



FOR RELEASE:
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**The International
Organization on
Arts and Disability**

**Announces Winners of the
2019 VSA International Young Soloists Competition**

**Program Celebrates the Talents and Skills of
Young Musicians Living with Disabilities**

**Five Winners Perform on the
Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage July 26, 2019**

(WASHINGTON)—Five young musicians have been named as winners of the 2019 VSA International Young Soloists Competition, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The program focuses on identifying, elevating, and celebrating the work of young musicians living with disabilities. The winning recipients, who each receive a \$2,000 award, will spend July 24–26, participating in pre-professional development activities including rehearsals and roundtable discussions with music professionals. The two-day intensive culminates with a performance on the Kennedy Center Millennium Stage on July 26 at 6 p.m. This performance is free and open to the public and will be streamed online at [kennedy-center.org/video/upcoming](https://www.kennedy-center.org/video/upcoming).

The award recipients are:

MUSICIAN(S)	INSTRUMENT	HOMETOWN
Tori Adams	Soprano	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Avery Dixon	Saxophone	Riverdale, GA
Kasyfi Kalyasyena	Piano	Jakarta, Indonesia
José Andrè Montaña	Piano	Washington, D.C.
Maya Wagner	Singer/Songwriter	Hillsborough, New Jersey

“Through their individual achievements and musical excellence, these five outstanding young musicians demonstrate exceptional artistry and defy the presumption that having a disability means you cannot excel,” stated Betty Siegel, Director of VSA and Accessibility at the Kennedy Center. “While not only honoring artistic accomplishment, this award, along with other VSA programs, advances the public conversation and shifts perceptions about disability. It is an honor to support their continued creative development.”

Since 1984, the VSA International Young Soloists Competition, founded by Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, has annually recognized emerging young artists, ages 14–25, from all over the world who have disabilities and demonstrate exceptional musical talent. Celebrating its 36th year, the award has been given to more than 112 awardees from approximately 29 states and 30 countries. Previous winners have gone on to careers with top symphony orchestras around the world, become international recording stars, and achieved success on television programs such as *American Idol* and *Platinum Hit*. Past recipients include international recording artist Melody Gardot, *America’s Got Talent* Season 12 finalist singer-songwriter Mandy Harvey, violin virtuoso Adrian Anantawan, and award-winning jazz pianist Justin Kauflin.

2019 VSA International Young Soloists Winners

Based in Minneapolis, soprano **Tori Tedeschi Adams**, age 22, is in her fifth year at Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Her most recent performances include Miles in *Turn of the Screw* and Constance in *Dialogues de Carmélites* with Oberlin Opera Theater and Gretel in *Hänsel und Gretel* with LAH-SOW Minneapolis Opera Workshop. In past summers, Adams has been a Young Artist at Songfest and the Oberlin in Italy program where she sang Bianca in *La Rondine*. Other notable performances include the title role in *Griffelkin* by Lucas Foss with Project Opera and roles with the Minnesota Opera in the world premiere productions of *The Shining*, *Doubt*, and *The Giver*. She is pursuing her singing career while living with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, a connective tissue disorder that causes hypermobility, chronic pain, among other symptoms.

Avery Dixon, age 18, was born near Atlanta weighing only 1 lb. 8 oz. and was not expected to live. He has a condition that causes his voice to be airy and pitchy at times because his vocal cords do not close completely, also causing asthma and other medical complications. He has developed his musical talent by playing the saxophone. Dixon has had many opportunities to play for various programs and serenade audiences, keeping up with artists twice his age. He feels that every time he plays, he is having fun, telling a story, and painting a musical picture.

Kasyfi Kalyasyena is a 17-year-old pianist from Jakarta, Indonesia, who has impaired vision. His musicality started at age three. He then learned piano and performed his first composition in a recital at age five. He will soon graduate with honors from a classical pre-conservatory. He has also studied at Daya Indonesia Performing Arts Academy. He has won several national competitions in piano, saxophone, arranging, and composition. He enjoys performing at jazz festivals, teaching piano, and opening for music community events. For the upcoming Millennium Stage performance, Kalyasyena is planning to play his own composition to inspire musicians to respect their own work.

José André Montaña is a 14-year-old jazz musician from Bolivia, currently living in Washington, D.C., who is blind. He formed his first Latin Jazz band at age six, and recorded his first album in 2013. Montaña has performed with many great musicians including Marcus Miller, Jason Moran, and Renée Fleming. He has played in Rome to celebrate the 70th anniversary of UNICEF, in Kuala Lumpur for the Global Transformation Forum, in Finland for the Business Nordic Forum, and other venues worldwide.

Maya Wagner is an 18-year-old singer/songwriter from Central New Jersey. Wagner was diagnosed with Tourette syndrome at age eight. She has found that music is her most important coping mechanism. Singing has helped calm her tics and songwriting has given her an outlet of expression, which has helped her to put her struggles into words. This year, she recorded and released her first EP, *Nostalgia*, which she wrote and produced in her bedroom studio. The EP is available on Apple Music, Spotify, and Amazon Music, along with her new single, “Her.” Wagner will be attending Berklee College of Music this fall, where she will continue to study songwriting and music production.

About VSA

The Kennedy Center has been at the forefront of making the performing arts accessible to persons with disabilities. Serving the international disability and arts community, the Office of VSA and Accessibility, a Jean Kennedy Smith Arts and Disability program, provides opportunities for people with disabilities of all ages across the globe to learn through, participate in, and enjoy the arts. The Office focuses its efforts on cultural access for patrons and visitors with disabilities; arts and special education initiatives; professional development for educators and cultural administrators; and career opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities. For more information, please visit <http://education.kennedy-center.org/education/#Access>.

About Education at the Kennedy Center

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts sets a national standard for arts learning. Working through model programs and a nationwide network of partners, the nation’s cultural center harnesses the power of the arts to address education challenges, accelerate best practices, and uplift citizen artists.

Across all its programs, the Kennedy Center is committed to increasing accessible, inclusive opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in, learn about, and learn through the arts.

Highlights of the 2018-2019 season include the 50th anniversary of the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, which impacts thousands of college-aged theater students across the country; the expansion of Ensuring the Arts for Any Given Child into two new communities; and *Long Way Down*, a Kennedy Center-commissioned work based on the young adult novel of the same name. On September 7, 2019, the Kennedy Center will open the REACH, an immersive arts and learning center with significant space and programming for arts education.

As an essential component of the living memorial to President Kennedy, the Center's Education programs utilize the arts to embrace President Kennedy's ideals of service, justice, freedom, courage, and gratitude. By cultivating the citizen artist in everyone, the Kennedy Center brings the arts and creativity to the center of our lives. For more information, please visit kennedy-center.org/education/.

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For more information, please visit the VSA [website](#).

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