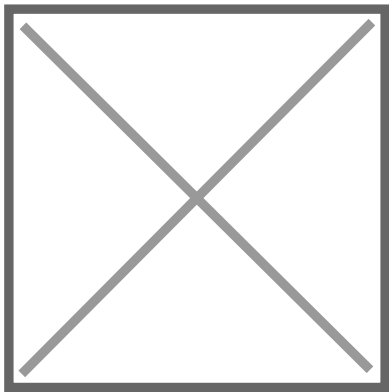




Bachauer Foundation Opens 2026-27 Concert Series Celebrating Its Laureates

Description

An interview with Executive Director Kary Billings

After hosting the Junior and Young Artist competitions and celebrating 50 years of history, the Bachauer Foundation is turning its attention towards the new concert series season built around its laureates. The 2026-27 series brings together pianists from different parts of the world at different stages of their careers. Each artist brings a program shaped by their own interests. For Kary Billings, executive director of the Bachauer Foundation, the goal is not to just fill a concert calendar, but to bring audiences into the room to experience the variety, passion, and connection that live music can create. Keolanani and I sat down with Billings to talk about the upcoming season and the connections the foundation has built with its artists over the years. Putting together a season like this begins way before audience members imagine.

According to Billings, the Bachauer Foundation begins planning nearly two years in advance, considering each artist’s availability, background, and place in their careers while also looking for variety across the concerts. The foundation’s laureates are given freedom to shape their own programs, allowing the pianists to reflect not only the music they can perform, but also the music they are passionate about.

Season at a glance

Date	Pianist	Bachauer connection
October 9	Kotaro Fukuma	2010 Artists Competition gold medalist
November 6	Youl Sun	2024 Artists Competition gold medalist
March 12	Lori Sims	1998 Artists Competition gold medalist
April 30	Bolai Cao	2012 Young Artist Competition silver medalist

The Concerts

October 9: Kotaro Fukuma: [Concert details](#) · [Tickets](#)

The season opens October 9th with Japanese pianist Kotaro Fukuma, whose relationship with the Bachauer Foundation goes back nearly thirty years. Fukuma was a competitor in the 1997 Young Artist Competition, then returned as a finalist in the 2010 Artists Competition, where he won gold. This season, he brings a program centered on Franz Liszt. Billings described the program as a musical journey through the composer's life. The recital also includes Wagner's Tristan und Isolde in a transcription written by Fukuma himself, giving audience members a chance to hear how he approaches work in his own way.

A pianist performing passionately at a grand piano, dressed in a black suit, capturing the emotion of

November 6: Youl Sun: [Youl Sun's website](#) • [Tickets](#)

The series continues on November 6th with Youl Sun, a 2024 Artists Competition gold medalist. Sun was in Utah in May 2026 when he played Saint-Saëns's Fifth Piano Concerto with the Utah Symphony. Sun's concert series' program has a personal connection to the Bachauer Foundation. Gabriela Lena Frank wrote the opening work for the foundation of his program. Following a piece by Texu Kim, a major contemporary Korean composer. He will also feature Debussy's works. Sun has a particular connection to Debussy, whose preludes he performed during the competition. Billings said he believes that connection to Debussy was part of what helped Sun stand out during the competition. The program then builds towards all 12 of Liszt's Transcendental Études, a demanding set that requires significant technique and stamina from the pianist. Together, the works bring Peruvian, Korean, and French influences into a program that also explores the technical and expressive range of Liszt.

A close-up black and white portrait of a young man with short, dark hair, wearing a button-up shirt, a

March 12: Lori Sims: [Lori Sims's website](#) • [IU Jacobs School announcement](#) • [Tickets](#)

On March 12th, the concert series continues with Lori Sims, a 1998 Artists Competition gold medalist and professor of piano at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. Sims also served as a juror for Bachauer's most recent competition, giving her another connection to the foundation beyond her own time as a competitor. Her program has a more contemporary direction, with plans to feature Bach's Partita, Ligeti's Hungarian Rock for amplified harpsichord, and music by Sofia Gubaidulina, one of the influential voices in contemporary classical music. Billings described the program as a driving one and distinctly different from the season's first two concerts.

Smiling woman with shoulder-length brown hair, wearing a black leather jacket over a red shirt, set a

April 30: Bolai Cao: [Bolai Cao at Ohio State](#) • [Tickets](#)

The concert series closes April 30th with Bolai Cao, a Chinese pianist and 2012 Young Artist Competition silver medalist. Cao has returned to Salt Lake City several times since his time in the competition and recently completed his doctorate at Eastman School of Music, studying with Douglas Humpherys. For his Bachauer performance, he is planning on presenting a program featuring Ravel's Miroirs alongside selected works by Samuel Barber. Billings explained to us that he is already looking ahead to the next Bachauer International Artist Competition in 2028. Planning for a competition begins years in advance, and the work continues even while the foundation is preparing its concerts and staying connected with past laureates.

A young musician in a black tuxedo and bow tie, posing confidently beside a grand piano with his ha

The 2028 competition is still in planning stages, but it shows how far ahead the Bachauer must look to bring pianists from around the world to Salt Lake City. Although the four pianists come from different parts of the world and are at different stages of their careers, they share an important connection: each is a Bachauer laureate. In our interview, Billings explained to Keolanani and me that the Bachauer is like a family, which he sees as a unique part of an international competition. The foundation has spent decades building relationships with pianists who continue to perform, teach and return to the Bachauer in different ways. This season brings some of those relationships back to the stage while giving each pianist the opportunity to share the music that reflects their own interests and passions. Even after decades of watching pianists take the stage, Billings said he is still surprised by the variety and international connections that the Bachauer brings to Utah. Musicians arrive for different countries and cultures, but the music creates a connection that can go beyond differences in language. They all have in common the respect for the art. What continues to stand out for him is the way some young musicians can approach music with a maturity beyond their age while still finding a way to bring something fresh to their performances. The foundation is also celebrating its 50th anniversary with a new documentary that shows the foundation's beginnings, the people who shaped its history, and its impact on generations of young pianists.

Logo celebrating 50 years of Bac Hauer, featuring stylized text and numbers.

Parts I, II, and III are available on YouTube, offering audiences another way to explore the story behind the music.

Part I <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyusN5PFHOQ>

Part II <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjf-kyMuaas>

Part III <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aa8XH7grNs>

Experience It Live

The Bachauer Concert Series is an invitation to experience these musicians and their music in person. The four programs may differ in style and repertoire, but they share the same purpose: bringing audiences together through live performance. After 50 years of building connections between pianists, audiences, and the international music community, the Bachauer is beginning another season, inviting audiences to experience the variety of its artists and programs and, most importantly, the difference that comes from hearing the music live.

All concerts are at 7:30 p.m. in the Jeannette Wagner Theatre at the Rose Wagner Performing Arts Center. [Series tickets and information](#) are available through ArtTix, and more is at bachauer.com.

Category

1. Events

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