

Moscow Takes Top Honors at Golden Mask Fest

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A scene from “Por Vos Muero,” winner of best ballet for the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theater. **Svetlana Postoenko**

It wasn't the best beginning for a festive evening. The first four envelopes opened at the 18th annual Golden Mask Festival award ceremony contained the same message: No award given.

So much for the entire genre of operetta and musical. Or, perhaps, so much for a stingy jury.

The good news is that things could only improve after that. Indeed, by the time the final awards were announced on the stage of the Bolshoi Theater 2 1/2 hours later, the audience was warmed up and vocal.

Moscow theaters ran away with the vast majority of honors Monday. The Bolshoi took top honors with six awards while the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater pulled down five. In all, Moscow companies won 19 awards, St. Petersburg grabbed five,

artists from Yekaterinburg and Chelyabinsk went home with two awards each and the cities of Barnaul, Kazan, Kostroma and Perm each picked off one.

Lighting designer Damir Ismagilov was an entity unto himself. Nominated four times in two categories — best lighting for a drama and for a musical show — he won in both for his work on "The Golden Cockerel" at the Bolshoi and for "Enemies. A Love Story" at the Sovremennik.

Arguably the night's biggest crowd pleaser was Yury Butusov, honored as best director of a drama for his scintillating production of "The Seagull" at the Satirikon Theater. Following the explosion of cheers that greeted the announcement, Butusov was decidedly low-key. He quietly declared that he was filled with feelings of "awe and tenderness for the actors" in his cast.

Something approaching pandemonium greeted the news that Sasha Denisova's play "Light My Fire," an innovative treatment of the lives of American rockers Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin for Teatr.doc, was named winner in the experiment category. As Denisova clutched the distinctive plaque featuring a winged ceramic mask on a mirrored background, actor Alexei Yudnikov joked that no one in the cast "had ever won anything, not even in school. Now here's a Golden Mask on the stage of the Bolshoi Theater!"

Best acting honors went to Svetlana Zamarayeva of the Yekaterinburg Young Spectator Theater and Yevgeny Mironov of Moscow's Theater of Nations, respectively. Zamarayeva, accepting for her performance of Kruchinina in "Guilty Without Guilt" wistfully said, "If only you knew how many people will be happy when I bring this Golden Mask to Yekaterinburg!" Mironov, cited for his performance of the title role in "Caligula," thanked his mother, without whom, he said, he "would never have learned so much text."

Prizes for small-form and large-form productions went to shows created by directors who have established prominence over the last decade. Andrei Moguchy's "Happiness" for the Alexandrinsky Theater of St. Petersburg was tapped as best large-form show, while Kirill Serebrennikov's "Thugs" for Moscow's Seventh Studio was named best small-form show.

Serebrennikov stirred some controversy and earned warm applause by dedicating his award to people who are "struggling in Russia for justice, doing that on the squares, sitting in prison and holding hunger strikes for that." According to a report Wednesday on

Newsru.com, however, everything but "struggling in Russia for justice" was cut from the delayed telecast of the ceremony on the Culture channel.

Alexander Shishkin was cited best designer in a drama for his inventive use of puppets and film in the Moguchy production of "Happiness," which was an unorthodox rendition of Fernand Crommelynck's classic symbolist play "The Blue Bird."

The awards given in the music and dance categories prompted The Moscow Times music critic Raymond Stults to call this the fairest and best crop of winners at a Golden Mask festival in recent years. "There wasn't a single award that raised doubts about its legitimacy," he said at a reception following the ceremony.

The Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Musical Theater pulled in the two biggest

prizes with best ballet for "Por Vos Muero" and best opera for "The Tales of Hoffmann," the first time one theater has taken these two prizes since the Mariinsky Theater in 1997. The theater may also boast that it is the home of Russia's best conductors. Felix Korobov was named best conductor of a ballet for "Rusalochka" while Yevgeny Brazhnik was cited best opera director for "The Tales of Hoffmann." Anna Khamzina was cited best female dancer for her performance of the title role in "Rusalochka."

The Bolshoi, looking shimmering and sparkly after a prolonged restoration that kept its stage closed from 2005 to October 2011, added a sixth plaque for the Critics Prize for the ballet "Chroma" to five garnered in traditional nominations.

Denis Savin was named best male dancer in the Bolshoi's ballet "Herman Schmerman," while Mauro Bigonzetti was named best choreographer for his work on "Cinque." In the field of musical theater, the Bolshoi's ballet "Lost

Illusions" brought awards to Jerome

Kaplan for costume designs, and to composer Leonid Desyatnikov for his original music.

St. Petersburg's Mariinsky Theater, usually a heavy winner, settled for two plaques this year. Zinovy Margolin was cited best designer for his work on the opera "Dead Souls," and Jamaican-born, British singer Willard White was named best male opera singer for his performance of Bottom in "A Midsummer Night's Dream."

Georgy Isaakyan was selected best director of an opera for "The Love for Three Oranges" at Moscow's Natalya Sats Children's Musical Theater, while Albina Shagimuratova was singled out as best female opera singer for her performance of the title role in "Lucia di Lammermoor" for the Tatar Opera and Ballet Theater of Kazan.

All four choreographers of "Punto Di Fuga" for Dialogue Dance of Kostroma and Zerogrammi of Turin, Italy, crowded the podium on stage to receive the honors for best contemporary dance production. Without identifying himself, one of them declared that they "all were happy" and added playfully they would all "fight" for possession of the single plaque awarded to them.

In the field of puppetry, the Volkhovsky Puppet Theater of Chelyabinsk won two awards for its production of "The Miraculous Journey of Edward Tulane," Zakhar Davydov being named best designer in a puppet show and Alexander Borok being honored as best director.

Screams of joy cascaded from the Bolshoi's balconies when "The Tea Party Is Likely to Take Place," a production of the Karlsson Haus Theater Studio of St. Petersburg, was announced the winner as best puppet show.

The evening's most emotional speech was made by legendary St. Petersburg-based designer Eduard Kochergin, one of three recipients of a Lifetime Achievement award. His voice breaking, Kochergin ticked off a long line of great designers of the past and declared that his was an award for the entire guild of theater designers. Kochergin was greeted by a standing ovation from the crowd of 2,000.

OTHER AWARDS: Special music jury prizes: 1) "Seeing Music," Perm Theater of Opera

and Ballet, 2) Valentina Ostankovich and Filipp Vinogradov, designers of "The Love for Three Oranges," Natalya Sats Musical Theater, 3) Ilgam Valiyev in the role of the Prince in "The Love for Three Oranges," Yekaterinburg Theater of Opera and Ballet. Special drama jury prizes: 1) "Enemies. A Love Story," Sovremennik Theater, 2) "Mother Courage and Her Children," Shukshin Drama Theater, Barnaul. Additional Lifetime Achievement awards were made to actor Mikhail Pakhomenko of the Kaluga Drama Theater and director Pyotr Fomenko. Krzysztof Warlikowski's "(A)pollonia" was honored as best foreign production presented in Russia in 2011.

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