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YoungArts SELECTS RECIPIENTS OF 2009 ALUMNI ASTRAL AWARD

Winners are Visual Artist Jill Penny and Actor/Composer Michael McElroy

Miami, FL (November 5, 2009) YoungArts, the core program of the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts, has selected the winners of its Alumni Astral Award, an annual award which provides financial assistance for a specific project that will enhance a YoungArts alumni's artistic and professional growth. YoungArts awards two Alumni Astral Awards, which come with a grant of \$2500 each. This year's recipients are visual artist Jill Penny and actor/composer Michael McElroy. Both Penny and McElroy submitted impressive applications which were reviewed by a panel of YoungArts staff, Board members and alumni representatives, including CEO Christina DePaul, and selected as the best from a pool of submissions.

Originally from Murfreesboro, Tennessee, Jill Penny is a 2001 YoungArts winner in Visual Arts, and has gone on to become an accomplished visual artist, specializing in contemporary doll art. Penny works with a range of media including clay, fabric, yarn and various found objects. Her passion for doll art evolved into a focus on puppetry and stop motion animation. Her work has been shown all over the world, including Washington D.C., Spain, Australia and Sweden. The Astral Award will fund her project, *Bailey and The Bats*, an original poem that she will transform into a stop motion animated film that conveys a powerful message that we must all learn to show respect for one another and embrace our differences in order to peacefully co-exist.

Michael McElroy is a 1985 YoungArts winner in Musical Theater. Originally from Shaker Heights, Ohio, McElroy currently resides in New York City. He has spent the past 19 years successfully establishing himself as an actor and music composer. He has been in seven Broadway shows, various off-Broadway shows and national tours.

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He has been nominated for several awards including a Tony award for best supporting actor in a musical and a Grammy award for best orchestrations with a choir. McElroy currently is developing a musical with book, lyrics and music called *The Light*. The Astral Award will fund the creation of the CD of the music from the production.

YoungArts is pleased to continue to support the talented artists that have gone through the YoungArts program. The organization is dedicated to cultivating generations of talented artists who will help further the artistic culture of our nation. Alumni like McElroy and Penny are perfect representations of how this mission manifests throughout the years.

Jill Penny

Michael McElroy



Michael McElroy

About YoungArts:

YoungArts is the core program of the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts (NFAA). It is the signature national organization that recognizes and supports America's most talented 17-18 year olds in the visual, literary and performing arts. YoungArts is the sole nominating agency for Presidential Scholars in the Arts. The foundation provides emerging artists with financial support and life changing experiences with internationally renowned artists. YoungArts alumni go on to become leading professionals in their fields. Alumni include Emmy nominated actress Vanessa Williams, three-time Tony Award nominee Raúl Esparza, star of HBO's *Entourage* Adrian Grenier and Warner Brothers Recording Artist Josh Groban. For more information, please visit www.youngARTS.org.