

PHIL POTEPA: VU grad wins 2015 Jeff Award for Lookingglass Theatre's 'Moby Dick'

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Local talent took home awards this week at the **47th annual Equity Jeff Awards** at Monday's ceremony at Drury Lane Theatre in Oakbrook Terrace, Ill.

Theatre at the Center in Munster earned eight nominations in **Jeff Award** categories for recognizing stage excellence. Six of the nominations for Theatre at the Center were the shared nominations with **Mercury Theatre**, which is currently in a run of "**Ring of Fire, The Music of Johnny Cash**," the musical revue first seen by Munster audiences last year and then relaunched for Chicago audiences at Mercury Theatre.

It was actress **Cory Goodrich** winning the Actor or Actress in a Revue award for "Ring of Fire, The Music of Johnny Cash," for her portrayal of **June Carter Cash**, a role she will continue in through Nov. 1.

Isaac Schoepp, a 2007 graduate of **Valparaiso University**, also won a coveted Joseph Jefferson Award for Artistic Specialization in stage rigging design for "**Moby Dick**," a production of Chicago's **Lookingglass Theatre Company** in association with the **Actors Gymnasium**. Given annually by **The Joseph Jefferson Awards Committee** to honor excellence in professional theater produced in the immediate Chicago area, "the Jeffs" are often referred to as "Chicago's **Tony Awards**." The Jeff Awards have been committed to celebrating the vitality of Chicago area theater since 1968.

Schoepp, who majored in theater and humanities at VU, has directed the **Christ College**, the university's honors college, annual run for the Freshman Drama Workshop and Production since 2011. In this curricular innovation headed by Schoepp, the 90-member first-year honors class writes, scores and performs an original play with music, based on themes in its first semester readings.

There are a total of 187 nominations in 36 categories honoring Chicago Equity theatrical productions that opened between Aug. 1, 2014, and July 31, 2015.

Two theaters in their first year of Equity eligibility received the most awards at the gala.

Newly Equity eligible, **The Hypocrites** earned six awards for "**All Our Tragic**" and **Paramount Theatre**, also in their first year of eligibility, scored five large tier Equity awards. Production-Musical for a midsize theater was awarded to "**The Addams Family**," which had an extended run at Mercury Theater Chicago.

Special awards were presented to husband and wife actors **Paula Scrofano** and **John Reeger**, who appeared in last year's "**A Christmas Memory**" at Theatre at the Center in recognition of their career contributions to Chicago theater over the past five decades.

Principal acting honors went to **Kate Fry** as Rosemary Muldoon in "**Outside Mullingar**" at **Northlight Theatre** and **Jerod Haynes** as Bigger in "**Native Son**" at **Court Theatre**, produced with **American Blues Theater**. Awards for principal acting in musicals went to **Heidi Kettenring** as Anna in "**The King and I**" at **Marriott Theatre** and **Nicholas Dantes** as Young Billy in "**Billy Elliot, the Musical**" at Drury Lane.

In the revue categories, **Porchlight Music Theatre's "Sondheim on Sondheim"** received nods for Production-Revue, for Director **Nick Bowling**, and for Music Director **Austin Cook**.

Chicago continues to be a nurturing center for New Works, and top awards for New Work-Play went to the late **PJ Paparelli** and **Joshua Jaeger** for their provocative examination of Chicago public housing in **"The Project(s)"** at **American Theater Company** and to **Mat Smart** for **"The Royal Society of Antarctica"** at **The Gift Theatre**. New Work-Musical was awarded to **Paul Gordon** for **"Sense and Sensibility,"** a moving chamber piece based on the **Jane Austen** novel, produced by **Chicago Shakespeare Theater**.

The Solo Performance honor went to **Ronald Keaton** as **"Churchill,"** produced by **SoloChicago Theatre** and **Greenhouse Theater Center**. Supporting Actress awards were presented to **Kate Buddeke** as Tanya in **"Airline Highway"** at **Steppenwolf Theatre Company** and to **Michelle Aravena** as Anita in **"West Side Story"** at **Drury Lane Productions**. Supporting Actor in a musical went to **Matthew Crowle** as Hysterium in **"A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum"** at **Porchlight Music Theatre**.

The opinions expressed are solely those of the writer. He can be reached at philip.potempa@nwi.com or (219) 852-4327.