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MSU's Inaugural International Piano Competition:

Free public events showcase elite young pianists from around the world.

EAST LANSING, Mich. — The Michigan State University College of Music invites the public to experience the artistry of ten extraordinary young pianists at the inaugural [Ralph Votapek International Young Artist Competition](#), taking place **August 15 and 17**. This international competition for pianists ages 14–18 is designed to spotlight emerging talent on a prominent stage—with finalists competing for more than \$10,000 in prizes.

Named in honor of longtime MSU piano professor and Van Cliburn gold medalist, Ralph Votapek, the competition is a new initiative that honors and fosters the next generation of classical pianists. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend both events:

- [Semifinal Round](#): Friday, August 15, 10:30 a.m.– 6:30 p.m.
- [Final Round](#): Sunday, August 17, 1:00– 6:00 p.m.

The events will be held in **Cook Recital Hall** in the Music Building on MSU's campus in East Lansing. **Admission is free** (ticket required), and audience members will also have the chance to cast their vote for a special Audience Favorite Award, presented during the final round. A panel of judges comprised of piano faculty from the College of Music will award additional top honors to the competitors. The public is also invited to attend masterclasses led by MSU Piano faculty for non-advancing semifinalists on Saturday, August 16 at 1:00 p.m. in Cook Recital Hall.

"We are thrilled to welcome such a remarkable group of young musicians to Michigan State University," says [Eric Zuber](#), Assistant Professor of Piano and director of the competition. "It's an incredible opportunity for audiences to hear the future of piano performance and celebrate the global talent converging right here in East Lansing."

[This year's competitors](#), ages 14–18, represent an international slate of rising artists, hailing from cities spanning the U.S., Canada, and China:

- Olivia Ajero, 16 – Nacogdoches, Texas, U.S.
- Yiming Chang, 18 – Natick, Massachusetts, U.S.
- Yunen Gu, 14 – Oakville, Ontario, Canada
- Dayou Kim, 16 – Richmond Hill, Ontario, Canada
- Olivia Larco, 15 – Pasadena, California, U.S.
- Alexander Liu, 14 – Millburn, New Jersey, U.S.
- TongTong Liu, 16 – Midland, Georgia, U.S.
- Samuel Lu, 17 – Salt Lake City, Utah, U.S.
- Celicia Thendean, 17 – Pleasanton, California, U.S.
- Zhongkai Zhang, 16 – Beijing, China

The Votapek Competition reflects the College's commitment to excellence in piano performance and piano pedagogy. For more about this inaugural competition, visit music.msu.edu/votapek, including detailed bios about each young pianist. Free tickets for this event can be acquired at music.msu.edu/events, or by calling 517-353-5340. For remote viewing, this event will also be streamed live via music.msu.edu/online.

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