Theatre & Dance students compete for scholarships

Sacramento State Theatre & Dance acting students are preparing for a competition that could result in trips to the Kennedy Center in Washington.

Actors will compete in the annual Irene Ryan Scholarship Auditions for the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival for region 7, which encompasses all or parts of nine western states. They won’t have far to go this year because the regionals are being held at American River College, Feb. 18-22. Regional winners will head to the Kennedy Center for the finals April 15-21.

A special Showcase Fundraiser Performance of the Sac State actors’ scenes will be staged in the University’s Playwrights’ Theatre on Feb. 11 and 14.

Eight Sacramento State students are in the competition, each with a scene partner for a total of 16 actors. Each competitor performs a three-minute, two-person scene in the preliminary round of the regionals, has five minutes to perform the first scene plus a contrasting two-person scene, and is given six minutes to present the scenes plus a monologue or solo musical number in the final round.

“We try to pick the first scene especially to showcase their individual strengths as performers,” says Theatre & Dance Professor Michelle Felten, who coordinates the University’s participation in the festival.

While choosing the right scenes is important, getting the right acting partner is just as critical. The partner needs to be someone who will complement the nominee and work well with him or her, without upstaging the nominee.

Senior Zipporah Wilson’s scene partner is fellow student actor Shasta Slaughter. “Shasta and I have a really great sister connection,” Wilson says. “She’s the one who would open my eyes to my potential. She’s the one who would whip me into shape and tell me what I need to know and not hold back.”

Senior Jessilee Windhaus chose Danelle Aros, partly because the two already had worked as partners in the classroom. “I think we have really good chemistry,” Windhaus says.

Junior Brent Bianchini is doing scenes from McNally’s Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune and Miller’s All My Sons, and a monologue from Hanson’s King Arthur.
“Scene selection was difficult,” Bianchini says. “I wanted to make sure I didn’t get just a good scene but that I got the right scene,” adding that the same held true for his scene partner, Alissa Doyle.

The added factor of having the festival at American River College this year is a big plus, says Felten, who usually has to worry about airline flights, hotel reservations and transportation in addition to her duties helping the students. “This year it’s ‘meet in the parking lot’ and we’re there in 20 minutes,” she says. And they’re all excited to be supporting their colleagues at ARC.

The special Showcase on Feb. 11 and 14 starts at 5 p.m. each day, with all eight nominees and their acting partners performing all their scenes. The performance is a fundraiser for the students. A $5 donation is requested at the door.

The other competitors are Kristen Sanchez, Erik Meza, Diona Burnett, Ure Egbuho, and Gavin Sellers.

For more information on the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival click here. Information on the Theatre & Dance Department is at www.csus.edu/dram or call (916) 278-6368. For media assistance, call Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156.

– Craig Koscho
ckoscho@csus.edu

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