

## Government Cut Arts Programs. We Sent Two Stars To Paris Anyway. Now Help Us Finish The Job

When 1 point separates a dream, we say send them both! - Nation Wide Call To Help Send Them To Study and Perform this summer.



**New York City, New York May 31, 2025 ([Issuewire.com](http://Issuewire.com))** - Broadway dreams came to life last weekend at the N'Kenge Foundation's Are You the Next Showstopper?! competition. Held at the vibrant Off Broadway Theatre 555 in Midtown Manhattan, the afternoon was a dazzling display of talent, passion, and life-changing surprises. With 15 finalists performing to a sold-out house, the event celebrated the next generation of performers and reaffirmed the power of arts education at a time when it is needed most.

Taking place amid widespread national cuts to arts education and federal grant programs, Are You The Next Showstopper stood as a rallying cry for creative opportunity. As music, dance, and theater programs continue to be eliminated in schools across the country, the N'Kenge Foundation remains steadfast in its mission to uplift, train, and support rising artists—proving that the spotlight belongs to everyone with a dream.

Fifteen finalists, ages 12 to 30, were selected from across the country to compete for the ultimate prize: an all-expenses-paid trip to Paris this summer to train and perform in the Ultimate Paris Summer Arts Program. These finalists are:

**Quincy Adair, Julie Biancheri, Willow Lautenberg, Christopher Miller, Maryann Murray, Samridhi Nia Pandey, Matteo Russo, Mia Soleil Sanchez, Arianna Sangram, Gus Schonfeld, Nicole Suazo, Emily Trias, Jojo Vittoria and Olivia Wu.**

These 15 finalists are competing for a slot to attend a 15-day intensive which includes masterclasses and performance opportunities with an extraordinary faculty, including:

- N’Kenge (Broadway star and foundation founder)
- David Lee Brewer (Beyoncé’s vocal coach)
- Lou Stancil (Will Smith’s acting coach)
- Avery Wilson (Singer/songwriter, The Voice)
- Helen Goldsby (Acclaimed actress and vocal coach)
- Faculty from Juilliard, and more

“Are You The Next Showstopper?” opened with a high-energy rendition of “One Night Only”, led by N’Kenge and joined by all 15 finalists. It was a dazzling ensemble number that set the tone for an unforgettable afternoon filled with bold performances, personal stories, and heartfelt moments. The competition also featured a special guest appearance by Jahzara Martina of the Metropolitan Opera.

The finale brought the crowd to its feet with “Last Dance”, performed by N’Kenge and the entire finalist cohort—a joyful celebration of artistic ambition and unity.

One of the evening’s most unforgettable moments came in the 12–19 age group competition. Mia Sanchez scored 261 points, followed closely by Gus Schonfeld with 260—one of the closest margins in Showstopper history. In a stunning announcement from the stage, N’Kenge declared:

“It was just too close—how could you not send them both to Paris for this opportunity? We don’t have the money for both, but we will work hard to find it. If anyone feels like making a donation on the way out, we’ll gladly accept.”

Matteo Russo, winner of the 20–30 age group, will also travel to Paris as a grand prize recipient.

Showstoppers esteemed panel of judges included:

- Ben Cameron (Broadway Sessions, Wicked)
- Beverly Jensen ( Royal Academy of Dance, Fusion)
- Donnie Kehr (Jersey Boys, The Who’s Tommy)
- Michael Musto (Village Voice)
- Stephanie Rosenberg (Producer: Moulin Rouge, The Color Purple)
- Salisha Thomas (Beautiful: The Carole King Musical, Once Upon A One More Time)

Each judge selected one standout performer to receive a Judge's All-Star Award. This year's recipients were:

- Mia Sanchez
- Emily Trias
- Gus Schonfeld
- Quincy Adair
- Samridhi Nia Pandey
- Maryann Murray

The People's Choice Award, determined by a combination of in-person voting and online fundraising, went to Jojo Vittoria. However, due to the unique challenges some participants faced, the Foundation also created a new honor: the People's Choice All-Star Fundraiser Award, awarded to Quincy Adair who led in the peer-to-peer campaign with the most money raised.

This year also launched a new educational media partnership with Reel Works, providing young filmmakers with hands-on experience capturing behind-the-scenes footage. Student filmmakers Adjahani Desire, Danielle Ashurov, and Kiny Nagy documented the event for a forthcoming documentary web series, under the mentorship of Associate Producer TyNia Brandon, Broadway's powerhouse swing from Disney's Tony Award Winning Best Musical The Lion King. j

"Are You The Next Showstopper?" Is executive producer by Michael T. Clarkston and N'Kenge who extend their heartfelt thanks to everyone involved and especially our sponsors and partners who made the event possible:

Theatre 555, Big Apple Talent Competition, The Salisha Show, Reel Works, and the Ultimate Paris Summer Arts Program, as well as generous in-kind donors Lunella's Ristorante and Crab House, who provided meals for the cast, crew, and volunteers.

Extra Special Thanks to;

Danielle Ashurov, TyNia Brandon, Ben Cameron, Dennis K Creary II, Dan Demello, Dawn Derow, Adjahani Desire, Kira Faïman, Jim Friedlander, Y Dolly Fox, Cody L. Hall, Beverly Jensen, Donnie Kehr, Kimberly Lara, Jahzara Martina, Michael Musto, Kiny Nagy, Simion Pacurar, Stephanie Rosenberg, Mrs. Russo, Impana Srri, Salisha Thomas, Vivian Wu, Dr. Wu

Help Us Close the Gap

To fully fund the Paris scholarships for both 12-19 age group recipients, the Foundation is working to raise an additional \$5,000 by June 15. Tax-deductible donations can be made at [www.nkengefoundation.org](http://www.nkengefoundation.org) and supporters can also participate in an online auction featuring exclusive experiences and memorabilia like

- A signed guitar from music legend Prince

- A private astronaut training experience
- VIP treatment at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade
- Luxury international vacation packages
- High-end designer jewelry
- An exclusive aerial lesson with celebrity coach Jamal Story, Cher's aerialist

To place a bid visit [bit.ly/ShowstopperAuction](http://bit.ly/ShowstopperAuction)

### About the N'Kenge Foundation

The N'Kenge Foundation is a nonprofit organization committed to cultivating the next generation of artists through high-level training, performance opportunities, and mentorship including focus on mindfulness and financial literacy. From Broadway to international stages, the Foundation ensures young performers have access to the tools, experiences, and networks they need to thrive.

### About the Ultimate Paris Summer Arts Program

An elite international training intensive that brings emerging artists to the heart of Paris for immersive instruction, cross-cultural collaboration, and career-defining performance opportunities. Participants study voice, acting, dance, and artistry under world-renowned mentors while performing in landmark venues across the city.

For more information about the N'Kenge Foundation or to contribute to our Summer Arts program please visit [www.Nkengefoundation.org](http://www.Nkengefoundation.org) or on social @nkengefoundation



### Media Contact

N'Kenge Foundation

\*\*\*\*\*@gmail.com

Source : N'Kenge Foundation

[See on IssueWire](#)