



Press Contacts:

Christine Rogers, 214-364-7049, christine.rogers@thesparkfarm.com

Carrie Dyer, 210-287-5434, carrie.dyer@thesparkfarm.com

Farmers Branch Teen Chelsea Mayo Wins Dallas Portion of NEA Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge for High School Students

Big Thought Joins the National Endowment for the Arts and Playbill Inc. to Promote Musical Theater Songwriting

[Dallas, Texas – May 19, 2016] – Today, Big Thought joins the [National Endowment for the Arts](#) and [Playbill Inc.](#), with additional support from [Disney Theatrical Group](#), in announcing a Farmers Branch high school student as the local finalist of the national Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge for High School Students. Chelsea Mayo, an 18-year-old senior at R.L. Turner High School in Farmers Branch, is the Dallas winner of the national contest with her moving, personal song “Say Goodbye.”

Joining Mayo in the Dallas winners’ circle are the 1st Runner Up team of Lauren Michels and Nina Marguglio of Highland Park High School, and 2nd Runner Up Martha Alicia Morales of Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts. They will each receive commendation certificates from the NEA.

Mayo’s “Say Goodbye,” which tells the story of Julie Sonnen, a young lady who realizes she’s given up her dreams of becoming a singer for a relationship, is inspired by Mayo’s own struggle with pursuing her musical aspirations even when her friends and family felt disappointed by her career decision.

“I was being pulled in so many directions, and I simply wasn’t who everyone wanted me to be,” says Mayo, who found refuge in music. “My life has always revolved around music, and I only recently decided to tell my close friends and family that music was going to be my major. While my friends were deciding to study Biology and Pre-Med, I was doing music auditions. Suddenly, I didn’t fit in or measure up.”

Now she does. Entering and winning this contest has boosted Mayo's songwriting skills and confidence. She wrote "Say Goodbye" specifically for this challenge. She has written songs before, but mostly for herself or to perform in church. The self-taught vocalist, pianist and guitarist will be majoring in music business at Dallas Baptist University.

Mayo's song immediately caught the attention of Big Thought's esteemed panel of local judges. Kevin Moriarty, Artistic Director of Dallas Theater Center, said that the "lyrics and melody fit each other well," and praised the "nice journey in the lyrics – the singer changes during the song, which is compelling to the listener." Curtis King, Founder and President of The Black Academy of Arts and Letters, said that Mayo "clearly has an understanding of storyline in musical theater; and knows how to tell a story to move the book along."

This summer, Mayo will travel to New York City where she will compete with the winners from Seattle and Minneapolis and take part in an intensive songwriting workshop with professional musicians, singers, songwriters, and producers to learn more about songwriting and sharpen her songwriting skills. During the final competition before judges from the music and musical theater industry, professional musicians and singers will perform Mayo's original song.

The national winner will receive a \$5,000 scholarship award, and each national runner-up will receive \$2,500. [National Music Publishers' Association Supporting Our Next Generation of Songwriters \(S.O.N.G.S.\) Foundation](#) is providing the scholarships. In addition, [Sony/ATV](#) will publish the national winner's song.

"Big Thought is so proud to work with the NEA on this exciting songwriting challenge," says Gigi Antoni, President and CEO, Big Thought. "This is an incredible opportunity for Chelsea to learn, grow and benefit from a creative exchange with real-world working professionals in contemporary musical theater. This is the kind of skill-building that we at Big Thought consider priceless."

In its pilot year, the Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge for High School Students is only available to high school students in three metropolitan locales: in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota; Dallas County, Texas; and, Seattle and King County, Washington. More information on The Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge for High School Students can be found at arts.gov/songwriting. Follow the conversation about the Songwriting Challenge at #IWriteSongs16.

About Big Thought

For nearly three decades, Big Thought has worked to innovate education in Dallas by providing youth with access to creative learning programs to help them imagine possibilities, excel academically and contribute to their community. Driven by its mission to make imagination a part of everyday learning, Big Thought develops campus and community based programs that impact academic achievement and address youth development by connecting classroom objectives and traditional teaching methods with arts, culture and creative learning. Through its partnerships, Big Thought serves more than 140,000 Dallas children, families and teachers each year, both in and out of the classroom. Learn more at bigthought.org.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

Established by Congress in 1965, the NEA is the independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts, exercise their imaginations, and develop their creative capacities. Through partnerships with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning, affirms and celebrates America's rich and diverse cultural heritage, and extends its work to promote equal access to the arts in every community across America. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the National Endowment for the Arts and the agency is celebrating this milestone with events and activities through September 2016.

About Playbill Inc.

Since its inception in 1884, PLAYBILL has become synonymous with the legitimate theatre and is an internationally known trademark and symbol of the arts. Playbill Magazine, which can be found in theatres and classical arts venues throughout the country, proudly serves every Broadway house as well as the country's most prestigious fine arts institutions, including Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center. In 2016 Playbill presses will roll out 3.5 million programs monthly for nearly 100 theatres in 24 cities. Playbill.com was established in 1994, and has since grown to become the leading source of theatre information on the web and has expanded to a suite of online offerings including Playbill Vault, Playbill EDU, Playbillder, and more. Visit www.playbill.com for more information.

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