

As of August 2026

FACTS - FIGURES - PEOPLE: NEUE STIMMEN AT A GLANCE

In 2026, the International Singing Competition NEUE STIMMEN will be held for the 21st time.

NEUE STIMMEN is a project of the **Liz Mohn Foundation** that supports international emerging talent in the field of opera. The competition was initiated and founded by **Liz Mohn in 1987**. The aim of the program is to prepare young singers for their **careers over the long term and to provide them with sustained support**. At the heart of the support program is the singing competition of the same name, to which opera talents from all over the world can apply **every two years**. Following several selection stages, around **40 singers** are invited to the final round in Gütersloh. There, they can win not only cash prizes, but also gain **valuable contacts with opera company directors, agents and talent scouts** from the international opera world. Over the years, the program has been expanded to include numerous additional opportunities: since 1997, emerging talents have been able to take part in the **master class** for in-depth career development. Since 2013, prizewinners have also presented their skills at prizewinner concerts in Berlin. Further **concert appearances, coaching seminars and collaborations with universities, opera studios and festivals** complete the wide-ranging support program.

Organizer

Liz Mohn Foundation

Founder and President of NEUE STIMMEN: **Liz Mohn**

Objective

To **discover, advise and provide sustained support** to emerging talents, and to guide them toward national and international careers.

Participants

Between December 8, 2025, and February 8, 2026, **1,126 singers** from more than **69 countries** applied. The age limit is uniformly set at 30 years. In the first round, applications are submitted digitally. In addition to information on age, voice type, training and stage experience, applicants must submit two opera arias by video. In total, the preselection jury members review around 2,252 videos. **467 applicants qualify for the international pre-selection auditions**. In this second round, the **live auditions**, the **best 40 talents are ultimately selected for the final round** in Gütersloh. Applications from almost every continent underscore the competition's international reach and show how the power of music connects people from different cultural backgrounds.

Preselection Auditions

The **live auditions** take place from **April 13 to June 10, 2026, in twelve major cities**: Amsterdam, Berlin, Frankfurt, Houston, London, Milan, Munich, New York City, Paris, Warsaw, Vienna and Zürich.

Final Round and Concerts in Gütersloh

The final round with 40 participants takes place from **October 5 to 9, 2026** at Stadthalle Gütersloh. After two audition days (October 5 and 6), **16 singers** qualify for the **semifinal concert on October 7**. From this group, the jury selects the **eight best talents** for the **final concert on October 9**. At the final, prize money totaling EUR 60,000 will be awarded. The **Duisburg Philharmonic** will accompany the final under the baton of Vitali Alekseenok; Holger Noltze will host the evening in German. Both concerts will be **streamed**; the final concert will also be available to an international audience via **OperaVision**, a free opera streaming platform.

Prizes

Cash prizes totaling EUR 60,000 are awarded for the first three places in the **women's and men's** categories. In addition, NEUE STIMMEN awards an **Audience Prize** and several special **development prizes**. Particularly valuable for the finalists is the **direct exchange** with opera company directors, festival directors and agents, as well as the **individual advice** provided by jury members during the final round.

Prize Money 2026

1st Prize, Women: EUR 15,000	 1st Prize, Men: EUR 15,000
2nd Prize, Women: EUR 10,000	 2nd Prize, Men: EUR 10,000
3rd Prize, Women: EUR 5,000	 3rd Prize, Men: EUR 5,000

Special Development Prizes and Performance Opportunities

Brian Dickie Young Talent Award

The award will be presented for the fourth time in 2026 and carries prize money of **EUR 5,000**. It is intended **to support and encourage very young talents** whose artistic potential is particularly evident and should be developed in a targeted way.

Patagonia Voice Award

Fundación Teatro del Lago in Chile offers one singer the exceptional opportunity to perform at the **southernmost opera house** in the world. The venue is internationally renowned for its outstanding acoustics and is part of the prestigious Patagonia Festival.

Junior Jury Prize

Following its successful launch in 2024, a **Junior Jury** of young people aged 16 to 18 will again take part in the 2026 competition. During the semifinal, it will award its own prize of **EUR 1,000**. The young jurors independently determine which criteria are decisive for the award.

Audience Prize

Audience impact is a central aspect of a successful singing career. During the **final concert**, audience members vote for their favorite and thus honor an especially charismatic artistic personality. The Audience Prize is also endowed with **EUR 1,000**.

Jury of the Final Round

- Alexander Neef, Chair of the Jury, Director of the Opéra national de Paris
- Nicole Car, soprano, 1st prizewinner of the 2013 competition
- Samuel Gelber, Director of Artistic Planning and Operations, Washington National Opera **(also Rounds 1 & 2)**
- Xenia Hofmann, Opera Director for Planning and Casting at Zurich Opera House
- Boris Ignatov, Casting Director at Stuttgart State Opera
- Sophie de Lint, Director of Dutch National Opera
- Sophie Joyce, Casting Director at the Opera National de Paris **(Rounds 1 & 2 only)**
- Bernd Loebe, General Manager of Oper Frankfurt
- Christoph Seufferle, Opera Director of Deutsche Oper Berlin **(also Rounds 1 & 2)**
- Niel Shicoff, tenor
- Elisabeth Sobotka, General Manager of Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin
- Evamaria Wieser, Casting Director of the Salzburg Festival and European Casting Consultant for Lyric Opera of Chicago **(also Rounds 1 & 2)**

Successful Former Participants

Many former NEUE STIMMEN finalists have launched impressive international careers. They include: Nathalie Stutzmann, Vesselina Kasarova, René Pape, Michael Volle, Anna Samuil, Franco Fagioli, Maxim Mironov, Marina Rebeka, Kristine Opolais, Christiane Karg, Jakub Józef Orliński, Kristina Mkhitarian, Nadine Sierra, Elsa Dreisig, Emily D'Angelo, Pene Pati, Long Long, Nombulelo Yende and Anna El-Khashem.

Unique Support for Singers

The NEUE STIMMEN competition is characterized by an especially fair, development-oriented structure that is unique internationally in this form.

Worldwide Preselection Auditions

Unlike many other singing competitions, NEUE STIMMEN holds its preselection auditions worldwide. Every talent invited to a live audition is heard in person on site by one or more jury members.

No Financial Barriers

For all singers invited to the final round in Gütersloh, the Liz Mohn Foundation covers the costs of travel, hotel accommodation and meals. Pianists and rehearsal rooms are also provided free of charge during the competition. Apart from their own travel to the respective preselection auditions, participants incur no further costs. In this way, the competition ensures that talent, rather than financial means, determines participation.

Sustainable Networking and Career Opportunities

Through the extensive NEUE STIMMEN network, participants gain access to leading figures in the international opera world, including opera company directors, festival directors and agents. Many of them serve on the jury themselves and work directly with the emerging talents. This creates valuable personal contacts and concrete career opportunities that extend far beyond the competition.

Key Milestones Since the Competition Was Founded

- **1987:** First competition under the name "Neue Stimmen - European Singing Competition".
- **1989:** Introduction of the **two-year cycle**.
- **1993:** The competition becomes international: until then, participation had been restricted to students in Europe. From this point onward, **singers from all over the world** are allowed to apply, and a **preselection audition is held abroad** for the first time. With the new regulations, the name also changes - "European" becomes "International".
- **1995:** The German term "Wettstreit" is replaced by "Wettbewerb". Since then, the official title has been NEUE STIMMEN International Singing Competition.
- **1997:** The first **master class** takes place in Gütersloh and becomes a permanent fixture between competition years.
- **1999:** For the first time, more than **1,000 singers apply**.
- **2003:** The competition presents itself in a new design. The old logo, a stylized musical note, is replaced by the distinctive red visual identity. At the same time, a **standardized evaluation system, compulsory repertoire**, a dedicated website and **an applicant management tool** are introduced. The **first DVD recording** is also released.
- **2012:** A new format is launched: in addition to the master class with twelve to 15 participants each, four singers are invited for the first time to a **lied master class**. The **25th anniversary** is celebrated with a **gala concert** in Gütersloh on December 1, 2012.
- **2013:** A **new prize structure** with a higher total amount of prize money is introduced. **Annual prize winner concerts in Berlin** are also established.
- **2015:** The age limit is adjusted: 28 for female singers and 30 for male singers. The logo receives the claim "**Creating Careers**" to place even greater emphasis on the development mission.
- **2017:** The competition celebrates its 30th anniversary. The **Creating Careers** initiative is expanded with **additional performance opportunities, coaching sessions and Open Master Classes** that facilitate access to the international partner network.
- **2019:** The **alumni network** becomes a permanent part of the project. The experience of former participants feeds into the ongoing development of the competition. The academic study "**The Future of Opera Singing**" is also published.
- **2021/2022:** The **coronavirus pandemic** requires the competition to be postponed. **Video applications** are used for the first time, with consistently positive feedback. Despite the difficult circumstances, application numbers remain stable. In 2022, NEUE STIMMEN celebrates its **35th anniversary**.

Key Milestones Since the Competition Was Founded (continued)

- **2024:** The **20th competition** provides fresh impetus: with the **introduction of a Junior Jury**, young people from the opera and music fields actively participate in the competition for the first time. In addition, visitors can experience a **digital opera performance using a virtual-reality headset**, vividly demonstrating how classical music and new technologies can be combined.
- **2026:** The competition begins its 21st edition with an important innovation: **Alexander Neef**, Director of the Paris Opera, takes over as **Chair of the Jury**. He is one of Europe's leading cultural managers and is regarded as an outstanding supporter of young vocal talent.