



MEET THE 2021 MUSICAL THEATER SONGWRITING CHALLENGE WINNERS

Please note: School grade and name are from spring 2021 when students submitted their songs.

Ayana Williams – Brooklyn, NY – Junior at Brooklyn High School of the Arts

Williams is a 17-year-old artist who began writing songs at age 11. She has participated in multiple programs including the New York Youth Symphony’s Musical Theater Songwriting Program and in a musical theater program with her high school. That program was part of the Shubert Foundation’s High School Theatre Festival in 2020. She has worked with Broadway actors such as Sasha Hutchings on projects along with some of her classmates for the past virtual year. Along with musical theater, she participates in choirs at her school and had the honor of performing at the Barclay Center for a Juneteenth event. She is a self-taught musician/composer, and manages to find music in just about everything she does.

SONG: When I’m Empress

Adonia, daughter of the Roman emperor, sings to herself as she waits to be called to the stage to accept her new position as the first empress ever chosen to rule her land. She is not unprepared for this role. Her father, who has passed, raised Adonia himself and trained her to be a powerful warrior and strong leader. Nearly everyone in the land is laughing, doubting her capabilities all because she is a woman, but she is ready to prove them wrong and show them just how strong she is.

Elsa Miller – Maple Valley, WA – Senior at Tahoma High School

Miller is a multi-instrumental musician, and draws most of her inspiration from her family, art, music, and theater. Miller has been involved in theater her entire life, and dreams someday to perform on a Broadway stage. Her most recent writing venture has been as part of a writing team at Village Theatre in Washington State, writing the show *Dumb Club*. *Dumb Club* is the story of six kids who, over the span of four weeks, two days, and 16 hours, learn to fight, love, and improvise. While she wrote “The Beginning” alone, the rest of the show was written in collaboration with Sydney Coe, Jackie Moyle, and Mia Basulto, with mentorship from Porscha Shaw, Elisa Money, and Joel Arpin.

SONG: A Beginning

Five high school students in a small Connecticut town are navigating the challenges of being a teenager. From popular soccer player Matt to nerdy Jace, they each have their story and their struggle. In their own vignettes and as an ensemble, they reflect on their current situations, knowing that they are at the beginning of their lives, "whatever you can make."

Ethan Smith – Bethel, CT – Junior at Bethel High School

Smith is excited to be a part of this talented group of fellow songwriters. He's been involved with music since he was four years old, when he began taking piano lessons, and he's loved the arts ever since. He's participated in many theatre productions in and out of his hometown of Bethel, Connecticut. He started writing songs around 2018, and has worked to develop a musical theater EP, along with a script. He hopes that everyone enjoys his compositions along with his stories, and he can't wait to learn more from the professionals.

SONG: Some People Just Die

Ty, a Black young adult, sings to himself as he walks to the store late at night. Normally an optimistic person who preaches about how change is possible, Ty laments that he feels powerless to stop the injustices he sees. After watching another tragic video or reading another article about a terrible incident somewhere in the country, or in the world, Ty thinks there's only so much one person can do. "It ain't a problem till you wake. You got the option till you can't take anymore. And in the grand scheme of things, it's just another life."

Howard Godfrey – Gurnee, IL – Senior at Evanston Township High School

Godfrey is a multi-instrumentalist, writer/director, and musical theater performer. While in high school, he wrote and directed four, full-length musicals, two of which he co-wrote, the other two he worked on alone. These shows were performed at the Musical Offering, a local music school in Evanston. Howard also played in MOrchestra, a chamber ensemble at the Musical Offering. Throughout his time at Evanston Township High School, Godfrey was involved in the school's jazz ensemble, wind symphony, vocal jazz group, advanced vocal ensemble, and marching band. He was also a composer/performer for several of their musical theatre productions. Over the past three years, Godfrey has received recognition from the Illinois Music Education Association composition contest for four of his songs. He is currently a first semester voice principal at Berklee College of Music and plans to major in contemporary writing and production with a potential double minor in musical theater writing and musical theater performance.

SONG: The Waltz of Adonis & Delilah

Delilah Hunt is a famous jazz singer in 1948. She had signed a contract that gave control of her life to Adonis, her demonic manager/husband in exchange for fame and fortune. Delilah is called back to her hometown by her sisters as they fear their ill mother has only days to live. While there and in desperation, Delilah leaves the hotel where Adonis insists she and he stay and she flees to her sisters. She cries to them, telling them that Adonis is a monster. She sings that this may be the last time she is able to speak freely about her past and her feelings, that she'll have to "dance" with Adonis forever.

Kyler Huyse – Katy, TX – Junior at Seven Lakes High School

Huyse is an actor, singer, and songwriter. At Seven Lakes High School, he is the president of the school theater company, Studio VII. He also trains at the Humphreys School of Musical Theatre. Some of his favorite show credits include *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* (Leaf Coneybear), *The 39 Steps* (Compere/Pilot 1), *The Old Man and the Old Moon* (Matheson), *HSM* (Ryan), and *TUTS' Elf: The Musical* (teen ensemble). Kyler has been writing music for over six years, in genres such as musical theatre, pop, country, and rock. Through his music, he hopes to encapsulate the human experience and make those that listen feel seen and heard.

SONG: From a Distance

The song is about a teenage boy Luke and his struggle with his sexuality. The story takes place in a small Texas suburb in late 2015, a few months after the legalization of gay marriage. Luke has a problem; he has fallen in love with a boy at his school named Will but knows there is no possibility his deeply religious parents will accept him if he openly expresses his love. As a result, Luke and Will decide to keep their love a secret. However, after a near outing, Luke cuts off the relationship, putting his family's reputation first over his happiness. Although Luke and Will can't be together any longer, Luke still loves but now, "from a distance."

Lily Cline – San Rafael, CA – Junior at San Domenico School

Cline was born and raised in the San Francisco Bay Area where she has performed in musical theater since middle school. She also has a background in harp. During the height of the pandemic, she and a group of students got together with a teacher and composer to write, compose, and film a musical entitled *Forgotten Voices*. Here, she discovered her passion for writing music and dialogue. Many thanks to Erica Smith and Phil Schroeder, who were invaluable in this process.

SONG: Ganbare

In June of 1912, Emma Kuno, a recent high school graduate, has just lost her parents in a horrific fire. The daughter of a Japanese father and Irish-American mother, Emma has been accepted to attend Stanford University in the fall, a dream that is now deferred. She is packing up the family's apartment in San Francisco and preparing to travel across the bay to China Camp Village, as her parents instructed her to do in their will. Although she supposedly has a relative there, she does not remember the place or the person. Growing up, her father had instilled in her the Japanese value of *ganbare*, meaning work hard and keep your head high. Emma sings to his memory for the strength to face the journey ahead.

Nicole Acosta – Miami, FL -Junior at Miami Arts Studio

Acosta is a 17-year-old who began singing, acting, and dancing, at the age of eight and has not stopped. She is part of the musical theater program at Miami Arts Studio where she has been able to perform in many shows including the first high school production of *On Your Feet*, where she plays the role of Gloria Estefan. She has been part of Phil Collins' Little Dreams Foundation for the past eight years where she's had the opportunity to perform with many well-known artists. She was also on *American Idol 2021* where she received a golden ticket to go to Hollywood. She is currently writing her own music and hopes to one day pursue a career in the music industry and on Broadway.

SONG: Ordinary

Kassie, an overachieving high school senior, has always gotten everything she's wanted. She's a straight A student, captain of her cheerleading team, and got accepted into her dream school, Stanford University. However, there's one issue, she'll be leaving her boyfriend of three years, Justin, behind. During one of Kassie's many efforts of trying to talk to Justin and he avoiding the conversation, he suddenly gets overwhelmed by the situation and snaps, saying that maybe they "should just break up." Shocked, Kassie reveals to him how she's been feeling for the past couple of weeks, pleading for a chance to simply discuss their future and where they stand, saying she just wants to talk like "ordinary people."

Oluchi Nwaokorie – Jackson, MS – Senior at Murrah High School

Nwaokorie has been in multiple theater productions including *Beauty and the Beast*, *Matilda*, and *Once on This Island*. She is currently attending the University of Michigan where she is studying musical theater. She has been writing pop and R&B music for a while but she started exploring musical theater composition at the start of the pandemic. She is very passionate about creating unique work by drawing inspiration from the music she was surrounded by growing up.

SONG: Call Me Ke/ In Between

Kelechi, a first-generation Nigerian American teenager goes by the name of "Ke," a persona she created as a way to fit in at school and distance herself from her Nigerian heritage. She attends a predominantly Black high school along with Cameron, an African American teenager. A history buff, he struggles with the reality of his origin and identity. While at Kelechi's house working on an assignment, Cameron tells her that she's had it easy because her background has been spelled out for her, unlike his. This declaration makes her reconsider who she is and to embrace her identity as someone "in between."

Owen Knight – Sykesville, MD – Sophomore at Century High School

Knight has had a profound love for music from a young age. He's constantly infused with the ornate spirit of sound. He has been singing since he was in elementary school and has created small songs along the way. He was gifted a guitar in spring of 2020, and ever since has written acoustic pieces. Knight also commits to being a tutor and helping teachers when he can and is part of the National Honors Society. He remains active as a part of his high school's drama program as well. He's incredibly grateful for his family, friends, and mentors. He has so many people to thank for the help, encouragement, and support he's had with all his creative ventures.

SONG: Fear Me

The Queen of Fire aspires to be a more powerful demi-god than her predecessors who have belittled and hurt her. A long-time friend, the King of Lightning, joins her cause, finding solidarity because of similar experiences of hurt. But she manipulates him and uses his strength and obedience as a weapon against those who oppose her. But Lightning meets the Ruler of Tornadoes who demonstrates kindness and compassion toward him and with Tornado's help, Lightning leaves the Queen of Fire. Fire feels abandoned with a newly ignited fury against Lightning, promising that they are now enemies and that he must fear her from now on.

Tyler Kinnaman – Snoqualmie, WA – Senior at Mount Si High School

Kinnaman is currently studying music composition at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He's been involved in theater since middle school and can't remember a time where he wasn't writing music on his piano or guitar. He has written two albums with his band, Lake 22 (@lake22.music), co-written two musicals, and composed music in other musical genres. He would like to thank his friends, family and mentors for this incredible opportunity!

SONG: Life of a Reaper

It is a normal work day in the Underworld, as the reapers—don't call them grim—explain their job responsibilities of taking lives and collecting souls from the human world. They sing, "If death's a door then we're the key." The reapers work hard with their scythes, disguises, cloaks, and how-to-kill guidebooks. As the reapers begin their day, we meet MC for whom this is the first day on the job. MC can't imagine anything is going to go wrong. . .

Zeph Siebler – Lincoln, NE – Junior at Lincoln High School

Siebler is an international baccalaureate program senior. He is the recipient of a 2021 Nebraska Young Artist Award for his compositions. As a senior soloist, he performed "Velvet Night," an original piece for voice and orchestra, with the Lincoln Youth Symphony. He's written and arranged music for diverse ensembles around the city, from big bands, to cello duets, to rock ensembles. He is planning to major in music composition and study vocal music. Since he was young, musical theater has entranced him; from *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* to *Beetlejuice* to *Jesus Christ Superstar*. When he's not writing or performing music, he enjoys playing Dungeons and Dragons, learning about philosophy, volunteering at YMCA Camp Kitaki, and working at an after-school program.

SONG: Thus Spoke Zarathustra

The renowned intellectual Fredrick Nietzsche has recently retired as a lecturer at the University of Leipzig in Germany and is in the midst of writing his yet-to-be famous book of philosophical fiction, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In the book, Nietzsche declares, "God is dead, and we have killed him." In contrast to a religious god, Nietzsche argues that people should overturn their current moral system and pursue a concept he called overman, a superhuman image of humanity's greatest potential realized. This song features Nietzsche meditating on this idea and the dark and pivotal moment it represents in his emotional journey.

TEAM

Ashley DiLorenzo is an actor, singer, writer, and storyteller currently pursuing a B.S. in Media/Screen Studies and Theatre at Northeastern University in Boston. Some of her favorite acting roles include Woman 2 in *Songs For a New World* (Roger Rees Award Nominee), Tracy in *Hairspray*, and Julianna in *The Other Place*. At Frank Sinatra School of the Arts High School, she discovered her love for playwriting and met her writing partner for the Songwriting Challenge, Mateo Lizcano. Some of her plays (*Hopefully: An Ethnodrama* and *Someone Should've Told Me*) have gone on to festivals or received professional staged readings with TDF (Theatre Development Fund). She hopes her work can bring people as much joy as creating it gave her. She'd like to thank God, her family, friends, and teachers for constantly offering their support, love, and words of wisdom.

Mateo Lizcano majors in vocal studies, participating in Chamber's Singers/Concert Choir and the school musical theater program. His credits include *Songs for a New World* (Man 1), *Hairspray* (Link) and *Phantom of the Opera* (Raoul). He is a recipient of the New York Film Academy College of Visual and Performing Arts Talent Award for his performance in *Songs For a New World*. He discovered his passion for writing during the pandemic, when he began writing his own songs, as well as a musical with his friend, Ashley DiLorenzo. He is currently working on an EP and will be releasing his first single in the near future. Mateo is grateful to his family and friends for all their love and support.

SONG: Birdy-Lingo

It is 2019 and Humphrey, a 13-year-old boy is sheltering in a storm bunker during a Florida hurricane. Humphrey struggles to make friends at school, but he has discovered the language learning app, Birdy-Lingo (modeled after Duolingo) and the owl that is the app's mascot. Humphrey becomes consumed with learning languages with the goal of using them as a way to make international friends. He sings the song to bunker-mate Steve who, in casual conversation, unintentionally prompts Humphrey's impassioned response. This song was inspired by the love young people have for oddly specific things.