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## Arts Desk

# Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz International Piano Competition announces 11 semifinalists, including two from Philadelphia

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One of the most prestigious honors in jazz will go to an up-and-coming pianist later this month, and there's a decent chance it will be someone with roots in Philadelphia. Joe Block and Jordan Isaiah Williams, both born and raised in Philly, are among the 11 semifinalists in the [Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz International Piano Competition](#), which will be held Oct. 14 and 15 at the new Perelman Performing Arts Center in Lower Manhattan.

They'll be up against a cadre of other gifted young players — including another Pennsylvania native, Connor Rohrer, who hails from Mechanicsburg; and two seasoned competitors from New Jersey, Caelan Cardello (Teaneck) and Esteban Castro (Hackensack). The six other semifinalists, announced today, are Alan Bartuš of Lučenec, Slovakia; Paul Cornish of Houston, Texas; Brandon Goldberg of Miami, Florida; Dabin Ryu of Seoul, South Korea; Jahari Stampley of Chicago, Illinois; and Jenny Xu of Surrey and Vancouver, British Columbia.

These semifinalists will compete on Saturday, Oct. 14, each performing for 15 minutes with a rhythm team of bassist Rodney Whitaker and drummer Carl Allen. An all-star panel of judges — including Hancock, the institute's chairman, along with Danilo Pérez, Bill Charlap, Hiromi, and Philly's own Orrin Evans — will select three pianists to advance to the competition finals on Sunday, Oct. 15.

There they will perform on an All-Star Gala Concert with musical direction by multiple Grammy-winning arranger John Beasley, and performances by (among others) past competition winners Ambrose Akinmusire and Ben Williams, and past judges Terri Lyne Carrington and Joe Lovano. The Hancock Institute will also present its Maria Fisher Founder's Award to vocalist and educator Dianne Reeves, and its Herbie Hancock Humanitarian Award to the architect Frank Gehry.

The winner of the Hancock Competition — formerly known as the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, and last held in 2019 — will receive a \$50,000 prize. (Second and third prizes are respectively \$25,000 and \$10,000.) Three of the named semifinalists — Cardello, Castro and Cornish — were also among the contenders at the 2023 American Pianists Association Awards, and spotlighted in [a related episode](#) of Jazz Night in America.

Block, who received formative training at the Philadelphia Clef Club of Jazz and Performing Arts and the Kimmel Center's Creative Music Program, went on to earn a bachelor's degree in American Studies at Columbia University and a master's at the Juilliard School. He's the musical director for Jazz at Lincoln Center's Future of Jazz Orchestra, and a cofounder of the Philadelphia Ambassador

Big Band. He also has ties to the Boyer College of Music and Dance at Temple, where he'll [lead a quintet](#) at the Rite of Swing Cafe on Nov. 2.

Williams also received early jazz training at the Clef Club, as well as classical studies at the Settlement Music School; he was a preteen when he played his first gig, at the African American Museum in Philadelphia. But as a Presidential Scholar at George Washington University, he opted to major in biomedical engineering with a minor in music. He has worked extensively as a sideman — notably with saxophonist Bobby Watson, who brought him to the Newport Jazz Festival this summer as part of his All-Star Quintet.

WRTI will report from the Hancock Competition on Oct. 16, so be sure to check back in.