



## **The Leeds International Piano Competition returns in 2024 with new measures to make it fairer than ever before**

- **65 pianists from 18 countries announced for the First Round of the 2024 Competition, selected after a record number of applications**
  - **New measures implemented to tackle the long-standing issue of male dominance in the piano world, including blind judging in the selection process and unconscious-bias training for jury members**
  - **New Alexandra Dariescu Award for an outstanding performance of a work by a female composer**
  - **The Competition will take place in Leeds and Bradford from 11-21 September 2024**
    - **Tickets on sale from today**
- Booking links and information at [LeedsPiano.com](https://LeedsPiano.com)**

Sixty-five of the world's best aspiring pianists are today [5 February 2024] announced as the participants for the First Round of The Leeds International Piano Competition, to take place in six centres around the world, in April 2024.

The internationally renowned triennial event – established by Dame Fanny Waterman, Rosalyn Lyons and Marion Thorpe, Countess of Harewood in 1963 and firmly established as among the most influential of all music competitions – returns in September 2024 for its 21<sup>st</sup> edition.

Hailing from 18 countries and all aged between 20 and 29, the pianists will compete for one of the most prestigious prizes in the music world.

The pianists were selected from a record number of applications, which saw 366 pianists aged 20-29 from 40 countries apply, a 39% increase compared with 2021.

For the first time the Competition implemented blind judging in the shortlisting process to select the pianists for the First Round in April 2024.

Already recognised as a trailblazer among music competitions - and for having the highest artistic standards and integrity – the Competition introduced blind selection as a measure towards addressing a prevailing issue of male dominance in the piano world.

*“We need to create a more equitable stage and address the gender gap, a longstanding issue in the piano world”* says Fiona Sinclair, CEO of The Leeds. *“The Leeds’ own record shows that just two women have triumphed in the past 20 Editions of the Competition, only a third of our applications this year have come from women and only 18% of the most recent top 40 international piano competitions have been won by women. The imbalance becomes even more marked at the very top level of the world stage where, across many of the leading festivals and venues around the world, male pianists continue to dominate.”*

Despite The Leeds’ strong history of female leadership, only 31% of applications came from female pianists. This is reflected in the First Round, with 20 women included in the 65 competitors participating in the First Round in 2024.

The Competition has also introduced unconscious-bias training for all jury members – including prominent musicians such as Dame Imogen Cooper, Eleanor Alberga, Ingrid Fliter, Mariam Batishvilli, Pavel Kolesnikov, Sa Chen and Till Fellner – and offers bespoke support to all competitors to ensure a more balanced, fair and inclusive competition.

New for 2024 is the introduction of the Alexandra Dariescu Award for an outstanding performance of a work by woman composer. Dariescu – the renowned Romanian pianist who also worked with The Leeds to create a Leeds education initiative called Count Me In! and who will co-present the Competition in 2024 – is known not just for her artistry, but also for championing inclusion and diversity and for achieving gender equality in her concerto programming. As part of this, The Leeds has increased the number of works by women in the Competition repertoire, including the addition of the Clara Schumann Concerto in A minor.

Alexandra Dariescu says *“I am thrilled to introduce the Alexandra Dariescu Award at The Leeds. Mirroring our society in concert programmes, showing both sides of history and shining a light on the often-overlooked brilliance of women composers has long been at the very core of my work. By elevating the representation of women’s voices in the Competition repertoire and recognising outstanding performances, we are not only enriching the musical experience for both competitors and audiences, but also contributing to a more inclusive and equitable musical landscape.”*

The 65 competitors come from 18 countries, including Australia (1), Austria (1), Canada (3), China (19), Croatia (1), France (2), Germany (1), Hungary (1), Italy (2), Japan (5), Russia (6), Slovenia (1), Spain (2), South Korea (12), Taiwan (2), UK (2), USA (3) and Vietnam (1).

A notable trend among the Competitors for the 2024 competition is the shift in the geography and ethnicity of participants, with an increasingly significant number of pianists (60%) coming from Central and East Asia, and over 63% identifying their ethnicity as Asian. This reflects a broader global shift in classical music education and performance toward the

East Asian region, where learning the piano is considered an essential part of a child's education and preparation for success.

Adam Gatehouse, Artistic Director, said: *“Our recent memorable visit to China has served to bring home the extremely high regard that The Leeds enjoys on the world stage, and how much Central and East Asia is contributing to the world of piano. With a global audience over 5 million in 2021, and with our unrivalled prize package, we are proud of what we have achieved. But there is still much more to be done. In the spirit of innovation and inclusivity, we want to be pioneers in the competition world. Our Competitor + programme of career-enhancing activities for all the competitors coming to Leeds, and our striving for a more equitable gender balance in the piano world, will we hope bring about a long-term shift in attitude to what a major competition can offer.”*

Offering medallists not only significant cash prizes and recognition but a major career launch, The Leeds' pioneering prize package includes artist representation with Askonas Holt, a record deal with Warner Classics, tours with Steinway & Sons in South Korea and Europe, and prestigious concerts in the UK and beyond. There is also important career-development advice offered to all competitors in the Leeds' innovative Competitor+ programme. Recent Gold Medallists Alim Beisembayev (2021) and Eric Lu (2018) are now well-established international figures of classical music, joining past medallists such as Alessio Bax, Federico Colli, Sunwook Kim, Radu Lupu, Murray Perahia and Mitsuko Uchida.

The First Round will take place in April across six international centres, Berlin, Paris, Vienna, Beijing, Seoul and New York, where aspiring pianists' performance will be filmed and shared digitally with the jury. This innovative online model, initiated in 2021 in response to COVID-19 restrictions, has proven popular among both pianists and the judging panel and significantly reduces carbon emissions.

The live rounds of the Competition will return to Yorkshire from 11 – 21 September 2024. The Leeds' principal partner, The University of Leeds, will host the Second Round and Semi-Finals at the iconic Great Hall.

For the first time, the Final of the competition will relocate outside the city due to renovations at the Leeds Town Hall. The host venue for the Finals will be the historic St George's Hall in Bradford, known for its excellent 'shoebox' acoustic. This relocation coincides with Bradford's status as the 'UK City of Culture in 2025,' providing an opportunity to share music made in Bradford with a global audience of millions through multiple streaming services and the BBC. The partner for the competition Finals is the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, which also offer major performance opportunities for the medallists.

In addition to the Competition, the Award-winning Leeds Piano Trail returns for a spectacular festival of sculpture and music, bringing pianos and more to the streets of both cities in summer 2024. Playable pianos will accompany a set of iconic sculptures made from upcycled pianos, emphasizing the competition's commitment to the environment and to wider engagement with the public. Further details of the plans will be unveiled in due course.

For full details of the 2024 Leeds International Piano Competition are available at [LeedsPiano.Com](https://LeedsPiano.Com)

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**Notes to editors:**

Full information about The Leeds is available at [LeedsPiano.Com](https://LeedsPiano.Com).

An EPK with details and images of pianists and venues is available [HERE](#).

A selection of images from the 2021 Competition are available [HERE](#).

**Competition Schedule 2024**

January	First Round Competitors announced
April	First Round in six international centres around the world
May	Finalists announced
11-13 September	Second Round in Leeds
15-17 September	Semi-Finals in Leeds
20 & 21 September	Finals in Bradford