

06 / 2026

Jooyeon Ka wins the ZF Music Award 2026

Born in 1995, Jooyeon Ka from South Korea impressed across the board and wins the twelfth ZF Music Award.

Last Sunday, June 7, Jooyeon Ka won the ZF Music Award, endowed with €10,000. Second place, with prize money of €5,000, went to Spain's Emin Kiourktchian, while third place, awarded €3,000, was secured by Maiqi Wu from China.

The piano competition for the ZF Music Award 2026 remained exciting until the very last minute. Once again this year, the level of competition was exceptionally high. Six young pianists from five nations, all of them multiple international prizewinners, took part in the competition. The three finalists had already demonstrated outstanding musicality and exceptional virtuosity in the first two selection rounds. With masterful technique and outstanding interpretations of works by Johann Sebastian Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven, as well as contemporary music and works of German Romanticism, the three young artists prevailed in the first two rounds held at the Münzhof in Langenargen.

Accordingly, expectations were high for the third and decisive competition concert last Sunday at the Graf-Zeppelin-Haus in Friedrichshafen: concert études as well as works from the 19th and 20th centuries formed a demanding program that once again required the finalists to demonstrate the full extent of their abilities. Around 400 visitors came to the Graf-Zeppelin-Haus to experience the final concert with these exceptional young musicians up close. Expectations were more than fulfilled. All three finalists captivated the audience and delivered a concert of the highest musical quality.

During the intermission, the audience eagerly awaited the counting of the Audience Award votes and, above all, the decision of the jury, which had to evaluate performances across all three concerts. This year's international jury, chaired by Peter Vogel, included Turkish-American pianist Özgür Aydın, Prof. Yuka Imamine, Professor of Piano at the University of Music and Performing Arts Munich, and Seonghyeon Leem, winner of the ZF Music Award 2024.

Based on her consistently brilliant performances throughout all three competition concerts, the jury awarded Jooyeon Ka first prize at the ZF Music Award 2026. "She analyzes the score down to the finest detail and succeeds in making every nuance audible without losing sight of the overall structure. Her playing is characterized by the highest virtuosity and artistic sensitivity—it is rich in color, imaginative, lyrical, and highly versatile," the jury stated. In the final concert, the South Korean pianist once again delivered a magnificent performance with Frédéric Chopin's Étude Op. 10 No. 10 in A-flat major, Sergei Rachmaninoff's Étude No. 5 in E-flat minor from Études-Tableaux Op. 33, and Maurice Ravel's *Le Tombeau de Couperin*.

Emin Kiourktchian placed second overall. The Spanish pianist impressed in Friedrichshafen with Felix Blumenfeld's Étude for the Left Hand in A-flat major Op. 36, Frédéric Chopin's Étude Op. 10 No. 10 in C-sharp minor, and Alexander Scriabin's Sonata No. 3 in F-sharp minor Op. 23.

Third-place winner Maiqi Wu from China once again demonstrated her remarkable ability in the final concert with Frédéric Chopin's Études Op. 10 No. 4 and Op. 25 No. 5, the Polonaise-Fantaisie Op. 61, and the Nocturne Op. 62 No. 1.

Audience participation is also an important element of the ZF Music Award: at each concert, listeners can vote to award an Audience Prize, each endowed with €500. In addition to the programmatic focuses that give each concert a unique appeal, the Audience Prize makes the competition an

especially exciting musical experience. At the first concert, the Audience Prize went to Vivien Walser. The audience favorite at the second and third concerts was Emin Kiourktchian.

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Press Images ZF Music Award 2026 / Photocredits



Jooyeon Ka, South Korea, wins the ZF Music Award 2026.
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Jooyeon Ka, South Korea, wins the ZF Music Award 2026.
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Emin Kiourktchian, Spain, 2nd place ZF Music Award 2026.
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Maiqi Wu, China, 3rd place ZF Music Award 2026.
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Jooyeon Ka (center) wins the ZF Music Award 2026.
Emin Kiourktchian (left) finishes 2nd, Maiqi Wu (right) takes 3rd place.
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