

Foreigners Scoop Awards at Golden Mask Awards

By [John Freedman](#)

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The Golden Mask Festival award ceremony took place Friday in Gostiny Dvor. The festival, in its 17th year, honors the best in theater, dance and opera.

Seventeen times in as many years Russia's theater elite have gathered in April following the conclusion of the Golden Mask Festival to honor the best performers and theater artists in the nation.

They did so again on Friday at an elegant, if somewhat hurried, awards ceremony held in the beautiful and cavernous arched atrium of Gostiny Dvor, a polished gem's throw from Red Square.

And yet, for all the ritual repetition that goes into this annual event, there are always surprises and innovations.

2011 will go down as the year when the Golden Mask truly went international. Non-Russian

artists have won awards in the past, but this year was something special. More than two dozen foreign artists — singers, choreographers, conductors, directors and designers — received nominations for work completed during the 2009-10 season. Of them, five walked away with the coveted plaque featuring a ceramic mask on a mirrored background.

Accepting his award for Best Male Singer in “La Juive” for the Mikhailovsky Theater of St. Petersburg, American-born tenor Neil Shicoff noted that “La Juive” is an opera “filled with prejudice and intolerance,” and that theater helps people learn that “without dialogue and understanding we all lose.”

Greek conductor Teodor Currentzis is no stranger to the Golden Mask. His collaborations with various Russian companies over the last 15 years have often been singled out in the past. On Friday he was cited as Best Director of an Opera for “Wozzeck” at the Bolshoi Theater, and he noted the especial satisfaction this production brought him because it was the opera’s first in Russia and because it marked his own debut at the Bolshoi.

Emilie Valantin of the Theatre du Fust in Montelimar, France, was declared best designer of a puppet show for her work on “Ninny Gribouille and Mr. Bumblebee” for the Yekaterinburg Puppet Theater. A stand-in received the plaque for her because, at that moment, Valantin was performing with her own theater in Toulouse.

Other foreigners taking awards were Paul Brown of Britain, Best Designer in a Musical Production, for the Mariinsky Theater’s “Die Frau ohne Schatten;” and Johan Greben and Uri Ivgi, a Dutch-Israeli team that jointly took Best Choreographer for “Song Not About Love” for the Provincial Dances company of Yekaterinburg.

For the first time since the initial Golden Mask awards were handed out in 1995, the ceremony was conducted with no entertainment element, although the President’s Orchestra of the Russian Federation offered incidental music and flourishes. Guests were seated on three sides of a long red carpet, which winners traversed at varying speeds in order to mount the stage to receive their awards.

The fastest to move along the carpet was Maria Tregubova, named Best Costume Designer in a Drama for her work on “Tararabumbia” at the School of Dramatic Art. Tregubova, who was seated at the farthest end of the carpet, raced the whole way to the stage, keeping ahead of a camera on rails filming the ceremony for a delayed telecast on the Kultura channel late Friday night.

Two acceptance speeches evoked more than the usual laughter and applause.

Sergei Barkhin, responding to winning Best Musical Theater Costume Designer for “Cafe. Socrate” at the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater, referred humorously to a recent bout with bad health by quipping, “This time I can only thank all kinds of doctors and medics!”

After being proclaimed the winner of Best Musical Theater Lighting Designer, Gleb Filshtinsky dedicated his award to new twin daughters. “I just had two girls, and my mother and father are here, too!” he declared with a big grin.

One of the night's biggest winners was the Musical Comedy Theater of Yekaterinburg, which received four awards, including Best Operetta/Musical, Best Composer (Alexander Pantykin), Best Director (Kirill Strezhnev) and Best Conductor (Boris Nodelman) for a musical adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's classic novel "Dead Souls."

The Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater took Best Ballet with its production of "Small Death. Six Dances," while the renowned Mariinsky Theater of St. Petersburg was honored for Best Opera with its production of "Die Frau ohne Schatten."

Yelena Zhidkova emerged the winner in the competition for Best Female Opera Singer for her performance as Judith in the Mariinsky Theater's "Duke Bluebeard's Castle."

And in what some perceived as a neck and neck competition, Yekaterina Kondourova was declared Best Female Dancer for her performance of the title role in the Mariinsky Theater's "Anna Karenina." Natalya Ledovskaya, who danced the title role in the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater's "Esmeralda," was honored with a Jury Prize.

Awards in the field of drama were spread out over an array of theaters and artists from Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Pyotr Fomenko's "Triptych" at the Fomenko Studio received the nod as Best Small Scale Drama, while Rimas Tuminas' production of Chekhov's "Uncle Vanya" at the Vakhtangov Theater was proclaimed Best Large Scale Drama.

Tuminas invited half a dozen members of the cast to join him as he joked to the audience that he would like to stay on stage longer so "I could enjoy you and you could enjoy me. I'm so proud of this award." Eventually he turned the microphone over to actress Galina Konovalova who drew a burst of laughter when she stepped up and briskly snapped, "Thank you!" before backing up again.

The only double-dipping winner in the drama field was Andrei Moguchy's "Izotov" for the Alexandrinsky Theater in St. Petersburg. Moguchy was singled out in a field of 19 candidates as Best Director, while his collaborator Alexander Shishkin was chosen Best Designer from among 15 candidates.

Igor Gordin, nominated for his work in two productions at the Theater Yunogo Zritelya, was declared Best Actor for his performance in "A Gentle Creature." He pranced up the red carpet aisle, leaping and clicking his heels as he went.

Olga Yakovleva was cited Best Actress for her performance of the grandmother in "The Precipice" at the Chekhov Moscow Art Theater.

"What grandmother?! This is no grandmother!" emcee Inga Oboldina shouted as the veteran Yakovleva lightly bounded up the steps to receive her award.

Continuing a trend in recent years, Moscow-based theaters and artists came away with the most awards — 14 in all. But St. Petersburg was well represented with nine winners, while Yekaterinburg also reinforced its position as one of Russia's cultural capitals, boasting six winners.

Kostroma was the only other city among the eight winning awards to post multiple wins. The city's Dialogue Dance company took the Best Contemporary Dance award with its production of "Mirliflor," while the Kostroma Puppet Theater, in collaboration with Cult-Project of Moscow, won Best Puppet Show for its meticulous production of Chekhov's one-act play "The Bear."

Other Winners

Tatyana Maslakova, Khabarovsk Musical Theater, Best Female Singer in an Operetta/Musical; Dmitry Averin, Rostov-on-Don Musical Theater, Best Male Singer in an Operetta/Musical; Leonid Safranov, St. Petersburg Theater Center on Kolomenskaya, Best Male Dancer; Dmitry Chernyakov, Bolshoi Theater of Moscow, Best Opera Director; Vladimir Aronsky, Pokrovsky Chamber Musical Theater of Moscow, Jury Prize; "Gvidon," Moscow School of Dramatic Art, Experiment Award; Damir Ismagilov, Alexandrinsky Theater of St. Petersburg, Best Lighting Designer in a Drama; Anastasia Svetlova, Fyodor Volkov Theater of Yaroslavl, and Young Directors for Children Project, Moscow National Youth Theater, Jury Prizes; "Exhibits," Prokopyevsk Drama Theater, Critics Prize.

Raymond Stults contributed to this report.

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