

# Saint-Claire makes history at Naledis

Actress Louise Saint-Claire made history recently at the 7th annual Naledi Theatre Awards when she won two acting awards for two different productions.



The audience at the star-studded awards ceremony at the State Theatre in Pretoria, which celebrates the best in Gauteng theatre, saw the versatile actress win the award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Lead Role for the play *God of Carnage*, as well as Best Comedy Performance (Female) for *Pterodactyls*. Saint-Claire had been nominated in an unprecedented five categories for her various performances throughout the past year.

## Polar opposites

The remainder of the prizes were shared out fairly evenly among various productions, with no outright winner sweeping the boards. Two polar opposite productions - Janice Honeyman and Bernard Jay's much-lauded pantomime *Pinocchio* and Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's gritty adults-only play *Foreplay* - each received three awards on the night.

Grootboom was named Best Director, while Koketso Mojela was hailed as Best Supporting Actress and Israel Bereta awarded for Best Original Choreography. For *Pinocchio*, Sibusiso Radebe, who delighted audiences as the little wooden puppet, received the Naledi for Best Performance in a Musical (Male), with the production itself being named Best Musical and Timothy le Roux's turn as the dame earning him Best Comedy Performance (Male) laurels.

## Other big winners

Other big winners on the night included John Kani, whose revival of his powerful self-penned drama *Nothing But the Truth* earned the kudos for Best Production of a Straight Play, with Kani also scooping the award for Best Performance by an Actor in a Lead Role. *The Lion and the Lamb*, also with Kani at the helm, had Margaret Motsage and Nokukhanya Dlamini sharing the award for Best Performance in a Musical (Female).

Mike van Graan's gripping *Brothers in Blood* was singled out as the Best New South African Play Produced, and also earned Denis Hutchinson the Best Theatre Lighting Design trophy.

## Brer Rabbit hopped off

The hilarious *Travels with my Aunt*, produced by Pieter Toerien and directed by Alan Swerdlow, won the judges over in the Best Ensemble/Cutting-Edge Production category, with Theo Landey clinching the accolade for Best Performance by an Actor in a Supporting Role. The Market Theatre's *Brer Rabbit* hopped off with awards for costume and set design for Noluthando Lobese and Jenny-Lee Crew respectively, with Mark Malherbe earning deserved praise for his sound design in *Cats*.

Bryan Schimmel took home the honours for Best Musical Director for Richard Loring's *Knights of Music*, and the talented Mwenya Kabwe, who burst onto the theatre scene with a bang in *Yellow Man*, was recognised with the award for Best Performance by a Newcomer/Breakthrough.

The newly reintroduced Best Production of a Play/Musical for Children category saw Joyce Levinsohn's National Children's Theatre production of *Seussical Jr* emerging victorious, with the Best Community Theatre Production award going to *Sekwatlapa*, written and directed by Marlon Khoza.

## **Lifetime Achievement Awards**

Lifetime Achievement Awards were presented to music icon Hugh Masekela, veteran actor Tobie Cronjé and consummate entertainer and producer Richard Loring. Daphne Kuhn, the passionate, hands-on owner of the Old Mutual Theatre on the Square in Sandton, received the Executive Director's Award on the night.

In keeping with the meaning of “Naledi”, which is “shining star”, guests at the ceremony were treated to a stellar array of entertainment, celebrity presenters and VIPs. The Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra and the South African Ballet Theatre performed, as did Hugh Masekela, Sello Maake Ka-Ncube, Mark Banks, Kate Normington (with excerpts from *Tomfoolery*), El Rincon Fusion Flamenco, the African Sky Pipe Band, Tracy-Lee Oliver and Bryan Schimmel (*Knights of Music*), and young Cleo Philander, the nine-year-old SA's Got Talent finalist.

## **Honoured guests**

Guests of honour included former Minister Mac Maharaj and his wife Zarina, several ambassadors, State Theatre CEO Xoliswa Ngema, and Dali Tambo, the chairman of the Naledi Theatre Awards. With proceedings MC'd by the madcap characters Corné and Twakkie, the celebrity presenters included Joan Brickhill, Craig Urbani, Colin Moss, Mara Louw, Zwai and Mel Bala, Zoleka Helesi, Lesego Motsepe, Judy Page and James Ngcobo.

Dawn Lindberg, executive director of the Naledi Awards, expressed her gratitude to the many sponsors that came on board to ensure the high standard of the awards was upheld.

## **Sponsors**

She said: “We are delighted to welcome a new sponsors, Chauvet Lighting (for Best Lighting Design), Nando's (for the comedy categories) and Distell (for Best Community theatre), and the Gauteng Department of Arts and Culture, as well as our loyal and valued founding sponsors: Wharfedale, Matrix, Wits Theatre, Percy Tucker (who sponsored the Best Director category) and Christopher Seabrooke (Best Production of a Musical as well as Best Lead Actor - male and female).

“Substantial sponsorship in kind came from the State Theatre, which provided the Opera house and cocktail party; Distell for the wines, and the SA Gold Coin Exchange, which handed out over 1000 bronze Mandela Medallions to every guest. DKNY also gave gifts of perfume to all the presenters,” she concluded.

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