

## 2023 Lee Strebel Memorial Youth Concerto Competition Winners

### First Prize Winner, Senior Division

#### Catalina Wooldridge, Cello

Hometown: Pultneyville, New York

Teacher: Rosemary Elliott



**Bio:** Catalina is a 16-year-old cellist who loves different genres of music: classical, jazz, bluegrass, Broadway musicals, and pop music. One of her favorite performing opportunities has been to pop up on people's porches in her hometown, and play a mini-concert. This idea sprung from COVID and the lockdown when there was no live music, as a way to bring some joy and connection to her community during a difficult time. Similarly, she enjoys participating in the national movement, Play for the Vote, which encourages musicians across the country to perform at polling sites to add a peaceful and thoughtful environment. She also like busking at public events or on street corners. These types of performances give her immediate feedback from the audience as well as an intimate connection to the music and the people she is interacting with. Making these connections with the

audience and community are why she is so passionate about playing music. Her goal is to continue to develop as a performer who connects with others through music, whether on a stage in a performance hall, on the street with passersby, or in a setting where hearts need lifting like a prison or a shelter. She wants people to feel the love, comfort, and joy that music provides in such a palpable way.

**Inspiration:** I chose the instrument when I was 8 years old and had my first lesson on my 9th birthday. I have always loved the sound of the cello; it stood out to me above all other instruments because of the deep rich tones.

**On competitions:** I also enjoy performing in competitions because there is an added excitement and competitive buzz particularly against yourself, which elevates one's performance.

## Runner Up, Senior Division

### Paul Di Folco, Piano

Hometown: Fayetteville, New York

Teacher: Russell Posegate



**Bio:** Paul Di Folco is a senior at Manlius Pebble Hill School. His pianistic accomplishments include participation in the 2022 Forte/Piano Summer Academy at the Cornell-Westfield Center for Historical Keyboards, four-time participation in the Ithaca College Summer Piano Institute, 2022 Claudette Sorel Fellow, 1st prize in the 2023 Civic Morning Musicals Youth Concerto Competition, and a live performance of the Goldberg Variations in 2021. Paul also plays the viola for his school orchestra and has

participated in NYSSMA and regional festivals several times.

**Inspiration:** The piano has been the instrument I've played since I was five, so for years I never put much thought into it. However, today I love the piano because of the unmatched variety of sounds that can be produced with so few variables of input. With keystroke speed, key release, and pedalling alone, the piano can accomplish anything from the singing of a single voice to the crashing sound of a whole orchestra.

**On Competitions:** Unlike other competitions, the CCO Youth Concerto Competition allowed me to choose a concerto of my choice rather than picking from a restricted repertoire list and gave me the opportunity to perform the whole concerto, not just a single movement. This freedom of choice and opportunity for a fully-fledged performance makes it an excellent opportunity for any soloist wishing to play with an orchestra.

## Honorable Mention, Senior Division

### Riley Hubisz, Flute

Hometown: Ithaca, New York

Teacher: Elizabeth Shuhan



**Bio:** Riley is a sophomore at Ithaca High School. He plays in the CCO Youth Orchestra (CCOYO) as well as the IHS Wind Ensemble, and is a varsity runner on the IHS cross country and track teams.

**Inspiration:** I was inspired to choose the flute upon reading a book in first grade in which the main character could hold their breath for two minutes because they played the flute (I have since exceeded that measure by almost a minute.) I also really enjoyed the flute excerpt from Peter and the Wolf by Prokofiev.

**On Competitions:** Despite the large amount of work I put into competitions compared to regular

performances, I still feel less nervous at competition time than at performances due to the smaller crowd of people watching me.

## Honorable Mention, Junior Division

### Joni Woods, Cello

Hometown: Ithaca, New York

Teacher: Zachary Sweet



**Bio:** Joni is an 8th grader at Boynton Middle School in Ithaca. Joni has been practicing cello at Ithaca Talent Education for 8 years, and enjoys playing in the CCO Youth Orchestra, the Boynton orchestra and chamber orchestra. Joni also plays French horn in the middle school band, and practices many styles of dance on a competitive dance team.

**Why the Cello:** I started out playing the violin, but then I decided that I wanted to play the cello instead, and I don't regret that decision. One of the things I enjoy most about the cello is its range, and how you can do so much with that range.

### **Honorable Mention, Junior Division Cynthia Zhang**

Hometown: Ithaca, New York

Teacher: Elizabeth Shuhan



**Bio:** Flautist Cynthia Zhang is from Ithaca, New York, and is currently an 8th grader at DeWitt Middle School. Cynthia was principal flautist in the Junior Area All-State Band, and attended Luzerne Music Center 2022. In her free time, she enjoys playing tennis, hiking, drawing, and reading.

**On Competitions:** For me, performing in a competition was a very challenging and rewarding experience. Before this competition, I had only mostly performed in local recitals, so this was a step out of my comfort zone. I learned a lot from not only the competition itself, but also from all the preparation that went into the competition. The day before the competition, I played

over the more challenging parts of my piece, and made sure that I'm comfortable playing through the entire piece. I like to get a good warm-up in on the day of the competition, and take deep breaths to stay calm.