

2026 Competition Rules

The Eleventh Sonare International Piano Competition — formerly known as the Seattle International Piano Competition and Festival (hereinafter referred to as SIPC), 2026, is open to pianists of all nationalities. Gold medal winners of any prior SIPC Piano Competition are ineligible from competing again in the same category.

The SIPC is presented by the Seattle International Piano Festival (SIPF)

All rules, dates, and details are subject to change without prior notification at any time.

Note: *alterations to rules or text appear in red.*

COMPETITION CATEGORIES

The Piano Competition has five categories in which participants may compete:

- professional artist (no age limit)
- collegiate artist
- youth, ages 14-18
- youth, ages 10-13
- youth, ages 9 and under (semi-competitive)

COMPETITION ROUNDS

For fully competitive participants, namely professional artist, collegiate artist, youth (14-18), and youth (10-13), the 2026 competition consists of two rounds:

- a preliminary round based on submitted pre-recorded video links (made anonymous and blind to the listening committee)
- a final live competition round in Seattle, Washington on the weekend of September 26-27, 2026; this event will be open to the public

Exception: For the semi-competitive participants of the Youth, ages 9 and under category, the competition consists of a single pre-recorded video round (deadline: during the SIPC's published application deadline), plus a live winner's recital during the events of the SIPC. Note that Youth, ages 9 and under selected winners must attend the live winners' recital to receive a prizer.

A description of each category, and its respective eligibility requirements and rules are listed hereafter. Note that date, location info, and final round procedures during the events of the live SIPC, September 26-27, 2026, are subject to change.

CATEGORY SPECIFICS

PROFESSIONAL ARTIST

Participants must hold the minimum of a master of music degree or its equivalent by the date of application into the 2026 SIPC. This category also includes participants who may be enrolled in a terminal graduate degree music program (such as PhD, DM, or DMA degree programs) during the 2025-26 academic year, or have considerable professional performing experience. Such performance credentials may include such things as membership in a professional management agency, a significant number of annual concert engagements, or other similar criteria. The participant must be either studying or living as a professional musician and/or music teacher during 2026. There is no upper age limit for this category.

The first of two rounds consists of a submittal of video link(s) featuring the participant performing a piece(s) of their choice. The total performance time represented on the video recording must adhere to a strict 15 minute limit. Participants must submit:

- a completed electronic application registration
- an electronic payment using a credit card in the relevant amount (\$180 USD)
- a one-page electronic copy of a vitae of musical experience and education
- original video link following the specified guidelines (see below)
- a brief but well-written artist's profile in 1400 total characters or less
- a recent high-resolution color headshot of the performer

If selected, the final live round in Seattle during September 27, 2026 must be identical to the program submitted during the preliminary round with a 15 minute hard limit, excluding breaks between works (see below for more detail on final round procedures and requirements).

COLLEGIATE ARTIST

Participant must be enrolled in a college, university, or conservatory majoring in a piano performance program during the 2025-26 academic year. Note that qualification in this category of the SIPC is based on the academic year during which one applies (2025-26), not the year in which one participates in the final round (2026-27). This enrollment must lead to an undergraduate or graduate non-terminal degree program in music (with a major or minor in piano), along a 4-year or 2-year bachelor or associate degree track, master of music degree, or any non-terminal equivalency. Participants enrolled in a terminal graduate degree program in music (such as PhD, DMA, or DM degree programs) are not eligible for the 'collegiate' category, and are eligible only for the 'professional artist' category. There is no upper age limit for this category.

The first of two rounds consists of a submittal of video link(s) featuring the participant performing a piece(s) of their choice. The total performance time represented on the video recording must adhere to a strict 15 minute limit. Participants must submit:

- a completed electronic application registration
- an electronic payment using a credit card in the relevant amount (\$180 USD)
- original video link following the specified guidelines (see below)
- a brief but well-written artist's profile in 1200 total characters or less
- a recent high-resolution color headshot of the performer

If selected, the final live round in Seattle during September 27, 2026 must be identical to the program submitted during the preliminary round with a 15 minute hard limit, excluding breaks between works (see below for more detail on final round procedures and requirements).

YOUTH, AGES 14-18

Participant must be of qualifying age on May 15, 2026. Participants, aged 18 or younger who are attending, or have been accepted, in a piano-related music degree program after the date of application into the SIPC are still considered Youth, ages 14-18 participants, unless said participant was fully enrolled in such program during any part of the 2025-26 academic year; in this latter case, participants should apply as Collegiate artists.

The first of two rounds consists of a submittal of video link(s) featuring the participant performing a piece(s) of their choice. The total performance time represented on the video recording must adhere to a strict 12 minute limit. Participants must submit:

- a completed electronic application registration
- an electronic payment using a credit card in the relevant amount (\$160 USD)
- original video link following the specified guidelines (see below)
- a brief but well-written artist's profile in 1000 total characters or less
- a recent high-resolution color headshot of the performer

If selected, the final live round in Seattle during September 26, 2026 must be identical to the program submitted during the preliminary round with a 12 minute hard limit, excluding breaks between works (see below for more detail on final round procedures and requirements).

YOUTH, AGES 10-13

Participant must be of qualifying age on May 15, 2026.

The first of two rounds consists of a submittal of video link(s) featuring the participant performing a piece(s) of their choice. The total performance time represented on the video recording must adhere to a strict 10 minute limit. Participants must submit:

- a completed electronic application registration
- an electronic payment using a credit card in the relevant amount (\$140 USD)
- original video link following the specified guidelines (see below)
- a brief but well-written artist's profile in 800 total characters or less
- a recent high-resolution color headshot of the performer

If selected, the final live round in Seattle during September 26, 2026 must be identical to the program submitted during the preliminary round with a 10 minute hard limit, excluding breaks between works (see below for more detail on final round procedures and requirements).

YOUTH, AGES 9 AND UNDER

Participant must be of qualifying age on May 15, 2026. The first and only round for this category consists of a submittal of video link(s) featuring the participant performing a piece(s) of their choice. The total performance time represented on the video recording, excluding breaks between works, must adhere to a strict 6 minute maximum length or less. Participants must submit:

- a completed electronic application registration
- an electronic payment using a credit card in the relevant amount (\$120 USD)
- original video link following the specified guidelines (see below)
- a brief but well-written artist's profile in 600 total characters or less
- a recent high-resolution color headshot of the performer

If selected as an unranked medalist, the participant must commit to attend the live winners' concert in Seattle on September 26, 2026 as a condition to receive a prize. The participant

must present the identical program to their submitted preliminary recording. The SIPF will deny any request to change the participant's program for this event. The failure to appear during this event will result in the forfeiture of any prize.

COMPETITION FORMAT

The 2026 piano competition consists of two rounds*:

- a preliminary round based on recordings submitted by the participant; and
- a final live competition round in Seattle, Washington, on September 26, 2026 for all Youth categories, and September 27, 2026 for all Professional and Collegiate Artist finalists**.

The final round is open to the public and will be held at Benaroya Hall**.

** Exception: Youth, Ages 9 and under category; for this group, the competition is considered 'semi-competitive', conducted solely from recordings submitted by the participant.*

*** Note: date, location info, and final round procedures during the events of the live SIPC and Festival, September 26-27, 2026, are subject to change.*

PRELIMINARY ROUND REPERTOIRE

There are no specific program requirements of solo classical repertoire in any category, with the exception that no works requiring any sort of preparation or amplification of the piano will be admitted for either the preliminary or final round. No styles, including jazz, new age, free improvisation, or pop music of any kind are acceptable. Works performed must be complete movements (no cuts or excerpts allowed). Examples include the entire first movement of Beethoven's "Waldstein" Sonata, Op. 53 or Mozart's entire Ten Variations on the Theme, "Unser dummer Pöbel meint", K. 455. Miniatures, including etudes, scherzi, dances, and the like, may be chosen singly, completely, or among a subset of selected favorites and need not be presented entirely in their cyclic form. Portions of movements, such as only the prelude from a prelude and fugue by J. S. Bach, or the exposition section of a sonata by Mozart, are not acceptable. All works performed must be solo works. Chamber music, works for 4-hands/2-pianos, or concerti are also not admissible. Participants need not, and should not, include scores with preliminary round submissions or during the final round of the competition.

The final round program for all fully competitive participants must be identical to the video program submitted for consideration in the preliminary round. All total performance durations for the final round program are subject to the hard time limits outlined above. Participants must calculate total program time beginning with the first note of actual performance to the termination of physical contact with the instrument, whether done with the hands or feet. Using this method, calculate playing time only, negating silence that may exist between works in a multi-work program.

Because the preliminary program and final round program are identical, participants wishing to capture some of the secondary prizes of note must also include them in their preliminary video performances. These work- or composer-specific prizes are as follows:

- The best performance of a mazurka by Karol Szymanowski and \$200***
- The best performance of an étude by Frédéric Chopin and \$200***
- The best performance of a solo work by George Gershwin (arrangements permissible) and \$200***

*** Youth, Ages 9 and under may be considered for a prize, but are not eligible to receive a cash prize

In addition, a President's Artist Prize will be bestowed upon a Collegiate or Professional artist (one prize) for the best performance of a work by Frédéric Chopin. Visit <http://seattlepianocompetition.org/competition/prizes/> for complete information, including the cash

value of the above secondary prizes. A work from the list above is not required to participate in the 2026 SIPC.

VIDEO PREPARATION

It is to the participant's benefit to provide a video recording of high quality. Recordings with too much background noise or distortion make it difficult for adjudicators to render a fair judgment of technical and artistic qualities. However, recordings need not be professionally edited. The SIPF requires the video link(s) to be hosted on YouTube. The program may be recorded in one sitting with a single take, or works may be captured singly in separate links. Furthermore, observe the following requirements:

- the camera angle must be fixed (no multiple angles), clearly showing the performer's both hands, face, and feet at all times
- the footage must contain no more than 5 seconds of leader (silence) before the commencement of the performance
- the footage may not contain any vocalizing or other audible clues (including sound of footwear) that may give clues as to the identity of the performer (however, the links may contain whatever text you wish)
- multiple links must be listed in the application according to your desired presentation order, including the order desired during the live final round
- all performances recorded strictly by memory

Although the video quality must be clear enough to recognize the participant and speak to the authenticity of the performance, the most important aspect is the audio quality. The use of a well-prepared and maintained acoustic piano is strongly urged, as are the efforts taken to produce an audio of high fidelity.

Avoid recording performances with low-grade cell phones and video cameras with built-in microphones unless they are sufficient to capture a higher fidelity audio. Such devices often compress the sound (removing the natural ambiance and compressing dynamic sound levels), yielding poor audio quality. Participants may opt to record at a professional studio, record audio from a sound recording device (such as a flash recorder), or use a higher-grade camera with external microphones and dedicated sound capturing capability.

Note that any auditory identification of the performer, including spoken dialogue, or vocalization by the participant or coach will result in disqualification of the participant without notice or refund. The SIPF takes no responsibility nor is liable for technical errors resulting from recording methods or failure for a video to stream. Ensure that the video link is available for view by a third party without special permission control.

Review all tracks carefully and completely so that they are free of flaws or other unanticipated issues.

PRELIMINARY ROUND PROCEDURES

All preliminary performers will be numbered randomly, and made anonymous to the listening committee. During audio-only playback by a mediator, an assembled pool of artist-teachers will survey the video performances in each category. These committees will not be assembled until after all applications have been collected in order to facilitate fair and unbiased adjudication (such as might occur when assigning a juror to a category in which a former or current student may be participating). Six preliminary round participants from each category will be selected by the listening committee to compete in the final live round to the general public in Seattle, Washington during the weekend of September 26-27, 2026.

Selected finalists will be notified shortly on or after August 10, 2026. At that time, selected participants must declare their intent to continue to the live final round in Seattle in September, 2026. Failure to appear will result in the ineligibility to receive a prize or a mention of finalist.

status. Selected finalists who choose to appear at the final round must notify the SIPF board in writing (e-mails are acceptable) by August 17, 2026. No change to the program is allowed after preliminary round submission.

Although preliminary recordings are submitted in video format, all rounds of the 2026 SIPC are still conducted blind. The purpose of video is for the SIPF board to authenticate the performance, but are played without video reference to the listening committee.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

All preliminary round submission and applications must be submitted by May 15, 2026. For those submitting applications near the deadline, please ensure that all required application materials have been collected and prepared, including biographical sketch and photo. Incomplete applications or improper submittals may result in delay, or potentially the participant's disqualification without notice or refund.

FINAL ROUND

Taking place on September 26-27 in Seattle, selected finalists will be notified of their status on August 10, 2026 via email. Additionally, participants who do not pass the preliminary stage will be notified via email. The SIPF reserves the right to recognize those non-finalist applicants whose entries were nonetheless exemplary, including distinctions such as 'semi-finalist', as well as notify one or more alternates in the event that a selected finalist declines to appear for the live final round event. These alternate participants will receive further communication in their August 10th email notifications.

Once selected to appear as a finalist, no changes to the preliminary program will be permitted. Participants have until August 17 to reply confirming their intent to appear during the live final round event.

FINAL ROUND PROCEDURES

A finalist will not be required to perform earlier than their assigned time in the case of a last-minute finalist cancelation or absence. The performance order within each category will be randomly determined. Once announced, any request to alter the order or time slot to appear will be denied. All finalists (and unranked winners in the case of Youth, Ages 9 and under participants) must appear at their respective performance time in Illsley Ball Recital Hall at Benaroya during the Seattle Int'l Piano Festival during September 26, 2026 for all Youth participants, and September 27, 2026 for Professional Artists and Collegiate Artists.

All finalists must plan to attend the award ceremony during the evening of awards immediately following the Professional Artists final round and Guest Artist Recital on September 27, at which time prizes will be announced.

Exception: For Youth, Ages 9 and under winners, any additional awards will be distributed immediately after their winners' performance on Saturday, September 26. These winners need not attend the Sunday, September 27 event.

All finalists must be prepared to stay through the end of the festival weekend in the case that one will be asked to perform during the winners' concert. Finalists must appear and participate during these events, including winners' concert concert at the end of the festival in order to maintain eligibility to be recognized for an award and to receive award prize money.

All award winners of the 2026 competition must cite their award in any and all future professional promotional and developmental literature, including, but not limited to, performer biographical profiles, promotional posters, printed programs, resumes, and the like. Whenever possible, the winner must cite their award in the full format: "[NAME OF AWARD] in the [PARTICIPATION CATEGORY] of the 2026 Sonare International Piano Competition". If and only

when a full citation is not possible, the winner may cite: “[NAME OF AWARD], ’26 Sonare Int’l Piano Competition”.

Any act of dishonesty during any stage of proceedings of the 2026 competition will result in the immediate expulsion of the participant from any performance opportunity, distinction, mention, or award during the 2026 SIPC.

Note that to sustain the equitable nature of the SIPC, the 2026 jury will be seated behind a curtain during the proceedings of the final round, having access to no information that may identify a finalist by name, gender, or nationality. Jurors will adjudicate without visual stimuli based solely on sound. Finalists may not approach nor identify themselves to any juror prior to the announcement of winners at the end of the 2026 SIPC. This includes any written or spoken contact regardless of the communication platform.

PRACTICE

Finalists will be offered practice time prior to the competition to those who request such accommodation for non-local finalists only. Such amenities are off-site and may require travel at one’s personal expense. Such practice opportunities are not guaranteed. Due to the limited availability of instruments, we cannot guarantee more than one hour of practice time in total. A brief warm-up will be possible in the dressing room of the performance hall immediately prior to the participant’s start time.

JURORS’ DECISIONS

The final round will be judged by a pool of internationally trained artists musicians and pedagogues (see JURY on the website). The jurors are not permitted to evaluate a current or former student with whom he or she has worked during the past five years. In such situations, a nonpartisan juror will be selected to substitute in a given category, or cast a vote in the case of a tie. The decision of the jury on both the preliminary round and final round is final and not subject to question, review, nor appeal. All participants must agree to waive any and all claims of liability (see ‘Release, Waiver, and Sworn Statement’).

Preliminary round participants receive no written commentary other than a general letter from the organization concerning the results of the preliminary round. Finalists will have the opportunity to speak with jurors after the announcement of awards during the evenings following competitive events of the SIPF.

All winners, finalists, and semi-finalists will be listed on www.seattlepianocompetition.org by name shortly following the 2026 SIPC. The SIPF will deny any request to be exempt from this list. Current instructors of finalists and winners will also be listed on our Master Teachers page.

TRAVEL AND ACCOMMODATION

Finalists must be prepared to travel to Seattle, Washington, USA at one’s own expense. The organizers do not provide housing. A limited number of host opportunities among Seattle area residents and SIPF supporters may be available upon request. Such accommodations are available solely for Collegiate and Professional Artist finalists who travel alone. The SIPF will deny any request for such accommodations by finalists among any youth participants. The organizers offer no guarantee that they will be able to fulfill a host family stay request. Non US residents are responsible for obtaining a visa, if necessary, to participate in the final round.

RELEASE, WAIVER, AND SWORN STATEMENT

I, the PARTICIPANT or the PARENT or LEGAL GUARDIAN of the AGE 17 OR YOUNGER PARTICIPANT (hereinafter collectively referred to as "PARTICIPANT"), hereby comply fully and in good faith with all regulations, rules, and procedures as outlined in the 2026 Sonare International Piano Competition Complete Rules, Release, Waiver, and Sworn Statement (hereinafter referred to as "Agreement"). I understand that the Seattle International Piano Festival (hereinafter referred to as "SIPC") reserves the right to prohibit from future activities any PARTICIPANT and/or the teacher or coach of the PARTICIPANT for failure to adhere to said rules. The participant agrees to treat the organizers, volunteers, and adjudicators of the 2026 Sonare International Piano Competition (hereinafter referred to as "SIPC") with respect, and promises not to harass or malign any such individuals connected with or about the event's activities, including, but not limited to its guest adjudicators. Furthermore, the participant hereby affirms to the fact that all information entered in conjunction with the participant's application is true and accurate. The participant also promises to adhere to the rules and procedures set forth in the Agreement.

Release

The PARTICIPANT, hereby waives, releases, and grants to and for the benefit of the SIPC and/or its assignees, any and all rights the participant may have to any recordings, videography, and/or photographs made by or for the SIPC of any performance or event organized or sponsored by it. The participant understands and agrees that by virtue of this waiver, release, and grant of rights, the SIPC will have the right to make full and unrestricted use of such recordings, videography, and/or photographs, including without limitation, in advertisements, commercial ventures, and promotions and for the sale or lease of same, without any fee or other compensation owed to the participant.

Waiver

The PARTICIPANT, fully and in good faith intending to be bound thereby, does hereby promise not to initiate any claim, lawsuit, or other legal action, pertaining to any action or omission by the SIPC relating directly or indirectly to the SIPC as to which application is herewith being made. This promise is made as a condition of the application, and in consideration for the SIPC's processing and evaluation of the application. This promise constitutes an acceptance and agreement by the participant that, for example, decisions by competition judges are final and unappealable, and the physical spaces of the competition/festival venues are reasonably safe and appropriate for their intended purposes. (However, this promise is not in any respect limited to the above two examples.) The participant intends that this promise be fully binding upon the participant, as well as upon heirs, successors, and assignees of the participant. This promise applies to the application process, the competition, and all events under the purview of the 2026 SIPC and Festival and its associated activities and/or events.

Sworn Statement

The PARTICIPANT hereby certifies that all recordings of the repertoire herein which have been submitted to the 2026 SIPC piano competition or its associated festivals for consideration have been performed and/or recorded by the participant completely from memory, without the use of musical scores, notes, or auxiliary musical notation of any kind, unless an exemption as outlined in the 2026 Sonare International Piano Competition Complete Rules grants such waiver. The participant agrees to treat the organizers, volunteers, and adjudicators of the 2026 SIPC with respect, and promises not to harass or malign any such individuals connected with or about the event's activities. The participant agrees to cite any award garnered during the proceedings of this event in all future promotional materials as set forth in the rules above. Furthermore, the participant hereby affirms to the fact that all information entered in conjunction with the participant's application is true and accurate. The participant also promises to adhere to a rules and guidelines set forth in pages 1 through 7 of the Agreement.

Furthermore, the Participant agrees to the following:

- This Agreement supersedes any prior written or oral Agreement, contains the entire Agreement, and there are no other promises or conditions in any other Agreement whether oral or written;
- This Agreement may be modified or amended by the SIPC;
- In the event that the SIPC requires the services of an attorney in connection with enforcement of this Agreement, or in the event that litigation is commenced, the prevailing party shall be entitled to reasonable attorney's fees;
- If any provisions of this Agreement are held to be invalid or unenforceable, the remaining provisions shall continue to be valid and enforceable. If a court finds that any provision of this Agreement is invalid or unenforceable, but that by limiting such provision it would become valid and enforceable, then such provision shall be deemed to be written, construed, and enforced as so limited;
- Failure of the SIPC to enforce any provision of this Agreement shall not be construed as a waiver or limitation of the SIPC's rights to subsequently enforce this Agreement;
- This Agreement shall be governed by the laws of the state of Washington and venue shall lie in King County; and
- This Agreement may be executed in any number of counterparts, all of which shall be deemed to be an original and constitute a single Agreement. An electronic transmission bearing any person's acceptance of the terms and conditions shall have the same force and effect as the original of this Agreement bearing such person's signature.

By clicking the "I agree to the terms and conditions below" selection on the electronic application for the 2026 SIPC, the participant fully affirms that the above statements in this agreement are true, and legally binding upon the participant.