

2024 Lee Strebel Memorial Youth Concerto Competition Results

Grand Prize Winner, Senior Division

Nathaniel Shuhan, Piano

Hometown: Ithaca, New York

Teacher: Andrea Merrill, Opus Ithaca



Bio

Nathaniel Shuhan is a junior at Ithaca High School. An enthusiastic member of the IHS Wind Ensemble, the IHS Jazz Band and pianist for the CCOYO, Nathaniel enjoys making music with others. For five summers he studied piano at Luzerne Music Center with Aniko Szokody and Marco Stuparevic. In the summer of 2024, he spent six weeks in the piano program at Brevard Music Center studying with Donna Lee and Michael Chertock. Nathaniel was the winner of Luzerne Music Center's 2023 Senior Concerto Competition and in the Fall of 2023 placed second in the Nazareth University Piano Competition and was winner of the Diversity in Music award at the same competition. He also won the CCOYO Concerto Competition in 2023. Recently, he placed as runner up in the Senior Piano Division of the Heddy Killian Empire State Competition and was also the 2024 Skaneateles Festival Robinson Award recipient. A first place winner in the 2023 Cayuga Chamber Orchestra Youth Orchestra Concerto Competition, Nathaniel performed the first movement of the Grieg Piano Concerto. When Nathaniel is not playing the piano or the flute, he enjoys golfing with his brothers, hanging with family and playing basketball with friends.

Getting to know Nathaniel...

Inspiration

I think what drew me to the piano was the fact that it was very accessible, and we had one in our house. My older brother played piano and I always heard him practicing. I think that, combined with my musical family, is what drew me to the piano, and music in general.

On performing and competitions

Competitions are definitely different from other performances. The fact that there are only judges listening and no audience makes me a little more nervous. As for

preparation, I don't prepare any differently than I would for a concert. I still see competitions as performance opportunities but just usually with higher stakes. That being said, I do have little things that I always do before a performance. I eat a banana, make sure I take a nap, and if it is cold out, I use hand warmers to keep my hands warm before I go on stage.

I still get nervous performing, but I think it is something that I have learned to embrace. There are ways to calm your nerves, such as breathing, or eating a banana, but nothing can supplement proper preparation. I find that the more I prepare, and especially practice performing for people, the less nervous I get.

I am always looking for new ways to put myself out there and enter different competitions. The CCO concerto competition was a great opportunity to learn a new concerto, and compete to play with the orchestra.

On the Lee Strebel Competition

I think supporting the arts is very important, and I am grateful that the Lee Strebel Memorial Youth Concerto Competition helps support high schoolers on their musical journey. I am honored to be a recipient of this award, and greatly looking forward to performing next season. I am also thrilled to be the second Shuhan to win this competition; my brother Sam won it in 2010.



Honorable Mention, Junior Division

Svana Lai, Violin

Hometown: Ithaca, New York

Teacher: Asher Wulfman, Opus Ithaca

Bio

Svana is a freshman at Lansing High School, where she plays the violin in its symphony and string orchestras and plays the clarinet in its concert band. She is a violinist in the CCO Youth Orchestra, Ithaca Suzuki Music Education Chamber Orchestra and Heifetz Violin Ensemble.



Svana is also a competitive figure skater in both free skate and ice dance. She is a three-time US Figure Skating Gold Medalist, and has won numerous medals in regional, state and national figure skating events.

Getting to know Svana...

Inspiration

I have always loved how expressive violin is and how well it can convey different emotions when played.

On performing and Competitions

I believed that participating in a competition related to violin for the first time would gain me a new life experience, and offer me another opportunity to learn how to conquer stage fright.

To prepare for this competition, borrowing from my experience in figure skating competitions, I planned ahead with my teacher, and tried my best to run my practice routines whenever possible. When the competition day was finally approaching, I played through the piece daily, and paid special attention to slow practicing the technical passages, but avoided over practicing. On the competition day, I tried not to feel overwhelmed (although I truly was) by attending the rehearsals of two string ensembles on that Saturday morning just as I regularly do. Then I arrived at the competition venue early to get ready for my turn. I kept reminding myself to trust my training and practice, and to believe that I was going to deliver as best a performance as I could give.

On the Lee Strebel Competition

I felt so fortunate that the CCO's Lee Strebel Memorial Youth Concerto Competition offered me and other young musicians in the region this valuable opportunity, and extremely honored that I was one of the honorees. I want to express my most sincere gratitude to my previous teacher, Mr. Gabriel Meza, and my current teacher, Mr. Asher Wulfman, for their inspiring teaching, patient guidance and tremendous belief in me. I would also like to share a quote from the email Mr. Meza sent me after the competition, "... remember to always play because you enjoy playing and to make the highest artistic quality possible! Sometimes there is no control over how other people will respond to your playing, but you can make the best music you possibly can and that will be more rewarding than you could ever ask for!"

