

# HELLER AWARDS FOR YOUNG ARTISTS MOVING FROM THE LONG CENTER TO TEXAS PERFORMING ARTS

*\$1M raised to ensure the long-term future of the program as part of TPA's education program expansion that will serve more than 30,000 K-12 students annually*

AUSTIN, TX, UNITED STATES, February 11, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Texas Performing Arts (TPA) and the Long Center for the Performing Arts today announce the [Heller Awards](#) for Young Artists (HAYAs) will become a program of TPA beginning in the 2025-2026 season. The home of Broadway in Austin will host the Heller Awards ceremony at Bass Concert Hall beginning in 2026, after 12 successful years at the Long Center for the Performing Arts.

The HAYAs are a highly anticipated annual event that recognizes the outstanding achievements of high school musical theater students and educators in the Greater Austin area. Founded by the Long Center, TPA, and ZACH Theatre, the program has been produced and presented by the Long Center since 2014.

Starting with 19 schools participating in the first annual ceremony, then known affectionately as the Greater Austin High School Musical Theatre Awards (GAHSMTA), the Long Center has elevated the program to now feature 37



Texas Performing Arts Logo



Long Center for the Performing Arts Logo

schools and counting, reaching over 20,000 students and educators. With a focus of promoting the values of arts education, collaboration, and creativity under the Long Center's leadership, the Heller Awards have continued to evolve as the needs of students and teachers have changed. Ginger Morris, Executive Artistic Director of Impact Arts, has served as the Producing Director of the program since its inception.

Cory Baker, President and CEO of the Long Center, remarked, "For twelve years, the Long Center has invested in and grown this amazing program to the extraordinary heights that it has achieved. Part of our continued support is recognizing this incredible opportunity for the HAYAs to partner with Broadway in Austin and TPA. Although we will all miss having the event in our theater, we are thrilled for this new chapter and excited to see this program continue to thrive and flourish."

Stewardship of the HAYAs is part of TPA's multi-year expansion to maximize its educational impact. To help ensure the long-term viability of its educational programs, TPA has raised \$1M in new funding which will support the transition and ongoing operations of the HAYAs.

The Heller Awards are named for Andrew and Mary Ann Heller, whose initial gift established an endowment fund to support a portion of the program costs. That endowment has been transferred to TPA and increased with new funds.

Bob Bursey, the Executive & Artistic Director of Texas Performing Arts, noted that, "As the home of Broadway in Austin and as part of the University of Texas, the Heller Awards align perfectly



2024 Winners Heller Awards for Young Artists

with our passions for musical theater and education.” He continued, “We are happy to ensure that the Heller Awards continue to celebrate our community’s high school theater artists and to expand their opportunities in the years ahead.”

Modeled after the Tony Awards®, the HAYAs honor the entire high school musical experience, on and off the stage. Awards are presented in 19 categories such as best production, lead and supporting performers, and technical design. 37 high schools are participating in the 2025 awards, from Travis and five surrounding counties.



2024 Participants of the Heller Awards for Young Artists

The 2025 [HAYA](#) nominees will be announced via livestream on Sunday, February 23, at 5 PM, with the ceremony taking place on Wednesday, April 16 at the Long Center. In 2026, the event will move to TPA’s Bass Concert Hall, where the larger venue will allow for increased attendance and engage participating students with other educational opportunities offered by Texas Performing Arts and the College of Fine Arts at UT Austin.

The HAYAs will be integrated into the next phase of TPA’s education program expansion, which will serve more than 30,000 K-12 students across Central Texas in 2025-2026. New offerings include Austin’s first-ever daytime school performance of a nationally touring Broadway show, a musical theater performance for every 5th grader in the Austin Independent School District, and additional school-day performances of acclaimed touring artists. With TPA’s expanded programming for Austin area youth and Impact Arts’ mission to train the next generation of young artists, the HAYAs moving to TPA extends their ongoing collaboration.

Since 2022, TPA has hosted Impact Arts’ Summer Stock Austin, creating more avenues for young theater artists to hone their craft through performances at TPA’s McCullough Theater each summer. This partnership expanded in 2023 when the HAYAs became a Regional Awards Program (RAP) for the National High School Musical Theatre Awards® (popularly known as The Jimmy Awards®) through TPA’s membership in the Broadway League. As part of this collaboration, Impact Arts has worked closely with TPA to provide training and administrative support for Jimmy Awards preparation.

Presented by the Broadway League Foundation, the Jimmys represent the highest level of achievement in high school musical theatre, recognizing individual artistry in vocal performance, dance, and acting while underscoring the importance of theatre arts education in schools. Over the past two years, four students—Langston Lee, Kyra Carr, Ava Moak, and Jamias Hughes—have

represented the HAYAs at the Jimmy's in New York City. In 2023, Lee, a student from Rouse High School, won the prestigious award for Best Performance by an Actor, further solidifying the HAYAs as a nationally significant platform for nurturing young talent.

At Texas Performing Arts, the Heller Awards will be produced in association with Impact Arts, and Ginger Morris will continue to play a key role in the program. "As the program's Producing Director since its inception and now as the Executive Artistic Director of Impact Arts, I am proud of how this initiative has fostered community, mentorship, and excellence in arts education," said Morris. "Texas Performing Arts has been instrumental in helping us achieve national recognition through our participation in the Jimmy Awards, and their deep connections to the industry will undoubtedly elevate the program even further. Together, we will continue to empower students, honor the vibrant contributions of educators who shape their journeys, and create unforgettable experiences. We look forward to reaching new audiences and embarking on the next chapter in this extraordinary venue."

Support for the Heller Awards for Young Artists at Texas Performing Arts is provided by the Heller Awards for Young Artists Endowment and HAYA Executive Producers Andrew & Mary Ann Heller, Bettye Nowlin, and Marc & Carolyn Seriff.

Support for Austin's participation in the Jimmy Awards is provided by Andrew & Mary Ann Heller, Mila McCutchen, Marcia & Gary Nelson, Bettye Nowlin, and Marc & Carolyn Seriff.

#### ABOUT THE HELLER AWARDS FOR YOUNG ARTISTS

The Heller Awards for Young Artists (HAYA) was founded by the Long Center for the Performing Arts, Texas Performing Arts, and the ZACH Theatre. The program was presented and produced by the Long Center from 2014 to 2025. Since its inception, the Heller Awards for Young Artists have impacted over 20,000 students and educators from over 30 high schools by providing resources and key support systems for musical theatre programs. In addition to the awards ceremony, this year-round program celebrates the achievements of exceptional students and provides professional training, mentorship, performance opportunities, industry networking, and community building for thousands of young artists across Central Texas. More information including participation on the Heller Awards can be found at [impactarts.org/heller-awards](https://impactarts.org/heller-awards).

#### ABOUT TEXAS PERFORMING ARTS

Texas Performing Arts (TPA) enriches life in Austin and beyond through creativity, learning and live performance. As the University of Texas at Austin's performing arts center, TPA presents more than 200 performances and welcomes nearly 400,000 audience members each year. TPA's venues include Austin's largest theatre, Bass Concert Hall, and other venues on the UT campus. TPA presents Broadway in Austin; the Texas Welcomes series of touring artists; and a curated season of performing arts from around the globe. As part of UT's College of Fine Arts, TPA engages thousands of university students and introduces 16,000 K-12 students across Central Texas to the arts each year. Since 2020, Bob Bursey has held the position of Executive & Artistic Director. He is a Tony Award-winning performing arts executive, member of the Broadway

League's Intra-Industry Committee, and Tony Award voter.

#### ABOUT THE LONG CENTER

Uniquely facing the city skyline, the Long Center is an iconic cultural hub and community gathering place – a reflection of Austin's eclectic and creative soul. Built in 2008 and with a local history that spans many more generations, the Long Center is dedicated to fueling community through creativity, elevating Austin's creative sector, and connecting communities near and far through creative discovery. For more information about the Long Center, please visit [thelongcenter.org](http://thelongcenter.org) or follow on Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn.

#### ABOUT IMPACT ARTS

Impact Arts is a 501c3 nonprofit cultivating the next generation of artists and leaders through Summer Stock Austin, Texas Arts Project, Digital Learning Series, In-School Workshops, Teacher Workshops, and Private Lesson Studio all under the organization. Created by Ginger Morris, Victor Villalobos and Donelvan Thigpen, Impact Arts is committed to lifelong learning fostering empathy, creativity, and critical thinking through theatre and film programs propelling young artists to the next level in their careers. Uniquely empowering youth by producing professional quality productions, Impact Arts aims to be a leader in inclusive educational programs that use arts to unite people creating a lasting impact. Visit [impactarts.org](http://impactarts.org) for more information.

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