

Jeff panel's dozens of award nominees reveal depth of local talent

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It will not be easy for the Joseph Jefferson Awards Committee to make its final decisions this season. Scan the list of nominees in many of the 26 categories for which awards for excellence in Chicago's Equity theater productions are given, and the evidence is clear: There is simply a surfeit of talent on this city's many stages. Add to the list all those who deserved nominations but didn't make the final cut, and the case becomes even stronger.

Consider, too, the impressive range of work on offer. The five nominees for best production of a play during the 2004-2005 season included: Two powerhouse revivals of Edward Albee's best-known dramas ("A Delicate Balance" by Remy Bumppo Theatre Company, whose principal actors were unaccountably overlooked, and "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" by Court Theatre); a controversial new play about child abuse and more (Bruce Norris' "The Pain and the Itch" at Steppenwolf Theatre); a revival of August Wilson's "Seven Guitars" that could easily rival any production of his work on Broadway (presented by the fast-rising Congo Square Theatre Company), and an East-West cross-cultural experiment of grand beauty ("Kabuki Lady Macbeth" at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater).

The musicals category revealed that it's not just a Marriott Theatre monopoly anymore, with competition from the far less financially flush Porchlight Music Theatre Chicago, the newly opened Drury Lane Theatre Water Tower Place, Theatre at the Center in Munster, Ind., and, in a bit of rule-stretching, the "Chicago cast production" of "Wicked."

This year's gala Jeff Awards ceremony -- at 7 p.m. Nov. 7 and open to the public as well as the industry -- marks the first time in many years that it will be held downtown. There will be a post-show reception at the Mity Nice Grill in the adjacent Water Tower Place.

Advance purchase tickets are \$65 for general admission and \$50 for members of Actors' Equity Association, United Scenic Artists and the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers. No tickets will be available at the door as the intimate 550-seat Drury Lane is expected to be fully sold out. Reduced-rate parking is available for \$7.50. Ticket orders may be mailed to David Liesse, 3531 S. Kenilworth, Berwyn, Ill. 60402. For further information, call (708) 788-6072 or go to www.jeffawards.org.

The 2004-05 Jeff nominations

PRODUCTION, PLAY: "A Delicate Balance," Remy Bumppo Theatre Company; "Kabuki Lady Macbeth," Chicago Shakespeare Theater; "The Pain and the Itch," Steppenwolf Theatre Company; "Seven Guitars," Congo Square Theatre Company; "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?" Court Theatre.

PRODUCTION, MUSICAL: "Beauty and the Beast" (Marriott Theatre); "The Full Monty," Drury Lane Theatre Water Tower Place; "She Loves Me," Theatre at the Center; "Sunset Boulevard," Marriott Theatre; "Sweeney Todd," Porchlight Music Theatre Chicago; "Wicked," Broadway in Chicago, Wicked-Chicago.

ENSEMBLE: "Closer Than Ever," Porchlight Music Theatre Chicago; "Lookingglass Alice," Lookingglass Theatre Company and Actors Gymnasium; "Omnium Gatherum," Next Theatre Company; "Seven Guitars," Congo Square Theatre Company; "Swing!" Marriott Theatre.

NEW WORK: David C. Field, "Symmetry" (Victory Gardens Theater); Mia McCullough, "Since Africa" (Chicago Dramatists); Tom Mula, "W!" (Theater Wit); Bruce Norris, "The Pain and the Itch"; Adam Rapp, "Red Light Winter" (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); Karen

Sunde & Shozo Sato, "Kabuki Lady Macbeth."

NEW ADAPTATION: Curt Columbus, "Cherry Orchard" (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); Rebecca Gilman, "Dollhouse" (Goodman Theatre); Tim Gregory & David Bell, "A Christmas Carol" (Provision Theater Company); Andrew White, "1984" (Lookingglass Theatre Company).

DIRECTOR, PLAY: James Bohnen, "A Delicate Balance"; Kate Buckley, "To the Green Fields Beyond" (Writers' Theatre); Jason Loewith, "Omnium Gatherum"; Charles Newell, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"; Shozo Sato, "Kabuki Lady Macbeth"; Derrick Sanders, "Seven Guitars"; Anna D. Shapiro, "The Pain and the Itch."

DIRECTOR, MUSICAL: Joe Leonardo, "Sunset Boulevard"; Joe Mantello, "Wicked"; Dominic Missimi, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" (Marriott Theatre); Marc Robin, "Beauty and the Beast"; L. Walter Stearns, "Sweeney Todd."

DIRECTOR, REVUE: Nick Bowling, "Closer Than Ever"; Mick Napier, "Red Scare" (The Second City); Marc Robin, "Swing!"

PRINCIPAL ACTOR, PLAY: Lance Stuart Baker, "The Importance of Being Earnest" (Court Theatre); Kevin Gudahl, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"; Tracy Letts, "The Dresser" (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); Jefferson Mays, "I Am My Own Wife" (Goodman Theatre); John Mossman, "Peer Gynt" (The Artistic Home); Dale Rivera, "Guinea Pig Solo" (Collaboraction); John Sterchi, "A View from the Bridge" (American Theater Company); Greg Vinkler, "The Merry Wives of Windsor" (Chicago Shakespeare Theater).

PRINCIPAL ACTOR, MUSICAL: Guy Adkins, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum"; Bradley Armacost, "A Christmas Carol" (Provision Theater Company); Sean Allan Krill, "Brigadoon" (Marriott Theatre); Michael Aaron Lindner, "Sweeney Todd"; Aaron Serotsky, "The Immigrant" (Northlight Theatre and Arizona Theatre Company).

PRINCIPAL ACTRESS, PLAY: Charin Alvarez, "Two Sisters and a Piano" (Apple Tree Theatre and Teatro Vista); Sandra Marquez, "Living Out" (American Theater Company and Teatro Vista); Barbara E. Robertson, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"; Kathy Scambiaterra, "Natural Affection" (The Artistic Home); Maggie Siff, "Dollhouse."

PRINCIPAL ACTRESS, MUSICAL: Rebecca Finnegan, "Sweeney Todd"; Ana Gasteyer, "Wicked"; Johanna McKenzie Miller, "Beauty and the Beast"; Kate Reinders, "Wicked"; Paula Scrofano, "Sunset Boulevard."

SUPPORTING ACTOR, PLAY: Tom Aulino, "Take Me Out" (About Face Theatre); Lance Stuart Baker, "Dollhouse"; Matthew Brumlow, "A View From the Bridge"; Tony Dobrowolski, "The Importance of Being Earnest" (First Folio Shakespeare Festival); Robert Petkoff, "Romeo and Juliet."

SUPPORTING ACTRESS, PLAY: Jayne Houdyshell, "The Pain and the Itch"; Lisa Joyce, "Red Light Winter"; Martha Lavey, "Lost Land" (Steppenwolf Theatre Company); Rondi Reed, "Romeo and Juliet"; Peggy Roeder, "The Dresser"; Whitney Sneed, "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

SUPPORTING ACTOR, MUSICAL: Larry Adams, "Do I Hear a Waltz?" (Theatre at the Center); Sean Fortunato, "Brigadoon"; Michael Aaron Lindner, "The Full Monty"; Peter Pohlhammer, "Sweeney Todd"; Bernie Yvon, "Beauty and the Beast."

SUPPORTING ACTRESS, MUSICAL: Renee Matthews, "The Full Monty"; Cristen Paige, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum"; Rondi Reed, "Wicked"; Paula Scrofano, "Do I Hear a Waltz?"

ACTOR, REVUE: Antoine McKay, "Red Scare"; Gregory Porter, "It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues" (Northlight Theatre); "Mississippi" Charles Bevel, "It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues."

ACTRESS, REVUE: Rebecca Finnegan, "Closer Than Ever"; Maribeth Monroe, "Red Scare."

CHOREOGRAPHY: Jim Corti, "The Full Monty"; Randy Duncan, "Hello Again" (Apple Tree Theatre); Mark Stuart Eckstein, Beverly Durand, and Marc Robin, "Swing!"; Ron Hutchins, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum"; Marc Robin, "Beauty and the Beast."

SCENIC DESIGN: Scott Bradley, "Silk" (Goodman Theatre); Santo Loquasto, "The Dresser"; Jack Magaw, "Seven Guitars"; James Noone, "The Merry Wives of Windsor"; Keith Pitts, "Vincent in Brixton" (Apple Tree Theatre).

COSTUME DESIGN: Mara Blumenfeld, "Lookingglass Alice"; Mara Blumenfeld, "Silk"; Jacqueline Firkins, "The Importance of Being Earnest"; Fritz Masten, "Diva Diaries" (The Diva Company LLC); Nancy Missimi, "Beauty and the Beast"; Mariann Verheyen, "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

SOUND DESIGN: Andy Brommel and Andre Pluess, "The Love Song of J. Robert Oppenheimer" (Next Theatre Company); Joshua Horvath and Andre Pluess, "1984"; Lindsay Jones, "Kabuki Lady Macbeth"; Lindsay Jones, "Kid-Simple" (American Theater Company); Andre Pluess and Ben Sussman, "Red Herring" (Northlight Theatre).

LIGHTING DESIGN: Chris Binder, "Lookingglass Alice"; T. J. Gerckens, "Silk"; Michael Rourke, "Kabuki Lady Macbeth"; Diane Ferry Williams, "Beauty and the Beast"; Diane Ferry Williams, "Sunset Boulevard."

MUSICAL DIRECTION: Eugene Dizon, "Closer Than Ever"; Eugene Dizon, "Sweeney Todd"; Joel Hoekstra, "It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues"; Doug Oberhamer, "Swing!"; Doug Peck, "Hello Again."

ORIGINAL INCIDENTAL MUSIC: Alaric Jans, "Measure for Measure"; Alaric Jans, "The Merry Wives of Windsor"; Aaron Krister Johnson, "Peer Gynt"; Andre Pluess & Ben Sussman, "Red Herrin"; Andre Pluess & Ben Sussman, "Silk."

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT: John Boesche, "Sunset Boulevard" (for Projection Design); Sylvia Hernandez-DiStasi, "Lookingglass Alice" (for Circus Choreography); Robin H. McFarquhar, "Romeo and Juliet" (for Fight Choreography); John Musial and HMS Media Inc., "1984" (for Film Design); Pablo Perea, "Two Sisters and a Piano" (for Murals).

Caption: Barbara Robertson plays the title character and Michael F. Goldberg is Macbeth in "Kabuki Lady Macbeth," nominated for several Jeffs. Porchlight Music Theatre's production of "Sweeney Todd," with Michael Lindner (left) and Rebecca Finnegan, has been nominated for Jeff Awards.

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