2015)

Competition	Location	Age Limit	Entry Fee	Application Due	Top Prize	Email	Frequency
Grzegorz Fitelberg International Competition for Conductors	Poland	Born after 1976	100€ (\$130)	15-May-12	25,000€ (\$33,000+)	konkurs@filharmoniaslaska.pl	Quadrennial
Arturo Toscanini International Competition for Conductors	Italy	Born after 30-Sep-77	100€ (\$130)	15-Jun-12	15,000€ (\$19,800)	concorso.toscanini@fondazionetoscanini.it	Biennial

Competition	Location	Age Limit	Entry Fee	Application Due	Top Prize	Email	Frequency
Europäischer Opernregie-Preis (European Opera-Directing Prize)	Belgium	35 and younger	None	Mar-13	30,000€ (\$39,700) and opportunity to stage concept in a European opera house	info@camerata-nuova.com	Biennial

Competition	Location	Age Limit	Entry Fee	Application Due	Top Prize	Email	Frequency
Città di Porcia Concorso Internazionale	Italy	Limit of 35 for tuba, 30 for horn, trumpet, and trombone	75€ (\$100)	Sep-12	8,000€ (\$10,500)	ass.gandino@iol.it	Annual: 2012 competition is for tuba
Beijing International Music Competition	China	Flautists born on or after 10-Oct-80	\$100 for those selected to participate	4-Jul-12	\$25,000 and engagement	bjimc_official@yahoo.com.cn	Annual
Carl Nielsen International Music Competition and Festival	Denmark	Violinists, clarinetists, and flautists under 30 and organists under 35 years old	750 Danish Kroner (\$132)	1-Feb-13	125,000 Danish Kroner (\$22,250)	nielsen@odense.dk	Quadrennial: Clarinet (2013), flute (2014), organ (2015)
Aeolus International Competition for Wind Instruments	Germany	Born on or after 1-Jan-85	70€ (\$90)	30-Apr-13	7000€ cash (\$9,300), 3000€ scholarship (\$4,000); all prizes are awarded for the competition as a whole rather than for each instrument	aeoluswettbewerb@rsh-duesseldorf.de	Rotating, annual: trombone, trumpet, tuba (2013); flute, horn, clarinet (2014); bassoon, oboe, saxophone (2015)

Competition	Location	Age Limit	Entry Fee	Application Due	Top Prize	Email	Frequency
Joseph Joachim International Violin Competition, Hannover	Germany	Born between 13-Oct-84 and 30-Sep-96	100€ (\$130)	23-May-12	50,000€ (\$66,000), three-year loan of a Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin (Parma, ca. 1765), a CD-production with Naxos and concert debuts in recital and with internationally renowned orchestras and ensembles	info@violin-competition.de	Triennial
Michael Hill International Violin Competition	New Zealand	Between 18 and 28	\$150NZ (\$120)	20-Nov-12	\$40,000NZ (\$32,300), CD recording, winner's tour of New Zealand	violincompetition@michaelhill.co.nz	Biennial
Alhambra Concorso Internacional de Guitarra	Spain	Guitarists younger than 35	40€	1-Jun-12	14,000€	contacto@concursoalhambra.com	Biennial
Lionel Tertis International Viola Festival and Competition	Isle of Man	Born on or after 16-Mar-83	£175 (\$275)	31-Oct-12	£7000 (\$11,100), London recital	information@erinartscentre.com	Triennial
Trondheim International Chamber Music Competition	Norway	Quartet single members, 16 to 34; total age of 120 years	160€ per quartet	20-Apr-13	30,000€ & concert engagements	ticc@kamfest.no	Biennial. For string quartet (2013); piano trio (2015)

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