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Calling All Dallas County High School Students for a Songwriting Challenge

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

DALLAS, TEXAS (February 17, 2016) – Are you the next Lin-Manuel Miranda (“Hamilton”) or Tom Kitt (“Next to Normal”)? Or perhaps you share creative kinship with the guru of contemporary musical theater, the late Jonathan Larson (“Rent”)? High school students from Dallas County can showcase their songwriting talents and compete for the opportunity to be one of three finalists traveling to New York City in a new songwriting program launching February 17, 2016. The Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge for High School Students is calling for Dallas County parents to encourage their high school students to upload their submission to www.arts.gov/songwriting between February 17 and April 4th, 2016.

Big Thought is working with the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and Playbill, Inc., with additional support provided by Disney Theatrical Group, to encourage high school students from Dallas County to submit a song – the music and lyrics – in any style, from Broadway-style to pop or rock, or Latin to country or rap, as long as it is part of a musical theater story. A local winner or winning team (one composer, one lyricist) from Dallas County will be selected from among three semi-finalists chosen by a local panel of judges hailing from the arts. Semi-finalists will be announced April 26, and the local winner will be announced May 17.

In the summer of 2016, the winner or winning team from Dallas County will travel with one adult chaperone to New York City, all expenses paid, to take part in an intensive songwriting workshop with professional musicians, singers, songwriters, and producers to learn more about songwriting and sharpen their songwriting skills. At the end of the workshop, professional musicians and singers will perform the students’ original songs during a final competition with judges from the music and musical theater industry.

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

"This is an incredible opportunity for Dallas County high school students to showcase their talents and learn from working professionals in the world of contemporary musical theater," says Gigi Antoni, President and CEO, Big Thought. "This kind of creative exchange and real-world skill-building is priceless. Big Thought is so proud to be working with the NEA on this exciting songwriting challenge."

In its pilot year, The Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge for High School Students is only available to high school students in three metropolitan areas: Minneapolis/St. Paul, MN; Dallas County, TX; and, Seattle and King County, WA. More information on The Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge for High School Students can be found at www.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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