

Thelma Willett International Piano Festival and Competition

November 14-16, 2025 / Josephine Campbell Recital Hall

About Thelma Elizabeth Willett

Thelma Elizabeth Willett was born on February 6, 1923, in Mansfield, Ohio, the beloved daughter of Philip S. and Betty (Jones) Willett. She spent her formative years in Granville, Ohio, where she attended high school and developed an early passion for music that would shape the course of her life. Her academic journey began at Denison University in her hometown, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree, laying the foundation for a distinguished career in music and education.

Pursuing advanced study in her field, Ms. Willett earned a master's degree in music from the University of Illinois. Her commitment to lifelong learning and artistic excellence also led her to undertake further graduate studies at both the University of Michigan and Indiana University, two institutions known for their strong music programs.

Ms. Willett began her teaching career at the University of Illinois, where she nurtured the talents of young pianists and musicians. In 1949, she relocated to Grand Forks, North Dakota—a move that would mark the beginning of a lasting legacy in the region's musical and academic communities. Initially, she joined the faculty of Wesley College, a private liberal arts institution closely affiliated with the University of North Dakota (UND). In 1953, she transitioned to the UND Department of Music, where she served with distinction as Associate Professor of Music until her retirement in 1989.

Throughout her four decades of teaching in Grand Forks, Ms. Willett mentored generations of students, instilling in them not only technical proficiency but also a deep appreciation for the expressive power of music. Her influence extended beyond the university setting. She was a cherished and active member of the Federated Church, where she shared her gifts as a pianist and music leader, inspiring her congregation through her artistry and unwavering dedication. Colleagues remember her as a generous and insightful educator, a supportive mentor, and a consummate professional whose contributions helped shape the music department at UND into what it is today. Her former students, many of whom went on to careers in music and education themselves, carry forward the lessons she taught them—both musical and personal.

Thelma Elizabeth Willett's life was one of quiet, steadfast service to music, education, and community. Her legacy continues to resonate through the many lives she touched with her teaching, her leadership, and her passion for the transformative power of music.

International Piano Competition

The **Thelma Willett Piano Competition** is committed to seeking out outstanding pianists from the region and celebrating excellence in piano performance. The competition is **open to pianists from 1st grade through college graduate students, as well as adult pianists.**

Awards

Winners will receive **cash prizes** generously provided by sponsors and will be **invited to perform one piece at the Gala Concert.**

Important Dates

- **Application Deadline:** Monday, November 3, 2025
- **Competition Date:** Saturday, November 15, 2025, between 9:00 AM and 2:00 PM
- **Gala Concert:** Saturday, November 15, 2025, 4:30 PM

Eligibility & Categories

The competition is open to students enrolled in music schools or private instruction from 1st grade through graduate school, as well as adults. It takes place in **one round/session.**

Category	Eligibility	\$550 (total amount)
Category 1	Age 6-8	\$20
Category 2	Age 9-10	\$30
Category 3	Age 11-12	\$40
Category 4	Age 13-14	\$50
Category 5	Age 15-16	\$60
Category 6	Age 17-18	\$70
Category 7	Non-Music Majors and Amateur Pianists	\$80 (no age limit)
Category 8	College Undergraduate Piano Majors	\$100
Category 9	College Graduate Piano Majors	\$100

Repertoire Requirements

- **All contestants must provide one clean copy** of each selection for the judges.

Categories 1–3 (Grades 1–6)

- Perform **two contrasting pieces.**
- Maximum total performance time: **10 minutes.**

Categories 4–6 (Grades 7–12)

- Perform **two contrasting pieces**, each from **different musical periods** (Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionistic, or Contemporary).
- Maximum total performance time: **15 minutes. All repertoires must be original compositions for piano.**
No arrangements, simplifications, or transcriptions are allowed.

Categories 7–11 (College and Amateur)

- Perform **two or more pieces**, each from a **different period** (Baroque, Classical, Romantic, Impressionistic, or Contemporary).
- Maximum total performance time: **15 minutes**.
- If more than two pieces are presented, they should be in **contrasting styles**.

Memory Performance: Strongly encouraged and included in the judging criteria, though not required.

Note: The repertoire listed in the application **may not be changed** after submission.



Jury & Evaluation

- The jury is composed of **University of North Dakota Piano Faculty**, nationally and internationally recognized for their performance and teaching excellence.
- The jury's decisions are **final**.



Awards & Scoring

For each category, the following recognitions may be awarded:

- **First Prize:** 97–100 points
- **Second Prize:** 94–96 points
- **Third Prize:** 90–93 points
- **Honorable Mention:** 85–89 points

Additional **special awards** may also be granted.

The competition is **open to the public**.



Competition Application Process

The links will be available from October 1st until November 1st, 2025.

Apply online: The link will be available by October 1st on the UND Music Website.

Application Fee: \$20 (non-refundable)

Piano Master Class by UND Piano Faculty (no fee for this event)

November 15, 2025 (Saturday) 3:00-4:00pm

Apply online: The link will be available by October 1st on the UND Music Website.

International Piano Festival Schedule

November 14, 2025 (Friday)

7:30pm Dr. Catalin Dima Guest Piano Recital

November 15, 2025 (Saturday)

8:00am Warm-up

9:00am Piano Competitions

2:00pm Dr. Catalin Dima Guest Piano Master Class

3:00pm Piano Master Class by UND Piano Faculty

4:30pm Announcement of Winners and Gala Concert

November 16, 2025 (Sunday)

1:30pm Recital featuring Select UND Piano Studio Students and Piano Studio Alumni

Contact: Dr. Nariaki Sugiura

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University of North Dakota Music Department

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