

APRIL 23, 2025

14 Southern California Teens Take Center Stage As Grand Prize Winners in The Music Center's 37th Annual Spotlight Performing Arts Competition

The Public is Invited to Witness the Grand Prize Winners Perform at The Music Center's Ahmanson Theatre on Friday, June 6, 2025, at 8:00 p.m.

Photos Available

LOS ANGELES (April 23, 2025) -- Cue the curtain! **The Music Center** proudly announces 14 rising stars from across Southern California as the Grand Prize winners in its **37th Annual Spotlight** program, a nationally acclaimed free performing arts competition and scholarship program for high school students. Selected among more than 1,600 applicants, the 14 talented teens triumphed in the annual contest comprised of seven categories: acting, ballet, dance, classical voice, non-classical voice, classical instrumental and contemporary instrumental. Each Grand Prize winner receives a \$5,000 scholarship and the opportunity to shine in front of a live audience at **The Music Center's Spotlight Grand Finale** on **Friday, June 6, 2025, at 8:00 p.m., at The Music Center's Ahmanson Theatre**. Tickets for the *Spotlight Grand Finale* are available for free at musiccenter.org/spotlightfinale

Spotlight, part of the portfolio of The Music Center's programming arm TMC Arts, offers teens expert advice, coaching and audition experience as well as mastery classes taught by professional artists and arts administrators. Throughout the competition, which began in fall 2024, the young artists experience a range of invaluable opportunities, such as performance auditions, individual feedback from industry professionals and more than \$100,000 in cash awards. To date, The Music Center has awarded more than \$2.9 million in scholarships.

With two students chosen in each of the seven categories, this year's *Spotlight* Grand Prize winners are:

Acting:	11th grade students Matilda Luz Concha Pearson, 17, of Los Angeles High School for the Arts; and Baz Felber, 17, of Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual & Performing Arts.
Ballet:	9th grade students Liam Geoffroy, 18, of Huntington Beach High School; and Kiera Sun, 15, of Cabrillo Point Academy.
Classical Instrumental:	Minji Choi, 15, a 10th grade student at Northwood High School; and Evangeline Lien, 15, a 9th grade student at Claremont High School.
Classical Voice:	Madison Becerra, 18, a senior at Orange County High School of the Arts; and Jane Hasty, 17, a junior at Los Angeles High County High School for the Arts.
Contemporary Instrumental:	11th grade students Elie Samouhi, 17, of Calabasas High School; and Saoirse Sipes, 17, of Thousand Oaks High School.
Dance:	12th grade students Emma Donnelly, 18, from The Bishop's School; and River Novin, 17.
Non-Classical Voice:	10th grade students Elina Ghosh, 15, of West Ranch High School; and Harlem Shepherd, 15, of Los Angeles County High School for the Arts.

"Congratulations to this year's extraordinary Spotlight Grand Prize winners! Advancing to the final stage of this distinguished program is a remarkable accomplishment that reflects not only immense talent, but also countless hours of hard work, rehearsals and resilience," said Rachel S. Moore, president and CEO of The Music Center. "From the time it began 37 years ago, Spotlight has continued to shape the lives of tens of thousands of students across Southern California. In a world where we all need more connection, joy and inspiration, these young artists remind us of the transformative power of the performing arts and the vital role the arts play in building more vibrant and united communities."

An important part of The Music Center's fundamental support for arts learning, *Spotlight* offers performance opportunities, audition experiences and mentorship, plus technical and artistic insights provided by professional artists and arts administrators. It is distinctive from other programs of its type: the program accepts students at every skill level and focuses on learning, growth and accessibility. *Spotlight* is completely free with no financial barriers for participants, which gives equal footing to all aspiring artists no matter their talent level. This year, the more than 1,600 teens who

auditioned for the prestigious program--from Kern County in the north to San Diego in the south--represented 265 schools, 177 cities and eight counties. All *Spotlight* applicants receive written feedback from distinguished panels of judges following each audition round to help students improve and gain knowledge in their specific performance discipline.

Since the program's launch in 1988, numerous *Spotlight* participants have gone on to successful professional careers. Nearly two dozen past finalists are Presidential Scholars, and many more have joined or performed with professional companies, such as Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, American Ballet Theatre, Metropolitan Opera, LA Opera, Boston Symphony Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic. Notable *Spotlight* alumni include **Misty Copeland**, who made history in the dance world as the first African American principal dancer for American Ballet Theatre; recording artists **Adam Lambert** and **Josh Groban**; Emmy® Award-winning composer **Kris Bowers**, whose work includes the scores for *Bob Marley: One Love*, *Bridgerton*, *Green Book* and *Dear White People* and who is the co-director of the Oscar®-winning short documentary *The Last Repair Shop*; **Lindsay Mendez**, Tony Award® winner for her role in the Broadway revival of *Carousel* and who recently starred in the Broadway revival *Merrily We Roll Along*; **Erin Mackey**, star of Broadway's *Wicked*, *Sondheim on Sondheim*, *Anything Goes*, *Chaplin*, and *Amazing Grace*; **Matthew Rushing**, interim artistic director for Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater; **Yao Guang Zhai**, associate principal clarinet of the Toronto Symphony; and **Gerald Clayton**, GRAMMY® Award-winning jazz recording artist; among many others.

Guests and performing arts lovers can elevate their experience at the *Spotlight Grand Finale* by supporting The Music Center's inaugural *Spotlight Grand Gala*, which will take place prior to the Grand Finale performance. Proceeds help ensure that *Spotlight* continues to be provided, at no cost, to future generations of young artists. Honorary gala chairs are Teresita and Shelby Notkin; honorary gala committee members are Pamela and Dennis Beck; Judith and Thomas L. Beckmen; Merle Mullin; and Fredric Roberts. More information about the *Spotlight Grand Gala* can be found at musiccenter.org/spotlightgala

Major support for *The Music Center's Spotlight* program is provided by lead endowment benefactor and founding chairman of *Spotlight* Fredric Roberts, Edgerton Foundation, Robert Gold and Cathy Stone. Fredric Roberts is founding chairman of *Spotlight*; the late Walter E. Grauman is the creator.

For more information about *The Music Center's Spotlight* program, visit musiccenter.org/spotlight or follow @musiccenterspotlight on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok and @spotlightawards on X.

To RSVP for free tickets to this year's *Spotlight Grand Finale*, visit musiccenter.org/spotlightfinale

Hometown	Name	Category	School	Grade
Burbank	Jane Hasty	Classical Voice	Los Angeles County High School for the Arts	11
Calabasas	Elie Samouhi	Contemporary Instrumental	Calabasas High School	11
Fullerton	Madison Becerra	Classical Voice	Orange County School of the Arts	12
Huntington Beach	Liam Geoffroy	Ballet	Huntington Beach High School	9
Irvine	Minji Choi	Classical Instrumental	Northwood High School	10
Irvine	Kiera Sun	Ballet	Cabrillo Point Academy	9
La Verne	Evangelina Lien	Classical Instrumental	Claremont High School	9
Lomita	River Novin	Dance		12
Los Angeles	Matilda Luz Concha Pearson	Acting	Los Angeles County High School for the Arts	12
Los Angeles	Harlem Shepherd	Non-Classical Voice	Los Angeles County High School for the Arts	10
North Hollywood	Baz Felber	Acting	Ramon C. Cortines School of Visual & Performing Arts	11
San Diego	Emma Donnelly	Dance	The Bishop's School	12
Santa Clarita	Elina Ghosh	Non-Classical Voice	West Ranch High School	10
Thousand Oaks	Saoirse Sipes	Contemporary Instrumental	Thousand Oaks High School	11

CALENDAR LISTING

WHAT:

The Music Center's 37th Annual Spotlight Grand Finale

Selected from more than 1,600 teen applicants, 14 Grand Prize winners of *The Music Center's Spotlight* program will showcase their artistry on stage in front of a live audience at The Music Center's Ahmanson Theatre. *The Music Center's Spotlight* is a nationally acclaimed free performing arts competition, scholarship and artistic development program for Southern California teens in seven categories: acting, ballet, classical instrumental, classical voice, contemporary instrumental, dance and non-classical voice.

WHEN:

Friday, June 6, 2025

8:00 p.m.

WHERE:

The Music Center's Ahmanson Theatre

135 S. Grand Ave.

Los Angeles 90012

TICKETS:

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

To RSVP for tickets, visit musiccenter.org/spotlightfinale

ABOUT THE MUSIC CENTER

The Music Center convenes artists, communities and ideas with the goal of deepening the cultural lives of every resident in Los Angeles County. The \$80 million non-profit performing arts organization has two divisions: TMC Arts and TMC Ops. TMC Arts, The Music Center's programming engine, provides year-round programming inside The Music Center's four theatres, on Jerry Moss Plaza, outside at Gloria Molina Grand Park--a 12-acre adjacent green space--in schools and other locations all over Los Angeles County. TMC Arts presents world-class dance with *Glorya Kaufman Presents Dance at The Music Center*, free and low-cost public concerts and events, live and digital K-12 arts education programs, workshops, performances, interactive experiences and special events. TMC Ops manages the theatres, the Plaza and Gloria Molina Grand Park, which comprise \$3 billion in county assets, on behalf of the County of Los Angeles. The Music Center is also home to four renowned resident companies--Center Theatre Group, Los Angeles Master Chorale, LA Opera and LA Phil. For more information, visit musiccenter.org. Follow The Music Center on social media @MusicCenterLA.

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