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Eight Ouachita students named finalists in regional NATS competition, Susan Monroe honored

By Anna Hurst

November 23, 2015

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

ARKADELPHIA, Ark. --Eight Ouachita Baptist University students were named finalists at the 40th annual Southern Region National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) conference held recently at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. Among the finalists, Esther Atkinson, a sophomore musical theatre student, earned two first place awards. Susan Monroe, OBU staff accompanist, also received the James Ronald Brothers Award for Outstanding Collaborative Pianist in the southern region of NATS.

Conference attendees included students from universities and private studios in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Participants auditioned in classical or music theatre divisions. All OBU voice teachers who attended the conference served as judges for the multiple round audition process and staff collaborative pianists Kristen LaMadrid, Susan Monroe and Phyllis Walker assisted the students.

"The NATS audition approximates a real-life experience as well or perhaps better than any other," said Dr. Jon Secrest, coordinator of OBU's vocal studies program and professor of music. "The OBU vocal studies program and our team of professional singing teachers are always encouraged when our students are awarded for their hard work and diligence. Awards are the affirmation of a work ethic that produces growth and results, the 'icing on the cake,' if you will.

"This should not diminish the efforts of those who were not lucky enough to receive awards, for their work is just as important," Secrest added. "The regional NATS conference and auditions are designed to augment the vocal development and instruction our students receive at OBU and provide an additional outlet for their creative efforts."

This year's conference offered a recital and master class experience featuring guest artists and clinicians from outside the region. For the first time in 22 years, a Broadway performer served as a guest artist at the southern regional conference.

"When I became regional governor for NATS some three years ago, one of my goals for the region was to feature a Broadway singer/actor in our annual guest recital," Secrest said. "Our guest artist this year was Broadway star Kyle Dean Massey. His Thursday evening recital was the highlight of the conference."

Massey taught a music theatre master class that included two Ouachita students, Hunter Brown and Bethany Gere, in addition to six others from throughout the region.

In a region filled with "many very accomplished pianists," Susan Monroe said she considered receiving the James Ronald Brothers Award to be "a real honor."

"Collaborative pianists are their own worst critics," she said. "We hear all our own mistakes, and worry that our errors will confuse students in performance, so it is encouraging to know that our peers see excellence in our work. I did not think many people noticed the collaborative pianists, so it was very humbling to realize that people were watching me, even on bad-attitude days. As a Christian, it is good to

be reminded that my attitudes, words and actions should reflect Jesus, that He gives me the abilities and opportunities to perform and that all the glory belongs to Him.

"I am very proud of our vocal students who performed at NATS this fall and their support of each other," Monroe added. "I just started my ninth year as an accompanist here at OBU, and it is a privilege to get to work with very appreciative vocal professors who help me grow as a collaborator and very forgiving students who are joys to work with."

The following Ouachita students were NATS finalists, in order of hometown:

Crossett, Ark. – Seth Russell, a senior vocal performance student of Dr. Jon Secrest, earned third place in the senior men division.

Jonesboro, Ark. – Will Stotts, a sophomore musical theatre student of Dr. Jon Secrest, placed second in the lower college music theatre men division.

Plano, Texas – Amy Lytle, a junior worship arts student of Dr. Becky Morrison, earned fourth place in the freshman women division.

Rogers, Ark. – Esther Atkinson, a sophomore musical theatre student of David Stanley, placed first in the sophomore women division and in the lower college music theatre women division.

Russellville, Ark. – Hannah Hines, a junior musical theatre student of Dr. Margaret Garrett, placed second in the lower college music theatre women division. Scotty Scott, a freshman musical theatre student of Dr. Jon Secrest, earned third place in the lower college music theatre men division.

Texarkana, Texas – Tara Clem, a senior musical theatre student of Dr. Jon Secrest, earned fourth place in the upper college music theatre women division.

White Hall, Ark. – Bethany Gere, a senior musical theatre student of Dr. Margaret Garrett, placed second in the upper college music theatre women division.

Additionally, Brooke Melton, a high school student of Dr. Becky Morrison, earned third place in the high school women music theatre division.

Other Ouachita students named NATS semifinalists, in order of hometown, include:

Barling, Ark. – Zach Myers, a freshman musical theatre student of Dr. Glenda Secrest, was a semifinalist in the lower college music theatre men division.

Bella Vista, Ark. – Beth Crisler, a junior vocal performance student of Suzetta Glenn, was a semifinalist in the junior women division.

Benton, Ark. – Matthew Burns, a freshman choral music education student of Dr. Glenda Secrest, was a semifinalist in the lower college music theatre men division. Mercedes Mata, a freshman musical theatre student of Dr. Margaret Garrett, was a semifinalist in the lower college music theatre women division.

Bonnerdale, Ark. – Victoria Bateman, a senior choral music education student of David Stanley, was a semifinalist in the senior women division.

Central City, Ark. – Hunter Brown, a senior musical theatre student of Dr. Glenda Secrest, was a semifinalist in the lower college music theatre men division.

Frisco, Texas – Alexis Morgan, a junior choral music education student of Dr. Glenda Secrest, was a semifinalist in the junior women division and the upper college music theatre women division.

Greenwood, Ark. – Garrett Sayers, a senior musical theatre student of Dr. Glenda Secrest, was a semifinalist in the upper college music theatre men division.

Heath, Texas – Kenzie Osborn, a freshman musical theatre student of Dr. Glenda Secrest, was a semifinalist in the lower college music theatre women division.

North Little Rock, Ark. – Mattie Bogoslavsky, a senior musical theatre student of John Alec Briggs, was a semifinalist in the upper college music theatre women division.

Rockwall, Texas – Micah Brooks, a freshman musical theatre student of Dr. Jon Secrest, was a semifinalist in the lower college music theatre men division. Jessie Brunson, a freshman vocal performance student of Dr. Jon Secrest, was a semifinalist in the freshman women division.

Wylie, Texas – Jacob Hemsath, a sophomore musical theatre student of David Stanley, was a semifinalist in the sophomore men division and lower college music theatre men division. Libby Villegas, a freshman musical theatre student of David Stanley, was a semifinalist in the freshman women division and lower college music theatre women division.

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