

WFIMC now

WELCOME!

Welcome to *WFIMCnow*! We would like to reach out to you, discuss current issues, give you updates on the newest developments, and provide a new forum for all our members with this newsletter. Online media have become ever more important and continue to grow because of the restrictions on our daily lives caused by the Corona-virus, and we hope you will enjoy reading from/about the World Federation and our member competitions.

Recently, we have been asked about *Online Competitions* from many people, and a number of competitions are considering to hold at least part of their annual contests through the internet.

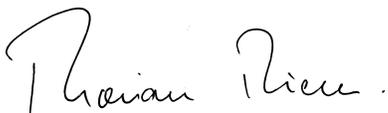
Is this really an alternative? Should we even discuss? We have asked four colleagues- Rob Hilberink, Jan Jiracek von Arnim, Sisi Ye and Marja-Leena Petas- for their opinion.

Below you will also find the latest update of the 2020

Calendar- please do not hesitate to let us know if we are missing any important changes.

We wish you a pleasant Easter weekend, stay safe and healthy!

Yours sincerely



Florian Riem, Secretary General



TIME FOR ONLINE COMPETITIONS

Should we go online in times of pandemic and lockdown? WFIMC asked four competitions

A number of member competitions are considering to try an online edition this year. Do you support this idea?

I do encourage the idea of online competitions. The reality is that nowadays the majority of our audience exists outside of the concert-hall. This holds true especially for competitions, most of the performances are observed (and judged) online. Having said that, nothing compares to being present at a live performance, as I truly believe that the sharing of energy between performer and audience contributes immensely to overall concert-experience.



ROB HILBERINK

Executive Director, International
Franz Liszt Competition, Hilversum



Tivoli-Vredenburg (Utrecht)

What would be the biggest issues against such a project?

The biggest issue with holding an online competition would be to maintain equality among participants (and judges). Are you letting them perform at the same venue? What instruments are they each working with? How do you make sure that the quality of recordings is good enough to be judged? And will the jury be in the same location while judging? For me it feels important to be in charge of the creation of the material. In other words, I would not let participants record something from their homes or local venue. I would want them to record in the same (or comparable) location using the same technical facilities. Furthermore I would want to make sure that the jury has the same possibilities to observe the performances... and clearly, in this situation you want to make sure you can trust them (if they are not in the same location).

Time for online Competitions- Rob Hilberink

Are we ready technically to hold a competition online without substantial loss of quality?

Yes, I think it would be possible. There are even some excellent developments for the piano-world which will make it even better in the future. Yamaha is currently perfecting their silent piano technique. There are already competitions, who have been using these pianos to record performances on different instruments around the globe and play them back to a jury in one location. More recently there have been a number of experiments where this technology has been used live (for both masterclasses and concerts) where a piano is played remotely from a location from the other side of the world. (it has even been used for quatre-main performances, with performers in two different locations). If you were to combine this technology with a proper video connection, you would have a truly live sound with a visual of the performer at work. I am not saying this would a better way of hosting a competition, but it is an interesting alternative.

JAN JIRACEK VON ARNIM

Artistic Director, International
Beethoven Piano Competition, Vienna



International
Beethoven Piano Competition
Vienna

A number of member competitions are considering to try an online edition this year.

Do you support this idea?

I do not support this idea. The situation is so extremely difficult at the moment, and the focus for all of us at the moment should not be how to save „our“ events in times of a worldwide crisis.

I actually welcome the possibility during this „Generalpause“ for students and teachers to „breathe“, think, and hopefully dig deeper what music means to you and me and society in general.

From a practical standpoint, I would like to mention as an example my student Evgeny Konnov, who recently won 1st prize „Maria Canals“ and this year’s 1st prize for piano at „Unisa“ in South Africa. He was supposed to compete in Brussels soon... Now he is stuck in a small apartment with no instrument! My university is not allowing for students to practice there, and he only has a small electronic keyboard to at least try to put in some practice hours.



Time for online Competitions- Jan Jiracek von Arnim

We are under lock down in Vienna, and there is no way for my students to get out of this disaster anytime soon. Others however may have much better possibilities in these stressful times (e.g. their own instruments).

This example alone makes me believe that it would be incredible unfair at this point to put pressure on contestants to just continue as everything is normal, for the sake of competition organizers and to have one or two competitions more this year, to put it bluntly.

What would be the biggest issues against such a project?

As a pianist, teacher and Jury member, what I am looking for is nuances. I am convinced this is not possible in an online setting. At least not when you are looking for the best of the best and believe that your competition is the right outlet for the best of the best.

In a competition setting, how is a contestant dealing with the pressure to perform in front of an



Brahmssaal, Musikverein, Vienna

audience, how is the contestant reacting to the instrument and the acoustics? What kind of In the ideal setting, as Jury members and listeners, we will be transcended into a state where we will forget time and everything around us, feeling „together“ as an audience, feeling the magic of music together with the performer, being absolutely captivated. I have never sit through a performance „counting mistakes“, but hoping and being open for "the magic"... The greatest competition performances in my mind are, when I completely forget that I am supposed

to „judge“, and just be overpowered by the beauty of music, bringing us together and celebrating live. After all, (to paraphrase Bill Clinton): „It’s the music, stupid!“

Not once have I personally experienced this transcending feeling when watching an online performing of an audition or competition (or broadcast, for that matter)!

If a competition wants to garner attention by doing an online event, fine. However, I believe this is not the way for serious competitions, because competitions should be a celebration of music, not a „game show“. Winners are supposed to play live concerts in the end, anyway. Call me old-fashioned, but I do not believe music should be like „sports“, which is easily watched on TV and success being measured differently.

Time for online Competitions- Jan Jiracek von Arnim

Are we ready technically to hold a competition online without substantial loss of quality?

Please define „quality“. If it is about sound quality, I guess it depends on the internet streaming quality and the instrument.

A short side note: I was just now trying out online lessons via zoom. It is basically useless to really work on the finest details with the best talents (which I am fortunate to have as students).

I guess an online edition would have to find venues from where to stream, putting in place everything, controlling all details, and hoping for faultless transmissions.

Lastly, I would like to point out the rather strange (in my opinion) experience of contestants at the 2019 Salzburg „Juries in Competition“ (with transmissions into a different hall on a Bösendorfer Computer piano). My student Alexander Panfilov won a 2nd prize from one Jury, a 3rd prize from the other, and the only Audience prize. The overwhelming feedback from everyone I heard from was, that it was a bizarre experience and made some contestants believe that an outcome of a competition can not be trusted when there are so different feedbacks and different Jury decisions.

We should be *extremely* careful as members of this highly regarded federation to have people start to think that the outcome of a competition is a matter of luck and game. Instead, our competitions must try to offer the best possible platform with the highest regarded experts in charge, in the end forming a bond of trust together with our contestants, that they will be supported and their talent cherished, even if they do not win a prize.

The only possibility I would consider at this point is having a first round of a competition being held online, especially when there is an extremely high number of contestants. However, after that for me there is no alternative to a „live“ edition.

SISI YE

CEO, Schoenfeld International
String Competition, Harbin



A number of member competitions are considering to try an online edition this year. Do you support this idea?

What would be the biggest issues against such a project?



Time for online Competitions- Sisi Ye

What would be the biggest issues against such a project?

Live interaction between the performer, the audiences, the venues and even the city is an integral part of the Schoenfeld International String Competition, and this valuable element is irreplaceable with internet.

On the other hand, implementing this idea (with support from WFIMC) would have a large chance generating a favourable impression for many of our existing and potential donors as well as the cultural bureaus of the competition's cities— meaning conducting a competition online might be a good option for actually running a competition in the city. We all know that technology will not be able to replace the unique intimacy and experience one can get from a live performance, but it definitely can create a dangerous threat in the future. It could be extremely harmful to competitions and art organisations, i.e. when looking for support and funding. Therefore, we would rather insist on keeping the irreplaceable element of a live performance- either by postponing or cancelling the events.



Harbin Concert Hall

Do you think we are ready technically to hold a competition online without substantial loss of quality?

Having the “live” performance streamed online via network technology is a good way to get more people involved and to distribute “historic” moments of a competition. But it always has to be based on the elements of a live performance, which is always unique. We hope our colleagues in WFIMC will acknowledge that.

AMADEUS.TV (CHINA): We do not think that international music competitions can be held on the Internet.

The competitors are from various countries and regions, their video equipment, audio equipment and internet conditions are all different. The video and sound quality cannot meet the requirements of a "live competition", and the internet signal transmission also cannot meet the requirements, which inevitably leads to lagging of sound and image. The competitors cannot focus on the competition, but have to pay attention to the equipment, which will also affect the standard of the competition.

Amadeus.tv does not consider an online competition a viable option at present... Many important competitions are held once every few years, various factors may restrict the performance of the competitors, thus affecting the fate of the competitors. Only if all competitors perform in the same environment, a competition can be judged equally and fair.

MARJA-LEENA PÉTAS-ARJAVA

Executive Director, The Mirjam Helin International Singing Competition

Can/ should /should not Competitions be held online? When holding a competition based on the principles created in the normal or optimal circumstances is no longer possible, the easiest solution is naturally to stick to the principles and simply postpone or cancel the competition.



The apparent result of the many current postponements is naturally a temporary overlap and surplus of cultural events in general and therefore also competitions next autumn or spring 2021. With competitions this could lead e.g. to a larger number of cancellations amongst the participants and maybe also loss of audience.

The financial consequences, agreements or several other reasons might, however, force the competition organisers to consider other options. If there is a digital leap in other fields, why not in the world of competitions.

Competitions have already now a possibility to be of global reach. We have access to excellent recording and streaming devices. And audiences are getting more aware and active in finding and enjoying the performances online.

In the world of classical music, however, no device has so far been able to substitute the acoustical experience of a performance and the authentic opportunity to distinguish the smallest but the most crucial differences of the musicians and their playing. But we are getting closer. The fact remains that though through transmitting some instruments lose more of their natural tone quality than the others.

But what happens when no-one is able to travel? Trying to stream the competition online from many different locations all around the world at the same time would create a huge risk with connections and I do not believe anyone is willing to take that.

We would then have to use the method we all know from the preselection rounds, the use of video recordings. By clear technical and practical instructions the competition would guide the process but it would naturally be claimed that no competition, is able to secure equal recording circumstances (acoustics, microphone, recording device) and therefore an equal chance for every contestant.

Time for online Competitions- Marja-Leena Pétaš-Arjava

Many universities of music e.g. Sibelius Academy in Finland will be choosing students this year by using video recordings of the applicants and have panels to judge them with remote access. They believe that experienced panels will be able to distinguish the educational ability by doing so. Equally an experienced jury, in my opinion, should be capable of evaluating the qualities of the competitors, their abilities for a successful career, the best performance – whatever is the requirement by the rules of the competition - and choose the winner. If the winner would have been the same in an acoustical hall would always remain unanswered and should actually not be even addressed since it would be a competition run in an entirely different surrounding.

The key question remains, how would the music industry and the audiences respect and value an award delivered this way. Would the laureates benefit equally compared to the winners of a normal, acoustically run edition? The answer is yes - if winning a competition is considered as a launch for a career, an opportunity to redeem the expectations and one´s place at the top of the world of music, and that excellence would have to be proven in every performance ever after.

By arranging an online competition this way we would naturally lose some major elements: bringing people physically together to an event, the social and shared educational learning opportunities and the competing experience on stage.

I do not recommend any competition to make a permanent change going online but who could afford to try it once and make it a learning experience for the rest of us to benchmark? Maybe there are elements that would serve us in any case? Or maybe in the future a competition could have an online competition as one edition amongst the junior and amateur ones. I would have to end by saying that any competition trying it for the first time is guaranteed for extra interest and marketing opportunities for sure!

In short:

A number of member competitions are considering to try an online edition this year. Do you support this idea?

Yes, as a temporary solution.

What would be the biggest issues against such a project?

Credibility, fairness, technical issues.

Do you think we are ready technically to hold a competition online without substantial loss of quality?

The loss of quality is relevant..

THE
MIRJAM HELIN
COMPETITION

