

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT for the ARTS

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MUSICAL THEATER SONGWRITING CHALLENGE

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING.
Collaborators are Disney Theatrical Productions, Concord
Theatricals, and NMPA S.O.N.G.S. Foundation.

SONG SUMMARIES FOR THE 2020 WINNERS

High resolution files of all photos are available upon request.



Ada Fender from Windsor Heights, IA
“Great Grim Green”

Great Grim Green takes place in a fantasy world called Morania where Liz, an orphaned, now 27-year-old peasant girl, lives. Liz is tired of not knowing who she is and being rejected by those around her. She decides to visit a witch, known as the Great Grim Green Guinevene, who she asks to make her into a new person. The song was inspired by the idea of someone feeling so misunderstood that they want to completely change who they are.

Adam Jones from North Chesterfield, VA
“A Father’s Fear/Mardi Gras”

The setting is 1940's- early 1950's New Orleans where a tall, well-dressed Black man named Quincy steps off a train. Quincy is from a well-off family in upstate New York that has roots in New Orleans. He has returned to the city with a sense of duty to serve as an educator for poor children there. The song starts with Quincy's father, Robert worrying about his son's safety in Deep South. As the music changes to a New Orleans jazz sound, Quincy gets caught up in a Mardi Gras parade that despite the festiveness, confronts him with racial realities and reflections.





Alejandro Rodriguez from Weston, FL
“Days From Long Ago”

In 1940s Germany, Elijah Metzinger has been forced to leave home when his homosexuality is revealed to his family and later, to the authorities. He goes into hiding with three Jewish fugitives, one of whom is Rosalyn Freyda. Rosalyn fled Spain during the Spanish Civil War, leaving behind her mother, to live with her father in Berlin. “In Days From Long Ago,” Rosalyn sings with a younger version of herself about being forced to adapt to a new life, let go of her past, and lose everything that she loves. Throughout the song she realizes the importance of the memories, which are the only thing keeping her hope alive.

Chelsea Rose from Durham, NC
“It’s Me, Dorothy”

Dorothy Rose is a quirky high school sophomore whose self-assumed popularity doesn’t match reality and who yearns to have genuine friends. On a Friday evening, she calls three of her peers hoping to get together, only to be rejected by each one. Amidst the disappointment, Dorothy confronts and then comforts herself, realizing that it is less important who you are with than what you bring of yourself to create a fun Friday night.



Henry Crater from Andover, MA
“Your World/Safe”

“Your World/Safe” is part of a musical about the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The night after the shooting, Cameron, a senior at Stoneman Douglas, grapples with grief and the urge to step into the world and take political action against gun violence. Sofia, another Stoneman Douglas student, consoles her badly shaken younger sister with whom Sofia took refuge in a cramped, dark closet during the shooting. David, a friend of Cameron’s, anxiously anticipates the local rally that he and Cameron have organized for the next day—a rally that will mark the beginning of the March for Our Lives.

**Jane Brinkley and Ashley Schmittle from Eugene, OR
“Just Another Night”**

The setting is rural Oregon, 1956. Lana’s husband has left her with their three children to fend for themselves. Lana, who is closeted, meets Jo, a woman from an upper social class at a traveling carnival. Jo invites Lana to her home for dinner where Lana learns that Jo’s husband, Nate, has been physically abusing her. A mishap during dinner sends Nate storming out of the house. The two women adjourn to the garden and argue about what should be done about Jo’s domestic situation. Lana urges Jo to escape with her, eventually declaring her love for Jo just as Nate returns.



**Joseph Mosby from Nashville, TN
“Light Breaks Through the Dark”**



Every few generations, a special storm brews over the region of Truden that creates the mythical bluestone which gives its holder the ability to draw energy and power from their surroundings. Although a bluestone hasn’t appeared in decades and many doubt its existence, Korin, a slightly deranged researcher, believes an impending storm will yield such a stone. With it, he can liberate himself, his family and his people from the tyrannical king. But Korin’s plan reaches the ear of the king who throws him in jail. However, also in the prison is Fleming who has been hired to repair the prison’s clock. Fleming harbors dreams of saving his people too which Korin tries to incite, urging Fleming to overcome his fear and release him from prison so they can go off in search of the bluestone together.

Leilani Patao from Los Angeles, CA
“Mauna Kea”

Ailani has lived in Hilo, Hawai'i her entire life. In the summer of 2019, the Mauna Kea protests begin against the building of a 30-story telescope on sacred Hawaiian land on the mountain of Mauna Kea. At the same time, Ailani moves to New York to study literature at college. But she is deeply disillusioned when she learns that her college isn't interested in the kinds of stories she has to tell about her Hawaiian people. Once she realizes that she doesn't have to compromise her writing for the sake of a professor, she leaves school and returns to Hawaii. Now, it is December 2019 and Ailani sits down to write the story she has wanted to the whole time. Ailani sings about her people, their spirit, and their mountain.



Sierra Blanco from New York, NY
“Don't Wanna Know”

Todd is a high school senior at a pre-eminent high school in Palo Alto, California. Todd is an athlete and, reflecting the high academic standards of the school, is second in his class. Emerging from a mandatory counseling session with an ineffective guidance counselor, he is preoccupied with life's changes, the loss of his friends, and a previously stable world. He meets his girlfriend Heather who rejects him and he sings the song to himself but for her. As he struggles to accept the messiness and difficulties of reality he sings, “Maybe the world can't be golden but it still can glow.”

Soleil Singh from Southlake, TX
“Love in the Scene”

Hallie, an aspiring actress, dreams of pursuing a career in theatre and “making it to Broadway,” despite her tiger dad's prearranged plans to have her pursue a “safer” career, such as engineering. Her friends encourage her to gain the courage to let him know via a phone call before heading home from boarding school for winter break. In her own quirky, awkward, and nervous phone call she continuously tries to leave the perfect voicemail, before finally just blurting out the news that she is pursuing her passion. And maybe some other news. . .





Viola Durfee from Washington, DC
“Free”

Lila is a 15-year-old girl with autism. Intelligent and quirky, she is proud of her low voice which has placed her as the only tenor in her choir of sopranos. Lila sings this song to herself, as she imagines what it would be like to be free from the taunts and teasing she regularly endures and to stop having to pretend she's someone other than herself. Eventually, the voices inside her head telling her she can't achieve what she wants get louder and louder until she lets it all out at once. But that release sends her back to basics and she decides that while not accepting others' negative opinions about her is hard, it's not impossible and she can “spread these wings and fly away / And I think I know just the way.”

Xyzsa Pagaduan from Rockwall, TX
“Left-over Love”

The singer is a teenage girl stuck in a relationship in which she is in love with a boy who wants only to be friends. In her optimistic way, she believes that she sees a side of him no one else can and that she can bring out that special part of him. The boy visits her for comfort after his every breakup and over and over, her feelings for him grow until he leaves to pursue a new infatuation. Gradually, she lets go of her pride, willing to “settle for less, for him,” claiming his “leftover love” for herself.

