

Program Spotlight

Talent Competition Finals Explode on Stage

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2012 Young Talent Big Dreams Winners

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Felipe Herrera, a 14-year-old pianist and student at Coral Reef Senior High, took top honors in the solo musical instrument category for his stunning performance of an original composition. New World School of the Arts student **Johnny Wright**, 17, stole the show in the dance category with contrasting strength and grace, while a diverse group from the **Thomas Armour Youth Ballet** tapped their way into everyone's hearts to win group dance. **Isabel Peña**, age 10, transported the audience to Broadway with her theatrical vocal performance, and **Janay Blakely** pierced souls with her powerful spoken word piece.

Esther and Gloria Chae, the final act of the night, electrified the audience with their precision and technical mastery of piano



Overall Winners sisters Esther and Gloria Chae

and cello and walked away as overall grand prize winners. The sisters, 9 and 12 respectively, took home a \$500 cash prize and earned a private recording studio session with award-winning musician, producer and arranger, Paul Fakhourie, who has worked with such renowned artists as Eric Clapton, Stephen,



Felipe Herrera

Damian, Ziggy Marley, and Lauryn Hill.

All of the Young Talent Big Dreams winners will continue to share their talent throughout the year with scheduled performances around Miami-Dade County. Winners also won the chance to attend master classes with professionals in their discipline. But regardless of who won, there were no losers at the Miracle Theater Saturday night, even after the last balloon and confetti flake floated to the floor.



Shatori Wright



Isabella Peña

to get exposed to different people, actors, dancers, musicians," said 17-year-old dancer Shatori Faison.

Guitar player Christopher Torres actually passed on his high school prom to participate in the finale. "It's an opportunity to play for people, and I've never had a

chance to do this before outside of school."

"When we watch and read the news every day we don't often see the most shining examples of our young people, but when you come here and experience all of this extraordinary talent you realize hope is very much alive, and that our future is bright because of them," said Modesto E. Abety-Gutierrez, president and CEO of The Children's Trust, presenting sponsor of the competition.

The Young Talent Big Dreams competition, now in its second year, is coordinated by Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theater. Seven auditions in all held at theaters from the northern corner to the southern tip of Miami-Dade, and hundreds of participants showcased their talents this year. The competition follows the popular TV talent show model, and judges have included a host of industry professionals

from the performing arts community. Judges for the finals were Milton Granger, Howard Cohen, Daniel Lewis, Jodie Langel and Nerissa Street. Wells Fargo was the evening's sponsor.



Thomas Armour Youth Ballet Tap Group I

"Actors' Playhouse is proud to have initiated Young Talent Big Dreams, in partnership with The Children's Trust, to help develop young talent in Miami-Dade County," said Barbara S. Stein, Actors' Playhouse executive producing director. "The arts are a critical component to a well-

rounded individual, both educationally and culturally, and arts programs develop character, self-confidence, and skills as much as the three R's in traditional learning experiences."



Janay Blakely

"I had no idea I would make it into the finals. I was so surprised," said 9-year-old Gabriella Ortega. "I was really nervous in rehearsal, but once I'm on stage I get into it!"

"I'm so glad to find a competition that's really all about the talent God gave you and not about your looks," said 12-year-old Kristynn Portugues, who has diabetes and wants kids to know that no chronic disease or disability should slow them down.

Arantza Espinosa certainly didn't let her visual impairment hold her back. Despite being blind, she and her performance partner, **Eddy Camacho**, both from Braddock Senior High School, won in the group instrumental/vocal category.

A total of 88 acts made it to the semifinals, and 22 advanced to the finale. The contestants, all residents of Miami-Dade County, ranged in age from 8-17.

"Boy, do I love my job!" roared Earl Maulding from the stage. The director of Theatre for Young Audiences at Actors' Playhouse was the official emcee of the competition. "It's so inspiring to travel around Miami-Dade County and see all of this amazing talent."



Eddy Camacho & Arantza Espinoza

"It's also gratifying to see kids who didn't make it to the finals last year come back again. It shows you that they have the perseverance to keep on trying and the desire to improve," added Maulding.

Contest rules prohibit previous winners from returning in the same category, but allow them to compete in another category. Last year's winning vocalist, Biana Pinchuk, entered this year as a solo violinist, and Patrick Barham, the 2011 overall winner, returned in the group musical instrument category with a cello quintet he put together with the help of his parents and private teacher.



The Grace Girls

"The competition last year was so much fun and so rewarding so I got 'Quintus' together so that we could all try to have the same experience I had last year. It really lived up to my expectations," said Barham, who won last year as a 12-year-old solo cellist.

Young Talent Big Dreams Competition Winners

Individual Spoken Word

Janay Blakely, age 16, Coral Reef Senior High

Individual Vocal

Isabella Peña, age 10, St. Christopher Montessori

Vocal Group

The Grace Girls

Daja Gordon, age 11, Jorge Mas Canosa Middle

Abigail Myrie, age 11, Coral Reef Elementary

Daviana MCGhee, age 10, Santa Fe Academy

Group Instrumental/ Vocal

Arantza Espinoza, age 15, Bradock Senior High

Eddy Camacho, age 17, Bradock Senior High

Individual Musical Instrument

Felipe Herrera, age 14, Coral Reef Senior High

Group Musical Instruments

Esther Chae, age 9, Frank C. Martin K-8 Center

Gloria Chae, age 12, Arvida Middle

Individual Dance

Johnny Wright, age 17, New World School of the Arts

Group Dance

Thomas Armour Youth Ballet Tap Group I

Chaniya Dawson, age 9, David Fairchild Elementary

Destiny Delancy, age 9, Morningside Elementary

Mena Williams, age 8, Coconut Grove Elementary

Sharrieff Muhammad, age 9, Muhammad University of Islam

Victoria Smith, age 12, Riviera Preparatory