Boston's August Wilson Monologue Competition Finalists to Compete on Broadway, 5/6

Boston high school students Antonio Stroud of Boston Day and Evening Academy, Iliana Mendez of Brighton High School, and Derek Lindesay of Codman Academy Charter Public School will compete in the National Finals of the August Wilson Monologue Competition this coming Monday, May 6 at Broadway's August Wilson Theatre. Stroud, Mendez, and Lindesay were the top three finalists of the Huntington Theatre Company-sponsored Boston round, which was held on March 16. Each finalist receives a cash scholarship, prizes, and an all-expense-paid trip to New York to compete and attend theatre performance, talk-backs, and workshops with theatre professionals.

Stroud placed first with his performance of a Hedley monologue from Seven Guitars; Mendez placed second with her performance of Rose from Fences; Derek Lindesay finished third with his monologue as Memphis from Two Trains Running.

This coming Monday's competition marks the end of the competitors' months of study and preparation that began last fall. Beginning then, Huntington Education Department staff and teaching artists made weekly visits to eleven public high schools in Boston where they worked with over 500 students to introduce them to Wilson and the ten plays of his Century Cycle about the 20th century African-American experience, support script analysis and character development, and coach performances in preparation for the competition.

At the Boston competition held at the Huntington's Calderwood Pavilion, students performed a two to three-minute monologue of their choosing from one of the ten plays. A panel of theatre and education professionals judged contestants on the basis of preparedness, understanding of the text, emotional connection to the material, and commitment to the performance.

After the ceremony first-place winner Stroud said, "I don't ask for much in life other than an opportunity. Give me an opportunity and I'll do the rest."

Teaching artist and Huntington staff member Solange Garcia said, "Working with Iliana has been a blessing. She pushes herself to achieve greatness. I'm proud we have a young Latina woman competing this year as August Wilson's work is meant to speak to people from different backgrounds and all walks of life. The three students who are representing Boston this year are all powerhouses, and I hope they make it to the top this weekend."

The Huntington enjoyed a special relationship with August Wilson and his work, beginning in 1986 with a production of Joe Turner's Come and Gone, his third play. For 25 years, the Huntington served as an artistic home to Wilson, developing and premiering seven of the ten plays of his Century Cycle during his life and producing three after his death.
Wilson's Century Cycle is a singular achievement in American theatre. Each of the ten plays is set in a different decade of the 20th century. At the plays' core are soaring, lyrical monologues that take the song, laughter, pain, and rich content of African-American life and place it in the mouths of the most varied ensemble of characters written since Shakespeare.

The competition's inspiration was sparked by two of August Wilson's closest living collaborators: Kenny Leon (director of Stick Fly at the Huntington and on Broadway) and Todd Kreidler. Leon worked closely with Wilson directing many of the Century Cycle plays on Broadway and at major regional theatres, including the Huntington. True Colors Associate Artistic Director Kreidler served as dramaturg for Wilson's last play and director of his one-man show.

"The goal of the competition is to build partnerships with schools and theatres across the United States and to create educational materials about August Wilson that allow students to connect these important theatre works with educational curricula in history, social studies, and literature," said Kreidler. "This monologue competition offers students of all races the opportunity to inhabit the lives and speak the words of these vital, lively characters."

"I've felt the power that August Wilson's words have on students firsthand in the more than 20 years the Huntington has produced his plays," says Donna Glick, Director of Education at the Huntington. "His plays are poetry, and young people are hungry to inhabit the rich characters he creates."

Funding for the national August Wilson Monologue Competition is provided by the Boston Public Schools Arts Expansion Fund and Edvestors.

For more information, visit huntingtontheatre.org/awmc and truecolorstheatre.org/august-wilson-monologue-competition.