

20 YOUNGARTS WINNERS NAMED 2017 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS IN THE ARTS

YoungArts Winners From 10 States and Representing Eight Artistic Disciplines Receive High Honor Bestowed to Talented High School Seniors

Tony Yazbeck to Direct Multidisciplinary Public Showcase featuring U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts

Performance and Accompanying Exhibition of Scholars' Visual Art and Writing Will Take Place at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts June 19, 2017

MIAMI, FL (May 5, 2017) – The [National YoungArts Foundation \(YoungArts\)](#) congratulates the 53rd class of **U.S. Presidential Scholars**, with special acknowledgement to the **U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts**, announced by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. The U.S. Presidential Scholars award—one of the nation's highest honors for high school students who exemplify academic excellence—is presented on behalf of the President of the United States, and honors up to 161 graduating high school seniors of high potential each year. The 20 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts are all YoungArts Winners, and were nominated by the organization to The White House Commission on Presidential Scholars and selected based on academic and artistic excellence, leadership qualities and community service.

The 2017 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts include actors, dancers, singers, classical musicians, filmmakers, visual artists, designers and writers, and join an illustrious group of YoungArts and U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts alumni, including Tony Award-nominated performer and choreographer **Desmond Richardson**; Los Angeles Music Center President **Rachel S. Moore**; novelist and National Book Award Finalist **Allegra Goodman**; Grammy Award-nominated violinist **Jennifer Koh**; Bravo's "Work of Art" winner **Abdi Farah**; Obie Award-winning actress **Donna Lynne Champlin**; and RCA Records award-winning singer-songwriter and Grammy Award-nominated artist **Chris Young**.

"I congratulate this year's class of Presidential Scholars for their devotion to academic excellence and their parents and teachers who have guided them along the way," said U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. "Today's Presidential Scholars are tomorrow's leaders, and I am confident they will continue to be shining examples as they enter the next phase of their academic careers."

From June 18–20, the U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts will join the other 141 U.S. Presidential Scholars from across the country in Washington, D.C. for the annual **National Recognition Program**, during which all Scholars receive a Presidential Medallion presented on behalf of the President of the United States. On **Monday, June 19**, the Arts Scholars will present their work to the public at the **John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts** through a special performance at **8:00PM** in the **Concert Hall** entitled "**A Salute to the 2017 U.S. Presidential Scholars.**" The free multidisciplinary showcase will celebrate all of this year's awardees, and will be directed by Tony Award-nominated actor, singer and dancer, and 1997 YoungArts Winner in Theater **Tony Yazbeck**. That evening, an exhibition of works created by the recognized visual artists and writers will also be on view in the **Hall of Nations**.

"I am thrilled to be a part of this incredible program that recognizes and showcases the talent of the next generation of great artists in the U.S.," said Tony Yazbeck. "As a YoungArts alumnus and performing artist myself, I know firsthand the difference that recognition and support can make in a young artist's

life and I am grateful to YoungArts and the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars and the U.S. Department of Education for the work that they do to encourage young people to pursue careers in the arts.”

“YoungArts congratulates all of this year’s U.S. Presidential Scholars, and is proud to be the nominating agency for the Arts component of the esteemed U.S. Presidential Scholars Program,” said Carolina García Jayaram, YoungArts President and CEO. “The Scholars in the Arts represent our nation’s greatest artists of tomorrow, and each have the sheer talent, tenacity and dedication to innovation that will create real change—and make our world a better place.”

The 2017 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts are:

| <i>Name</i> | <i>School City, State</i> | <i>School</i> | <i>YoungArts Winner Year and Discipline</i> |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
| Todd Baker | Dallas, TX | Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts | 2016, Dance |
| Alexa Bleasdale-Curnutte | Interlochen, MI | Interlochen Arts Academy | 2017, Writing |
| Carissa Chen | Exeter, NH | Phillips Exeter Academy | 2015, Writing |
| Elle Cox | Houston, TX | High School for the Performing and Visual Arts | 2017, Visual Arts |
| Nicholas Cummings | Dallas, TX | Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts | 2017, Dance |
| Adriana De La Torre | Miami, FL | New World School of the Arts | 2017, Visual Arts |
| Salvador Flores | Galena Park, TX | Galena Park High School | 2017, Classical Music |
| Jayden Gillespie | San Diego, CA | Canyon Crest Academy | 2017, Cinematic Arts |
| Aaron Greenberg | New York, NY | Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts | 2017, Theater |
| Andrea Guo | Chicago, IL | Homeschool | 2017, Classical Music |
| Korri Lampedusa | Miami, FL | Design & Architecture Senior High | 2017, Design Arts |
| Juliana Missano | Bloomsburg, PA | Keystone National High School | 2017, Dance |
| Isabella Pete | North Canton, OH | Hoover High School | 2017, Dance |
| Samuel Siegel | San Francisco, CA | Independence High School | 2016, Voice |
| Amir Siraj | Brookline, MA | Brookline High School | 2017, Classical Music |
| Lianah Sta. Ana | Farmingdale, NJ | Howell High School | 2016, Theater |
| Meilan Steimle | San Jose, CA | Harker School | 2017, Writing |
| Kathryn Stenberg | West Palm Beach, FL | Alexander W. Dreyfoos Junior School | 2017, Visual Arts |
| Clayton Stephenson | New York, NY | Dalton School | 2017, Classical Music |
| Benjamin Wenzelberg | Tenafly, NJ | Tenafly High School | 2017, Voice |

* Interviews can be facilitated upon request.

BECOMING A U.S. PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLAR IN THE ARTS

The first step to becoming a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts is to apply to the National YoungArts Foundation, which is the nominating agency for this honor. To be eligible for the YoungArts program, applicants must be between the ages of 15–18 or in high school grades 10–12. To be further considered for nomination as a U.S. Presidential Scholar, applicants must be high school seniors and meet all of the U.S. Presidential Scholars requirements.

YoungArts Winners demonstrating excellence in the visual, literary, performing or design arts are selected annually through a blind adjudication process. This year, YoungArts received a record number of applications and, from this pool, 691 YoungArts Winners were selected. In January, approximately 160 Finalists from across the nation were invited to National YoungArts Week in Miami, where they participated in intensive master classes and workshops with internationally renowned artists and shared their work through public performances, readings, exhibitions and screenings.

During National YoungArts Week, eligible participants are further evaluated, award levels are determined, and nominations are made for that year's U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts candidates. After a rigorous selection process, YoungArts nominates 60 candidates for an invitation to apply to the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program. Finally, the Commission on Presidential Scholars selects 20 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts each year.

ABOUT U.S. PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS

In 1964, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program was established by executive order of President Lyndon B. Johnson to recognize and honor the nation's top graduating high school seniors. In 1979, the program was extended to recognize students who demonstrated talent in the visual, creative and performing arts. In 2015, the program was again extended to recognize students who demonstrate ability and accomplishment in career and technical education fields.

Scholars are selected annually by the White House Commission on Presidential Scholars, appointed by the President, based on academic achievement, personal characteristics, leadership and service activities, and writing ability. This year, more than 5,000 candidates qualified for the 2017 program determined by outstanding performance on the College Board SAT and ACT exams, through nominations made by Chief State School Officers, partner recognition organizations or the National YoungArts Foundation.

Since its inception, the U.S. Presidential Scholars Program has honored more than 7,000 of the nation's high-performing students. During the National Recognition Program, scholars are brought to D.C. to receive a Presidential Medallion, which is given to honorees during the annual ceremony in Washington, D.C.

The 161 2017 U.S. Presidential Scholars are comprised of one young man and one young woman from each state, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and from U.S. families living abroad, as well as 15 chosen at-large, up to 20 U.S. Presidential Scholars in the Arts, and up to 20 U.S. Presidential Scholars in Career and Technical Education.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL YOUNGARTS FOUNDATION

The National YoungArts Foundation (YoungArts) was established in 1981 by Lin and Ted Arison to identify and nurture the most accomplished young artists in the visual, literary, design and performing arts, and assist them at critical junctures in their educational and professional development. Through a wide range of annual programs, performances and partnerships with some of the nation's leading cultural institutions, YoungArts aspires to create a strong community of alumni and a platform for a lifetime of encouragement, opportunity and support.

YoungArts' signature program is an application-based award for emerging artists ages 15–18 or in grades 10–12 from across the United States. Selected through a blind adjudication process, YoungArts Winners receive valuable support, including financial awards of up to \$10,000, professional development and educational experiences working with renowned mentors—such as Debbie Allen, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Rebecca Walker, Plácido Domingo, Frank Gehry, Jeff Koons, Wynton Marsalis, Salman Rushdie and Carrie Mae Weems—and performance and exhibition opportunities at some of the nation's leading cultural institutions, including the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, D.C.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), The Museum of Modern Art (New York) and New World

Center (Miami). Additionally, YoungArts Winners are eligible for nomination as a U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts, one of the nation's highest honors for high school students who exemplify academic and artistic excellence.

YoungArts Winners become part of a thousands-strong alumni network of artists, which offers them additional professional opportunities throughout their careers. YoungArts alumni who have gone on to become leading professionals in their fields include actresses Viola Davis, Anna Gunn, Zuzanna Szadkowski and Kerry Washington; Broadway stars Raúl Esparza, Billy Porter, Andrew Rannells and Tony Yazbeck; recording artists Josh Groban, Judith Hill and Chris Young; Metropolitan Opera star Eric Owens; musicians Terence Blanchard, Gerald Clayton, Jennifer Koh and Elizabeth Roe; choreographers Camille A. Brown and Desmond Richardson; visual artists Daniel Arsham and Hernan Bas; internationally acclaimed multimedia artist Doug Aitken; *New York Times* bestselling author Sam Lipsyte; and Academy Award-winning filmmaker Doug Blush.

Carnival Foundation is the YoungArts National Premier Sponsor.

For more information, visit youngarts.org, facebook.com/YoungArtsFoundation or twitter.com/YoungArts. To watch a brief video about YoungArts, click [here](#).

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