

**NewsRoom**

- [Feature Stories](#)
- [Editorial and Op-Ed](#)
- [Beat Columns \(Live Music\)](#)
  - [New Music](#)
  - [On Opera](#)
  - [World Music](#)
  - [Jazz Notes](#)
  - [Bookshelf](#)
  - [Community Ensembles](#)
  - [Musical Theatre and Dance](#)
  - [Choral Scene](#)
  - [Early and Period Music](#)
  - [Ori's Stories: Jazz in the Clubs](#)
  - [Opera at Home](#)
  - [Classical and Beyond](#)




**Classical and Beyond**

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Beat Columns - Classical and Beyond

Written by Allan Pulker



My focus last month was Toronto as a cultural tourism destination, looking at the potential of several weekends for offering what I termed a festival experience – that is to say, more or less wall-to-wall concert going. Extraordinarily, November will begin with a whole week of just that, in the form of the new Chinese Cultural Centre's Toronto International Piano Competition. This is a major development in the musical life of Toronto.

**Lu Wang and Lang-Ning Liu**



The minds behind the CCC International Piano Competition, November 1 to 8, are two young adopted (like so many of us) Torontonians, Lang-Ning Liu and Lu Wang. Concert pianists themselves, they perform all over the world as solo recitalists, concerto soloists and together as the Juilliard Duo.

When they sat down with me to talk about their lives in music and the festival it was only two days before Lang-Ning was leaving for France to give two recitals and about a week before Lu was leaving for China, where (among other things) he was going to be meeting the conductor of the orchestra with which he'll perform a concerto next year.

I asked why they had decided to make Toronto home, and what had motivated them to undertake such a major project as an international piano competition. For Lang-Ning, who had come here at the age of 17 to study at the Glenn Gould School, and then went to Juilliard, Toronto is an ideal place for an artist. "You can find quiet places here where you can work," she told me. "In New York, no place is quiet." Lu told me he had lived in New York most of his life, and would not have thought of settling in Toronto except that his parents told him they want to come here to retire. That was a good enough reason for him, and within seven months of applying for landed immigrant status he was here. His parents, however, haven't yet arrived. "His mother runs a big music school in China," explained Lang-Ning; "She's not ready to give that up!"



Their reasons for putting their energy into a piano competition are related to their personal aspirations and goals. Lang-Ning feels strongly that music can be a force for good and for peace in the world. What motivated them was a wish to do something for the musical tradition.

Their original idea was a music festival that would feature the best young pianists in the world. The difficulty of bringing many artists together at the same time persuaded them that a competition would be more feasible. To make the event more like a festival for both audiences and competitors, in the first two rounds each of the 24 competitors will give a short recital, and the jury will select the six semi-finalists. For those of us fortunate enough to attend much or all of the first round, it will be a wonderful opportunity to develop a more discerning ear, by hearing a wide range of approaches to the piano.

Allan Pulker is a flautist and a founder of The WholeNote who currently serves as Chairman of The WholeNote's board of directors. He can be contacted at [classicalbeyond@thewholenote.com](mailto:classicalbeyond@thewholenote.com).

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