

THE AMERICAN PRIZE

questions from composers / answers from David Katz, chief judge

Q: Why must composers submit recordings either on disc or online? Why don't you just accept the scores—and why must scores be sent by mail? My music is available as PDFs.

A: The recorded component is key to the philosophy of The American Prize—central to what makes it unique. Different from many composition contests which require that only new, unperformed works be submitted, **The American Prize in Composition** seeks to evaluate and reward composers of works **which have already been performed and recorded**. Here's why we think that's important:

In an age when second hearings are sometimes more difficult to obtain than premieres, TAP provides a forum for the composer who has already accomplished **thousands of hours of toil**—shepherding a work from conception through to performance. By being previously performed—whether by a student, community or professional ensemble—submitted works have, to a certain extent, already been vetted. The scores (and parts) are more likely to be free of errors (and therefore more attractive to conductors interested in additional performances); the recording also helps provide the judges with more than a mind's ear conception: music being an aural art, they can hear (as well as see) the extent to which the composer seems to have satisfied his or her **intended artistic aims**, taking into consideration who is performing, of course.

Many composers do have their music available as PDFs, but speaking as a conductor myself, and for my fellow judges, I like to have a score to open before me: I like to easily turn the pages, turn back quickly, check a fact, confirm a hunch, observe on the printed page **the geography of the music**. I often look through the piece from beginning to end before I read a note of it or turn on the recording—much about the form of the music can of course be sensed from its graphic depiction on the page. Also, music is still—at least for the moment—far easier to read on paper than on a computer screen, where the monitor may be too small to see the whole page, or too small to read the notes.

Scores will of course be returned if the composer supplies a stamped, self-addressed envelope (minimum size 10x13 inches.)

Q: Aren't so-called "romantic" or "accessible" works more likely to win The American Prize?

A: I hate those terms as much as you probably do, and the short answer is a resounding "NO." "Challenging" music, whatever that means, elegantly crafted, performed at a level of accomplishment where its merits are clearly discernible, is every bit as likely to win The American Prize as more conventional works.

We have no compositional axe to grind here—other than to bring to the larger musical community information about valuable pieces with which it may not be familiar. I charge my fellow judges to favor no style over another as a matter of policy, make every effort to avoid bias

and conflict of interest (the judges' guidelines are particularly clear on this last point) and try to provide **well-considered evaluation** at every stage of the audition process. The best music, in the opinion of the judges—the work that most closely fulfills its artistic intent, **regardless of style**—should win.

(It strikes me with a certain irony, as someone who has "been in the business" longer than I care to admit, that it used to be the composers of "romantic" or "accessible" music who worried about being **frozen out of the running**—at least in competitions sponsored by elite performing and educational institutions...Times have indeed changed.)

Anything we at The American Prize can do to raise the profile of the art of musical composition through the winning works we select, **helps regain for American composers** some of the attention and respect they once had, and still deserve.

Q. What type of composers does The American Prize attract?

A: Serious ones, both professionals and students, writing in any style. A number of composers we have heard from generated **additional performances** of works directly as a result of their placement in the competitions.

We are told that The American Prize helps give its laureates a way to cut through the **welter of "noise"** in the marketplace, to derive local, regional and national attention for their work, while seeking to provide contestants at various stages of the selection process—whether they win or not—with visibility and feedback far beyond the modest application fee.

Q: I am an American citizen living outside the U.S. May I still apply? What about recordings by foreign ensembles?

A: Perfectly fine. The competitions of The American Prize are open to all U.S. citizens, whether living in this country or abroad, and to others currently living, working and/or studying in the United States of America, its protectorates and territories. All application fees must be remitted in U.S. funds. Recordings by student, community or professional ensembles from anywhere in the world are acceptable. Performances by multiple ensembles are fine.

Q: I don't have an actual performance of my piece (in front of an audience) but I do have a good reading that I feel does my work justice. May I submit that?

A. Absolutely. Any "performance" that you feel is a good representation of your work is acceptable (except computer generated performances of acoustic music.) Works must have been performed with the instrumentation or type of ensemble for which they were originally written.

Q: I have a performance of my work but have revised it since then. May I submit the revised score with the older recording?

A. Yes. We do recommend that you include a note with your application bringing any substantive changes to the judges' attention.

Q: I have one choral piece I would really like to submit, about seven minutes long. Must I send more?

A. No. One piece is fine. You decide what to submit, up to the limit of 30 minutes in the choral composition area. There is no limit to the number of pieces represented within the 30 minutes, and no restrictions on the number or type of groups performing them, provided they are all identified. The focus in the composition contests is on the **works themselves**, rather on the performers, though of course, the performances that do the best justice to the music (in the opinion of the composer) are the ones to send.

Q. Does the composer retain all rights to his/her music if he applies (or wins)?

A, Without question. The composer relinquishes **no rights** whatsoever. We only ask to publish photos and bios of runners-up and winners, which may be posted to our website and blog. We do expect **The American Prize** channel on YouTube to go live this season and hope to post excerpts of winning compositions on the site, but **only with the permission** of the composer. (Sometimes, union rules or other contracted limitations prevent this from being possible.) The composer makes the final call.

Q. Whose links get selected for the NEWS highlights on your Facebook page?

Several times a month, **The American Prize** shares news links from competition laureates on our [Facebook](#) page, including the latest information from individual performing artists, ensembles and composers. The links help to highlight some of the many different **ways contestants have shared their success** in the competitions, as well as focusing on their ongoing achievements. Some are gleaned from web searches, others the artists submit themselves. We are always happy to highlight the performances and success of our laureates.