



TOIVO KUULA SINGING COMPETITION 2025

Press Release

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City of Alavus
www.alavus.fi

Toivo Kuula Singing Competition welcomes international participants for the first time

The esteemed **Toivo Kuula Singing Competition** is set to take place **on 9th and 10th August 2025 in Alavus**, Finland. The competition in 2025 will, for the first time, be open to participants from around the world, in addition to Finnish singers and those living in Finland.

The competition is named after the revered Finnish composer Toivo Kuula, whose vocal music forms an integral part of Finnish cultural heritage alongside with his contemporaries Jean Sibelius and Oskar Merikanto.

"Our goal is to introduce Toivo Kuula's music and the cultural heritage of South Ostrobothnia to new generations of singers from different countries. To address language barriers, we will allow some Finnish songs to be performed with translated lyrics if available," explains the competition's **artistic director Sirkka Lamminen**.

Finnish contemporary music in the spotlight

The Toivo Kuula Singing Competition 2025 will also evolve to showcase contemporary Finnish vocal compositions. Alongside Kuula's works, each round will include a piece of contemporary art music from Finnish composers chosen by the participants. Lamminen expresses enthusiasm for this development: *"This enhancement will enrich the competition, providing audiences with a blend of classical and contemporary art music."*

Kirsi Tiihonen, chair of the jury, comments on the revised evaluation criteria: *"Our assessment will now place greater emphasis not only on vocal ability and expressiveness but also on the curation of the repertoire. The artistic cohesion of the performance will be given more weight, encouraging singers to present a more nuanced and distinctive artistic persona."*

Lamminen and Tiihonen highlight the competition's role in advancing singers' careers: *"Winners of the Toivo Kuula Singing Competition have gained prominence and career momentum, proving themselves as exceptional artists in varied professional settings. For instance, soprano Silja Aalto recently performed as a soloist at the renowned BBC Proms festival with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sakari Oramo at the Royal Albert Hall in London."*

Competition open to singers of all ages, voice types, and genders

The Toivo Kuula Singing Competition 2025 is open to classical music singers of all nationalities and ages, with a single category accommodating all voice types.

Sirkka Lamminen explains the rationale behind the competition rules: *"There is no age limit for participants because performing Toivo Kuula's songs demands a high level of technique and expressive maturity, which are typically developed by more experienced singers. We aim to highlight the artists who excel in performing this music, so age is not a factor. Similarly, gender and voice type are not considerations. Kirsi Tiihonen continues: "Toivo Kuula's songs are vocally and expressively demanding, like opera arias. That's why an opera aria is required as the second piece in the pre-qualification. We seek to provide singers the opportunity to select Finnish contemporary works that best complement their voice, as this is likely to bring out the fullest expression of the compositions."*

The three best singers of the Toivo Kuula Singing Competition 2025 will be awarded as follows:

I Prize: 10.000 euros

II Prize: 6.000 euros

III Prize: 3.000 euros

The jury will also award the "Seppo Ruohonen" Prize for the best interpretation of contemporary music. The prize is worth 1.000 euros.

Registration is now open

Registration for the Toivo Kuula Singing Competition 2025 is currently open and will continue until 31 October 2024. Interested participants can register via the electronic form available on the event website at www.toivokuula.fi, where further details and competition rules in both Finnish and English can be found.

Strong cultural tradition creates vitality

The Toivo Kuula Singing Competition will be held in the composer's hometown for the fourth time.

Liisa Heinämäki, Mayor of Alavus, praises the competition's concept: "*Alavus takes pride in its deep-seated cultural heritage, and this competition is a testament to its refined development. It will enhance the profile of Alavus and attract visitors, benefitting local entrepreneurs. The Toivo Kuula Singing Competition has become a significant cultural event that invigorates the community and offers valuable experiences.*"

Tiihonen and Lamminen agree with Heinämäki: "*This competition has firmly established itself as a premier event in Finnish cultural life. It is highly esteemed and enjoys considerable popularity among participants. Past competitions have greatly enhanced the city's visibility and provided substantial benefits to local businesses.*"

Ticket sales will start in November 2024

Anu Katajamäki, project manager of the Toivo Kuula Singing Competition 2025, notes that preparations are well underway: "*Tickets for the event will go on sale in November 2024, and the jury will be announced later this autumn. We are managing numerous details, but our extensive experience in organising the event ensures its smooth execution. The event has always been commended for its impeccable arrangements, which is a point of pride for us!*"

Toivo Kuula singing competition in brief

The Toivo Kuula Singing Competition 2025 is organised by the City of Alavus. A competition committee has been set up to organise the event. The competition was established to celebrate Toivo Kuula's (1883-1918) remarkable music and discover new interpreters for his work. The Toivo Kuula Singing Competition 2025 aims also to showcase contemporary Finnish composers and their vocal music. Each participant's repertoire must include contemporary art songs in classical genre.

The competition unfolds over four stages. Preliminary entrants will be chosen through a pre-qualification process based on video submissions. The preliminary round is set for 19 January 2025 in Seinäjoki, with the semi-finals and finals to be held on 9-10 August 2025 in Alavus.

The Toivo Kuula Singing Competition has been held in 2012, 2016 and 2021 in Alavus. The jury of previous competitions has included internationally recognized opera and Lied singers e.g. Monica Groop, Camilla Nylund, Karita Mattila, Seppo Ruohonen, Jaakko Ryhänen and Matti Salminen. A competition with the same name has once been held in 1987 by different organizers in Vantaa.

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