

# THE 5TH AVENUE THEATRE 2015/16 SEASON WRAP-UP BY THE NUMBERS

We reached over 83,000 students across the Pacific Northwest region, increased our service by 14% and kept our thriving programs accessible to all students.



**Rising Star Project** uses the resources and professional knowledge that exist at The 5th Avenue Theatre to help young people achieve a fulfilling career, a stronger sense of self and confidence in their ability to inspire positive change in the world. In 2016, the tuition-free Rising Star Project celebrated its fifth year, presenting an all-student production to an audience of almost 5,000.

**79 STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**  
FROM  
**39 SCHOOLS**  
WERE CAST,  
CREW, ORCHESTRA,  
HAIR, WARDROBE  
AND MORE.

**2,322 STUDENTS FROM 31 LOCAL SCHOOLS ATTENDED SCHOOL PERFORMANCES**

**1,678 STUDENTS FROM HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED SCHOOLS RECEIVED FREE TICKETS**



Since 1994, the **Adventure Musical Theater Touring Company** has brought the wonder and joy of live musical theater to elementary and middle school students throughout the Northwest. Productions are created by local composers and writers and incorporate standards-based educational content. We provide free performances to ensure no school is turned away.

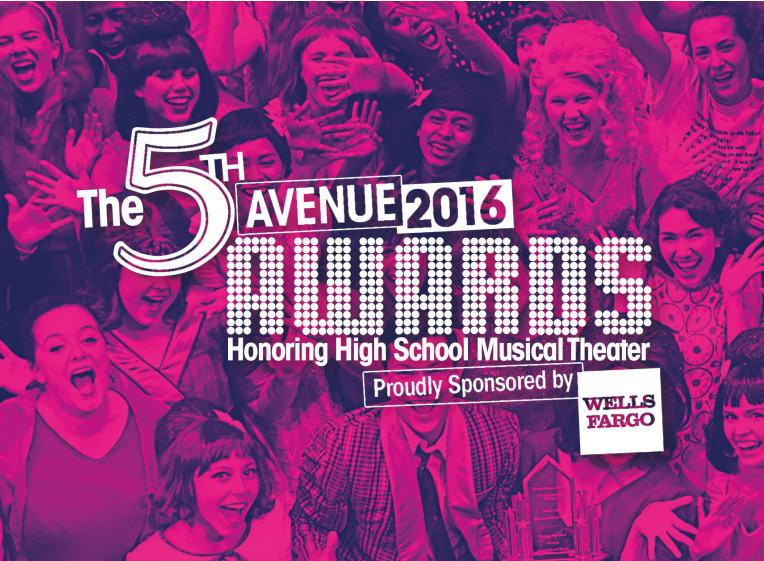
PERFORMANCES:  
**149**

FREE PERFORMANCES:  
**63**

K-8TH GRADE STUDENTS SERVED:  
**62,250**

**43% OF STUDENTS WERE ELIGIBLE FOR FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH**

WASHINGTON COUNTIES VISITED: **21**



**The 5th Avenue Awards** honors outstanding achievement in high school musical theater, celebrating the hard work and dedication students and educators put forth to make their school productions a success. This program was created to shine the spotlight on musical theater in the same way sports are regularly celebrated in schools.

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS: **95**

PRODUCTIONS SEEN: **116**

5TH AVENUE AWARDS EVALUATORS: **24**

WASHINGTON COUNTIES VISITED: **18**

Thank you to the generous donors who supported our education programs this season.



## WHO CALLS THE 5TH AVENUE THEATRE HOME



**800** local actors, dancers, musicians, designers, creative artists & theater employees

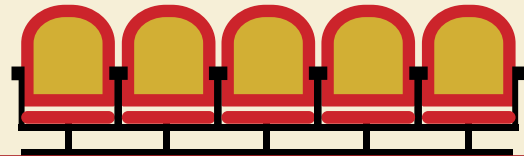


that represent these technicians & creative artists

## WHO CREATE

**220**

live musical theater performances



**330,000 GUESTS**

who enjoy mainstage performances including **20,000** subscribers

## SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

**2,000** free tickets to student matinees for students from underserved schools

**5,700** free tickets to six mainstage performances to 57 local nonprofits that help underserved seniors, adults and youth



**33,000** total free tickets to the Seattle community

## EDUCATING AUDIENCES



**9,600**

— guests attend —

**85** free events for an insider's view of our shows

## MAKING PERFORMANCES ACCESSIBLE

**8,000**



guests benefit from comprehensive accessibility services to ensure that patrons of all abilities can fully experience and enjoy musical theater

# TEENS TAKE CHARGE WITH THE 10-MINUTE MUSICAL PROJECT

By **ORLANDO MORALES**, Director of Rising Star Project and Internships

**Eight high school students** and two adult mentors are seated around a large table in The 5th Avenue's Rehearsal Studio B. Everyone has a freshly photocopied script in hand. Old scripts and well-worn notepads are strewn across the table. Otherwise, the fluorescently-lit studio is an unassuming space, furnished with some chairs, a large folding table and an upright piano waiting in the corner. Yet the room transforms as the students begin to read from the draft of a recently written scene.

Suddenly we're in the office of Mr. Davenport, a surly HR manager within the sinister headquarters of X-Corp—the world's most elite super villain agency. Melody, an aspiring young villain, has just arrived to interview for a position. As the scene plays, it becomes very clear that the interview is not going well...

## 10 MINUTE MUSICAL PROJECT THE 5th AVENUE THEATRE

"I'm sorry," sneers one student reading Mr. Davenport's lines. "But if X-Corp is going to stand a chance against our competitors, we're going to need someone a little more—"

"What?" responds another student, as the hapless Melody. "Are you saying I'm not good enough?"

"Not at all, not at all," asserts the matter-of-fact Mr. Davenport. "I'm saying you're not bad enough."

The room erupts in approving laughter, yet Annie, the young playwright who penned the scene, still seems unsure.

"I know the scene is still way too long. Do you think it would be better if I cut the lines about Melody's parents and her tragic backstory?"

The villainous corporate office vanishes and we're back in Studio B. The group transforms into a thoughtful writers seminar and the room immediately fills with feedback and questions:

"It didn't feel too long to me. Or, wait—actually... I got a little confused at—"

"But wait, what do you mean by 'would it be better?' Like less redundant? What were you hoping to reveal in this scene?"

"Why do you think it's too long, again? I mean, a long scene isn't so bad if it's helping you set up the conflict between Melody and Gwen later—"

"Yeah, so maybe the section with the parents is kind of unnecessary. And it's kind of pausing the action."

"Wait! What is Melody's action in this scene?"

The lively discussion halts as the eyes of every student dive back onto the pages of the script. Eyebrows are furrowed. In the sudden quiet, you can hear the whirring of young brains working to solve a giant puzzle...



PHOTO CREDIT: KWAPI VENGASAYI

**This is the 10-Minute Musical Project**, a new program which seeks to empower students by introducing them to the process of writing an original musical. During the summer writing phases, the program also happened to produce a team of high school writers who are completely preoccupied with the concept of dramatic action.

Morgan, a sophomore at Tahoma Senior High School, didn't mind being stuck in a studio for hours at a time with other young composers, lyricists and playwrights. "When I heard about the 10-Minute Musical project I was super intrigued because it combines my two loves: theater and songwriting. I enjoy performing in musicals—as well as writing and performing my original songs—so this project seemed to be the perfect way to squish together two loves of mine. A great way to spend my summer!"

This fall, the 10-Minute Musical Project team will be working to develop and present readings of four original works at The 5th Avenue's NextFest: A Festival of New Musicals. Student directors, stage managers, producers and music directors will be called upon to bring the stories to life.

For Morgan, the process of handing her show over to her peers is thrilling. "I am beyond excited to see our work taken, interpreted and sung by actors during readings and rehearsals. I'm definitely looking forward to all of our team's hard work paying off!"

It is clear to any observer that every step of the process has been hard work for these students, but they are all in agreement about how important the work is.

Blayne, a senior at Ingraham High School, sees it this way: "On top of being an escape from the troubles that life has in store, musical theater is the type of medium that can make connections, look at real life situations and problems, put society on trial... and provide us a path for a more harmonious future."

Morgan can't help adding, "Yeah, I've heard multiple times that the shortest distance between two people is a story. And I agree with that completely. With all the troubles going on in our world right now I think we all could benefit from this way to connect to one another."



## ABOUT RISING STAR PROJECT:

Since 2012, Rising Star Project has used the resources and professional knowledge that exist at The 5th Avenue Theatre to help young people achieve a fulfilling career, a stronger sense of self and confidence in their ability to inspire positive change in the world. With one-on-one mentorship, local teens take on all of the roles involved in putting on a full scale musical production—from director to technical crew to hair and wardrobe to cast and orchestra. This year's program will culminate in four performances of *The Pajama Game* on March 17-18.

Rising Star Project also encompasses in-class residencies, leadership workshops and this season, introduced the 10-Minute Musicals Project and the Empowering Young Artists Initiative, intensive musical theater training for emerging performers.

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Rising Star Project is made possible by a generous grant from The Sheri and Les Biller Family Foundation and with additional support from The Herman and Faye Sarkowsky Charitable Foundation, Susie and Phil Stoller, The Boeing Company, Washington State Arts Commission, National Endowment for the Arts, GM Nameplate, Jean K. Lafromboise Foundation, The Morgan Fund, DCG One (in-kind) and Promotion Arts (in-kind).

# CREATING COMMON GROUND:

## Reflections On The First Day Of Rising Star Project's Empowering Young Artists Initiative (EYAI)

**Orlando Morales**, Director of Education and Outreach

In 1996, August Wilson famously stated: "We can meet on the common ground of the American theater." He also insisted that "we must develop the ground together."

These are the words that I can't help but recall as I sit on the floor of our rehearsal studio surrounded by 19 young performers—the inaugural cohort of the Empowering Young Artists Initiative (EYAI)—as they meet together for the first time.

It is hard to believe that Rising Star Project, the education program that EYAI supports, is in its sixth year of providing mentorship and training to local teens. As I've watched the program grow and flourish, the words of Wilson's famous speech seem to echo with more and more insistence. By supporting young people along their

The Empowering Young Artists Initiative is made possible through the generous support of the Seattle Rotary Service Foundation. You'll see members of EYAI in action in the Rising Star Project production of *The Pajama Game*, March 17-18.



## Meet This Season's EYAI Squad

Alexsair and Sophia, inaugural members of EYAI, took some time out after their first class to answer a few questions:

### How did you get started in musical theater?

**SOPHIA:** I started acting and singing when I was seven at my elementary school.

**ALEXSAIR:** A friend pulled me into a musical audition my sophomore year at my high school. I ended up with the lead role in the production and my life basically turned upside down!

### What do you like most about musicals?

**SOPHIA:** Once a musical is written and performed, there will never be another production like the original. The West End production of a musical may mean something different to the people of London than the Broadway production may mean to the people of New York. Still, the deeper message can remain the same. So, if a show can cause thousands of people all over the world to think about important issues through theater, a lot of change can come from it.

**ALEXSAIR:** Yeah, the stories that are told through musicals can be inspiring. In a community, theater has the power to tell a story that may increase awareness for a certain topic or it can help someone get through their day with a little extra happiness. I like how theater can impact anyone if they're willing to have an open mind.

### How was your first day of EYAI?

**SOPHIA:** I was excited at first—and very nervous! But even before we started, it became a really comfortable environment. Everyone there was different—but we all shared a love for theater.

**ALEXSAIR:** I was nervous too! I have only been involved with theater for less than two years, so it was a little nerve racking.

**SOPHIA:** I also realized that even though the program is geared toward improving our skills in acting, dancing and singing, the goal of the program is to discover the ways in which diversity adds new context and understanding to theater. I am really excited to work towards that discovery.

### What are your personal goals for the future?

**ALEXSAIR:** I want to take this as seriously as I can. My parents migrated to the United States in hopes of a better life... So that we—my siblings and I—could pursue our dreams. Because of the opportunities I've been given in the performing arts world, I want to be able to make what seemed like an impossible dream into a reality.

**SOPHIA:** My long term goal is to go to an excellent school that supports my interests in both Theater Arts and Biology. I'm not sure where that will take me after school—but I would love to live in Europe!

unique paths to careers and higher education, we hope that we are also contributing to the positive impact that these young people will have on the world in the future.

But Wilson's words remind me that, by bringing together such a diverse and driven group of students, Rising Star Project is also in a unique position to participate in the project that he was insisting on.

The EYAI Squad represents communities as far away as Marysville and Yakima, and as near as Rainier Valley. Through remarkable support from our community, this group will come together for 10 weeks to train with theater professionals, prepare for participation

in the mainstage presentation of Rising Star Project: *The Pajama Game* and to learn more about the form of musical theater. Importantly, this group will also convene to create a dialogue on the topics of diversity, equity and inclusion—and the part that the arts can play in our society.

After Day 1, I will admit that it is equally inspiring to see this group of teenagers acknowledge each other as self-proclaimed musical theater nerds. I guess that is the other area of common ground, the one that August Wilson didn't cite—but the one that the EYAI Squad will welcome you to with open arms.

# ADVENTURE MUSICAL THEATER: SHARING THE MAGIC OF MUSICAL THEATER WITH STUDENTS THROUGHOUT WASHINGTON STATE

By **ANYA RUDNICK**, Director of Education and Outreach

**IF YOU HAVE NEVER** sat in an elementary school auditorium with 300 students who are watching a live musical theater production, many for the very first time, let me tell you, it is a treat. I'll paint the picture: Imagine a large cavernous room with no furniture, a wood or concrete floor and grade school art or inspirational posters that scream, "You Can Do it!" plastered to the walls. The auditorium doubles as the lunch room in most schools, so the lunch tables are stacked to the side, and there are remnants of a busy lunch rush, including bits of trash on the floor waiting to be swept up and the smell of pizza and chocolate milk in the air. Take yourself back a few years and remember what those lunch rooms, gyms, multi-purpose rooms and musty auditoriums felt like. Can you picture it?

Now imagine you walk into the room and see on one end an elaborate stage set that has popped up while you were playing outside or eating lunch. The set has multiple panels on wheels that move around to display different scenes. Actors in costume are rushing around setting up props, putting on makeup, fixing their hair and warming up their voices. Someone at the piano is running his or her fingers over the keys testing the sound in the room. There is excitement in the air. Something magical is about to happen.

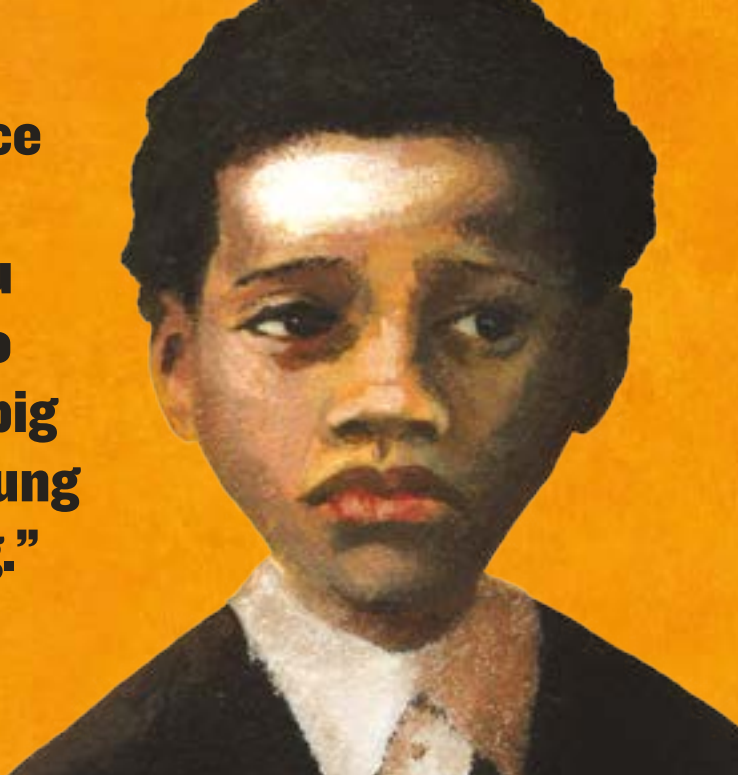
This is a scene that plays out every day, several times a day, at elementary schools throughout the Northwest from February to May. Each year the cast and crew of The 5th Avenue's Adventure Musical Theater Touring Company (also known as AMT) arrive at a school, load in the sets, props and costumes and perform original, curriculum based, high-quality musical theater to thousands of young people each year. This past spring, AMT's production of *The Mercer Girls* was performed 155 times for over 60,000 students in cities as far south as Tigard, Oregon, as far north as Lynden, as far east as Walla Walla and as far west as Ocean Shores and many towns in between.

AMT is the longest running education program at The 5th Avenue Theatre. Now in its 22nd year, AMT's mission is to enrich the lives of elementary and middle school students through dynamic performances of high quality musical theater productions that inspire, educate, and encourage young students to engage with the world around them. AMT productions teach about the Northwest region's history, culture and heritage. With live performances and study guides available to schools, AMT productions connect to classroom curriculum by providing arts-based education



**“Free Boy gives us a chance to investigate just what freedom means. How you get it and what it costs to keep it. To examine those big questions with and for a young audience is really exciting.”**

Valerie Curtis–Newton



experiences for elementary and middle school students, especially in areas where opportunities for arts education are limited. Each original AMT production is written, directed and performed by local Northwest artists.

Next year, in spring of 2017, we are excited to announce a brand new AMT production. *Free Boy: A True Story of Slave and Master* will be the first new show since 2011. Based on a book written by local historians Lorraine McConaghy and Judy Bentley, *Free Boy* tells the story of young Charles Mitchell, a thirteen-year-old slave who was brought to Washington Territory by his master James Tilton in the 1850s. Even though there were no slave laws in Washington Territory at the time, under Dred Scott laws in place, young Charles was considered property and not a free citizen. *Free Boy* tells the story of his escape from Washington Territory to freedom in Canada on the West’s Underground Railroad. This new production will tell young students a story of our region’s history that many do not equate with the West—slavery. But ultimately, it is a story about freedom.

Seattle director and educator Valerie Curtis–Newton will direct this new AMT production. Curtis–Newton is currently the Head of Performance—Acting and Directing at the University of Washington School of Drama and Artistic Director for The Hansberry Project, a professional African American theater lab. She has directed at Seattle Children’s Theatre, Intiman Theatre and ArtsWest. This will be her first show with The 5th Avenue. When asked why this show should be presented for young audiences in the Northwest,

Curtis–Newton responds, “*Free Boy* gives us a chance to investigate just what freedom means—how you get it and what it costs to keep it. To examine those big questions with and for a young audience is really exciting.”

The development of new musicals is part of The 5th Avenue Theatre’s mission. It is our investment in the future of musical theater. Creating new productions for AMT also allows us to showcase new work for our youngest audiences. It allows us to share stories of the history and culture of our region. As a teacher from a local elementary school recently wrote in response to seeing an AMT production, “Thank you for sharing. Our students always love it when The 5th Avenue comes to our school. The [show] was amazing and it was so special to watch it with our diverse group of students and staff. These types of events, sharing stories of history, are so important for our community health.”

As students filter into their school’s auditorium and see the sets of AMT’s show, their bodies come alive. Students giggle and whisper, wondering about what they are about to see. As the kindergarteners, first, second, third, fourth and fifth graders settle down, the principal gives the signal and the rooms become quiet. With anticipation. The students lean forward, listen to the opening notes, gasp as the actors come out on stage and the magic begins. The magic of storytelling. The magic of musical theater.

*AMT is made possible by the generous contributions of many donors including major sponsors The Boeing Company and Expedia.*

# LOCAL STUDENT ANGEL RODRIGUEZ WINS NATIONAL SONGWRITING COMPETITION

By **ANYA RUDNICK**, Director of Education and Outreach

**This past spring**, The 5th Avenue Theatre and the Seattle Office of Arts & Culture were invited to join the National Endowment for the Arts—with additional support from Playbill, Inc—to bring the Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge to Seattle and King County. This was the pilot year of the national initiative with students from Seattle/King County, Dallas, and Minneapolis/St. Paul invited to submit original musical theater songs for the Challenge.

Finalists from each area were selected to travel to New York for a weekend in July to participate in workshops and sessions with professional songwriters. After two days of intensive work sessions, the three finalists performed their songs for a panel of judges. We are thrilled to share that Angel Rodriguez, a student from Renton, was awarded the first prize for his original song, “Bleeding.” Angel won a \$5,000 scholarship provided by the National Music Publishers’ Association Supporting Our Next Generation of Songwriters (S.O.N.G.) Foundation and will have his song published by Sony/ATV.

**Here are some of Angel’s impressions about participating in the Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge and his experiences in New York:**

“I first got into songwriting when I was about nine. My brother was learning the guitar, so he started teaching me. Then I just started learning by myself and writing songs from there—and just kept going. In most of the songs I [write], I picture



Student Angel Rodriguez works with Mentor César Alvarez on his song *Bleeding*.

PHOTO BY JOSEPH MARZULLO FOR PLAYBILL, INC.

myself in what the character is going through. I write off of my feelings, but then I put myself in the character’s shoes—and then just build off of that.”

**“The song that I wrote is ‘Bleeding.’ It’s about being in a situation where you feel like you’ve fallen down and you don’t know if you’ll be able to get back up. I was in a situation like that. [...] Literally I felt like I was bleeding out.”**

“Originally I was not going to enter [the competition]. I was like, ‘I’m not gonna win. I’m not gonna be a finalist. I’m not gonna have time. I don’t even know if this song’s good enough.’ But [a friend] said, ‘Hey, just do it. You’re feeling the song. Just go with it. Enter!’ The trip to New York was an amazing experience. We talked to songwriters and music directors in the music business and had mentors to help us with our songs for the final competition. We also went out and experienced New York. I went to Times Square, Central Park, Sardi’s, the Empire State Building. We also went to see a Broadway show, *The Color Purple*, and met with [Director] John Doyle and some of the cast. I am grateful and happy to have been able to represent Seattle in this competition.”

Congratulations to Angel and all participants. To learn more go to [www.5thavenue.org/songwriting-challenge](http://www.5thavenue.org/songwriting-challenge).



Chelsea Mayo (Runner Up), Jake Berglove (Runner Up), Angel Rodriguez (National Champion) and NEA Chairman Jane Chu pose for a picture during the final competition for The Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge for High School Students.

PHOTO BY JUDITH KARGBO/NEA