



Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

March 22, 2018

The Kennedy Center Announces 2018 Recipients of The Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards

Four Teachers from Across the United States Receive
National Award for Excellence
Over \$750,000 Has Been Given to 75 Teachers in the Program's Eight Years

2019 Nominations Cycle Now Open

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts announced the 2018 winners of the Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards—a series of annual grants which recognize American teachers by spotlighting their extraordinary impact on the lives of students. Four teachers were selected in 2018 from a pool of nominations received through the Kennedy Center's [website](#). Award recipients each receive \$10,000 and are showcased, along with the former students they inspired, on a [website](#) dedicated to inspirational teachers. The awards, created by the Center in honor of Stephen Sondheim's 80th birthday in 2010, were initiated and funded through the generous support of Myrna and Freddie Gershon. To date, 75 awards totaling \$750,000 have been presented.

The teachers are: **Catherine Albers** of Oregon, Wisconsin; **Askia Egashira** of Brooklyn, New York; **Dennis McDavid** of Oak Park, Michigan; and **Caryn Obert** of Staten Island, New York.

In many people's lives there is at least one teacher who inspired and helped them become who they are today. Although the range of subjects and grade levels vary widely, these inspirational teachers have one thing in common: each has

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overwhelmingly impacted his or her students' lives and encouraged them to reach their potential. Quotes from nomination essays include:

- From Ashley Maloff, who nominated Dennis McDavid: “He would stay after school to help me complete assignments that I missed due to absences from doctor appointments and seizures...He never once gave up on me and helped me to tackle each academic and personal obstacle I faced head on.”
- From Ebony Johnson, who nominated Askia Egashira: “Mr. Egashira’s care and artistry in the classroom motivated me to become a leader. His impact is precisely why I have dedicated my career to public service.”
- From Priyan Wickremesinghe, who nominated Caryn Obert: “The level of commitment that she brings to her students is unmatched...she took me aside and explained to me that I should never settle for mediocrity in life. Her words have never left my mind, and the lessons she instilled within me have been the fuel for my academic success thus far in life.”

“Teachers define us,” stated Stephen Sondheim. “In our early years, when we are still being formed, they often see in us more than we see in ourselves, more even than our families see and, as a result, help us to evolve into what we ultimately become. Good teachers are touchstones to paths of achieving more than we might have otherwise accomplished, in directions we might not have gone.”

“This award is an incredible opportunity to recognize the passionate and hard work teachers are doing to awaken the joy of learning for their students and communities.” said Mario Rossero, Senior Vice President of Education at the Kennedy Center.

“Through our national outreach programs within schools across the country, we see first-hand the lasting and immeasurable impact that teachers can have on their students. We are in constant awe of all they achieve.”

Noted composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim frequently attributes his success to the teachers in his life. The Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards are presented each year around Sondheim’s birthday—March 22—to a select

group of teachers, kindergarten through college, who are nominated via the Kennedy Center [website](#). Nominators must be at least 18 years of age and have been a student of the nominee. Teacher nominees must teach or have taught in a K-12 school, college, or university in the United States. Teachers of all grade levels and subject areas are eligible. A panel of judges reviews a pool of nominations and selects the recipients based on the power and quality of the nomination from their former students. Nominations for the 2019 cycle are now open through the Kennedy Center [website](#).

Winner of the Special Tony Award® for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre, **Stephen Sondheim** has received more Tonys® than any other composer. Mr. Sondheim wrote the music and lyrics for *Saturday Night*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Anyone Can Whistle*, *Company*, *Follies*, *A Little Night Music*, *The Frogs*, *Pacific Overtures*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *Sunday in the Park With George* (for which he received a Pulitzer Prize), *Into the Woods*, *Assassins*, *Passion*, and *Road Show*, as well as lyrics for *West Side Story*, *Gypsy* and *Do I Hear a Waltz?*, and additional lyrics for *Candide*. Revues of his work include *Sondheim on Sondheim*, *Side by Side by Sondheim*, *Marry Me a Little*, *You're Gonna Love Tomorrow*, and *Putting It Together* and *A Bed and a Chair*. For films and television, he composed the scores of *Stavisky* and *Reds* and wrote songs for *Dick Tracy*, for which he received an Academy Award®. He also received the Kennedy Center Honors in 1993. Mr. Sondheim is on the Council of the Dramatists Guild, having served as its president from 1973 to 1981.

Nominators for posthumous recognition of a teacher must designate a 501(c)3 organization or fund within a K-12 school, school system, college, or university in the United States to receive the \$10,000 award in the deceased teacher's name. To learn more about the Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards, please visit kennedy-center.org/sondheimteacherawards.

A full list of recipients and their nominating students is below.

TEACHER	CITY, STATE	NOMINATING STUDENT
Catherine Albers	Oregon, Wisconsin	Jodie Guillen
Askia Egashira	Brooklyn, New York	Ebony Johnson
Dennis McDavid	Oak Park, Michigan	Ashley Maloff
Caryn Obert	Staten Island, New York	Priyan Wickremesinghe

About Education at the Kennedy Center

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is the national champion for arts learning and creativity. Committed to increasing opportunities for all people to participate in, learn about, and understand the arts, [Education at the Kennedy Center](#) offers programs and events that strive to reflect the nation and communities and that are accessible and inclusive for all. From performances and exhibits on the Center’s stages and in the community, to classroom and community partnerships, including the recent addition of the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities Turnaround Arts initiative, to online resources accessible nearly anywhere, the Center serves the burgeoning artist, the exploring student of any age, the teacher and teaching artist, and even the local and national infrastructure—any person interested in arts learning and utilizing the arts for positive change. As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center’s Education utilizes the arts to embrace the ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude, and to activate and support the Citizen Artists in all our audiences. For more information, please visit kennedy-center.org/education/.

FUNDING CREDITS:

The Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards are made possible in their entirety by Myrna and Freddie Gershon.

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For more information about the Kennedy Center/Stephen Sondheim Inspirational Teacher Awards, please visit kennedy-center.org/sondheimteacherawards
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