



# ATOS Young Theatre Organist Competition

## 2026 Rules and Guidelines

The American Theatre Organ Society (ATOS) is pleased to announce its Young Theatre Organist Competition (YTOC) for 2026. Founded in 1985, the YTOC has aided in the career advancement of many theatre organists who perform internationally today. The immense success of the competition makes it one of the most successful of those sponsored by the ATOS, alongside the annual Summer Youth Adventure (SYA) events, and George Wright Memorial Fellowship awards.

YTOC is open to young organists between the ages of thirteen and twenty-nine. Successful competitors are eligible to win \$500 from ATOS, a trip to the 2026 YTOC in Rochester, New York, and the opportunity to perform live before the convention audience in July!

The first place winner of the competition will be awarded an additional \$500, plus \$1000 from the Garden State Theatre Organ Society (GSTOS). They will also be featured at the 2027 ATOS Convention in a concert appearance! Changes to the competition have been introduced in recent years, so please read these rules and guidelines carefully.

# Competition Rules

## Eligibility

- 1) The Young Theatre Organist Competition is open to organists between the ages of **thirteen** and **twenty-nine**, as of July 1, **2026**. Previous winners of the YTOC are not eligible.
- 2) Entrants who are ATOS members and affiliated with an ATOS Chapter may be sponsored by their local Chapter. There is no limit to the number of entrants an ATOS Chapter may sponsor. Each Chapter is encouraged to sponsor as many entrants as possible.
- 3) Entrants who are not members of ATOS, or who are ATOS members but unaffiliated with an ATOS Chapter, may enter the competition as “entrants-at-large.”
- 4) There is no limit to the number of years a finalist may compete in the YTOC competition. (Past winners are ineligible to compete.)
- 5) Candidates are requested to send a Notice of Intent to enter the YTOC immediately.
  - a) Please send the Notice of Intent to Luke Staisiunas, competition chair, at [l.staisiunas@atos.org](mailto:l.staisiunas@atos.org).
- 6) All competition materials must be submitted by **May 1, 2026**
- 7) Should the adjudicators determine that there will be fewer than three qualified entries, there will be no competition and no overall winner will be declared. Those finalists may be asked to perform as part of a live public performance at the ATOS event. Since there would be no overall winner, only the \$500 finalist compensation would be awarded.
- 8) Audio recordings for the preliminary round of the competition must be submitted electronically.
  - a) No video files will be accepted.
  - b) Each selection must be a separate file.
  - c) The selections should be trimmed to exclude any talking, applause, or other extraneous noises.
- 9) The materials submitted to the Competition Committee must include the signed Young Theatre Organist Competition Application & Certification Form. In the case of an entrant sponsored by an ATOS Chapter, the recording must be certified by the Chapter President or other officer (e.g., Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer). In the case of an “entrant-at-large”,

the recording must be certified by an ATOS member at least 18-years-old, who is not related to the entrant, and who does not live in the same household as the entrant.

- 10) The following selections must be recorded by the entrant. The titles and composers must be provided. In addition, the source of the arrangement (i.e. the artist, another musician, their instructor, published arrangement) must be indicated.
  - a. Up-Tempo: An up-tempo number, which could be used as the opening number in a program. The up-tempo selection may not exceed five (5) minutes.
  - b. Ballad: A lyric composition or ballad. This selection may not exceed seven (7) minutes.
  - c. A medley consisting of at least three (3) selections based on a common theme or idea (musical, composer, genre, etc). The medley must be between approximately five (5) and ten (10) minutes in length.
  - d. Classical Work or Transcription: A selection from the Classical Organ Repertoire, or a transcription of an orchestral work or classical piano piece. This selection must not exceed ten (10) minutes.
- 11) The entrant's performance shall be played on a theatre pipe organ or electronic theatre organ, whether Analog, Digital, Hauptwerk, etc. The entrant shall indicate the size of instrument (manuals, ranks, builder) or make and model of electronic organ.
- 12) The entrant's recording may not (a) feature automatic rhythm units, such as those found on some electronic or pizza parlor organs; (b) make use of features such as overdubbing and/or multi-tracking; or (c) be edited, spliced, or otherwise altered. Noise reduction and equalization to accurately represent the instrument are allowed, as is the trimming of takes to only include the entrant's playing.
- 13) A high quality photo of the entrant and biography (not exceeding 300 words) must be submitted with the recorded materials. This material will be used to feature all entrants in forthcoming articles in the ATOS Theatre Organ Journal and will be published on the ATOS website. Additionally, it will be included on the ATOS Facebook page.
- 14) Submission of recordings, printed material, photographs, and any other material to ATOS in connection with the Competition constitutes an irrevocable worldwide license for ATOS to distribute, copy, and/or otherwise use that material in connection with the activities of ATOS. Digital copies of the finalists' recordings submitted for the competition may also be posted on the ATOS website.

## Adjudication Criteria for Entries

- 15) Each entrant's recording will be duplicated and distributed to several judges. Judging will be done anonymously. However, the judges will be given information about the instruments on which the entrants recorded. Recordings will be identified by an anonymous number.
- 16) Three anonymous judges will select up to three (3) finalists among the entrants of the preliminary round. In the event that there are insufficient entries in the competition to allow for a valid competition, there will be no competition and no overall winner will be declared. The competition Committee reserves the right to determine if an entry meets the standard to win the Competition in a given year.
- 17) The judges will review each of the entries and will evaluate the entrant's performance based on the following criteria:
  - a. Accuracy and Clarity: How cleanly and accurately the entrant plays each of their selections. Correct notes and correct rhythms will be taken into consideration when scoring.
  - b. Use of the theatre organ's resources: How well the entrant uses theatre organ styling, registrations, console management, etc.
  - c. Musicality: Overall musical sensitivity to the selections, attention to detail in phrasing/dynamics, how well the lyrics (if applicable) are reflected, etc.

## Live Round Criteria

The live round will be judged on the same criteria, with an added focus on console management.

The live round will also feature the following criterion in addition to the above:

- d. Stage presence: How well the artist presented themselves on stage, the preparation into their spoken remarks, clarity of diction, etc.
- 18) The judges' decisions will be final. The identity of the judges of the competition will not be disclosed until after each round of the competition has ended.
- 19) *(As of 2024)* For the live round, each finalist will have 30 minutes to present a program of their choosing. **The finalists do not have to play the same material as the recorded round, and may not be able to based on the time constraints.** It is suggested that the finalists prepare contrasting selections to show off their abilities and personal styles as effectively as possible for the judges and audience.
- 20) Additionally, the audience will have the opportunity to vote for their favorite among the finalists.

## Competition Prizes and Payment of Expenses

- 21) Each of the finalists will receive an honorarium of five hundred dollars (\$500). ATOS will cover the cost for finalists to Milwaukee WI, where they will perform in the Young Theatre Organist Competition concert. Any finalist who is under the age of 18, as of the beginning date of the event (July 5, 2026), must be accompanied by a guardian..
- 22) ATOS does not cover meals, personal or incidental expenses, or expenses for an adult supervisor for candidates under the age of 18, or any other expense not specified above. An adult parent/guardian may, however, share the hotel room paid for by ATOS.
- 23) If a finalist is not an ATOS member, ATOS will provide the finalist a complimentary one-year membership. If a finalist is an ATOS member, ATOS will provide the finalist a complimentary one-year extension of their membership.

## Rehearsal Information

Transportation will be provided to and from the hotel to the venue where the YTOC will be held. Finalists will have three (3) hours, final time allotment dependent on venue scheduling, to familiarize themselves with the organ, set pistons, and rehearse. Should their time be interrupted for any reason, accommodations will be made as much as possible to ensure that finalists get their full rehearsal time.

Each finalist will have 30 minutes to warm up on the day of the competition.

### Memory Levels:

1. YTOC Finalists will be allotted memory levels, dependent on the organ. On instruments equipped with the capability of separating groups of memory levels into “folders”, “users”, “libraries”, etc., each artist will have one folder/user/library/etc. at their disposal.
2. On organs containing multi-level combination actions *without* folder/user/library/etc. capability, the artists will be allotted a predetermined level of memory levels.
3. On instruments with a single memory level, setterboard, or mechanical combination action, artists will be allotted pistons as needed, while otherwise sharing an agreed-upon set of “house” pistons.
4. Any extenuating circumstances pertaining to the distribution of memory levels and pistons will be dealt with at the discretion of the YTOC Chair, the YTOC artists, and those responsible for the technical care of the venue’s instrument.
5. Artists will *not* be allowed to reconfigure or otherwise alter the instrument itself nor the instrument's definition file/configuration of the venue organ’s specification unless extenuating circumstances warrant it.
  - a. Altering the stops which are affected by pistons (known as “range”, “map”, “compass”, etc.) *is* allowed, provided that such settings do not interfere with other competitor’s memory levels.

### Questions?

Please feel free to contact Luke Staisiunas, YTOC Chair, should you have any questions or need any additional information. The Chairperson, judges, and all involved will do everything reasonably possible to ensure an enjoyable experience!

## Recording Suggestions

- 1) Make sure performances are not overshadowed by noises and other distractions in the facility. These include talking, traffic, or building construction noise. These should be minimized to ensure that the recording is of the highest quality achievable.
- 2) A high quality digital recorder and/or external microphones should be used if possible. Recording in an uncompressed format (such as WAV) ensures that the organ will be captured in the best possible resolution.
- 3) Automatic level adjustments should be disabled, as automatic gain control can interfere with (or eliminate) expression.
  - a) Be sure to set the level with full organ, and ensure that the recorder can capture the full range of dynamics used by the entrant.
  - b) Be sure to test recorder placement to ensure that extraneous noises such as air-conditioners, other mechanical equipment, etc. will not interfere with capturing the organ in recording.
- 4) Microphone placement should be such that it accurately captures the sound of the organ. It is highly recommended that electronic organs are *not* recorded through the line outputs.
- 5) When the recording is started and stopped, be sure to allow a few seconds to avoid cutting off any of the musical performance, and capturing the acoustic of the room.