

When he was 6 and living in Chernihiv, Ukraine, Illia Ovcharenko heard a performance of Tchaikovsky's first piano concerto. After the concert, Illia told his mother he wanted to be a pianist when he grew up.

Today, just a dozen years later, he's a celebrated virtuoso playing concerts all over the world

Most recently he won the Honens International Piano Competition in Calgary which recognizes an artist who demonstrates technical mastery, perseverance against adversity and an understanding of musical text that is intellectual and emotional. He's also won top prizes at the New York, Hilton Head, Busoni and Horowitz Piano competitions and has performed with La Monnaie Symphony in Brussels, the Jerusalem Symphony and l'Orchestre National Ile de France. Highlights of the 2023/24 season include debuts with the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Liechtenstein Symphony, and Haifa Symphony, as well as return engagements with the Calgary Philharmonic. Illia is scheduled to perform at Koerner Hall in Toronto, Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, Sendesaal in Hannover, Robert-Schumann-Saal in Düsseldorf, and Salle Bourgie in Montréal in the upcoming season. Illia began piano lessons at 9 and gave his first concert at 12 at the National Philharmonic of Ukraine.

At 13, Illia went to study in Kyiv at a high school for gifted musicians and later moved to Tel Aviv. He's currently living in Hannover, where he's finishing a master's program with his longtime mentor, Arie Vardi.

He thrives on live performance, feeling as if two souls - his and the composer's - are united together on stage. He's most at home playing romantic repertoire.

"I'm so happy when people hear me play and say I brought something new to their life or let them forget about their current troubles," he says. "Playing the piano is usually a much better way of communicating since there is something intimate involved in this process."