



Comitato Permanente Promotore del Concorso  
Internazionale di Chitarra Classica "Michele Pittaluga"  
Premio Città di Alessandria  
P. Garibaldi 16 - 15100 - Alessandria - ITALY • Tel 0039/0131/251207  
• Fax 0039/0131/235507 • e-mail: [concorso@pittaluga.org](mailto:concorso@pittaluga.org)  
• <http://www.pittaluga.org>

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## **Artistic Report 2019 from the Association of the Permanent Promotional Committee for the Michele Pittaluga International Guitar and Composition Competition**



The two guitar-themed roundabouts on Spalto Gamondio and on Via Milite Ignoto serve as a permanent reminder that for half a century our city has been a focal point for guitarists around the world due to the Pittaluga Competition and the year-round spin-off events involving the instrument



**The 52nd Pittaluga International Guitar Competition** took place in Alessandria from the 23rd to the 28th September. 30 young competitors signed up for the 2019 competition and among the nationalities present we can find Bulgarians, Australians, Chileans, Mexicans, Swiss, Russians, French, Scottish, Hungarians, Israelis, Poles, Chinese, South Koreans, Taiwanese and, naturally, a handful of Italians. 25 of these made it to Alessandria.

Sometimes the very longevity of such an event can make it difficult for organisers to constantly seek out new points of interest to keep it in the public eye and ensure participation

Discussion at the last WFIMC (World Federation of International Music Competitions) Assembly in Bolzano focussed on competition management and how competitions could be fitted into music festivals.

Alessandria, partly due to its decidedly lower budget in comparison to American or Asian competitions or those held in Europe with the support of large foundations, has chosen to stay true to its unique selling point: a guitar-based competition as the main event. This entails year-round networking, agreements, collaborations and alliances in the interests of ensuring visibility for the winners, with generous prizes and an international concert tour.

The fact that the theme of the competition is highly specialised is not important: its value is to be found in the originality of the idea, in the unique way in which it has evolved and in the fact that it has stood the test of time while maintaining high standards and entry requirements





2019 kicked off with the presentation of the Music and Museums Exhibition at Alessandria Town Hall, organised by the Costruire/Insieme group under the artistic direction of the Pittaluga Competition, on 10th April. Concerts were held on 13th April at Palazzo Cuttica and 14th May, 11th June and 11th July at the Marengo Museum, and were very well attended







**At  
the**

**Collegiate Church of San Francesco di Cassine, on June 19th** the 24th Evening of Remembrance for Michele Pittaluga, founder of the International Guitar Competition, was held. Guest performers included the young flautist Michela Podera and the guitarist Giulio Tampalini, from Brescia. This was the first year the Concert had been moved to the evocative Church of San Francesco at Cassine, thanks to the participation of the UNESCO Club of Alessandria. The Concert was part of the celebrations for the 2019 European Music Day, promoted by the Heritage and culture Ministry .





**Winners on Tour:** In Russia, along with the established concert every year at the St Petersburg Musical Olympus festival there was also space for a recital at Tchaikovsky Hall, Moscow, at the "Guitar Virtuosos" Festival, whose artistic director is none other than Artyom Dervoe, winner of the Pittaluga Prize in 2006 and a regular presence in Alessandria. The Verbier Festival in Switzerland also included a guitar recital for the first time this year and the young winner of the Pittaluga Prize in 2018, the Serbian Vojin Kocic, was invited, to add to his presences at Todi, Lessa and Ravenna, for the Jeunesses Musicales in Milan, at the Alba Classical Festival and the Paganini Festival in Genoa



**Supporters and Sponsors:** As well as enjoying the support of the CRAL Foundation, the CRTO Foundation, the Region of Piedmont, along with contributions from local companies such as Guala Closures, Metlac, Solvay, Restiani, AMAG and clubs such as the Rotary Club of Alessandria and the Soroptimist Clubs of Alessandria and Acqui, the Pittaluga Competition has been the proud bearer since 1997 of the President of the Italian Republic Medal and takes place under the patronage of the National UNESCO Commission, the Town and Provincial Councils of Alessandria, the A.Avogadro University of Eastern Piedmont and the Vivaldi Conservatory

**Affiliations and Partnerships:** We have important partnerships with musical academies and cultural organisations, including foreign ones such as the Naxos label in Canada, the Sigall Competition in Chile, Klagenfurt in Austria, Amarante in Portugal and Brussels in Belgium. Moreover, we are actively involved in the cultural life of the city, offering partnerships with local trading organisations (Aperto per cultura, Guitar Corner), with the local hospital (Guitars on the Wards) and the Costruire/Insieme Project (Music and Museums), as well as with many local councils (Cassine, Tortona, Valenza, Solero and Sezzadio)









**2019 Programme:** This year the competition entailed a mandatory piece for the first and second rounds, created especially by the English composer Steven Goss. Over 130 guitarists downloaded the piece from the website with a view to preparing it for the competition, leaving their personal details and enabling us to see the level of engagement with specialists in this sector.

This year witnessed the innovation of four guitar concertos for guitar and orchestra being available for selection for performance at the final concert. Added to Rodrigo's masterpiece, the *Concierto de Aranjuez*, were a Concerto by Villa Lobos, Leo Brouwer's *Concierto Elegiaco* and the Concerto Op.67 by Sir Malcolm Arnold, the latter an evocative yet often overlooked work. Any finalist choosing the latter work was up for a further cash prize offered by the Arnold Trust. On the 23rd September at the Conservatory Marco Tamayo and the orchestra presented the Concerto by Malcolm Arnold and premiered the piece by Goss which every contestant would subsequently have to perform







International Jury:

The following were invited for the 2019 event

- OLIVIER CHASSAIN Member, France, guitarist and guitar teacher in Paris
- STEVE GOSS Member, UK, guitarist and composer
- ANABEL MONTESINOS Member, Spain, concert guitarist
- KRZYSZTOF PELECH Member, Poland, concert guitarist and guitar teacher
- MICAELA PITTALUGA Member, Italy, Competition President
- GIULIO TAMPALINI Member, Italy, concert guitarist and guitar teacher
- FABIO ZANON President of the Jury, Brazil, concert guitarist and guitar teacher

Featuring among these were three previous "Pittaluga" winners: Zanon, 1988, Tampalini, 2000 and Montesinos, 2010.

Three important partnerships have been signed in the last year regarding our collaboration with the Antonio Vivaldi Conservatory, the Santi Antonio and Biagio Hospital in Alessandria and, last but not least, the IDAGIO classical music portal, thanks to our partnership with the WFIMC

**Partnership with the Vivaldi Conservatory:** There have been numerous events staged to maintain the fruitful relationship between the Pittaluga Competition and the local musical academy, including guest concerts at the Conservatory or workshops run by some of our guests. The training offered by the Conservatory has gained from this understanding with the Competition, while participants at the Competition have benefitted from what the Conservatory has to offer, thereby creating a virtuous circle of mutual help and development.

**Partnership with Santi Antonio e Biagio Hospital:** For some years our "Music on the Wards" Project has brought music to several locations in the city, such as retirement homes, the children's hospital, the Borsalino centre for rehabilitation and so on, bringing entertainment and alternative therapy to guests, patients, doctors and staff.

The agreement establishes that during the Competition, and in accordance with the timetabling needs of each individual ward, free recitals will be performed by some of the contestants. These are open to medical staff, patients and their families, providing spiritual sustenance by cancelling out the dichotomy between patient and doctor, between the healthy and the sick, and by allowing patients to shift their attention onto the music.

We believe this beautiful and useful project will evolve into something more regular, with the partnership envisaging concerts throughout the year, thereby enabling this social and humanitarian aspect of our cultural project to gain greater visibility



**Partnership with the IDAGIO Portal and the WFIMC:** Ever since 1981 our competition has been part of the prestigious Geneva-based international music federation. We regularly participate with ideas, suggestions and proposals at General Assemblies. At the Regional Assembly in Bolzano in September the Alessandria Competition decided to subscribe to the German IDAGIO portal, with which other members have been working for some time. The portal will upload recordings of the Competition winners, the finals with the orchestra and tracks from the earlier rounds, new commissions and works from the Composers' Competition, to give new impetus to promotion of the Competition and to guitar music in general. The tracks will be available to

subscribers/users with the details of when the track was recorded, the authors, the performer and recording data. We believe this will help raise awareness of the canon of classical guitar music and increase the visibility and reputation of the Pittaluga Competition and Città di Alessandria Prize

During this meeting agreements were made with the Italian Competitions which are members of the WFIMC (promoters being Busoni, Pinerolo and Alessandria) for the creation of an alliance with a view to defending our uniqueness within the Federation and obtaining attention and consideration from the Heritage Italian Ministry.

### The semi-finalists and finalists

On Wednesday the 25th the jury in Alessandria decided to admit seven contestants to the semi-finals: the Italians Martina Barlotta and Giulia Ballaré, Damiano Pisanello



and Davide Tomasi, the Hungarian Zsombor Sidoo, the Australian Jesse Flowers, and the Polish Kasia Smolarek.

On the evening of the 28th, of the 25 initial contestants, only three hard-bitten finalists were left to fight over the Pittaluga Prize, one of the most sought-after prizes and the most important competition dedicated to the guitar in the world.

The three musicians, in order of performance were the Hungarian, Zsombor Sidoo, the Polish Katarzyna Smolarek and the Australian, Jesse Flowers, who performed Joaquin Rodrigo's Concierto de Aranjuez and Leo Brouwer's Concierto Elegiaco out of the four

they could choose from.

The Alessandria Classical Orchestra was conducted by Paolo Ferrara and strove to bring out the finalists' musical qualities by setting the appropriate volume and giving ample space to their instrumental voices

The evening was streamed live so that for the first time in history the whole world could follow the young guitarists' performances as they happened, reaching by thousands users.

After the third performer played their last note the jury met once more to decide the winner of the 52nd M. Pittaluga International Guitar Competition

The theatre awaited the result in trepidation and watched keenly as the jury delivered its verdict

Many were left disconcerted by the plot twist: **in the 2019 edition, first prize in the Pittaluga Competition went**



unassigned. Second prize went to Jesse Flowers and third to Zsombor Sidoo. Kasia Smolarek from Poland was awarded the consolation prize offered by Soroptimist.

The jury, while recognising that the solo performances by the contestants were all exemplary and excellent, could not reach the same judgement for their performances when accompanied by an orchestra. Fabio Zanon, the President, in explaining this to the theatre audience, went on to declare that none of the finalists had deserved the top prize, which served to highlight the difficulty and challenging nature of the competition

As the lights came down on the evening after the prize-giving ceremony we looked forward with eager anticipation to the next edition of the competition, the 53rd, which will be held in 2020 from the 21st to the 26th September



The evening was made possible by Fondazione CRAL, Fondazione CRT, Regione Piemonte, AMAG and local companies, while the prizes were provided by Metlac, some local clubs such as the Rotary and Soroptimist Clubs of Alessandria, the Robotti Foundation, the Regalzi Jeweller's, the record labels Naxos and Dotguitar along with Savarez Company and Daddario Foundation.

