



Touchstone Theatre Presents World Premiere Work of Young Playwrights, 5/18

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by BWV News Desk



[Touchstone Theatre](#) will be presenting the eighth year of its acclaimed Young Playwrights' Festival, a showcase of new plays written by local elementary and middle school

students, on May 18 at Zoellner Arts Center's Baker Hall. Immediately following the performance will be a gala reception in the Lehigh University Art Galleries.

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Throughout its season, [Touchstone Theatre](#) teaching artists work with elementary and middle schools in the Bethlehem and Allentown Area School Districts in afterschool arts-in-education programming. The flagship program, "Young Playwrights' Lab," is an eight-week residency developed by Touchstone and the Bethlehem Area School District to improve attitudes toward literacy and achievement in academic standards by linking literacy and creative self-expression. The residency engages students through theatre improvisation and writing exercises, culminating with each student writing his or her own original one-act play. One play from each participant school is then selected to be produced in the Festival, performed by Touchstone actors, local performers, and students from their own schools.

The Festival, originally held in Touchstone's 75-seat black box theatre, moved up to performing at Lehigh University's Zoellner Arts Center when the size of the program and performance grew. This is Touchstone's sixth year performing at Zoellner and third year performing in Baker Hall.

Participant schools this year include Central Elementary, Donegan Elementary, Dual Language Charter School, Freemansburg Elementary, Harrison Morton Middle, and Lincoln Elementary. Through improvisation, theatre games, character creation, and extensive writing exercises, the students and Touchstone teaching artists worked to challenge the notion that the only way to learn is through textbooks and testing. Since its inception, the program has served hundreds of students across the Lehigh Valley.

"In Young Playwrights' Lab, I have seen the souls of nine and ten year old boys in particular brimming over with thirst for knowledge and desire for self-expression," enthuses Jennie Gilrain, a teacher at Freemansburg Elementary. "I have seen boys who, in the opinion of their teachers (including me) are reluctant readers and writers, sitting and writing their plays with intense focus and concentration. The beauty of Young Playwrights' Lab is that it allows teachers to participate in the creative process. It allows the teachers to see the students in a new light."

After the performance, the celebration of creative expression continues in the Lehigh University Art Galleries with a gala dessert reception and auction. Gala attendees get a chance to meet the Touchstone Ensemble, enjoy sumptuous drinks and desserts, view the current exhibit, and further support Touchstone and its ArtsTouch education programs through live and silent auction.

"To many loyal supporters of the program, the Young Playwrights' Festival is the most magical night of theatre of the year," says Lou Cinquino, Festival Committee Chair. "And the Gala Reception that follows the performance makes it possible for Touchstone to maintain this program-one of the Valley's signature school-based arts education programs."

This year, the Young Playwrights' Festival is supported by the generosity of the Lehigh Valley Health Network, the Festival's naming sponsor. Media sponsorship is provided by WDIY. Touchstone's season is sponsored by First Generation, an integrated marketing communications company.

The Eighth Annual Young Playwrights' Festival and Gala takes place on Saturday May 18; doors open at 6:30pm for a 7:00pm show. Tickets are \$10 for the Festival only, with group rates available, and \$75 for the Festival and Gala. Advance tickets may be purchased at 610-867-1689 or online at www.touchstone.org