

A Look at the First National Music Theater Competition

In late 2011 NATS announced the first National Music Theater Competition (NMTC) and on June 30, 2012, Jacob Keith Watson, the first winner was announced at the 52nd National Conference in Orlando, FL. The NMTC aims to seek out and award the best emerging talent in music theater.

Open to singers age 20-28, the NMTC offered more than \$10,000 in cash and prizes to the top three contestants. Sponsors including Hal Leonard Corporation, Stage Door Access, Stage Stars, and ArtsApp all contributed to prize packages for first, second, and third place winner.

In the preliminary rounds, applicants had the option of auditioning in Chicago, New York City, Los Angeles, or online. Contestants who advanced from the preliminary rounds competed in the semifinals in Orlando, FL prior to the start of the 52nd National Conference. The finalists took the stage again that same week to compete in the final round.



Jacob Keith Watson, the first prize winner, is a native of Wynne, Arkansas and a graduate of Ouachita Baptist University, where he studied with John Secrest. In recent years, Jacob has performed roles in numerous mediums and genres. Some of his favorite roles include Frederic in *Pirates of Penzance*, Iago (U/S) in *Othello*, Feste in *Twelfth Night*, Corin in *As You Like It*, Horton the Elephant in *Seussical the Musical*, Albert in *Bye Bye Birdie*, Rodolfo in *La Boheme*, and Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*. In 2012, Jacob won second place in the international Lotte Lenya Competition and was regional finalist in the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Upcoming engagements include the roles of Conte Almaviva (cover) in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Beppe in *Pagliacci*, and Duke (cover) in *Rigoletto*. In February of 2013, Jacob will be a featured music theater soloist at the Kurt Weill Festival in Dessau, Germany.



Billy Marshall, Jr., the second prize winner, was born and raised in Denver CO. Billy studied music theater at the University of Northern Colorado. After graduating Billy moved to NYC in 2009. Billy currently studies voice with Michael Ruckles in NYC. Credits include (off-Broadway) *Theater for the New City*; *The Perfect Trio* - Dan, Dog

Mouth - Wilmer (Regional) *Arundel Barn* ME; *Millie* - Jimmy, *Babes in Hollywood* -Mickey Rooney (TV/Film) *Kenny Connected*- Kenny, *Gossip Girl* - Featured U5. Billy would like to thank Michael for his guidance and support, to Debbie and his family for their love and belief in his talents. Also a giant thank you to NATS for this wonderful opportunity and their dedication to the vocal instrument.



Linedy Genao, the third prize winner, is originally from Brooklyn, NY. She began singing at age 4 in her local church and her love of musical theater began to grow when she entered Hamden High School. There she received many academic and musical awards. She has been in many of the productions of the Hamden Mainstage Ensemble

including *Smitty* in *How to Succeed...*, *The Witch* in *Into the Woods*, *Lola* in *Damn Yankees*, *Irene Molloy* in *Hello Dolly!*, and *Esther* in *To Gillian on her 37th Birthday*. Linedy also played *Jessie* in the Hamden Arts Council's workshop production of *When Push comes to Shove* by Rachel Bloom and Michael Maricondi and *Anita* in the Whitney Players production of *West Side Story*. Linedy studies voice at the Sellati Studio under the tutelage of Robin Sellati and is entering her senior year at the University of Connecticut studying business administration. She hopes that her talent and education will lead her to the right path and maybe one day to the Broadway stage. With the support of her family and friends, she knows that anything is possible.

"The final round performances of all six finalists were outstanding and the audience reaction was enthusiastic" said Allen Henderson, Executive Director of NATS. "The first National Music Theater Competition was a rousing success with Jacob Watson giving a well-rounded performance that earned him first place honors. We look forward to the continued development of this competition as THE premier singing competition for music theater performers."