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75 years of the ARD International Music Competition

“Olympic Games of Classical Music” – The Jubilee Edition

75th Edition of the ARD Music Competition – for Bassoon, Organ, Percussion and String Quartet – from August 30 to September 18

- ▶ Following a scaled-down version, the juries are again adjudicating in four categories, with Organ back after 15 years of absence.
- ▶ Out of 492 applications, 184 musicians from 32 countries have qualified for the Competition.
- ▶ The jury captains are Martin Grubinger (percussion), Vineta Sareika (string quartet), Gustavo Núñez (bassoon) and Andres Uiibo (organ).
- ▶ Nina Šenk, Enjott Schneider, Johannes X. Schachtner and Camille Pépin are the composers of this year's commissioned works.
- ▶ Live streams and cooperative ventures with creators will further expand the Competition's presence in the digital arena.

Every September for the past 75 years, exceptional young musicians from all over the world have travelled to Munich to test their skills before an expert jury in the ARD International Music Competition. At the “Olympic Games of classical music” (Sir Simon Rattle) the winners are not those who perform higher, faster or further, but those who come closest to artistic perfection.

“Great careers sometimes begin with a single transformative moment. For 75 years, the ARD Music Competition has been creating just such moments for superlative young musical talent. This is where artists step up to the international stage, gain visibility and take the first decisive step on their career path. The ARD regards this commitment both as a labour of love and as a fulfilment of its brief as a public-service broadcaster.”

– Björn Wilhelm, BR Director Culture, Entertainment & Science

The Jubilee Edition of 2026

This year, 184 young musicians from 32 countries will travel from five continents to put their abilities to the test in the Competition. After a slimmed-down version last year, the juries will again give their verdict in four disciplines: Bassoon, Organ, Percussion and String Quartet. After fifteen years of absence, the organ – “King of Instruments” – is making a right royal comeback.

This Jubilee year sees the Competition represented even more strongly in the heart of Munich at a wider range of venues than ever: performance locations include the Herkulesaal, the Amerikahaus, the Jesuit Church of St. Michael, the Prinzregententheater, the University of Music and Drama (HMTM) and the Literaturhaus.

The final Prizewinners’ Concert with the Symphony Orchestra of Bayerischer Rundfunk under the direction of Dennis Russell Davies, Principal Conductor of the MDR Symphony Orchestra, will take place in the Herkulesaal on September 18.

The fulfilment of 75 years as a competitive event will be celebrated on November 7 with a gala concert in Munich’s Prinzregententheater – together with previous prizewinners such as Sharon Kam, Lukas Sternath und Thomas Quasthoff.

For all the Olympic enthusiasm, there is one thing that really matters to us, and that is to give a voice to young musicians. The decisions here are not made by an algorithm or a click count but by a jury of experts who are concentrating exclusively on the artistic interpretation. This has become a rarity and for that very reason is enormously valuable. The media momentum of ARD gives prizewinners a platform that reaches far beyond the concert hall. This is all the more important at a time when the music business is in a state of flux and new talent has more of a struggle than ever to make itself visible. We are a reliable and dependable channel for budding careers.

– Meret Forster, Artistic Director of the ARD International Music Competition

The Competition on digital channels

Classical music live, wherever you go: In this Jubilee year, the ARD Music Competition opens up its broad digital platform even further for an international audience. From the semi-final onwards, 18 live streams will transmit competition proceedings directly to their audience – boosted by cooperation with the vibrant musical creator scene, featuring figures like organist and YouTube creator Paul Fey and multi-percussionist Vivi Vassileva, who take classical music into new spaces and to new target groups.

The ARD Music Competition has international reach: if you win, all doors are open to you. As Frank Sinatra put it: If you can make it there, you’ll make it anywhere.

– Martin Grubinger, percussionist and jury chairman 2026

The long history of the ARD Music Competition has featured more than 11,000 participants and 983 winners from six continents, a total of 89 works commissioned and premiered. For a host of prizewinners – such as Mitsuko Uchida, Jessye Norman, Sol Gabetta, Thomas Quasthoff and the Quatuor Ébène – taking part in the ARD Music Competition was the springboard to a global career.

Further Information

You will find full details of the daily schedule, participants, competition results and the prizewinner concerts constantly updated on the website of the ARD Music Competition [HERE](#)

Photos and additional press material is available for download [HERE](#)

Press Contact

PS Music Berlin

Peggy Schmidt, Simone Dollmann

mail: ard-wettbewerb@psmusicberlin.com

phone: +49 (0)171 689 01 12

BR Press Liaison

Anna Scholder

mail: anna.scholder@br.de

phone: + 49 (0)89 5900-10552

