



The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AUSTIN TEEN COMPETES IN 33rd ANNUAL ENGLISH-SPEAKING UNION NATIONAL SHAKESPEARE COMPETITION IN NEW YORK CITY

New York City: With a performance of a sonnet and monologue from Shakespeare on stage at Lincoln Center in New York City, **JESSE HERNANDEZ** from Austin, TX, a student of Christina Burbank at Crockett High School in Austin, placed as a semi-finalist in the 33rd annual English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition. The Competition took place on May 2, 2016 with 55 semi-finalists from as many ESU Branch competitions nationwide. Jesse previously won the ESU Austin Branch competition.

The 2016 English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition is part of Shakespeare400, the international yearlong celebration of Shakespeare's works. This year, the Competition marked the milestone of exceeding 300,000 student participants since its inception in 1983. Among the winners and finalists of the Competition who have gone on to national acclaim are actor and director Joe Sofranko, whose Hulu series *Complete Works* is, in fact, based on the National Shakespeare Competition; actors Emily Bergl (*Shameless*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Southland*); Tyler Hilton (*Walk the Line*, *One Tree Hill*); Heather Lind (*Demolition*, *Boardwalk Empire*, *Turn: Washington's Spies*); Bronwyn Reed (*Law and Order: SVU*); as well as Broadway's Matt Harrington (*Twelfth Night*, *Matilda*) and Adam Wesley Brown (*Once the Musical*).

This winner of the 33rd English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition, **Ari Dalbert**, representing the Hawai'i Branch, received a full scholarship to attend the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art's *Young Actors Summer School* in London, England, this summer. Second place winner, **Zoë Oliver**, from Greenwich Branch, won a scholarship to attend the American Shakespeare Center Theatre Camp in Staunton, VA, while the third place winner, **Cecilia Harchegani**, representing the San Diego Branch of the ESU, received \$500 from The Shakespeare Society.

This year, actress Dana Ivey served as a judge, joining an illustrious roster of former judges that includes such luminaries as Sarah Jessica Parker, Sam Waterston, Phylicia Rashad, Blythe Danner, Jesse L. Martin, Cynthia Nixon, Richard Thomas, Courtney B. Vance, Dianne Wiest, and Helen Hayes.

The English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition is a school-based program designed to help students develop their speaking and critical thinking skills and their appreciation of literature as they explore the beauty of

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the language and timeless themes in Shakespeare's works. In three progressive competition levels, students memorize, interpret, and perform monologues and sonnets in their own schools, at ESU Branch-sponsored community competitions and at the English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition. Citing its 33rd season this year, the Honorable Bill De Blasio, Mayor of the City of New York, proclaimed May 2, 2016 as William Shakespeare Day in New York City. Danny Lopez, the British Consul-General in New York, read the proclamation, and Paul Beresford-Hill, CBE, KSt.J, Chairman of the English-Speaking Union, awarded certificates to the competitors.

The ESU provided the semi-finalists with two full days of educational and cultural activities in New York City, including an exclusive acting workshop at the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University and a performance of the *Something Rotten!* on Broadway. Perhaps best of all for these teenagers was the opportunity to spend a weekend in New York City with other students from across the country who share a love of the English language and, particularly, Shakespeare.

Founded in 1920, the English-Speaking Union is a nonprofit, nonpolitical organization that promotes English as a shared language to foster global understanding and good will by providing educational and cultural opportunities for students and educators.



Jesse Hernandez, semi-finalist, competing at Lincoln Center in New York City during the 2016 English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition.



The 55 semi-finalists at the 2016 English-Speaking Union National Shakespeare Competition in New York City.