



# National Society of Arts and Letters

Supporting young talent in the performing, visual, and literary arts since 1944

## National Newsletter December 2023



Dear NSAL Members,

As your National President, I am so happy to wish you happy holidays this year. It has been a good year for the National Society of Arts and Letters, and we look forward to more successes in our mission to support outstanding young artists in 2024.

Chapters around the country are gearing up to host musical theatre competitions to select their finalists to send to the national musical theatre competition in May in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. We will celebrate two anniversaries there—the 80<sup>th</sup> birthday of the National Society of Arts and Letters and the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our support for young artists who excel in musical theatre. This is an annual meeting you don't want to miss.

In October during a board meeting on Zoom, I asked for a volunteer to step up to put together the national newsletter. Ruth Albright and Twyla Martins stepped up and I am delighted. It is so important that all members know about our successes—and our needs.

You will find an article in this newsletter about the NSAL Centennial Fund. As we approach our 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we have a need for operating funds and we hope you will help with that.

Paul Wigley, president of the new Central Iowa Chapter, has written a wonderful article about how the new chapter came to be.

And then there is the information about what our winners and chapters are doing. Please send us your own chapter's information for the next newsletter. Reading about our chapters' successes and our winners' successes makes us not only happy but excited to help NSAL pursue its mission.

Thanks for all you do to support young artists.

Mary Ann Osborne  
NSAL National President

2023 National Drama Finalists  
Front row: Andrew LeBuhn,  
Gustavo Flores, Corbin Ford,  
Forrest Loeffler. Second row:  
David Obeng, Alycya Thomas,  
Megan Pecot, Hanna Kulawiak,  
Ashley Schwach, Jaylon  
Murchison, A'Keyah Williams.  
Back row: Zach Bazile, Dylan  
Chace Lee, and Malik James.



# 2024 NATIONAL MUSICAL THEATRE COMPETITION

MAY 16-19, 2024

Dear NSAL Membership,

The Illinois Chapter is thrilled to host the 2024 National Musical Theatre Competition this May 16-19th in Champaign-Urbana. The annual meeting and hotel accommodations will be held at the [I-Hotel and Conference Center](#) with our Musical Theatre Competition site hosted at the renowned [Krannert Center for the Performing Arts](#). Adjudicators include Broadway and former Harlem Ballet star [Endalyn T. Outlaw](#) and Broadway/Radio City Music Hall Music Director [Kevin Stites](#).

Sarah Wigley, President NSAL Illinois Chapter  
NSAL Annual Meeting and National Competition Chair

## *Welcome to Our New Chapter: NSAL Central Iowa*



The Central Iowa Chapter of the National Society of Arts and Letters received its official certification on May 19, 2023. It is the only chapter in Iowa and is located in Algona, Iowa, which is in the northern part of the state. I am delighted to be the first president of this new chapter.

The impetus for forming the Iowa chapter was twofold: first, Sarah Wigley (my daughter) was encouraging the growth of new chapters for NSAL, and Iowa has a solid history of supporting the arts. Second, there is a Trust that exists in Algona, Iowa, that was created solely for the purpose of supporting the arts in that city. The Trust has grown to a point that it needs to spend approximately \$130,000 per year to maintain its tax-free status. A board member of the Trust indicated that Algona just built a new Performing Arts Center, and the Trust furnished it with a Steinway Concert D Grand Piano (\$125,000), and it would be perfect to sponsor a musical competition with such great facilities. After having Sarah Wigley present to the entire Trust board via Zoom, it was determined that the NSAL competition guidelines were perfect for the vision the Trust had. The Trust board voted to financially

support a new Central Iowa Chapter of NSAL to get it up and running.

My personal story involves being a high school choral director for my entire career. I first started teaching in Mason City, Iowa (home of Meredith Willson and "The Music Man," and also where Sarah was born). We then moved to Algona, where I taught another 14 years, then moved back to our Minnesota roots, where I taught for another 14 years at a large suburban high school in Lakeville, Minnesota.

Our family has always participated in church choirs, community choirs, community theatre, school and community bands, and basically any other musical and theatre opportunities that we could find. I am also very involved in barbershop quartet singing and am a certified contest judge.

The Central Iowa members include many participants and supporters of various arts media. We have a former president of the Iowa Bandmasters Association, the former artistic director of the University of Iowa Hancher Auditorium, a world-famous photographer who has sailed the Arctic Circle, a very active attorney who has litigated major cases in the state of Iowa, a vice president of the Iowa State Bank, the head of choral activities at Morningside University, and on and on. I feel very fortunate to have a committed and supportive group for the arts.

We are currently in the process of getting out publicity for our first competition, to be held on March 16, 2024 in the Performing Arts Center at Algona High School. We fully plan on sending the winner to the National Musical Theatre competition to be held in Champaign, Illinois, next May. We are publicizing the Shirley Rabb Winston voice competition as well. Obviously, our biggest challenge will be getting out the word about Iowa NSAL competitions, since it's our first time around.

These are very exciting times for the Central Iowa Chapter of the National Society of Arts and Letters. We look forward to working with all chapters within this great organization.

Paul Wigley  
President, NSAL Central Iowa Chapter

## *News and Notes About Winners and Members*

### ARIZONA CHAPTER



Madi Latham

The Arizona Chapter got off to a good start. Journalist and author Jana Bommersbach spoke to NSAL Arizona members and guests on an October Saturday morning at Changing Hands Bookstore in Phoenix. She discussed her writing life and signed her latest book, *Hellraisers & Trailblazers: The Real Women of the Wild West*, co-authored with Bob Boze Bell.

Emphasizing the literary aspect of NSAL, Poetry Competition Chair Madi Latham presented details about the NSAL AZ high school poetry competition. The event was well attended and the chapter gained some new members.

### ARKANSAS CHAPTER

Dominic Muzzi, winner of the third-place award in the 2022 national NSAL piano competition, has become a member of "The President's Own" United States Marine Band. And he is thrilled. For the first time in 10 years, a space opened up for a pianist and Dominic applied. So did 10 other pianists, but Dominic was selected. He finished his Ph.D. studies at Indiana University in March and moved to Washington, D.C. Before he could join the band, he had to switch from being in the Army to being in the Marines. In August, he reported to Sherry Henderson that he had already played his first performance at the White House.

"The President's Own" United States Marine Band's mission is to perform music for the President of the United States and the Commandant of the Marine Corps. Founded in 1798 by an Act of Congress, the Marine Band is America's oldest continuously active professional musical organization.

Photo of Dominic in his Marine uniform and photo of piano he played in the White House.



## HAWAII CHAPTER

The Hawaii Chapter has started the year off strongly with two well-attended luncheons. At their May fund-raising event, they raised enough money that the chapter now has \$100,000 in its treasury, for the first time in President Carolyn Berry's memory. The Hawaii Chapter is conducting a membership contest, with a free lunch going to the member who brings in the most new members. They are especially looking for new members between the ages of 45 and 50. Lezlee Kaponu was the October guest speaker and she spoke about the Henry Kaponu Foundation and how they helped the musicians during Covid and again after the fires on Maui. Henry, who also attended, was voted Favorite Entertainer of the Year in 2021. The November speaker was Kyle Malis, who spoke about his rise from a teenager in Diamond Head Theatre productions to starring in the Manoa Valley Theatre's production of Sweeney Todd.



Hawaii 2023 Winner and National 2nd Place Winner, Dylan Chace Lee performing with the Hawaii Comedy Festival. He is also among the dubbing cast for Netflix series, "Song of the Bandits". Dylan dubs for the character Choraeng-yi.

## INDIANA CHAPTER

The Indiana Chapter of the National Society of Arts and Letters likes to start the year with a program that features whatever the national discipline will be. For 2023-2024 that is musical theatre. In fact, it is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of NSAL's first musical theatre competition in 2004.

Because many Indiana Chapter members like seeing what goes on behind the scenes, Lauren Haughton Gillis, an assistant professor in the musical theatre department at Indiana University, met with members on August 30 to show us how she is choreographing the musical Cabaret, which is the first musical of the 2023-2024 IU theatre season.

The actors showed up for rehearsal soon after members arrived, surprised to find us there but very welcoming since they all know about NSAL. Many of them have won NSAL awards.

Members agreed it was a great way to start our year.



## KENTUCKY CHAPTER



Laurel County native and award-winning author Silas House has been appointed Kentucky Poet Laureate by Gov. Andy Beshear. House was the Kentucky Chapter 1st Place winner in 1998. and was on the panel of poets along with Wendell Berry, James Baker Hall and Jane Gentry Vance for the 2003 national NSAL literature competition in Poetry, which was in Lexington, Kentucky. “I’ve always felt that being part of Kentucky’s literary tradition is great. I’m proud of that,” House said. “Some of my favorite writers have been poets laureates, making my appointment to the position extra special.” House is the nationally bestselling author of the novels “Clay’s Quilt,” “A Parchment of Leaves,” “The Coal Tattoo” and “Eli the Good.” In 2012 he co-authored “Same Sun Here” with Neela Vaswani. House’s most recent novel, “Lark Ascending,” was published in 2022.

To read more: <https://www.lanereport.com/164446/2023/04/silas-house-appointed-kentucky-poet-laureate-for-2023-24/>

## NEW JERSEY CHAPTER

On October 18, members who attended the New Jersey Chapter meeting enjoyed a photo presentation by Xiomaro, an internationally exhibited artist and curator from New York. Xio specializes in photographing national parks and other iconic sites to raise public awareness of their history, culture, and natural beauty. We were then treated to a field trip with Xio across the street to view his exhibit at the Mayo Performing Arts Center. His photos were on exhibit through November 28.



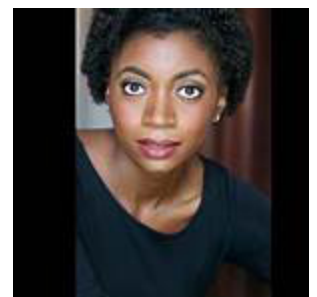
## NEW YORK CHAPTER



Malik' James, first-place winner of the New York Chapter drama competition in 2023 and the first-place national winner, is completing his fourth and last year at the David Geffen School of Drama at Yale. He is excited that he will be playing the lead, Angelo, in the school’s production of “Measure for Measure”.

## PITTSBURGH CHAPTER

Gena Sims, first-place winner of the national drama competition in 2019, representing the Pittsburgh Chapter, has created an amazing organization over the years. The summer before her senior year in high school she founded the Autism Theater Project. It started as community drama classes tailored to meet the needs of young people with autism. Today it has grown into a non-profit education and production company whose mission is to show the world that everyone has a voice.



Gena has requested funds to help grow her organization and has received grants from national NSAL in support of her efforts. This year ATP has been awarded a McDonald's Golden Grant for community service for special needs engagement.

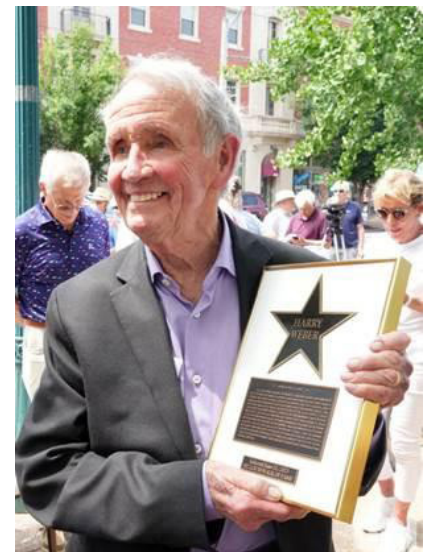
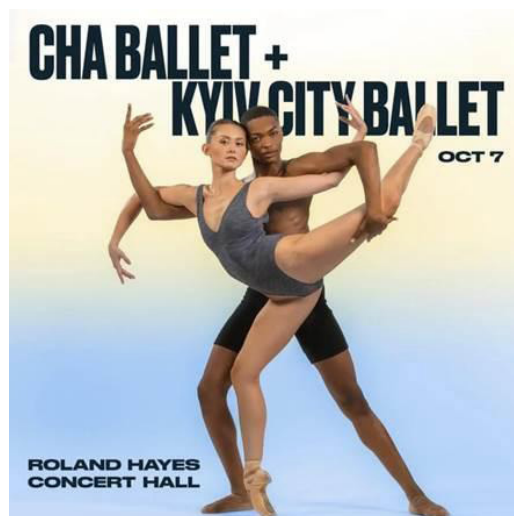
For more information, see [autismtheaterproject.org](http://autismtheaterproject.org).

## ST. LOUIS CHAPTER

Kameron (Kam) Saunders, Saint Louis Chapter winner and national fifth-place winner in dance (choreography) in 2011, is now a backup dancer for the one and only Taylor Swift. He is one of 15 and the only plus-size dancer for her national Eras tour. Kam has 150K followers on Instagram.

Alessandra Ferrari-Wong, Saint Louis Chapter winner in dance (classical ballet) in 2017, is a company dancer with the Chattanooga Ballet in Tennessee.

Henry Weber, NSAL chapter member since 2013, was inducted into the St. Louis Walk of Fame on June 21, 2023. Henry is a world-renowned sculptor who has made portraits of many famous subjects, including 26 St. Louisians who are also commemorated in the Walk of Fame. Among the most famous are Lewis and Clark, Chuck Berry, Stan Musiel, and Dred and Harriet Scott.



## NSAL CENTENNIAL FUND

### NSAL Centennial Fund - Lifeline for the Future

What in this world can we do to continue the vibrancy and dynamism envisioned by our founders?

In 1944, our founders and many following leaders, had both the time and expertise to guide and manage NSAL and its local chapters. Past donations fund our current awards, and are quite sufficient. Only a small percentage of those past donations is available to support the much-needed operations funds. For NSAL National, that small amount is no longer enough to fund the operational functions required of our organization. NSAL must be able to pay for auditable accounting, IRS 990 compliance filing, legal registration compliance, liability insurance, up-to-date website and social media communications and marketing, chapter services, and National's share of annual meeting costs, among

others. Our recently reorganized and re-registered organization needs a larger nest egg to ensure its future stability.

And there is a way forward. Many of NSAL's most experienced and visionary members believe such an *endowment for operations*, dedicated to supporting the invisible part of our activities, administration, is both doable and necessary. Let us explain.

Many nest egg savings instruments—pensions, IRAs, 401(k)s, and trusts are examples—are set up to ensure that a modest annual draw-down will allow that personal nest egg to grow over time. An annual draw averaging about 4% is considered a workable amount. If NSAL were to have an endowment for operations of \$1 million, that would sustain an annual draw-down of 4%, or \$40,000. A nest egg from which NSAL National could draw each year would be added to the monies already allowed from the awards endowment, giving NSAL National the funds to pay for the administrative activities now required of a modern tax-exempt organization. And of course, the larger the endowments, the larger the annual payout can be, fortifying our future sustainability. NSAL clearly needs to build such an endowment, to sustain the work that we now do in the arts.

The Board of Directors of NSAL National, together with its Strategic Planning Committee, enthusiastically invite you to donate to our **NSAL Centennial Fund, a Lifeline for the Future**. Donations, no matter how large or small, are tax deductible. As we begin seeking grant funding from larger donors, we'd like to be able to brag about the percentage of membership participating in the **NSAL Centennial Fund**: your **NSAL Centennial Fund** donation will help National raise larger funds from a wider "audience"—two outcomes from one donation!!

Please forward your donation to *NSAL National Treasurer, Ronald Ivey, 2801 New Mexico Ave NW, Washington, DC 20007*. We would be grateful if you might include NSAL Centennial Fund in your estate planning as well.

Many of you have asked whether NSAL National could have a "donate here" button on its website. We can do that for collecting dues and donations from members. Raising money where we do not have members seems to require a Fundraising License in every state from which donations come. The Executive Board is exploring whether NSAL National can find a way to implement such an easy-to-do, cost-effective fundraising method, and we will keep you posted.

Meanwhile, we encourage you to donate to the **NSAL National Centennial Fund**, to begin resolving the financial issues that are impeding our beloved organization from its most important job, supporting emerging artists.

Thank you

## PHOTO MEMORIES FROM 2023 ANNUAL MEETING





Photographer: Adelia Parker-Castro  
*Link to edited photos*

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cdBjqFASJRrD9h-w3WtdnWokv6NtQnk?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1cdBjqFASJRrD9h-w3WtdnWokv6NtQnk?usp=share_link)

*Please use the following links to view all the photographs from the Annual Meeting.*

May 18: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1SOMqkSJelcesCLy5\\_yYDZbQiX2D3fCJY?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1SOMqkSJelcesCLy5_yYDZbQiX2D3fCJY?usp=drive_link)

May 19: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QqpQT3g2bNdYkz4LE51huQz410z0AnNG?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1QqpQT3g2bNdYkz4LE51huQz410z0AnNG?usp=drive_link)

May 20: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1b36Er7YXqnxHoxwbMtbOLPX4XM6ZYOVH?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1b36Er7YXqnxHoxwbMtbOLPX4XM6ZYOVH?usp=drive_link)

## SHARE YOUR NEWS

*Please send information about your chapter and award winners to newsletter editors Ruth Albright and Twyla Martins at [ruthalbright@yahoo.com](mailto:ruthalbright@yahoo.com) and [trmarts@mac.com](mailto:trmarts@mac.com)*