

FFWPU USA: HJ Stars Winners: Yoshiha and Manny, Goldyn Avenue and Rice Paddy Heroes

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"We went from 56 [auditions](#) down to 19 semifinalists, then nine [finalists](#), and everyone that made it through was just incredible," said Resfred Arthur, co-host of HJ Stars alongside Issac Jeong. "But the audience voted for the top three winners, and congratulations to all of them! Thank you to all the performers and everyone who was a part of [HJ Stars](#), this wouldn't have been possible without each and every one of you."

On Aug. 12, the HJ Stars finals streamed [live](#) online with nearly 1,300 viewers. The virtual talent show and fundraiser benefits [YAYAM](#) and its

regional chapters, with \$7,800 in proceeds going toward scholarships for various workshops and events. Judges Jonathan Gullery, Sunhwa Reiner, and Sun Shim Santos said the many talented acts were challenging to evaluate throughout the show. "I didn't know what a difficult job it would be," said Gullery. "I'm just impressed with the talent and sincerity of heart that all the contestants have had."

In first place, with a grand prize of \$1,000, was the duo Yoshiha and Manny, from Minnesota and Las Vegas. "They received a lot of votes, with an outstanding score of 91.67 percent," announced Arthur. "They are crowned the champions of the very first HJ Stars, [and] they're really a sensation, putting together videos that look like they took months."



The creative duo wowed the audience and judges each round with unique storytelling in their songs and music videos. "I think Yoshiha really carried it, and he's the mastermind behind it," said Manny. "Without his determination this wouldn't have happened; I really appreciate that. Getting first place is crazy."

Yoshiha commended Manny, too, saying HJ Stars was quite the journey for them both. "We were so crunched on time [for the competition rounds], and we didn't know if we were going to make it," said Yoshiha. "As a creator working a lot on a project, you kind of get numb to it and whether the work is good or not, and so that was my biggest fear."

Yoshiha said their music video featured in the final round was inspired by his biological sister, an offering child, whose father passed away when she was very young. "Initially I was thinking we could share about

our own childhoods, but then one night while I was sleeping this inspiration hit me," said Yoshiha. "Losing a parent is not easy. I wanted to tell the story of my sister ... and she was happy and okay with it."

The singing sister ensemble, Goldyn Avenue, from Alpharetta, Georgia, placed second with a prize of \$500. "They have consistently delivered throughout the rounds, listening to the judges," said Arthur. "Their performances just got better and better every time."



The foursome delivered soulful, beautiful performances as they harmonized their voices. "We had a lot of fun and really appreciate everyone who voted for us," the group said. "All of our friends and family who really supported us, we thank you guys. It was a lot more difficult and challenging than expected, especially the final round, but we are grateful that we got votes ... and for the opportunity."

Energetic dance crew, Rice Paddy Heroes, from Worcester, Mass., came in third place with a prize of \$250. Round after round, the dancers impressed the viewers and judges with their original choreography and skilled dance moves. "We're so speechless," said the group as they were announced as winners. "We're really happy. All of the other performers were doing so well, so we were kind of scared [we wouldn't win]. Everyone was so great, and all the finalists were so good. Thank you so much everyone!"



Arthur described the group as "ninjas dancing on the streets," likening them to the popular Korean boy band BTS. "I was blown away," said Arthur. "The finals were their best performance throughout the entire competition."

The six other finalists received HJ Stars t-shirts, as viewers applauded the talent and performances of all the contestants. "This has been really exciting," commented Irmgard Baynes about the show. "Hard work pays off," added Jorge Cuello Espinosa in an online comment. "This was really an incredible show," said Arthur, "and we just hope to be able to see more talent in the coming months and years."

You can watch the HJ Stars finals in full [here](#).

National

HJ Stars Audition Highlights Diverse Talent



Photos courtesy of HJ Stars

“The HJ Stars audition went a lot longer than expected, because we got double the submissions than we were expecting – but it was an incredible turnout,” said Resfred Arthur, co-host of HJ Stars and the FFWPU USA Northeast secretary general. “The purpose of HJ Stars is to raise funds for YAYAM but also help cultivate and showcase talent from around the country.”

The preliminary round of the HJ Stars auditions was an immediate hit, streaming live July 22 with more than 2,000 views. The competition also raised some \$6,000 for the Youth and Young Adult Ministry ([YAYAM](#)).

“We thank everyone who donated,” said Resfred, as he presented audition highlights during an FFWPU USA Leaders’ meeting July 26. “We had 56 submissions that were all very incredible ... There was so much talent that was amazing to see.”

From choreographed dancing, singing, piano playing and guitar strumming, to heartfelt poetry and colorful artwork, the talent pool was diverse and impressive. A total of 19 candidates from across the country advanced to the semi-finals, as well as one participant from London. The Northeast alone had eight participants continue on in the competition.



"We have a glance of what's to come with our semi-finalists," said Resfred. "Every region is represented, and even one person from Europe, so let's continue to support them."

While some contestants were individual performers, others were an entire crew, such as the LA CARP Dancers. There were even couples in the mix who auditioned together, as all submissions were evaluated by three guest judges with backgrounds in the arts. "I'm so excited to see all this new talent," said judge Jonathan Gullery, a longtime designer and pianist.

HJ Stars channels the great passion True Parents have for the arts, as they founded the renowned Little Angels ballet troupe and the Hyojeong Youth Orchestra (HJYO), among many more creative endeavors. "This is the power of art," True Father said. "It allows people who don't understand each other's language to communicate. It lets people who don't know about each other's history understand each other's hearts."

The HJ Stars semi-final round is scheduled for August 5. Donations submitted in a specific region will go toward that region's YAYAM chapter. The grand prize winner will receive \$1,000, the second place winner will receive \$500, and the third place prize is \$250.

You can donate and tune in to HJ Stars [here](#), and watch the full preliminary round of auditions [here](#).

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Nine Contestants Advance to HJ Stars Final Competition



Eight talented acts are moving on to the August 12 final round of the popular new virtual talent show, [HJ Stars](#). The live show, which had more than 1,400 views during the [semi finals](#), promotes the talent, arts and culture of the national Unificationist community and beyond.

“I felt we had an amazing first round of incredible acts,” said Sunhwa Reiner during the show. Sunhwa is one of three featured judges with a professional background in the arts. “I am so inspired and moved by everything that was displayed,” she said. “I’m really excited to see what happens next. I have no idea what the final results will be.”

From 56 auditions, down to 19 semi-finalists in the [preliminary round](#), the competition on August 5 was fierce to make the final cut. Judges Jonathan Gullery and Sun Shim Santos, who joined Reiner in evaluating each performance, focused on several elements, including quality and skill, delivery and creativity, and *hyojeong*, a performer’s heart and investment.

“I think there’s just amazing talent out there, and there is so much energy that has gone into creating these video entries,” said Gullery. “I’m very happy and excited to see so much talent,” added Santos, who said every audition was valuable and enhanced the show.

The semi finals featured a great mix of humor, creativity, and, of course, talent. There were vocalists, dancers, musicians, artists, as well as one comedic skit that involved singing and dancing with a digitized hotdog. Another act, "Liverpool Lads," featured a multi-instrumental one-man band. Contestants wowed the judges with their creative flair and heartfelt performances.

"I think, in general, all art serves to move our hearts, and I certainly felt moved [by all the performances]," said Reiner. Co-hosts Resfred Arthur and Isaac Jeong emphasized that HJ Stars is ultimately a fundraising effort supporting [YAYAM](#) and its regional chapters, and the show's proceeds will provide scholarships for various workshops and events. So far, the event has raised nearly \$7,000 of its \$10,000 goal.

"Making a donation to YAYAM really goes a long way," said Jeong. "If you've seen the transformations of our youth and young adults attending workshops and similar activities, this [fundraising] can really take us far with those events."

Arthur said voting for contestants is also critical at every turn, as voting for the finalists expired at noon August 7. "Last time [in the preliminary round], the difference between making it through to this round and not making it through was less than a vote," he said. "It was only like 0.4 difference."

The nine contestants advancing to the upcoming final round hail from all across the country, with one finalist competing from the UK. The nine finalists are: Rhiannon Davies (UK), Goldyn Ave (GA), Julie Kim (FL), Jenny Hughes (UT), Yoshiha & Manny (NV + MI), Nami & Yumi (CA + NJ), Micheal Cordero, (NV), Rice Paddy Heroes (MA), and Yasuno Takeshima (VA).

The HJ Stars grand prize winner will receive \$1,000, the second place winner will receive \$500, and the third place prize is \$250.





You can watch and support the final round of HJ Stars airing August 12 at 8:30 p.m. EDT [here](#).

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Final Round

Friday, August 12 at 8:30 PM EDT

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