



2017 AMERICAN TRADITIONS VOCAL COMPETITION CONCLUDES AS LUCKY WINNERS ARE NAMED, JULIE BENKO TOOK FIRST PLACE

SAVANNAH, GA – February 25, 2017 – Last night, the American Traditions Competition (ATC) ended an exciting week in celebration of American music and showcasing tomorrow’s vocal stars with a full house at the Historic Savannah Theatre on Bull Street.

The winners were announced following an intermission during which the judges retired to make their final selections from among the talented pool of artists who had progressed through nine songs each from different genres through the quarter and semifinal rounds earlier this week.

The Courtney Knight Gaines Foundation Gold Medal, worth \$12,000 and a contract with the Savannah Philharmonic, was awarded to Julie Benko.

Other awards presented included:

- The Patricia and Heyward Gignilliat Silver Medal Award and \$6,000 was awarded to Dara Tucker.
- The Enmark Stations, Inc. Bronze Medal Award and \$3,000 was awarded to Kisma Jordan.
- The fourth-place prize of \$1,200, sponsored by Kay and Don Gardner, was awarded to Aundi Marie Moore.
- Fifth-place and \$1,200, sponsored by the Savannah Friends of Music, was awarded to Sarah Mesko.
- The Johnny Mercer Award along with \$750, given by Friends of Johnny Mercer, Inc. and Armstrong State University, was presented to Julie Benko for the best performance of a Johnny Mercer song.
- A new award this year – the Sherrill Milnes American Opera Award – of \$500 sponsored by Sherrill Milnes and Maria Zouves on behalf of the Savannah VOICE Festival, was awarded to Kisma Jordan for the best performance of an American opera aria.
- The Ben Tucker Jazz Award and \$500, sponsored by the David A. and Margaret L. Cohen Foundation, was awarded to Dara Tucker for the best performance of a jazz song.

- The Richard Chambless' People's Choice Award, sponsored by Swann Seiler, was awarded to Stephen Dobson from the quarterfinals, and Rachel Sparrow from the semifinals. The each received \$500 along with this award.

"This year's competition has surpassed all expectations with high-energy, amazing talent and love for American music demonstrated by contestants, judges and audience members alike," said ATC Board President Danny Cohen. "It has been an honor and privilege to work with everyone who had a hand in making the 2017 ATC one that will never be forgotten."

To learn more about the ATC – a world renowned nonprofit organization which was established to provide a forum for showcasing tomorrow's vocal talents and to celebrate the diverse repertoire of standard, classic American music – please visit www.americantraditionscompetition.com.

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For media inquiries, please contact Hollie Barnidge at hollie@lesleyfrancispr.com or 912-272-8651 or Lesley Francis at lesley@francis.com at 912-429-3950 or the team at 912-417-LFPR (5377).