Mary Bethune Second-Graders Win the Marilyn Bianchi Playwriting Festival

One day in February, six second-graders at Mary M. Bethune School in Cleveland squirmed in their seats as they began writing a play to enter into the Marilyn Bianchi Playwriting Festival’s 45th playwriting contest for kids. They had just watched a playwriting video created by Dobama Theatre, and although they hadn’t even considered writing a play until ten minutes earlier, they were excited to begin.

“Maybe we should write about animals,” said one of them.

“No, we should write about people,” said another.

“Maybe we should write about people that turn into animals,” said a third, and with that, they were off and running.

These six students–Jaylon Crosby, Nampewa Diebon, Raelita Finnie, Karri Johnson-Scott, Enarie Peabody, and Robert Sutton– had been chosen by their teacher, Julie Mellinger, to receive additional creative enrichment workshops with Mary Bethune’s Teach Arts Ohio teaching artist, Cynthia Larsen, from Lake Erie Ink. As they dictated their play to Ms. Larsen, she contributed only guiding questions and compromises to aid their creative flow (and her typing skills). The students watched as their play appeared on the interactive whiteboard. They read it over and over as they imagined their characters' words and actions. As the students took turns adding their lines of dialogue and action, Ms. Larsen began to think this play could be a winner.

After their play was completed, the six students rehearsed and proudly performed their play for their other classmates. Playwriting taught them not only how to write and perform a play, but also critical social-emotional skills: how to work together, listen to each other, and help each other. They celebrated each other’s ideas, and each worked to achieve their shared goal.

These students will be learning more about playwriting as the spring progresses, namely, they’ll learn what it feels like to see absolute strangers (professional directors and actors) perform words and actions that they imagined and wrote in their play, “MAGIC IN THE WOODS.” This is the ultimate power of playwriting!

The Mary Bethune second graders’ play is one of ten plays that will be performed at the 45th Annual Marilyn Bianchi Kids’ Playwriting Festival, held live on stage at Dobama Theatre on June 2, 3, and 4, 2022.

Winners of the Marilyn Bianchi Playwriting Festival, which is an integral part of Dobama Theatre’s mission to provide educational and outreach programming, come from all over Northeast Ohio. The Festival’s goal is to provide a platform for youth to express their thoughts, hopes, dreams, and creativity through the writing of original plays.

This is only the second year that the contest has accepted group submissions, and the students at Mary Bethune are the first collaborating playwrights to win the contest.

Cynthia Larsen

See below for the short version:

SHORT VERSION

Second-graders, Jaylon Crosby, Nampewa Diebon, Raelita Finnie, Karri Johnson-Scott, Enarie Peabody, and Robert Sutton from Mary M. Bethune School in Cleveland were selected as winners of the 45th Annual Marilyn Bianchi Kids’ Playwriting Festival, the longest-running celebration of young playwrights in the United States. Their play, MAGIC IN THE WOODS, will appear, along with nine other plays, in the Festival Production from June 2-4th, 2023.

The second-graders from Ms. Mellinger’s class wrote their play during two enrichment workshops with Cynthia Larsen, Teach Arts Ohio/Ohio Arts Council resident artist in creative writing at Mary M. Bethune School.

The 45th Annual Marilyn Bianchi Kids’ Playwriting Festival will be held live on stage at Dobama Theatre June 2, 3, and 4 2022. Directors include Williams, Esma Eddeb, Erin Dolan, Latecia Wilson, Colin Anderson, Jailyn Sherell Harris, Jonah Raider-Roth, Cali Parey, Kari Barclay, and India Pierre-Ingram. Performances on June 3rd and 4th are free to the public.

For more information, contact [clarsen@lakeerieink.org](mailto:clarsen@lakeerieink.org)

For information about the Marilyn Bianchi Playwriting Festival, see Dobama’s press release on the following pages.

**PRESS RELEASE**

**** 

CONTACT:

Nathan Motta

Artistic Director

[nmotta@dobama.org](mailto:nmotta@dobama.org)

DATE: April 11, 2023

**ANNOUNCING THE WINNERS OF THE**

**45th ANNUAL MARILYN BIANCHI KIDS’ PLAYWRITING FESTIVAL**

Dobama Theatre is delighted to announce the winners of the 45thAnnual Marilyn Bianchi Kids’ Playwriting Festival, the longest-running celebration of young playwrights in the United States. Every year Dobama Theatre accepts submissions from students all over Northeast Ohio, and a few of the winning plays will be presented on Dobama’s stage at the end of the season.

The following plays will appear in the Festival Production from June 2-4th, 2023:

**MAGIC IN THE WOODS** by Jaylon Crosby, Nampewa Diebon, Raelita Finnie, Karri Johnson-Scott, Enarie Peabody, and Robert Sutton, 2nd Grade, Mary M. Bethune School

**THE DISASTER OF NO SUMMER SCHOOL** by Kajsa Roberts, 3rd Grade, Redwood Elementary

**MOMENTS OF MAGIC** by Milo Dominic, 4th Grade, Canterbury Elementary

**THE ALL-YOU-CAN-EAT BUFFET AT THE END OF THE WORLD** by Emma Foradori, 5th Grade, Woodbury Intermediate

**THE MAGIC THIMBLE** by Sophia Petrovic, 6th Grade, Roxboro Middle School

**THE BIG EGG** by Dominic Dottavio, 7th Grade, North Royalton Middle School

**OFFICE OF ODDBALLS** by Nathan Singleton, 8th Grade, North Royalton Middle School

**DOLLY GUTS** by MaKenna Hughmanic, 11th Grade, North Olmsted High School

**MADE WITH LOVE** by Josh Mink, 12th Grade, Shaker Heights High School

**BAXTER AND MONICA AND THE NEXT GREAT AMERICAN MUSICAL** by Sophia Casa, 12th Grade, Laurel School

In addition, we recognize the following winning plays and playwrights:

**THE MYSTERIOUS GLASSES** by Melora Dodge, 2nd Grade, Homeschool

**ALL BECAUSE OF A BEAR** by Ava Lynn Finley, 3rd Grade, Columbus Intermediate School

**CAMP SUGAR CRASH** by Meredith Cushwa and Lily Sparks, 3rd Grade, Roxboro Elementary

**THE POWER OF FRIENDSHIP** by Lillian Ritter, 4th Grade, Erieview Elementary

**MYSTERY OF THE MUSEUM MUSEUM** by Elle Safran, 5th Grade, Fairfax Elementary  **SUKII** by Aidan Rodney, 5th Grade, Boulevard Elementary

**TOURING AROUND THE BUILDING** by Maggie Thomas, 6th Grade, Communion of Saints School

**JUST LIKE MAGIC** by Sarah Close, 7th Grade, North Royalton Middle School

**WEIRD WORLD** by Isabella Luberger 7th Grade, North Royalton Middle School

**3, 4, 5** by Luciana Dura, 8th Grade, North Royalton Middle School

**A DEBT UNPAID** by Sophie Daniel, 8th Grade, Hudson Middle School

Thank you to all of our school partners, to Lake Erie Ink, and to this year’s readers:

Alison Garrigan, Andrew Bidwell, Andy Zicari, Anne Miano, Barb Dragony, Blanche Valancy, BJ Tindal, Bryce Evan Lewis, Cali Parey, Cassandra Cornelius, Christopher Johnston, Claire Robinson May, Colin Anderson, Constance Dickerson, David Blanchard, David Munnell, Elise Kuklinca, Eric Coble, Eric Schmiedl, Erin Dolan, Erin Horan, Esma Eddeb, Faye Sholiton, Greg Vovos, Hannah Storch, Heather Utsler-Smith, Jamie Cohen-Kiraly, Jean Martin, Jesse Hernon, John Kuder, Jonah Raider Roth, Julia Fisher, Karen Gygli, Kate Smith, Kelly Dunn, Kitty Wen, Luke Brett, Maansi Sahay Seth, Mariah Burks, Mary Weems, Mike Glavan, Minor Stokes, Rachel Zake, Rebecca Calkin, Rose Fairman, Samantha Cocco, Shelley Nixon, Stuart Hoffman, Tania Benites, Teddi Bianchi, Tim Collinwood, Theodore Pavelich, Travis Williams, Zach Palumbo

“Reading plays for the Festival is the highlight of the year for many people,” says Dobama Theatre’s Education Director, Carrie Williams. “Our judges include educators, journalists, and theatremakers of all kinds. The most important part of the Festival for me is making sure that every submission is read by excited and thoughtful creatives.”

The 45th Annual Marilyn Bianchi Kids’ Playwriting Festival will be held live on stage at Dobama Theatre June 2, 3, and 4 2022. Directors include Williams, Esma Eddeb, Erin Dolan, Latecia Wilson, Colin Anderson, Jailyn Sherell Harris, Jonah Raider-Roth, Cali Parey, Kari Barclay, and India Pierre-Ingram. Performances on June 3rd and 4th are free to the public.

The Marilyn Bianchi Kids’ Playwriting Festival is an integral part of Dobama Theatre’s mission to provide educational and outreach programming. The Festival’s goal is to provide a platform for youth to express their thoughts, hopes, dreams and creativity through the writing of original plays.

The Marilyn Bianchi Kids' Playwriting Festival is supported in part by The Martha Holden Jennings Foundation, The David and Inez Myers Foundation, The Char and Chuck Fowler Family Foundation, The Music and Drama Club, and The Dennis Bianchi Charitable Fund in memory of Donald and Marilyn Bianchi. Dobama Theatre is generously funded by Cuyahoga County residents through Cuyahoga Arts and Culture and by state tax dollars allocated by the Ohio legislature to the Ohio Arts Council. Dobama Theatre is also generously supported by many individual donors and the following: Benesch, Friedlander, Coplan & Aronoff; The Cleveland Foundation; The George Gund Foundation; Mr. Daniel Maltz; MAI Capital Management; The Paul M. Angell Family Foundation; and The Shubert Foundation.

**CONTACT INFORMATION:**

Office: 216.932.6838

Website: dobama.org

E-mail: [hello@dobama.org](mailto:hello@dobama.org)