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Tommy Tune Awards to honor outstanding theater students

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Bruce Bennett

Tommy Tune Awards to honor outstanding theater students

Theatre Under the Stars - TUTS presentation of the 2012 Tommy Tune Awards: the '12 Tommys by Stratford High School.



Posted: Wednesday, April 3, 2013 11:07 am | Updated: 4:52 pm, Wed Apr 3, 2013.

By Kim Hogstrom

Contributing Writer

When you think of Houston, do images of Galveston, Sugar Land, or The Woodlands spring to mind? No? Well, they should. The Houston Metro area, as defined by the Federal Office of Management and Budget, includes all of the above, and then some. We're big; the Houston Metro officially hosts more people than the total population in 33 different American states. True story.

As you might suspect, there are very few efforts that touch the high school students in our entire Metro area, but there is one — the Tommy Tune Awards ceremony hosted each year by our city's musical theatre lifeline, Theatre Under the Stars, or TUTS.

TUTS is a Houston-based non-profit agency dedicated to enriching our lives through quality musical theatre. As one of the largest agencies of its kind in the nation, TUTS is impressive by any measure, but its community outreach is notable on its own, reaching more than 220,000 people of all income levels, annually.

However, the big scene-stealer year-after-year are the Tommy Tune Awards — the "Tony Awards" of Houston's high school theatre.

"The 11th Annual Tommy Tune Awards will be held in Sarofim Hall at the Hobby Center for the Performing Arts this year, and they do follow the same format as

the Tony Awards," explained Geneva Cisneros, Assistant Manger of Education for TUTS. "There are selections from different performances, a finale, and we recognize outstanding students and teachers from the nine-county metropolitan area throughout the evening.

"We chose to call it the Tommy Tune Awards because Tommy Tune went to school in Houston, Lamar High School to be exact, so it seemed perfect. We started with about nine high schools, and this year we have included 45," Cisneros continued.

"High school musical theatre productions were evaluated during the school year starting last August, and our 29 judges determine the winners in all sorts of categories — everything from best actor and actress, to best production, to lighting, costuming, and orchestra," Cisneros stated, her enthusiasm brimming over.

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"What's remarkable is the talent in our community. It just keeps getting better each year. It's amazing! We have so much young talent here, it thrills us to watch," Cisneros concluded.

TUTS' Tommy Tune Awards will be held on Tuesday, April 16, at 7:30 p.m. The students will appear before a packed house, as it always sells out. When all is said and done, about 3,500 students will have participated in this event. The audience can look forward to selections from "Sweeney Todd"; "Chicago"; "Spamalot" and many other shows that evening.

Notably, the primary objective of the awards is to help high school seniors who are pursuing a degree in musical theatre. Over the past nine years, TUTS has awarded more than \$115,000 in scholarships. Today, those recipients can be found working in all aspects of production-on Broadway, in TV, and film and music-throughout the country.

Roshunda Jones is the Theatre Director at G.W. Carver Magnet High School in the Aldine Independent School District. This dedicated teacher and her troupe of 85 high school kids and 15 elementary school kids, have been nominated for 12 Tommy Tune Awards for their production of "The Color Purple," including Best Musical. Notably, there are only 15 categories in which to be nominated.

"It is such an honor to be recognized," the humble Jones explained. "The kids work so hard to to create the productions. We are overwhelmed, we are so happy about the nominations. The kids can be heard singing the songs in the hallways at school, and the community has been so supportive. They all come out now to see what we are producing. They've even started anticipating productions," Jones said with a laugh.

"It's a pleasure to see this level of enthusiasm and support from the school, parents and kids, and a joy to bring art to the community," the teacher concluded.

So, come out and see this year's Tommy Tunes Awards. It's a safe bet you'll be watching Houston's next Beyonce, Jim Parsons, Chandra Wilson or Tommy Tune in-the-making, and you'll be supporting the outreach of TUTS at the same time.

For more information about Theatre Under The Stars' education initiatives, or to order tickets go to www.tuts.com.

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