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Four Ouachita students named finalists at KCACTF regional auditions



By Taylor Tomlinson

March 17, 2014

For more information, contact OBU's news bureau at newsbureau@obu.edu or (870) 245-5208.

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. -- Four Ouachita Baptist University students were named finalists in recent auditions at the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF). The festival took place at Centenary College in Shreveport, La., Feb. 25-March 1.

Joe Ochterbeck, a senior theatre arts and mass communications major from Maumelle, Ark., was named a finalist in KCACTF's Regional Irene Ryan Acting Auditions. Ochterbeck was nominated for his work as Carthage Kilbride in last fall's production of *By the Bog of Cats*. Ochterbeck selected Lauren Linton, senior musical theatre major from Coldwater, Miss., to serve as his acting partner during the auditions.

"My wonderful partner Lauren Linton and I came into this competition simply wanting to do good, honest work," said Ochterbeck. "This is the fourth year I've been to the festival and I had yet to advance those previous years. We had no expectations of advancing at all, so making it into the finals was quite a thrill and surprise for both of us."

According to Mary Handiboe, OBU associate professor of theatre arts, Ochterbeck is the first student from Ouachita to advance to the final round of the Irene Ryan Auditions on the regional level. This placed him in the top 16 students out of approximately 200 participants from across the region of Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Missouri.

"I think the most important part of being a finalist in the festival this year would be representing OBU's amazing theatre department and holding our own against huge, well-funded public universities," said Ochterbeck.

Chad Burris, a junior musical theatre major from Van Buren, Ark., and Garrett Whitehead, a senior musical theatre major from Cleburne, Texas, also advanced to the final round of auditions for the Regional Musical Theatre Initiative (MTI). Burris, who placed first in the region, will have the opportunity to attend the Open Jar Institute in New York City, an elite summer program with current Broadway personalities.

"The audition process was great because I actually got to sit down with the judges in a response session and get feedback on my work," said Burris. "It is an incredible experience and really encouraging, but really any of the participants could've won. The friends and contacts I made are invaluable."

"This is only the third year for our region to host the MTI, but it is an excellent opportunity for our students to be seen by some of the top people in the industry," added Handiboe. "This opportunity could actually open the doors for Chad on Broadway."

Cody Myers, a senior musical theatre and psychology major from Van Buren, Ark., attended the Regional Institute for Theatre Journalism and Advocacy at the festival.

Kenderick Scorza, a sophomore musical theatre major from North Little Rock, Ark., and Tyler Wisdom, a junior musical theatre major from Russellville, Ark., were nominated for the Irene Ryan Auditions for their work in *A Year with Frog and Toad*.

Kathleen Suit, a junior theatre arts major from Hot Springs, Ark., served as Scorza's acting partner, and Stacy Hawking, a sophomore musical theatre major from Sherwood, Ark., served as Wisdom's acting partner.

For more information, contact Mary Handiboe at handiboem@obu.edu or (870) 245-4157.