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Starlight

STARLIGHT
Blue Star
AWARDS

THE National High School
Musical Theatre Awards
JIMMY AWARDS

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Area Performing Arts Students Shine in the JIMMY AWARDS® - The National High School Musical Theatre Awards

Kansas City, Mo. — Starlight is pleased to announce Blue Star Awards winners, Justin Cooley and Ava Wolesky, as finalists at the 2021 JIMMY AWARDS®, a prestigious national competition hosted by the Broadway League that aims to celebrate the best of high school musical talent. The 12th annual JIMMY AWARDS® was presented virtually on Thursday, July 15, 2021, and will remain available for online viewing through Sunday, July 18, at JimmyAwards.com.

For the 2021 JIMMY AWARDS®, 72 nominees from 36 regions around the US participated in online coaching, rehearsals and activities. This experience culminated in the awards ceremony, which featured solos by select finalists. Throughout this annual Broadway-focused talent showcase, students were recognized for individual artistry in voice, dance and acting, underlining the importance of theatre arts education in school. The event was hosted this year by Corbin Bleu, with a special appearance from Mandy Gonzalez.

As finalists, Cooley and Wolesky represented the Kansas City region well, each placing in the Top 4 for the JIMMY AWARDS® for Best Performance by an Actor and Best Performance by an Actress, respectively. Both will receive \$3,000 scholarships toward their future education. The JIMMY AWARDS® for Best Performance by an Actress and Best Performance by an Actor were presented to Elena Holder, Triangle Rising Stars (Durham, NC) and Bryson Battle, The Blumey Awards (Charlotte, NC).

Cooley is a 2021 graduate of Olathe East High School (OEHS) in Olathe, Kansas. He has been involved in theatre since his freshman year and has fallen in love with the arts. Cooley has many musicals under his belt to include *Mamma Mia!*, *Anastasia*, *Hairspray*, *The Outsiders*, *Les Misérables* and many more. His performance as Dmitry in *Anastasia* during his time in the OEHS theatre department earned him the 2021 Blue Star Award for Outstanding Actor in a Lead Role, opening his invitation to participate in this year's JIMMY AWARDS®.

Wolesky is a rising senior at Liberty North High School (LNHS). She has been performing in regional and educational theatre productions since she was eight years old. She is the 2020 Blue Star Awards winner for Outstanding Actress in a Featured Role. Most recently, her performance

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as Esmerelda in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* at LNHS earned her the 2021 Blue Star Award for Outstanding Actress in a Lead Role, qualifying her for the JIMMY AWARDS®.

“This is well-earned recognition for Ava and Justin,” said Alex Jones, Vice President of Community Engagement at Starlight. “Their performances were off the charts, and it was wonderful seeing both of Starlight’s Blue Star Awards winners representing Kansas City so well as Jimmy Awards finalists.”

This year, a total of 20 awards and scholarships were available to participants. Winners and recipients were selected by a panel of Broadway industry experts. The program has been the catalyst for more than \$4,000,000 in educational scholarships to date, and many past student participants have appeared in leading or supporting roles in Broadway, Touring and West End productions. Six finalists each received a \$3,000 scholarship toward their future education:

- **Benjamin Brown**, Philadelphia Independence Awards (Philadelphia, PA)
- **Justin Cooley**, Blue Star Awards (Kansas City, MO)
- **Mateo Lizcano**, The Roger Rees Awards for Excellence in Student Performance (New York, NY)
- **Victoria Evans**, The 5th Avenue Theatre: Celebrating High School Musicals (Seattle, WA)
- **Kuper Walker**, The Jerry Herman Awards (Los Angeles, CA)
- **Ava Wolesky**, Blue Star Awards (Kansas City, MO)

JIMMY AWARDS® BY THE NUMBERS:

- 1 – 2021 is the first and only time the JIMMY AWARDS® has been completely virtual
- 3 - Number of nominees who have a twin
- 4 - Number of JIMMY AWARDS® nominees who were in the audience of the show prior to being a nominee
- 6 - Number of nominees who are songwriters
- 9 - Number of nominees whose first Broadway show was *Wicked*
- 10 - Number of nominees who play sports
- 11 - Number of nominees who play musical instruments
- 15 - Age of youngest nominee
- 20 - Number of awards and scholarships available to students
- 33 - Number of JIMMY AWARDS® alumni who have been on Broadway and in National Tours
- 36 - Number of regions that the nominees represent
- 59 - Number of high school seniors amongst this year’s nominees
- 72 - Number of nominees for this year’s JIMMY AWARDS® program
- 709 - Total number of JIMMY AWARDS® alumni
- 100,000+ - Estimated number of students nationwide who participated in the program
- \$4,000,000+ - Since its inception, NHSMTA has been the catalyst for this number of educational scholarships for deserving young performers

For more information about the 2021 JIMMY AWARDS®, visit [JimmyAwards.com](https://www.JimmyAwards.com).

For information regarding all of Starlight’s community engagement programs, including the Blue Star Awards, visit [kcstarlight.com/engage](https://www.kcstarlight.com/engage).

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Follow Starlight on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and TikTok @kcstarlight.

About Starlight

Opened as a theatre in 1950 and a nonprofit organization in 1951, Starlight is the largest and oldest performing arts institution in Kansas City and provides inspiring, one-of-a-kind experiences to its patrons. Starlight presents and produces Broadway musicals, concerts and indoors shows in addition to offering extensive community outreach and educational programming, including classes, scholarships and Starlight's Blue Star Awards, one of the largest high school musical theatre award programs in the nation. Located on 16 acres in Swope Park, Starlight's historic, city-owned venue is the second-largest outdoor producing theatre in the country and includes rehearsal halls, a museum, club area for dining, concessions, gardens, fountains and a 10-story, climate-controlled stage. For more information, visit kcstarlight.com.

About The JIMMY AWARDS®

Presented by the Broadway League Foundation in honor of legendary Broadway producer/theatre owner James M. Nederlander, The JIMMY AWARDS® are supported by many leading theatre industry organizations. To get more information about the JIMMY AWARDS® National High School Musical Theatre Awards program, or to make a tax-deductible donation to support the program, visit JimmyAwards.com.

THE BROADWAY LEAGUE (Charlotte St. Martin, President), founded in 1930, is the national trade association for the Broadway industry. The League's 700-plus members include theatre owners and operators, producers, presenters, and general managers who present in nearly 200 markets in North America. Each year, League members bring Broadway to nearly 30 million people in New York and on tour across the U.S. and Canada. The Broadway League has recently added a new category for International membership to collaborate with professionals from around the world who produce and present Broadway quality theatre. The Broadway League annually co-presents the Antoinette Perry "Tony" Awards®, one of the most coveted awards in the entertainment industry.

Key League programs and resources include: Kids' Night on Broadway®, The Jimmy Awards®, Stars in the Alley®, Internet Broadway Database® (ibdb.com), Broadway.org, SpotlightonBroadway.com, Commercial Theater Institute (with Theatre Development Fund), as well as numerous conferences and forums for our members. Broadway Bridges®, with the support of the New York City Department of Education, is aimed at giving every New York City public high school student the opportunity to see a Broadway show before graduation. Careers.Broadway is a one-stop resource for anyone who wants to know what to do, where to look, and how to build a career on Broadway. TheatreAccess.NYC (co-produced with TDF) is the one-stop website of accessible Broadway performances for theatregoers with disabilities. Broadway.org is the League's official on-line headquarters for Broadway in NYC, on tour, and internationally. For more information visit BroadwayLeague.com or follow @BroadwayLeague on Twitter and visit Facebook.com/BroadwayLeague. Follow @Broadway on Instagram for more Broadway content.

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