

# Sibelius Violin Competition expels Russian performers

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The cowardly and unprincipled boycott of Russian culture and artists by international cultural organizations reached a new low last week with the April 8 announcement by the Committee of the 12th International Jean Sibelius Violin Competition that it would exclude Russian participants from this year's competition.

In wording that goes beyond the usual mealy-mouthed administrative language of other such organizations that have renounced Russian works and artists since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Competition Committee for the Sibelius Competition justified its undemocratic action by asserting:

The war in Ukraine and the atrocities that have been uncovered have led to a situation in which the Competition Committee has decided to exclude Russian participants from the competition in order to protect other competitors and the competition as a whole.

The absurd implication is that the presence of young Russian violinists poses a threat to the safety of the "other competitors and the competition as a whole."

Organized by the Sibelius Society and the Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki, the violin competition is held every five years for violinists up to the age of thirty. According to the competition's website, this year's competition was originally scheduled for late 2020 but was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Out of a record number of applications, two Russian violinists had advanced beyond the preliminary selection process.

The committee boasts in one paragraph on the web

page, "On March 7, 2022, the Competition Committee decided that all competitors would be judged purely on their artistic merits." (Russia had invaded Ukraine on February 24.) In the next paragraph, displaying a breathtaking lack of principle, they declare:

However, the situation has changed since the beginning of March as the war in Ukraine has continued to intensify. Therefore, on 8 April 2022, the Competition Committee re-examined the possibilities for Russian competitors selected for the Jean Sibelius Violin Competition and concluded that, in the current exceptional circumstances, participation in the competition was not possible. The horrors of the war and the recently uncovered atrocities have meant that the Competition Committee has no moral or ethical option but to exclude the Russians from the competition.

In other words, first, the committee argued that artistic merit is what counts and that a country's artists are not to be held accountable for their government's conduct. One might even extrapolate that it is art and culture that break down artificial partitions like nationality and ethnicity and that present humanity with the very counterpoint to war. But should "the situation" change, should a war "continue to intensify," well then, we'd better take a second look at those artists. The competition committee does not even attempt to smooth over its gross illogic but simply assures us that its hands are tied by morality.

They cap their statement with this declaration: "With this decision, the Competition Committee also wants to

guarantee a neutral and peaceful environment for all competitors.” In seeking a “peaceful” environment for the competition, the committee may imply that they fear a terrorist attack should the young Russians participate. If so, such a specific rationale should be spelled out. Easier to conclude is that the committee means to imply that where Russians go—even violinists—violence will follow.

No less absurd is the claim that the committee wishes to guarantee a “neutral” environment. Nothing could be further from the truth. By endorsing the US-NATO narrative of the war, the Competition Committee tips its hand, but there are larger forces at work here than the Sibelius Competition. Finland, which shares an 800-mile border with Russia, has been negotiating its entry into NATO, which could happen as soon as this summer. One would have to assume that the Finnish authorities brought considerable pressure to bear on the Sibelius Competition and the University of the Arts Helsinki to assume an anti-Russian stance. Nevertheless, Chairman Lauri Ratia and his colleagues on the Competition Committee must ultimately bear responsibility for their egregious decision to betray the arts by excluding Russian violinists from the competition.

As we have previously noted on the WSWS, outstanding Russian conductors, singers and musicians such as Valery Gergiev, Tugan Sokhiev, Anna Netrebko and Alexander Malofeev have become victims of the lynch mob atmosphere incited by the Biden administration and European governments. The anti-Russian propaganda is aimed both at stupefying the various populations and stampeding them into war and at concealing the cynical manner in which the conflict has been deliberately provoked and ignited by the US and its NATO allies.

The Sibelius Competition Committee has sided with the most reactionary, regressive forces and against social and cultural progress. Its actions should be condemned.



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