

# Chippewa Valley student a finalist in National Endowment for Arts contest



Chippewa Valley High School junior David Volpini had a song from an original musical he wrote selected as a national finalist in the National Endowment for the Arts Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge. Photo courtesy of JAMES PECAR

By Nicole Tuttle, For The Macomb Daily

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An original song from an original musical detailing 21 days of a zombie apocalypse recently earned Chippewa Valley High School junior David Volpini a trip to New York City and a chance to be mentored by some of theater's top talent.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), along with partner American Theatre Wing and collaborators Playbill, Inc., Disney Theatrical Productions and Samuel French, recently announced finalists of the NEA Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge. Six finalists — one duo and five individuals -- were selected by review panels of professional theater artists in a blind competition. Almost 200 high school students applied in 36 states.

Volpini, 17, a Macomb Township resident, was one of the six selected. For the past three years, he has attended Blue Lake Fine Arts Camp and is in the school's Men's Choir, men's A cappella group, mixed A cappella ensemble, wind ensemble and marching band.

"I met David in the fall of 2017 when he auditioned for our school musical. He joined choir in the middle of the school year and is already recognized – by myself and his peers- as a leader in the choir program," teacher and choir director James Pecar said.

Volpini had been writing songs to accompany his ukulele, but decided to try a more ambitious project last year.

“I really wanted to try writing a musical on my own,” Volpini said.

Although the musical is still an ongoing project, as one song is left to compose and the script is in rough draft stage, the subject and plot revolve around a zombie apocalypse.

“The main character keeps track of time, how many days it has been since the start of the apocalypse. It follows the main character’s first day to 21st day of the apocalypse,” Volpini said.

According to the NEA website, the Musical Theater Songwriting Challenge is a national competition for high school students interested in writing songs that could be part of a musical theater production.

The challenge was launched in 2016 as a pilot program in Dallas, Minneapolis and Seattle. It offers six finalists mentor opportunities with professional songwriters and musicians and the opportunity to have an original song performed by those musicians.

The national competition takes place in New York City April 20-23. During this time, songs are transcribed for an ensemble and singers. They are performed before a panel of professionals who judge the songs in a final competition.

In addition to the opportunity for one-on-one mentoring in New York City, Samuel French, a leading publisher and licensor for plays and musicals, will publish the finalists’ songs in a collection book available online.

One of the finalists will be selected as the national champion and will receive a \$25,000 scholarship courtesy of the National Music Publishers Association Supporting Our Next Generation of Songwriters Foundation.

Photos, videos and song clips from the six finalists will be posted on the challenge website, [arts.gov/partnerships/songwriting](https://www.arts.gov/partnerships/songwriting), in the coming weeks.

Volpini said a friend who graduated last year sent him information regarding the competition, and he decided to enter in December ahead of the January deadline. He sent the completed opening song of his musical about the first day of the zombie apocalypse to the competition organizers. Volpini said he recently received the e-mail detailing his trip to New York.

A dinner and performance is scheduled for Friday before a Monday competition.

The NEA was established by Congress in 1965. It is an independent federal agency whose funding and support gives Americans the opportunity to participate in the arts and develop their creative capacities. Through partnership with state arts agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies and the philanthropic sector, the NEA supports arts learning.