

Naledi Theatre Awards winners announced

The musical *Annie* came out tops at the annual Naledi Theatre Awards by garnering four awards, including 'Best Production of a Musical'. Three other highly-acclaimed productions, *Scorched*, *Suddenly the Storm* and the musical, *TAU*, won three awards each at a glittering event held at the Lyric Theatre, Gold Reef City on Tuesday, 5 June.

South African theatre in all its glory was celebrated on the night with entertainment, heartfelt speeches and surprises in the field of musical theatre where an Afrikaans production, *Altyd in My Drome*, walked off with two awards, including 'Best Director' for its creator Neels Claasen. Two international musicals, *Shrek The Musical* and the every-abiding classic *Singin' in the Rain*, were also honoured with two awards each. In addition to this, Afrikaans play, *AS*, won recognition for the 'Best Cutting Edge' production, while musical wunderkind Bryan Schimmel, who has received no fewer than nine nominations in his career, won the 'Best Musical Director' award for his work on *Annie*.



Lilla Fleischman as Annie

For the first time two nominees in the 'Best Lighting Design' category shared an award. They were Hlomohang Mothetho (*TAU*) and Wesley France (*Suddenly the Storm*). Greg King was honoured for his work (with Shanti Naidoo) on *Shrek the Musical* in 'Best Costume Design' and again for 'Best Set Design' for *Suddenly the Storm*.

Societal and cultural influence gained the judges' favour

Historically, the performing arts have inspired action and infuse strength to act upon the art's message when they couldn't deliver it in words themselves. This was the narrative that echoed throughout the evening's performances and award categories, as judges celebrated those artists and productions that proved a catalyst for discussions around change, cut across racial, cultural, social, educational, and economic barriers and enhanced cultural appreciation and awareness. "We made a strong statement in support of LGBTQ rights with a special arrangement of John Lennon's "Imagine", led by Timothy Moloi and 10 of our very best voices in harmony," shared Naledi Executive Director Dawn Lindberg.

The judges went into raptures over the ground-breaking African musical, *TAU*, which won in the categories 'Best Ensemble' and 'Best Original Choreography' for Nhlanhla Mahlangu. While, *Pay Back the Curry*, an acerbic look at South African society, written by the celebrated Mike van Graan and performed by comedian Daniel Richards earned a 'Best Newcomer Award' for the versatile Richards.

I See You, a hard-hitting South African play about police corruption and brutality, which was produced by the Market Theatre in collaboration with the Royal Court Theatre in London, won favour with the judges with two awards, including 'Best Lead Performance in a Play' (Male) going to Desmond Dube.

Porselein a bold, abrasive, in-your-face Afrikaans production that did not hold back on its punches and hammered home its message in no uncertain terms was acknowledged when Tiaan Slabbert was given an award for 'Best Supporting Actor'. Veteran South African playwright Paul Slabolepszy received an award for 'Best New South African Script' for *Suddenly the Storm*, while Ameera Patel ('Best Supporting Actress') and Ilse Klink ('Best Lead Performance in a Play': Female) won awards for their contribution to *Scorched*.



Mark Banks MC for the awards

A celebration of the arts

Four special awards were bequeathed on the night. Erik Holm, who is confined to a wheelchair after breaking his neck in a diving accident, was presented 'The Lesedi Spirit of Courage Award', while the 'Executive Director's Award' was handed to Popart for their innovative and exciting work in Maboneng. Haccius Mokokapasi, who has been a stage manager for over 50 years at various theatres was honoured to accept the 'Lifetime Achievement Award' and finally the 'World Impact Award' was bestowed upon legendary icon, Johnny Clegg, who is about to embark on his farewell world tour, after an astounding

40 years in the industry.

A benchmark of excellence

Now in its 13th year, the Naledi Theatre Awards applaud theatre excellence and is the biggest event on the Gauteng theatre calendar. With Tumi Morake and Alan Committie at the helm as the hosts for the evening, the audience was treated to an evening packed with wit, humour and boundless energy. The star-studded affair, which saw a host of celebrity presenters show up in their glamorous ensembles, included award-winning thespian John Kani, director Jade Bowers, actors Neels Clasen, Zak Hendrikz, Vusi Kunene, as well as TV stars, Jennifer Nkosi and Kgomotso Christopher.

Lindberg said the standard of excellence gets higher and higher each year. "The panel sees over 100 productions each year, with over 300 nominees on the list of excellence," she imparts. "Judging takes place over a weekend with everyone on the panel allowed space to debate and discuss each and every of the 27 categories. The final votes are by secret ballot and verified by Zeridium."

An exciting line up of presenters and entertainers were assembled on the night, including nominee Lilla Fleishmann, the star of *Annie*, performing *Tomorrow*, Earl Gregory from *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* singing *Close Every Door to Me*, and award-winning Daniel Richards delivering a sketch from the comedy *Pay Back the Curry*. The Kings of Harmony performed a moving tribute to the departed and the evening came to a close as the entire cast of *Sarafina* re-assembled to execute an emotive and rousing finale with *Freedom will come tomorrow*.

"The process of seeing, analysing and assessing all professional productions staged in Gauteng during each year is a full time job which is not always acknowledged, " adds Lindberg. "Lack of sufficient financial support from government and commercial sponsors is a constant battle, but Naledi is proud to be internationally recognised as the benchmark of excellence in South African live theatre."

List of winners

Best Supporting Actress

Ameera Patel (*Scorched*)

Best Supporting Actor

Tiaan Slabbert (*Porselein*)

Best Production for Children (Supported By Assitej Sa) (0 – 12)

Khokho's Treasure (Prod. by The National Children's Theatre. Adapt. & Dir. by Francois Theron.)

Best Production for Young Audiences (Supported By Assitej Sa) (13 - 17)

Just Antigone (Prod by The Movement. Adapt and Dir by Billy Edward and Mahlatsi Mokgonyara in collaboration with the cast.)

Best Performance in a Childrens' Theatre Production

Jòvan Muthray (*Just Antigone*)

Best Newcomer/Breakthrough

Daniel Richards (*Pay Back The Curry!*)

Best Costume Design (X 2 Certificates)

Greg King & Shanti Naidoo (*Shrek The Musical*)

Best Lighting Design

Hlomohang Mothetho (*TAU*)

Best Lighting Design

Wesley France (*Suddenly the Storm*)

Best Set Design

Greg King (*Suddenly the Storm*)

Best Sound Design

Mark Malherbe (*Annie*)

Best Score/Arrangement/Adaptation

Dawid Boverhoff (<>Altyd In My Drome)

Best Musical Director

Bryan Schimmel (*Annie*)

Best Production: Cutting Edge

AS (Prod. by Jannes Erasmus & the SA State Theatre. Written & Dir. by Jannes Erasmus.)

Best Ensemble

TAU (Prod. by the Market Theatre & the Windybrow Theatre. Written & Dir. by Thabiso T. Rammala.)

Best Original Choreography

Nhlanhla Mahlangu (*TAU*)

Best Director of a Musical/Revue

Neels Clasen (*Altyd In My Drome*)

Best Director of a Play

Jade Bowers (*Scorched*)

Best Supporting/Featured Performance in a Musical/Revue: Female

Taryn-Lee Hudson (*Singin' in the Rain*)

Best Supporting/Featured Performance in a Musical/Revue: Male

Rory Booth (*Shrek the Musical*)

Best Performance in a Musical (Female)

Charon Williams-Ros (*Annie*)

Best Performance in a Musical (Male)

Grant Almirall (*Singin' in the Rain*)

Best Lead Performance in a Play (Female)

Ilse Klink (*Scorched*)

Best Lead Performance in a Play (Male)

Desmond Dube (*I See You*)

Best New SA Script (Sponsored By South African State Theatre)

Suddenly the Storm (Prod. by the Market Theatre & Windybrow Theatre in ass. with the Auto & General Theatre on the Square & Bobby Heaney Productions. Written by Paul Slabolepszy, Dir. by Bobby Heaney.)

Best Production of a Play

I See You (Prod. by the Market Theatre & Royal Court Theatre. Written by Mongiwekhaya Mthombeni, Dir. by Noma Dumezweni.)

Best Production of a Musical

Annie (Prod. by Pieter Toerien & Hazel Feldman in ass. with Michael Harrison Entertainment & David Ian Productions. Written by Thomas Meehan, Dir. by Nikolai Foster.)

The Lesedi Spirit of Courage Award

Erik Holm

Executive Director's Award

Popart: Hayleigh Evans

Executive Director's Award

Popart: Orly Shapiro

Lifetime Achievement Award

Haccious Mokopakgosi

World Impact Award

Johnny Clegg

For more information, visit the [Naledi Theatre Awards website](#).

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