

THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL
FESTIVAL
of
EARLY MUSIC



2026

THE LONDON INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL OF EARLY MUSIC

**EARLY MUSIC YOUNG
ENSEMBLE COMPETITION**

FRIDAY 13 NOVEMBER 2026 • BLACKHEATH HALLS, LONDON

EARLY MUSIC YOUNG ENSEMBLE COMPETITION 2026

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PRIZES

First Prize	£1500 and a recital at LIFEM 2027
Second Prize	£1000
Third Prize	£500

ADJUDICATORS

Erik Bosgraaf (chair)
Tomoe Badiarova
Jane Chapman



INTRODUCTION

The Early Music Young Ensemble Competition is presented every two years by the London International Festival of Early Music (LIFEM). Selected finalists have the opportunity to perform to a panel and live audience during the festival, which is a bustling four-day event with concerts, an exhibition, talks, young performers' platforms, and much more. The festival has been at the forefront of the promotion of early music, both in the UK and internationally, for over 50 years.

We are pleased to invite applications for the 2026 competition. The preliminary round will be judged via audio/video recordings, and three ensembles will be selected to perform live in the final. **The final will be held on Friday 13 November 2026 as part of LIFEM 2026 at Blackheath Halls, London.**

EARLY MUSIC YOUNG ENSEMBLE COMPETITION 2026

HOW TO APPLY

Applications should be completed online by scanning the QR code or clicking the link below. As part of the application process, the application fee of £30 will be due for payment.

<https://lifem.org/early-music-young-ensemble-competition/>



The application deadline is **Monday 15 June 2026 at 23:59 BST**. All fees must be received by Monday 22 June. Incomplete or late applications will not be considered.

ELIGIBILITY

- Ensembles must have a minimum of two members and a maximum of eight.
- Soloists are not eligible.
- All musicians must be over 18 at the time of entry.
- The ensemble must have an average age of 30 or under on 13 November 2026 to be eligible.
- Ensembles must predominantly perform repertoire commonly accepted as 'early music' (i.e. pre-1800) on period instruments. **One contemporary piece** written for, or performed on, period instruments should also be included in preliminary round programmes.
- Applications are welcomed from any country.
- Individuals may enter with any number of ensembles.
- Previous winning ensembles may not enter.



2024 winners Polychroma performing their winners' recital at LIFEM 2025.

PROGRAMME GUIDELINES

The 15-minute programme that you provide as part of the application should be indicative of the type of programme that you would want to present at the final, but it does not have to be the same programme.

AUDIO/VIDEO GUIDELINES

The audio/video submitted must feature only the musicians who will take part in the competition. All individual members of the ensemble must be included. Two or more contrasting pieces totalling no more than 15 minutes should be chosen to best represent the ensemble's usual programming, consisting of early music repertoire with one contemporary piece. The audio must be un-edited and recorded in one take, just as in a live performance. Recordings should be submitted digitally, i.e. via Dropbox, OneDrive, Google Drive or similar. Recordings hosted on video streaming platforms such as YouTube may also be accepted, provided there is no mention of the competition in accompanying captions. Recordings must be accompanied by relevant track details.

SELECTION PROCESS & CRITERIA

A maximum of four ensembles will be chosen to proceed to the live final at LIFEM 2026. Finalists will be notified that they have been successful no later than Friday 11 September 2026. The judges will choose the finalists based on the following criteria:

- Musicianship
- Interpretation
- Historical style of performance
- Technical ability
- Repertoire choice

THE FINAL

The final will take place on Friday 13 November in the Recital Room at Blackheath Halls, London, as part of LIFEM 2026. Finalists will be given a short soundcheck (no more than 20 minutes) on the morning of the final at the venue. There will be a double manual harpsichord (tuned at a415) and a chamber organ (tuned at a415/440) available for finalists to use. LIFEM may be able to assist with other keyboard instruments, but their procurement will ultimately be the responsibility of the finalists. The order of the finalists will be decided by LIFEM. The finalists' programme and programme notes will need to be submitted by Thursday 1 October 2026, along with a photo and short biography of the ensemble if not already supplied.



PAST WINNERS

2024	Polychroma
2022	Ensemble Pampinea
2020	Ensemble Hesperis / Ensemble Pro Victoria (joint winners)
2018	Palisander / Tinker Pypker & Anders Muskens Duo (joint winners)

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OTHER RULES

The decisions of the panel are final and cannot be appealed.

LIFEM reserves the right to record any or all of the competition final, and to organise broadcasts and/or distribute recordings of the final without recompense to the competitors.

The finalists will co-operate with LIFEM and provide requested material in a timely manner, for example ensemble photos, biographies and any other material needed by LIFEM to promote the competition and the final.

LIFEM reserves the right to:

- Cancel or change the competition at any point
- Vary or change the prizes
- Substitute judges if required
- Disqualify any ensemble which breaches the rules

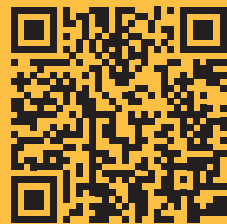
QUESTIONS?

If you have any queries or need help completing the online application, please contact our Festival Administrator, Finn, at: **finn@lifem.org**

The deadline for completed applications is Monday 15 June 2026 at 23:59 BST.

[CLICK OR SCAN HERE TO APPLY NOW!](https://lifem.org/early-music-young-ensemble-competition/)

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The 2026 Early Music Young Ensembles Competition is generously supported by
The Early Music Shop

www.lifem.org

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LIFEM Photography by Anna McCarthy