

Music

Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz Announces 12 Semifinalists For Its Int'l Guitar Competition

WBGO | By Nate Chinen
11/11/2019 at 7:16 AM EST



Pianist Tom Oren, winner of the 2018 Hancock Competition, with Concord's John Burk and Herbie Hancock. *Steve Munding/Herbie Hancock Institute Of Jazz*

The [Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz](#) has announced 12 semifinalists for its International Guitar Competition, to be held next month in Washington, D.C.

Previously known as the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, the Hancock Competition is among the most prominent events of its kind. Last year saw its first edition

under the new title, reflecting a larger change in the institute's branding; the instrumental focus was piano, and the winner was Tom Oren, who originally hails from Israel.

Half of this year's semifinalists are United States residents, each based in a different state. The other half hail from six different countries. In alphabetical order, they are: Cecil Alexander (Muskegon, Mich.); Joseph Bell (Princeton, N.J.); Will Brahm (Portland, Ore.); François Chanvallon (Paris, France); Lucian Gray (Toronto, Canada); Max Light (Bethesda, Md.); Armen Movsesyan (Los Angeles, Calif.); Evgeny Pobozhiv (Seversk, Russia); Matt Sewell (St. Louis, Mo.); Juan Vidaurre (Caracas, Venezuela); Tal Yahalom (Jerusalem, Israel); and Francesco Zampini (Rome, Italy).

These 12 guitarists will converge in the semifinals on Dec. 2, at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian. There they'll perform for a panel of judges composed of notable guitarists, including Pat Metheny, John Scofield, Stanley Jordan and Russell Malone. (Tickets for the semifinals are free, but limited; they'll be distributed at the National Museum of the American Indian at 11 a.m. on the day of the event, first-come, first-served.)

From this group, three finalists will go on to compete at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on Dec. 3, as part of a gala concert featuring music by Hancock, vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater, saxophonist Bobby Watson and many others. Also during the concert, the Hancock Institute will present its Maria Fisher Founder's Award to trumpeter and composer Terence Blanchard, a longtime director of the Institute's postgraduate college program.

The winning guitarist will receive \$30,000 in scholarship funds, and a guaranteed recording contract with the Concord Music Group. Even more significant, perhaps, is the prestige of the title: past winners of the Monk Competition include major artists like saxophonist Joshua Redman, trumpeter Ambrose Akinmusire, and singers Jazzmeia Horn and Cécile McLorin Salvant.



Credit Steve Mundinger / Thelonious Monk Institute Of Jazz

Lage Lund, left, performing alongside George Benson at the 2005 Monk Competition finals.

Guitar hasn't been a focus of the event since 2005, when the three finalists were Lage Lund, Miles Okazaki and David Mooney. Lund won first prize that year, but all three players went on to notable careers.

At a time when it can seem harder than ever to garner attention, that could be true again of the winner's circle this year.