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News from Headquarters

May 2011

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- **The 2011 English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition**

Teens from English-Speaking Union Branches Across the Country Bring New Life to Shakespeare's Centuries-Old Canon



With his stirring performance from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and recitation of Sonnet 65, Connor Lawhorn from Hawaii, a student of Edward P. Moore, Jr. at the Punahou School in Honolulu, won the 2011 English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition. The Competition was held on May 2 at Lincoln Center in New York City for 57 winners of ESU Branch competitions nationwide. Connor had won the ESU Hawaii Branch competition and had been a finalist in last year's Competition. As his prize, he will receive a full tuition scholarship to attend the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art's *Young Actors Summer School* in London, England.

K. Claire Hilton, this year's winner of the ESU Charlotte Branch competition, was runner-up in the National Shakespeare Competition, winning a full tuition scholarship to the American Shakespeare Center's *Theatre Camp* in Staunton, Virginia. Third place winner, Sony Mathew, representing the Philadelphia Branch of the ESU, won \$500 from the Shakespeare Society.



(l to r): Runner-up K. Claire Hilton, winner Connor Lawhorn and third-place winner Sony Mathew.



The Hon. Patricia S. Schroeder, Chair of The English-Speaking Union of the United States, (center) with the 57 competitors.



The finalists, chosen from the 57 ESU Branch Competition winners were (l to r): Daniel Goffstein from the New York Branch; Sony Mathew from the Philadelphia Branch; Dallin Hull from the Kansas City Branch; Joseph Pino from the Miami Branch; Alexandria Frisch from the Chicago Branch; Alexander Turner from the Washington DC Branch; Holly Reckers from the Cincinnati Branch; Scott Waller from the Tucson Branch; K. Claire Hilton from the ESU Charlotte Branch; and Connor Lawhorn from the Hawaii Branch.

NOTE: VIDEOS OF THE PERFORMANCES OF THE TEN FINALISTS MAY BE SEEN ONLINE AT <http://www.youtube.com/user/EnglishSpeakingUnion#p/u>

Press releases, personalized for each Branch including a picture of its competition winner in performance, were sent to Branch representatives the day after the competition for distribution to local media outlets. If you would like to see your local Branch's press release, please just respond to this e-mail.

The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition was initiated in 1983 with 500 students in New York City. Since then it has provided more than 250,000 young people of all backgrounds the opportunity to discover Shakespeare's writings and to communicate their understanding of his language

and message. High school students nationwide develop their speaking and critical thinking skills and their appreciation of literature as they explore the language and timeless themes in Shakespeare's works. The 2011 Competition engaged some 16,000 students and 2,000 high school teachers. In progressive competition levels, students studied, interpreted and performed monologues and recited sonnets in their own schools, at ESU Branch administered community competitions and at the National Shakespeare Competition. The dedicated ESU Branch volunteers who administered school and Branch competitions are to be heartily praised for their extraordinary work on the ESU National Shakespeare Competition. We also thank the high school teachers around the country who contributed so much effort into supporting and encouraging their students to excel!

The 57 winners of the local English-Speaking Union Branch Competitions were awarded a trip to New York City for the final stage of the National Competition. They arrived at ESU Headquarters on Sunday, May 1 for registration and immediately began to make friends with their fellow competitors.



Then they visited the nearby Morgan Library & Museum exhibition, *The Changing Face of William Shakespeare*, featuring the newly discovered Cobbe portrait of William Shakespeare believed to be the only surviving life-time portrait of the Bard. They also saw other Shakespeare-related pieces from the collections of the Morgan Library and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust in England.

Back at ESU Headquarters, competitors were officially greeted by Alice Boyne, ESU President and Executive Director, and the Competition rules and regulations were reviewed.



John-Michael Lyles, last year's winner of the ESU National Shakespeare Competition, also gave some words of encouragement to this year's competitors.



The students were then taken to New York University's Tisch School of the Arts for dinner and a private workshop lead by the Tish School's Experimental Theatre Wing Director, Rosemary Quinn.



While students were engaged in their workshop, contestants' families and teachers were invited to a reception and lecture at ESU Headquarters. Author Irene G. Dash presented an illustrated talk on the subject of her book, *Shakespeare and the American Musical*. Afterwards teachers participated in a workshop conducted by Heather Lester, a teaching artist at the Brooklyn Academy of Music and a frequent teaching artist for the Folger Shakespeare Library.



Early on Monday, May 2, the competitors were brought to the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center for the full-day Competition, which took place on the set of the award-winning play, *War Horse*.



The judges of the Competition were Shakespeare scholar and Rutgers University Distinguished Professor of English Maurice Charney; actor and teaching artist Jacqueline Gregg; actor Peter Francis James; Theatre for a New Audience Director of Education Katie Miller; Manhattan Theatre Club Director of Casting Nancy Piccione; teaching artist and actor Joy Jones; Director of the film *Private Romeo* Alan Brown; Director of the film *Shakespeare High* Alex Rotaru; Director of Mission and Co-Founder of the American Shakespeare Center Ralph Alan Cohen; and New York University Tisch School of the Arts Classical Studio Director Louis Scheeder.



After the semi-final Competition round, competitors were treated to lunch at The Juilliard School and visited the Shakespeare statue in Central Park. In front of the statue, they performed impromptu “random acts of Shakespeare,” encouraging their fellow competitors to recite lines from his monologues and sonnets as curious New Yorkers and tourists looked on.



At the final Competition round, Dr. Paul Beresford-Hill, Director General of The Mountbatten Institute, who was instrumental in establishing the National Shakespeare Competition in 1983, read a proclamation from the Hon. Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor of the City of New York, officially declaring it “William Shakespeare Day” in New York City. Mayor Bloomberg wrote, “Today’s competition reminds us once again that Shakespeare truly is our contemporary.”



At the conclusion of the Competition's final round, the Hon. Patricia S. Schroeder, Chair of The English-Speaking Union of the United States, presented each of the 57 competitors with a certificate as a Semi-Finalist in The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition. Each participant also receives a constructive, written critique of the judges' comments on his or her performance compiled by Gwenth Reitz, a director, actress and teaching artist.



After recognizing the students' accomplishments, Hon. Patricia S. Schroeder called their attending teachers to the stage. Approximately twenty dedicated teachers from as close as the Greenwich Branch and as far away as the Desert Branch had traveled to New York City to support their talented students.

Many of the English-Speaking Union of the United States Board members attended, showing their support for the ESU's largest educational program.



Above: English-Speaking Union of the United States National Board Members (l to r) Vivien Gurfein; Jean Bruce Poole; Matilde Jones; Patricia Moore; Christine Carty; Vice Chair Mark Stollar; Chair Patricia Schroeder; Herbert Rowe; President and Executive Director Alice Boyne, Chair/Finance Committee Jean Paul Elard.

While the ESU provided the students with two full days of activities, perhaps best of all for these teenagers was the opportunity to spend a weekend in New York City with other students from across the country. As one participant stated in a thank-you to the ESU, "Even though we only knew each other for a couple of days, I have never had so much fun with a group of people! It was so great to finally be around people that understood and appreciated my love for Shakespeare and the stage." As ESU President and Executive Director Alice Boyne noted, "The 57 competitors came as winners of their Branch Competitions, and their vibrant and intelligent performances on the Lincoln Center stage and their immediate, heartwarming bonding with each other demonstrated each and every one to be a true winner on a national scale. The ESU National Shakespeare Competition embodies the ESU purpose: to celebrate English as a shared language to foster global understanding and good will by providing educational and cultural opportunities for students, educators, and members."

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