

Elgin Opera House artistic director spends time in New York City

By TRISH YERGES
For East Oregonian

ELGIN — Terry Hale is bringing home some of Broadway's best tools after receiving special training at the 11th annual Freddie G Fellowship in New York City.

Hale, the artistic director of the Elgin Opera House, was one of six theater educators chosen nationwide for the Freddie G Fellowship, sponsored by Music Theatre International, and the only one from a small, rural community. The highly-coveted honor recognized Hale's work with young performing artists through the Opera House Youth Actors, the Hale-Turner Theater, the Blue Mountain Community College theater, Pendleton High School, summer youth theater camps and other community theater venues.

"I'm grateful for being recognized by a group of people who really understand what it is that I do," Hale said.

Freddie and Myrna Gershon founded the Freddie G Fellowship to recognize and celebrate exceptional theater educators, who are given the opportunity to live the Broadway experience and interact with qualified professionals through master workshops taught by staff at Music Theatre International and iTheatrics at the 52nd Street Project building in New York City.

"Without teachers there is no Broadway Junior," Freddie Gershon stated on the MTI website. He is MTI's co-chairman and, with wife Myrna, underwriter of the Fellowship.

"Myrna and I feel strongly about teachers and their



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Six Freddie G Fellowship Honorees received special Broadway training at iTheatrics at The 52nd Street Project building in New York City. Among them are Terry Hale, from left, Chad Haney, Dana Alvarez, Megan Kelly Bates, Krissy Brown and Michelle Campbell. All the training took place at this location, except for one day at Music Theatre International.

significant role," he said. "This week gives us an opportunity to immerse them in experiential skills they can take home, integrate with their students and pass on to other teachers."

The recipients of the Freddie G Fellowship were announced at the iTheatrics Junior Theater Festivals in February 2020, but training was delayed until July 2022 due to the pandemic.

"We learned really neat things from each other, but the most important thing was the bond that we made with the six of us together — so valuable to me," Hale said. "These are people from all over the country that are doing what

I do and have similar issues and joys and problems. For us to get together and work through those things together was very valuable."

While in New York, Hale and his colleagues attended a special master class led by Tony honor-winning director and choreographer Jeff Calhoun and participated in classes covering many aspects of musical theater. Hale and the other Fellows were immersed in Broadway, attending productions of "Between The Lines" and "Beetlejuice." They also observed a developmental workshop performance of "Beetlejuice Junior." There the Fellows were invited to

experience Broadway as theater insiders, offering their feedback to the developmental process from their perspective.

Energize and inspire

Music Theatre International, which sponsors the specialized training for theater teachers, is one of the top theatrical licensing companies in the world. Hale had worked with MTI many times over the years in his role as artistic director at the Elgin Opera House.

"If we wanted to perform Annie on our stage, we had to go through MTI to do that," Hale said. "More than half of the shows we do at the Elgin

Opera House go through Freddie's company. He's been a legend in New York and is highly respected."

While in New York City, Hale said he took in three Broadway performances, one on the night of his arrival to the city and two other performances that were part of the four-day MTI sponsored training.

"They basically spoiled us for a few days and gave us some extraordinary learning opportunities," he said.

The MTI master classes were designed to energize and inspire theater educators so that when they returned to their communities, they could share their enhanced

skills and tools of the craft with other teachers and young performing artists.

"The thing I brought home that is most important is the connections and relationships that I built while at the Freddie G experience," he said. "I was able to meet with these other five Freddie G recipients and really establish a connection that will be invaluable to me as I move forward."

As a recipient of the Freddie G Fellowship, Hale also received a \$5,000 grant to be utilized by Hale for the promotion of theatrical arts and education in his home community. Hale said the funds went to finish a new dance and rehearsal studio at the Hale-Turner Theater.

"We call that space the Opera House Studio," he said. "It includes space with a new floor, mirrors and air conditioning. It's a nice little practice area we can use for the purpose of rehearsing and learning choreography."

Hale's teaching career in Union County began at the Elgin Opera House shortly after moving to Elgin in 2006. There, he produced and directed his first production in December 2007, and afterward founded the Friends of the Elgin Opera House.

Since then, he has taught hundreds of children on the Elgin Opera House stage. He has mentored some who wanted to learn how to direct and facilitated other theatrical arts training for his cast members.

In late July, Hale conducted his annual summer theater camp, this time with 95 theater students. This has been one of the largest enrollments of youth participants in this program to date.

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