

**Northern Kentucky University
Philharmonic Orchestra Concerto-Aria Competition
2025–2026 Guidelines**

Applications Due:	Monday, October 27, 2025, 12:00 p.m. noon <i>NOTE: Applications are completely digital this year</i>
Performance Times Announced:	On or before Monday, November 3, 2025, at 4:30 p.m.
2025–2026 Competition:	Wednesday, November 12, 2025, 6:00–10:00 p.m., Greaves
Winner(s) Featured with NKU Philharmonic Orchestra:	Tuesday, February 24, 2026, 7:00 p.m., Greaves

Mission:

The annual NKU Concerto-Aria Competition provides an opportunity for students to perform as soloists with the NKU Philharmonic Orchestra. The mission is to identify and showcase exceptional talent, while offering the opportunity for emerging musicians to perform major concerti and arias with orchestra.

Goals:

- Provide an enriching experience for members of the Philharmonic Orchestra to perform as soloists and accompany soloists.
- Provide an enriching experience for non-orchestral instrumentalist and vocalist students to perform as soloists with an orchestra.
- To contribute to the university’s mission of empowering our graduates to have fulfilling careers and meaningful lives by offering real-world performance experience that further prepares them for futures in solo and collaborative music making.
- Offer a competitive yet supportive environment of artistic excellence that fosters collaboration between musicians.

About the Competition

The NKU Philharmonic Concerto Competition is open to all instruments and voice. There may be up to a total of four winners. NKU college students of any major and instrument/voice are welcome to participate, but *they must be full time and enrolled in applied lessons (during the competition and performance semesters)*. Orchestral instrumentalists must be enrolled in the Philharmonic Orchestra *(during the competition and performance semesters)*.

Eligibility

1. Students must be registered as a full-time student at Northern Kentucky University at the time of competition (fall semester) and performance (spring semester) with the orchestra.
2. Those auditioning on an orchestral instrument (violin, viola, cello, bass, flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, horn, trumpet, trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion) must be enrolled in the Philharmonic Orchestra during both the fall 2025 and spring 2026 semesters. Even though they are commonly in orchestra, piano/keyboard and harp musicians do not have to be enrolled in Philharmonic to compete.
3. Students must be enrolled in applied lessons during both the fall and spring semesters.
4. Winners of the previous year’s competition are not eligible to compete in the following year competition.
5. Students are eligible to win the competition twice in their time at NKU and may not compete in the adjacent year after they have won (they must wait a year to compete again).
6. Each student is allotted one concerto-aria competition entrance. In other words, students may only compete on one instrument/voice and with one entry. (For example, a student may not compete on both a tenor aria AND horn concerto).
7. Students may not compete on any repertoire in which they have previously competed.
8. Winners of the competition must be available to perform with the NKU Philharmonic Orchestra on **Tuesday, February 24, 2026, attend the evening dress rehearsal on Monday, February 23,**

2025, and be available to rehearse several times with the ensemble during the Tuesday: 12:15–2:55 p.m. and/or Thursday: 12:15–1:30 p.m. rehearsal times.

Repertoire Requirements

1. **Concerto (Instrumental) Category:** complete one-movement concerto, single movement from a multi-movement concerto, multiple movements from a multi-movement concerto (so long as it does not surpass time restriction). All selections must be a **minimum of 6 minutes and no more than 15 minutes in length**. Two movements of a concerto may be performed to meet the minimum time requirement. Both concertos for a single soloist or soloist group (up to 4 soloists) are eligible. For soloist group, all musicians must meet eligibility requirements. Please note that while any movement is eligible, movements that showcase contrast are preferred, and repertoire difficulty is taken into consideration from the judging panel. Outer movements of concertos generally work better and are preferable for competition.
2. **Aria (voice) Category:** Baroque, Classical, or Romantic aria(s) of choice. Post-Romantic period arias may be considered if they are public domain. Arias must be performed in their original language, be a minimum of 6 minutes and no more than 15 minutes in length. Multiple arias may be performed to meet the minimum time requirement. All arias must have orchestrations that are readily available. Although any aria type may be performed, operatic arias are particularly encouraged. Level of challenge and difficulty will be taken into consideration in the judging process.
3. Repertoire must be performed from memory for both the competition and for the performance with orchestra.
4. Repertoire must be suitable for performance with the NKU Philharmonic Orchestra in terms of instrumentation, technical difficulty, and feasibility of acquiring score/parts. All repertoire is subject to the approval of the NKU Philharmonic Orchestra Director. Students are encouraged to consult with Director of Orchestras regarding their repertoire choice before entering, as some concertos may not be acceptable or feasible.
5. In general, repertoire that is not standard, not easily accessible to obtain, or not available to purchase (i.e. rental only) is not feasible to complete/play with the orchestra.

Competition

1. The competition takes place **Wednesday, November 12, 2025, beginning at 6:00 p.m. in Greaves Concert Hall**. Applications are due by **Monday, October 27, 2025, by 12:00 p.m. noon**. Late applications will not be accepted. Incomplete applications will also not be accepted.
2. One (1) copy of the full orchestral score and four (4) copies of the solo part/vocal score must be submitted in hard copy with the application. (Note: many full scores may be obtained from imslp.org; you may also check the library)
3. The performance order of the competition will be determined by random drawing.
4. Alternate and/or make-up times for the competition or performance are not possible.
5. Students must perform their work from memory.
6. Students must perform with an accompanist. Students are responsible for making their own accompanist arrangements.
7. Individual time slots, determined by random drawing, will be emailed and/or posted to competitors no later than one week prior to the competition. Special time accommodations cannot be provided. Students should make sure both they and their accompanists have availability for the entire duration of the competition before entering the competition, as special time accommodations are not possible.
8. ***The competition is open to the public!***
9. Students will be informed of their specific competition time via email on or before **Monday, November 3, 2025**.

Additional Considerations and information

Selection of Winners

A panel of professional musicians from the Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky regions will judge the event. The panel may select one or multiple winners. The panel also reserves the right to select no winner. The NKU Philharmonic Director will also listen to auditions and will help determine the number of winners (based on work length, difficulty for orchestra, balance of repertoire, and similar constraints), but will not serve as a formal judge. ***Due to time restraints and the nature of the competition, comments and feedback***

will not be provided from the judges. If requested, Director of Orchestras may be able to provide some general comments to the competitor on behalf of the panel. Winner selection decisions are final.

Winners will be selected and judged based on technical and musical artistry, quality of preparation, ability to successfully perform with and orchestra, and difficulty of repertoire. When choosing repertoire, it is advisable to choose something that showcases one's breadth of artistry (pieces that include contrast).

Winners are chosen from the following competition categories:

1. **Instrumental: Orchestral Instrumentalists** (up to 2 winners) (NOTE: due to eligibility, these musicians must be enrolled in orchestra)
2. **Voice: Opera Aria** (up to 1 winner)
3. **Open Category** (up to 1 winner): This category is open to non-orchestral instrumentalists (piano, harp, saxophone, guitar, euphonium), voice, and orchestral instruments

Orchestral instruments (which also means those enrolled in Philharmonic) are eligible in two categories: "Instrumental: Orchestra Instrumental" and "Open Category," which has up to three winners. Voice competitors are eligible in two categories: "Voice: Opera Aria" and "Open Category," which has up to two winners. The "Open Category" is open to all those in the first two categories plus piano, saxophone, euphonium, guitar, piano, and harp. If a pianist or harpist is also enrolled in orchestra, they would be eligible in the "Instrumental: Orchestral Instruments" and "Open Category."

Application Submission and Competition

Applications are submitted digitally (new for this year). All participants must have permission of their applied instructor in order to participate. Applied instructors will receive a copy of your submission to confirm their support of your application. Please also confirm that you have a pianist available to perform with you at the competition. Participants are encouraged to use the same pianist when possible.

In your digital application submission, be prepared to submit the following:

- Full program information for your piece(s) (title, movement, composer, composer life dates, duration)
- A PDF of the music that includes your solo part (solo only for instrumentalists; vocal score for vocalists) and a full orchestral score (in that order),
- One-paragraph bio
- Photo
- Your desired gold jacket style and size

Participants will receive an email with their performance order on or before Monday, November 3, 2025.

Questions? Although Dr. Culligan is on sabbatical 2025–2026, she will be continuing to oversee this event. Please first direct questions to your applied instructor, but then feel free to contact Dr. Culligan (gillinghaa1@nku.edu) with any additional concerns. Please note that response times may be slower than usual.

Digital Application Form:

(must be submitted by 12:00 p.m. on Monday, October 27, 2025):

<https://tinyurl.com/NKUConcertoAria>