



League of Historic American Theatres

PRESS RELEASE

WRITER AND PERFORMER JASTON WILLIAMS HONORED ALONG WITH BEST HISTORIC THEATRE AND VOLUNTEER AT LEAGUE OF HISTORIC AMERICAN THEATRES NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN AUSTIN, TX

AUSTIN, TX (July 16, 2018) – The League of Historic American Theatres (LHAT), the nation’s leading historic theatre advocate, recognized outstanding achievement within the industry when it announced that **Struthers Library Theatre** of Warren, PA is the 2018 Outstanding Historic Theatre in America. Additionally, **Ben Hardeman** of Bryan, Texas was given the 2018 Outstanding Individual Contribution Award for his work to save, restore and reopen the Queen Theatre in Bryan. Actor, writer and producer **Jaston Williams** was also recognized for artistic achievement.

The 1883 Historic Struthers Library Theatre took home the 2018 Outstanding Historic Theatre Award during the League’s Annual Conference, the largest gathering of historic theatre professionals in the nation. The conference took place in downtown Austin and was attended by nearly 300 historic theatre operators and service providers from across the country.

“The Historic Struthers stood out among an impressive list of nominations to claim the award this year,” said **Ken Stein**, LHAT President and CEO, as he presented the award to Struthers Executive Director **Marcy O’Brien**. The Outstanding Historic Theatre Award is given each year by LHAT to a historic theatre that has demonstrated excellence in community impact, quality of programs and services, and quality of physical restoration.

“We are so honored to take this award home to the people of Warren, Pennsylvania,” said O’Brien after the ceremony. “We received our support from our community to follow the blueprint for possibility learned from our peers and the experts at the League of Historic American Theatres. We translated that knowledge to rebuilding both our programming and our facility to serve our rural community - a town whose soul still appreciates the importance of arts in the quality of its life.”

The Struthers celebrated its 135th anniversary with a major rehabilitation campaign that makes the theatre fully accessible to all patrons. Elevators, new seating, balcony handrails and other upgrades were part of a major fundraising campaign to ensure the theatre would remain viable for another generation of theatre goers.

Ben Hardeman began his journey in the historic theatre arena when the dilapidated 1939 Queen Theatre came up for sale in 2010. Once a focal point of downtown Bryan, the Queen had been shuttered since the late 1970's and was near ruin. Hardeman led a community wide effort to save the theatre that lasted the next eight years. The Queen had its grand reopening in May.

Writing checks and convincing other residents to do the same, Hardeman also grabbed a shovel or a hammer if needed as the theatre slowly came back to life. "The roof had holes big enough for pigeons to fly through," laughs Hardeman. "I think I shoveled about 600 pounds of pigeon poop off the marquee alone."

Sandy Farris, Executive Director of Downtown Bryan Association, attended the event. "We are so pleased that Ben's hard work to restore the Queen has received national recognition," she said. "His unparalleled commitment to the project has resulted in the restoration of an iconic piece of Bryan's history. The Queen is a place where stories are told through film, but it's also a part of Downtown Bryan's story - one that will be forever impacted by Ben Hardeman's contribution."

The Paramount Theatre of Austin, Texas was proud to see longtime veteran of their historic stage, Jaston Williams, honored by LHAT. Paramount spokesperson **Brooklyn Barbieri** reports, "As one of the Conference's host venues, the Paramount is excited to see the award go to an individual who has been performing on the Theatre's stage for over three decades in various productions, most notably in the *Greater Tuna* series. It can be said that Jaston Williams (along with creative partner Joe Sears and others) truly saved the Paramount during what were trying times for the now 103-year-old theatre."

Williams, a writer and performer, received the LHAT Marquee Award. Established in 2012, the award honors artists whose works not only inspire League members, but also showcases the beautiful, historic theatres that the League works tirelessly to restore and maintain. The recipient of this award is a celebrated artist whose name has lit up the many historic marquees of the member theatres. The award is not necessarily presented annually. Past recipients include Hal Holbrook, Garrison Keillor, and Vince Gill.

Williams is nationally recognized as the co-author, co-star and producer of the four award-winning plays in the *Greater Tuna* cycle. His performances have played on and off Broadway, at the Kennedy Center, the Edinburgh International Arts Festival, the Spoleto Festival U.S.A., and all over America. Williams received the Texas Governor's Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Arts by a Native Texan and has performed at the White House on three occasions.

The League's annual conference is the largest annual gathering of historic theatre professionals, community leaders, and service providers and suppliers, attracting participants from across the U.S., as well as Canada and the United Kingdom, for idea sharing and network building. Professionals, volunteers and devotees join together for

four days of networking and peer information exchange, tools & techniques sessions, and tours of local historic theatres, plus events, banquets and receptions.

By defining our field, creating a shared vocabulary and identifying best practices, the educational components of the League's annual conference strengthen efforts to sustain historic theatres of various sizes, operating structures and programming philosophies. During theatre tours, docents emphasize how each venue has dealt with the specific challenges of sustaining their operations to serve their communities, now and in the future. The conference takes place in different locations across North America each year.

For additional information, contact Ken Stein, LHAT President and CEO, at kstein@lhat.org

You can find more information online on the award and LHAT at lhat.org.

Supportive photography available upon request.

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