



SUNDAY
PLUS

Jimmy Award participants Kelly Whitlow, right, and Noah Henry, middle, are joined by student reporter Brityn Ramsey from John Overton High School. Student reporters were able to create video content of the Jimmy Award participants for social media. Ramsey also had sessions with press people to learn about that part of the theater business. CASSIE LAFEVOR

Students get coaching through TPAC program

Melonee Hurt
Special to Nashville Tennessean
USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

The Tennessee Performing Arts Center not only brings some of the best performances in musical theater to its Nashville stages, but the nonprofit organization is also bringing some of the genre’s best high school performers to the stage through the Nashville High School Musical Theatre Awards, or Spotlight Awards program.

This year, Ravenwood High School graduate Kelly Whitlow and Hillsboro High School graduate Noah Henry took Outstanding Lead Actor and Actress Spotlight Award honors and represented Nashville at the National High School Musical Theatre Awards or the Jimmy Awards, which culminated in a one-night-only talent showcase broadcast on the Jimmy Awards Facebook page and YouTube channels July 15.

Forty-five high schools in Middle Tennessee participated in the 2020-21 Spotlight Awards program, presented in partnership by TPAC and Lipscomb University’s George Shinn College of Entertainment & the Arts.

Although this year’s Jimmy Awards were virtual in lieu of the usual trip to New York City for an in-person experience, Whitlow and Henry spent 12 days at TPAC (June 20-July 1) participating in intensive theater workshops, rehearsals and coaching in a virtual setting.

“There were so many differences this year, but surprisingly even over Zoom I felt so connected to people I met even

though they live in different places,” Whitlow said. “I learned so many new things, we had great guest speakers and got to be face-to-face with them on Zoom. We still learned how to be in rehearsals and create a fun new project that will inspire people.”

Henry added that he, too, learned a lot, despite the program being virtual this year.

“The most important thing was getting to watch everyone else and their growth cycle,” Henry said. “Seeing them overcome roadblocks in their acting or singing was so valuable to me. I watched people learn how to open up and be more vulnerable.”

TPAC focuses on growing the arts

Cassie LaFavor, director of education enrichment for TPAC, said the main goal of the Spotlight Awards is to support, elevate and advocate high school education and engage the community in celebration of theater. “We always want to develop and grow theater and the arts,” she said.

Whitlow and Henry joined 70 student nominees from 36 regional programs across the country to work with coaches on rehearsing, learning opening and closing numbers and filming their parts of the award show broadcast.

“Kelly and Noah were still able to be part of medley groups, they worked with Broadway coaches and auditioned for amazing judges,” LaFavor said. “They got a very similar experience as those in years’ past, just in a different

Learning more

For more information about the Spotlight Awards, Nashville’s High School Musical Theatre Awards program, visit www.tpac.org/education-community/teaching-artists-in-schools/spotlight-awards. For additional information about the Jimmy Awards/National High School Musical Theatre Awards program, visit www.JimmyAwards.com.

way. The Jimmy Awards is focused on the learning experience and giving students the opportunity to network by getting to know the people who have been doing theater for a long time.”

All of the coaches, LaFavor said, are Broadway performers.

Students off to college

Whitlow is headed to Texas State University to pursue a Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theater and Henry is going to Belmont University where he will major in musical theater.

Both say they would love to perform in musical theater after college.

“I’d obviously love to be on Broadway or a national tour, but I’d also love to work on an original work,” Whitlow said. “I was very inspired to do something like that recently.”

Henry is also interested in original works and says his interests lie in the future of theater.

“Personally, I’d like to be involved in as many original works as possible regardless of what they are,” he said. “I’d love to do Broadway eventually, but it’s a tough path. It’s a lot of work, but I’m

willing to do it.”

Participants for the Spotlight Awards across Middle Tennessee are typically chosen by adjudicators going into schools to watch and score high school performers. This year, since schools weren’t doing live shows, students submitted auditions, which broadened the program’s reach into new counties for the first time.

“We had students participate from 10 different counties across the state representing 45 schools,” LaFavor said. “Normally because of logistics we only have about 30 schools participating, but because we weren’t sending people to the schools this year, we were able to increase the number and include more rural areas we cannot usually reach. Next year we will keep some of the virtual elements so we can include areas where we can’t send adjudicators.”

Additional 2020-21 Spotlight Award honorees include Brooke Colebank of Nolensville High School for the Spirit of Spotlight Award, Gracie Purkey of Goodpasture Christian School for Outstanding Choreography and Kate Henry of Hillsboro High School for Outstanding Design Concept.

OZ Arts Nashville announces 2021-22 lineup

Rose Gilbert
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USA TODAY NETWORK – TENNESSEE

Contemporary arts center OZ Arts Nashville announced the lineup for its upcoming 2021-22 season, which includes dance, theater and multimedia performances by creators from Nashville, Cuba, New York City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Germany and the United Kingdom.

During the earlier stages of the coronavirus pandemic, OZ, which was founded in 2013 by the Ozgener family, developed and showcased virtual content from artists across the nation. This spring, the arts center was able to host 66 live performances in their unique space, a former cigar storehouse. Now, OZ approaches the start of its ninth season, which features an international melange of performances exploring topics including generational divides, racial

justice and climate change.

“I’m inspired by the profound work of the artists we will host at OZ next season. They are at the forefront of their performing arts fields, and many of them are confronting some of the most important issues of these times in beautiful and inspiring ways,” said Mark Murphy, OZ Arts executive and artistic director.

The season opens Oct. 14 with “Nut-tin’ But a Word,” a contemporary, street and hip-hop fusion work by Philadelphia native Rennie Harris and his dance company Puremovement. A week later, they will travel to New York City to perform at the prestigious Fall for Dance Festival.

Other events include a Halloween show Oct. 30 by Nashville-based theatrical rockers Fable Cry; a collaboration Dec. 2-5 with music and dance by Dave Ragland, Shabaz Ujima, Inversion Vocal Ensemble and Diaspora Orchestra; and



Rennie Harris’ dance company, Puremovement. SUBMITTED/OZ ARTS NASHVILLE

on March 4-5 performances against the backdrop of soft sculptures by Nashville-born artist Vadis Turner.

For more information about the 2021-22 season, including schedules and prices, please visit ozartsnashville.org.