



**Announces Winners of the  
2018 VSA International Young Soloists Competition**

**Program Celebrates the Talents and Skills of  
Young Musicians Living with Disabilities**

**The Seven Winners Perform on the  
Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage May 30, 2018**

(WASHINGTON)—Three young musicians and a group ensemble have been named as winners of the 2018 VSA International Young Soloists Competition, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The program focuses on identifying, elevating, and celebrating the work of young musicians living with disabilities. The winning recipients, who each receive a \$2,000 award, will spend May 28–29, 2018, participating in pre-professional development activities including rehearsals and roundtable discussions with music professionals. The two-day intensive culminates with a performance on the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage on May 30 at 6 p.m. This performance is free and open to the public and will be streamed online at [kennedy-center.org/video/upcoming](http://kennedy-center.org/video/upcoming).

The award recipients are:

**MUSICIAN(S)**

Eva Casado Ariza  
Dennis O'Keefe

**INSTRUMENT**

Violin  
Percussion

**HOMETOWN**

Barcelona, Spain  
Rochester, New York

Out of Time Barbershop Quartet	A Cappella	
Devin Canavally (lead)		Watervliet, New York
Burke Herrick (tenor)		Schoharie, New York
Christian Gomez (baritone)		Schenectady, New York
Bobby Frazier (bass)		Fort Plain, New York
Madeline Sheard	Cello	Maple Grove, Minnesota

“Congratulations to each of these outstanding musicians—they are shining examples of world-class artistry and exemplars of the capacities and capabilities of people with disabilities,” said Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility at the Kennedy Center. “This award acknowledges achievement and at the same time advances the public conversation and shifts perceptions about disability. Through their individual achievements and musical excellence, we are honored to support their continued creative development.”

Since 1984, the VSA International Young Soloists Competition, founded by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, has annually recognized emerging young artists, ages 14–25, from all over the world who have disabilities and demonstrate exceptional musical talent. Celebrating its 34th year, the award has been given to more than 109 awardees from approximately 25 states and 30 countries. Previous winners have gone on to careers with top symphony orchestras around the world, become international recording stars, and achieved success on television programs such as *American Idol* and *Platinum Hit*. Past recipients include international recording artist Melody Gardot, *America’s Got Talent* Season 12 finalist singer-songwriter Mandy Harvey, violin virtuoso Adrian Anantawan, and award-winning jazz pianist Justin Kauflin.

### **2018 VSA International Young Soloists Winners**

**Eva Casado Ariza**, age 22, is a violinist and conductor who was diagnosed at age 12 with post-viral Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. She is currently pursuing a Master’s Degree in Music, with concentrations in Violin Performance and Instrumental Conducting at the University of Florida. While working as a graduate assistant, Casado Ariza performs regularly as concertmaster in the official quartet of the university and as the assistant conductor of the University Orchestra. She plans to pursue doctoral studies to develop a brighter future for rising generations of young music students with disabilities.

**Dennis O’Keefe**, age 25, is a percussionist from Rochester, New York. He has performed across upstate New York State and in the Mid-Atlantic region, including at the Kutztown Celebrate Marimba! Festival. Born autistic, O’Keefe received his Bachelor’s Degree in Music Performance in 2015 from the Ithaca College School of Music under the guidance of Gordon Stout and Conrad Alexander, and his Master’s Degree in Music Performance in 2018 from the State University of New York at Fredonia under the guidance of Karolyn Stonefelt.

The **Out of Time Barbershop Quartet** has been entertaining audiences in New York State’s capital region since 2016. **Devin Canavally** (lead), **Burke Herrick** (tenor), **Christian Gomez** (baritone), and **Bobby Frazier** (bass) are vocal performance majors attending the School of Music at Schenectady County Community College, part of the State University of New York. As members of the college a cappella club, the four friends decided to take their love for singing and entertaining to the next level. As a quartet, these young singers have developed a classic and tightly harmonized sound, sharing their passion and excitement for barbershop music and bringing joy and inspiration to their listeners. Out of Time has been specially invited to perform for college functions, and has given concerts at Camphill Ghent in Chatham, Caffe Lena in Saratoga Springs, the Glen Sanders Mansion in Scotia, and live on air in the studio of the WGY radio station, along with churches and retirement centers in the community. In addition, each is a member of the SCCC School of Music’s select chorus, which recently performed with the Albany Symphony. In the summer of 2017, Burke Herrick, who has cerebral palsy and visual impairments, performed as an ensemble member in *Porgy and Bess* at the internationally acclaimed Glimmerglass Festival in Cooperstown, New York.

**Madeline Sheard**, age 18, studies cello with Mina Fisher and has won numerous competitions, including Schubert Club, Thursday Musical, and Classical Minnesota Public Radio’s MN Varsity Competition. Her solo engagements have included the LaCrosse Symphony Orchestra and the Salon se Lève Young Artist Concert Series. Sheard studies chamber music with the Artaria Chamber Music School and has attended summer festivals including Bowdoin International Music Festival in Maine. She is principal cellist of the Greater Twin Cities Youth Symphonies and will tour internationally with them this summer. Sheard, who has a hearing loss, and is grateful for the chance to share her music with others.

### **About Education at the Kennedy Center**

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is the national champion for arts learning and creativity. Committed to increasing opportunities for all people to participate in, learn about, and understand the arts, the Center offers programs and events that strive to reflect the nation and its communities, and that are accessible and inclusive for all. From the Center’s stages to classrooms and communities across the country, to online resources accessible nearly anywhere, the Center serves the burgeoning artist, the curious explorer, the student (of any age), the teacher and teaching artist—any person interested in arts learning and utilizing the arts for positive change.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center's Education programs utilize the arts to embrace the ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude, and cultivate the Citizen Artists in all the people we serve. For more information, please visit [kennedy-center.org/education/](http://kennedy-center.org/education/).

### **About VSA**

The Kennedy Center has been at the forefront of making the performing arts accessible to persons with disabilities. Serving the international disability and arts community, the Office of VSA and Accessibility, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability Program, provides opportunities for people with disabilities of all ages across the globe to learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. The Office focuses its efforts on arts and special education initiatives; accessibility services for patrons and visitors with disabilities; professional development for educators and cultural administrators; and career opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities. For more information, please visit <http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/#Access>.

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For more information, please visit the VSA [website](http://www.vsa-kennedycenter.org).

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