**Press Release – SPOTLIGHT TALENT CONTEST – WINNER, COVID - LOSER**

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**SPOTLIGHT ON TALENT 2021 WINNERS**

**SOLO CATEGORY 1**

**1ST PLACE – Amber Luu, Piano**

**2ND PLACE – Annabelle DePolis, musical theater**

**3rd PLACE – Chloe Adams, acrobatic dance**

**4th PLACE – Kennedy Kring, acrobatic dance**

**SOLO CATEGORY 2**

**1st PLACE – Linley Bishop, lyrical dance**

**2nd PLACE – Tavin Groomes, dramatic monologue**

**3rd PLACE – Kendall Hill, musical theater**

**4th PLACE – Nikki Lang, piano**

**SOLO CATEGORY 3**

**1ST PLACE – Abigail Wallace, contemporary dance**

**2nd PLACE – Sofia Acosta, musical theater**

**3rd PLACE – Maelee Scaglione, contemporary dance**

**4th PLACE – Salvador Hernandez, classical guitar**

**SOLO CATEGORY 4**

**1ST PLACE - Kasey Lang, piano**

**2nd PLACE – Samuel Wu, piano**

**3rd PLACE – Larkin Mainwaring, musical theater**

**4th PLACE – Dylan Pham, piano**

**SOLO CATEGORY 5**

**1st PLACE – Katherine Hines, pop vocal**

**2nd PLACE – Ezekiel Richards, jazz dance**

**3rd PLACE – Harley White, musical theater**

**4th PLACE – Kennedy Engasser, spoken word**

**SOLO CATEGORY 6**

**1ST PLACE – Agnes Hernandez, piano**

**2nd PLACE – Faith Phaller, ballet dance**

**3rd PLACE – Julianna Cova, pop vocal**

**4th PLACE – Rhett Ricardo, musical theater**

**GROUP CATEGORY 1**

**1st PLACE – Showstoppers, musical theater**

**2nd PLACE – Star Company Apprentices, jazz dance**

**3rd PLACE – Little Stars, Broadway dance**

**GROUP CATEGORY 2**

**1ST PLACE – Star Company, ballet dance**

**2nd PLACE – Showbros and Showstoppers, musical theater**

**3rd PLACE – Broadway Players**

**PASCO HERITAGE SCHOLARSHIP**

**Agnes Hernandez, piano**

You would think that the big story here was that the Spotlight on Talent was even held at all – considering all the cancellations of big gatherings in the covid pandemic. This regional performing arts competition for young people in it’s 38th year came close to joining the cancellations several times, but producers held on stubbornly and the “show went on” last Saturday. Expecting maybe half of the usual number of applicants, Heritage Arts Center Association was astounded to find that 150 talented young people weren’t going to let a virus stop them from polishing and sharing their impressive talents with professional judges – even though their parents had to watch via a zoom setup, and the usual audiences of hundreds of community friends were not allowed this year! THAT’s the story! HACA was thrilled to be able to once again recognize and reward these amazingly gifted students with almost $6,000 of cash prizes, trophies & ribbons.

Above are the winners named Saturday, and each of these outstanding talented young people very much deserves recognition in our area newspapers and social media! Please go to our web site at [www.heritagearts.org](http://www.heritagearts.org), to pull up some excellent digital photos, all labeled and ready to go.

It is notable that the obstacles were many and great this year. A month before, the Pasco County School Board cancelled all performances in its facilities, including the huge, excellent Center for the Arts at Wesley Chapel High, with its 900 seats and all the top of the line technology necessary for this scale of production. The fellowship hall of Dade City’s Methodist Church was where it landed out of necessity, and HACA was thankful for that. The covid virus CDC protocols were followed to keep everyone safe, and that meant: no audience; no personal microphones; taking hundreds of temperatures; the necessity of 150 waivers signed; moving in a grand piano; the president of HACA wiping down the few chairs allowed between categories; registering and lining up 150 contestants outside; trying to find covered outdoor space because of the rain, etc. All hurdles were cleared – nothing could stop the Spotlight Team!

This team of super heroes were all volunteers – the 15 member Board of Directors with 5 producers Barbara Friedman, Laurel Weightman, Michelle Twitmyer, Michael Roberts and Ava Larkin, Lauretta Brown’s web site expertise, and additional community friends. 40 different corporate/community sponsors generously donated toward the awards and production costs.

It is a shame the audiences missed the wonderful variety of many types of talent that were presented, including vocal, piano, dance, musical theater, classical guitar, cello and violin, both comedic and heartrending spoken monologues, and – a beatboxer! An always exciting announcement was the naming of our 9th Pasco Heritage Scholarship recipient! The $1,000 award went to pianist Agnes Hernandez, whose strength on the Rachmaninoff Prelude was exactly what that grand piano was designed for! Agnes studies piano with Barbara Friedman, and has been in the winners’ lineup of the Spotlight competition for 7 years. She was the Pasco County graduating senior with the highest scores from the 5 judges for the day.

So hard work, discipline, great instruction and sacrificial parenting paid off with a demonstration of the wonderful and inspiring gifts that the performing and visual arts can be to our lives. The HACA organization is especially thrilled that even in an awful viral pandemic these precious gifts can survive and thrive!

Please put in as much as you can, and please call me if you need any other information.