

## Six Semi-Finalists Announced for the 2026 Bader & Overton Canadian Piano Competition

Friday, February 6, 2026

**Kingston, ON** – The Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts at Queen's University is pleased to announce the six semi-finalists selected for the 2026 Bader & Overton Canadian Piano Competition, taking place May 6–9, 2026, at the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts in Kingston, Ontario.

Chosen from applicants across the country following a competitive preliminary round, the six semi-finalists are: **Eric Guo, Lauren Esch, Linda Ruan, Charissa Vandikas, Naomi Wong,** and **Vanessa Yu.**

Made possible through the generosity of Bader Philanthropies, Inc., the Bader & Overton Canadian Piano Competition champions the next generation of Canadian pianists while advancing Indigenization – Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Anti-Black Racism, and Accessibility. Reflecting the Isabel's 2025–2026 season theme, *Extending the Rafters*, the 2026 competition features diversified repertoire requirements, a newly commissioned work by acclaimed Indigenous composer Cris Derksen, and special prizes recognizing outstanding performances of works by BIPOC and women composers.

"These six performing artists represent an extraordinary breadth of musical voices and artistic perspectives," said **Gordon E. Smith**, Director of the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts. "We look forward to welcoming them to Kingston as they share their artistry with our community."

The Semi-Final Round will take place May 6 and 7, 2026, followed by the Final Round on May 9, 2026. Performances will be presented before a live audience at the Isabel and will be livestreamed for online viewers. Three finalists will advance to the Final Round, where they will present both a solo creative performance and a concerto performance.

Prizes include \$20,000 CAD for First Prize, along with future performance opportunities, plus additional awards totaling more than \$35,000 CAD.

For more information about the competition and performance schedules, visit [queensu.ca/theisabel](https://queensu.ca/theisabel).

## ABOUT THE PIANISTS

Toronto-born pianist **Eric Guo** is a recent semi-finalist at the 19th International Chopin Competition in Warsaw and a prizewinner at major competitions in Paris and Warsaw, with performances in leading halls worldwide.

Award-winning Canadian pianist **Lauren Esch** has appeared at Carnegie Hall and leading recital venues across Canada, is recognized for her commitment to premiering new Canadian works and is currently completing graduate studies at Western University.

Award-winning pianist Charissa Vandikas, named one of CBC Music's "30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30," has appeared with orchestras across Europe and Canada and is an active chamber musician with international piano duo La Fiammata.

**Linda Ruan**, winner of the 2025 Eckhardt-Gramatté National Music Competition, is celebrated for her cross-cultural artistic vision and has performed in major venues including Carnegie's Weill Hall and Lincoln Center's Rose Studio.

Emerging artist **Naomi Wong** is recognized for her thoughtful programming and commitment to lesser-known repertoire, with recent prizes in international competitions in Italy, the United States, and Canada.

**Vanessa Yu**, named one of CBC Music's "30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30," is establishing an international career as both performer and educator, with concerto appearances across North America and solo performances in Europe and Canada.

## THE PRIZES

**FIRST PRIZE:** The first-prize winner will be awarded **The Isabel Overton Bader, Clifford Overton and Francoise Landry Prize of \$20,000 CAD**, a future engagement to perform with the Kingston Symphony, and a future engagement to perform a recital at the Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts, which will be recorded by CBC Music for national broadcast.

**SECOND PRIZE:** The second-prize winner will be awarded **The Margaret Foster and Katherine Foster Prize of \$10,000 CAD**.

**THIRD PRIZE:** The third-prize winner will be awarded **The Marion Dick Memorial Prize of \$5,000 CAD**.

**THE BADER FAMILY AUDIENCE PRIZE:** On Saturday, May 9, 2026, after the three finalists perform, the live audience will vote by ballot for their favourite player of the evening. The votes will be tallied and checked, and the elected audience favourite will be awarded the **Bader Family Audience Prize of \$1,000 CAD**.

**The Woodland Wealth Prize** for the Outstanding Performance of the Commissioned Work by an Indigenous Composer: **\$1,000 CAD** in the Semi-Final Round.

**The Irène Bujara Prize** for the Most Outstanding Performance of a Work by a Woman Composer: **\$1,000 CAD** to be awarded in the Preliminary Round of the competition.

**The Director's Prize** for Most Outstanding Performance of a Work by a BIPOC Composer: **\$1,000 CAD** to be awarded in the Preliminary Round.

For further information, please contact Alyssa de Hoop, Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts at [a.dehoop@queensu.ca](mailto:a.dehoop@queensu.ca)

We acknowledge with gratitude the generous support from

**Bader Philanthropies, Inc.**



**Hamburg Steinway Piano Donor:**  
**Joan Tobin and the Ballytobin Foundation**



**Performance Partner:**



**Broadcast Partner:**



**Media Sponsor:**



**Hotel Sponsor:**



**Donald Gordon Hotel & Conference Centre**