Photo Credit Dan Norman

And the 'Professional Acceptance and Validation' goes to...

https://minnesotaplaylist.com/magazine/article/2018/and-the-professional-acceptance-and-validation-goes-to

Awards, what do they mean? Really?

BY ERIN ROBERTS | OCTOBER 9, 2018

SAVE THIS ARTICLE

Full transparency; I'm that person who has imagined my
Oscar speech since I was a child. How will I react when my name is called? Will I have a prepared speech or speak off the cuff? Who would I thank? (Apparently if I don't include my sister by name she's officially "done" with me). It'a a romantic high stakes fantasy, knowing that at any moment they will cue the music and play you off the stage "but wait...just ONE more thing!" But I think you'd be hard pressed to find someone who hasn't had this type of fantasy, whatever profession they're in. So why do we all want to "take home the hardware?" What does it mean on a personal or professional level? Is it truly "all downhill from here" once you've nabbed The Nobel Prize, The Pulitzer, An Academy Award, The Booker Prize, The Wolf Prize, just to name a few of the highest accolades in the world...

I recently attended the newly minted Minnesota Theater Awards and wanted to write a wrap up response to the evening, but first I was interested in finding out the psychological and perhaps social purpose for these events, the "why" if you will.

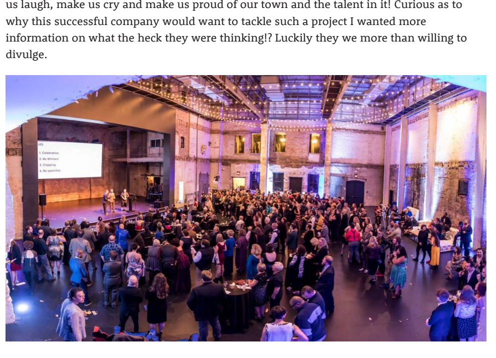
According to an online interview with a Dr. Jana Gallus, there are various reasons why "people give awards" and "organizations choose to create" them. One reason is to "establish status and gain reputation." Another reason is to "shape a field and influence the direction that a field takes." Gallus suggests that If you're trying to measure fields where quality and standards are based on taste, trends and subjectivity (as in the arts), creating an award can influence what is to be considered the ultimate ideal. By doing this you can also channel attention and create role models. From there you can determine who fits the ideal, who's in the in, who's out, who's challenging the status quo, implying that awards are how a field is shaped and then how it morphs and changes. In establishing what is considered quality, you influence the production of the art in the future, but only if the award is valuable enough to be something that people seek to achieve, to attain. In other words, people want to make things that other people will like AND see as successful. "Winning" a renowned award can give you that coveted high status and success. It's pretty fascinating really. Enough psycho babble, now how does this translate to us and our community? https://www.dinnerpartydownload.org/why-do-we-give-out-awards/

Until recently, the Twin Cities performing arts scene was celebrated with the anual IVEY Awards that were created in 2004 .[1] In an effort to acknowledge the ever-growing theater community, it provided our theater professionals and theater-goers an "annual celebration and recognition ceremony," honoring the previous year's theater season and theatrical accomplishments. The evening consisted of performances (ranging from musical theater, dance, scenes), award presentation, and lifetime achievement recognition.

For all intents and purposes, it read very similar to your classic Tony or Academy Awards format (minus the actual categories which is still a bit confusing to me). However, in the Spring of 2018, the announcement went live. The Ivey's would be no more. SO NOW what? How would our small yet mighty theatre community continue to establish standards, quality and in some cases even those boundaries that we need then to push?

Enter the ambitious quartet of local favorites, Four Humors.

As a well know local theatre company their mission statement articulates their desire to create art with humor, stupidity, and beauty...by letting the artist connect with the audience in a vulnerable and honest way. Who better than to take on this inherent challenge, make us laugh, make us cry and make us proud of our town and the talent in it! Curious as to why this successful company would want to tackle such a project I wanted more information on what the heck they were thinking!? Luckily they we more than willing to divulge.



What made you want to take on this endeavor?

When the Ivey's announced in March that they wouldn't be coming back, we saw an opportunity to celebrate the community that we love. Our mission statement speaks specifically to connections and celebration, so we couldn't think of a better way to bring together our friends, peers, and colleagues than with an evening focused on celebrating the great work that we all strive so hard to create and share with the world. Also, it was important to us that we do the show this year, even though it was a mad scramble. The fact that all the great work from the previous year would have to go by, uncelebrated or reflected on, outweighed waiting for another year until everything was perfectly in place. Just like in producing a piece of theater, if we waited for everything to be perfectly in place, no performances would ever happen.

What do community awards mean to you? What do you feel they represent?

We really thought the awards we're more of a resume builder and the most important part of the actual night was the celebration. So the whole thing was to lift up artists and organizations any way we could and then come together on one night and have a ton of fun.

What were some of the unexpected road blocks you encountered?

No too many roadblocks just bumps. This project went from a crazy idea to a fully formed event in just a little under 6 months. We definitely had to change details along the way as we collaborated and spoke with the community, but the celebratory nature and underlying intent of the project remained our course throughout the entire process.

Talk about your decision to just announce and celebrate the honorees?

When we tallied the first round of results, we just didn't see the whole community being represented. When we reopened the ballots, we heard from a wider breadth of the community, but the overall results didn't change much. We realized there was a fatal flaw with our "top vote-getter" metric, so we scrapped it almost completely and instead used the results from the ballots in combination with email and in-person conversations we were having with concerned community members to create a new system aimed at more equitable and representative results. We didn't change or make-up any of the votes, but we did change how we interpreted that information. Our biggest lesson was, as long as there are votes involved there will be disenfranchised voters.

What would you change moving forward? Do you plan on moving forward with this?

We are waiting a little while to have this conversation. If we were to have had this conversation right after the celebration we would have all said yes instantly but we need to let the success of the night wear off so we can remember all of the work that went into it before we make that decision. If we do continue towards a year two, we'll need more financial buy-in and support from people and organizations with the means to do so, and we'll need to fundamentally reconsider the nomination process to ensure equitable representation both in planning and participation.

What feedback did you get post event? Positive and/or negative?

The response has been overwhelming positive. We knew we were going to get at least a few emails with large complaints about the night but we are still waiting for those (that isn't an invitation by the way). We knew we had a fun night planned but we had no clue as to how it would be received and so far it has been very positive. Except the sound quality and that had more to do with not having time to do a proper sound check. I (Jason) certainly didn't help with the opening of the night by screaming "Hello!" into the most sensitive mic on the podium.

Scratchy sound (and Mr. Ballweber's personal volume control aside) I have to give them credit. As much as awards might be needed to maintain standards and encourage pushing boundaries I think sometimes then can also have a negative effect on people, individuals or companies alike. Art IS subjective and so not winning an award can feel like a failure when it really isn't. The gentlemen of FH's made the evening a party, more Golden Globes than Oscar. People standing, sitting, chatting, drinking, it was wonderful to honor the honorees but also great to feel like a community that wasn't singling anyone out. I understand that it was their first go at it and that not having enough voter participation is what initially sparked the honoring of all the nominated folks, but i loved that! I was cheering for everyone, for people I didn't know but had clapped for after an awesome show, cheering for my friends who ran up grinning to share a hug with another honored nominee, cheering for myself for making the choice to join this particular midwestern niche! It all felt very inclusive and affirming and I really had a lovely time and left with a big smile on my face. I wasn't the only one.

"Thanks to Four Humors for shouldering the responsibility of organizing a new theatre event for Minnesota without missing a year. They realized the importance of a primary award system as part of a healthy theatre ecosystem, and were flexible enough to modify their original conception to better represent the intended community. I look forward to watching the awards grow from here."

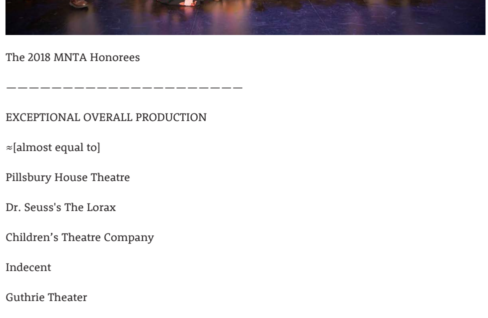
James Napoleon Stone

Artistic Director | Theatre Coup d'Etat

"I was skeptical at first, when I saw there were no actual Awards being given. As the night went on I realized I like the recognition better. It felt more inclusive. We have so much talent here in the Twin Cities and now with an average of five different people or groups being acknowledged a few more people get to shine! I look forward to next year!"

Charla Marie Bailey

Twin Cities Actor



The 2018 MNTA Honorees

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EXCEPTIONAL OVERALL PRODUCTION

≈[almost equal to]

Pillsbury House Theatre

Dr. Seuss's The Lorax

Children's Theatre Company

Indecent

Guthrie Theater

In the Heights

The Ordway and Teatro del Pueblo

This Bitter Earth

Penumbra Theatre

Two Mile Hollow

Theater Mu and Mixed Blood

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EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMATIVE DIRECTION

Amber Bjork - Direction

The Memory Box of the Sisters Fox - The Winding Sheet Outfit

Jason Hansen - Musical Direction

Assassins - Theater Latté Da

H. Adam Harris - Direction

Luna Gale - Underdog Theater

Wendy Knox - Direction

Revolt. She Said. Revolt Again. - Frank Theatre

Sarah Rasmussen - Direction

The Wolves - Jungle Theater

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EXCEPTIONAL DESIGN

Marcus Dillard - Lighting

Thaïs - Minnesota Opera

Man of La Mancha - Theater Latté Da

Assassins - Theater Latté Da

This Bitter Earth - Penumbra Theater

Arnulfo Maldonado - Set

Indecent - Guthrie Theater

Kathy Maxwell - Video Projection

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time - Mixed Blood Theatre

This Bitter Earth - Penumbra Theatre

A Crack in the Sky - History Theater

The Nether - Jungle Theater

Eli Sherlock - Set

Assassins - Theater Latté Da

Abbee Warmboe - Properties

The Ravagers - Umbrella Collective

Two Mile Hollow - Theater Mu and Mixed Blood Theatre

Underneath the Lintel - Theater Latté Da

Overall Design

The Skriker - Fortune's Fool Theatre

Joanna McLarnan - Lighting

Sean McArdle - Set

Terri Ristow - Properties

Tracy Swenson - Costume

Ariel Leaf - Makeup

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EXCEPTIONAL INDIVIDUAL PERFORMANCE

Joy Dolo

The Good Person of Szechwan - Ten Thousand Things

Becca Hart

The Wolves - Jungle Theater

Sam Landman

Prescription: Murder - Ghoulish Delights

Thomasina Petrus

Lady Day at Emerson's Bar and Grill - Jungle Theater

Miriam Schwartz

Indecent - Guthrie Theater

Maren Ward

Constance in the Darkness: A Musical in Miniature - Open Eye Figure Theatre

Hatchet Lady - Walking Shadow Theatre Company

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EXCEPTIONAL NEW WORK

Rachel Petrie and Keely Wolter

Fadeaway Girl - Raw Sugar

Harrison David Rivers, Ethan D. Pakchar, Douglas Lyons

Five Points - Theater Latté Da

Keith Hovis

Jefferson Township Sparkling Junior Talent Pageant: A New Musical - Keith Hovis

James Napoleon Stone

Moby Dick - Theatre Coup d'Etat

Derek Lee Miller and the Ensemble

The Privateer - Transatlantic Love Affair

Joey Hamburger, Iris Rose Page, and Michael Rogers

The Minotaur or: Amelia Earhart is Alive and Traveling Through the Underworld - Sheep Theater

Harrison David Rivers

This Bitter Earth - Penumbra Theatre

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EXCEPTIONAL ENSEMBLE PERFORMANCE

dat Black Mermaid Man Lady / The Show - Pillsbury House Theater

Ruthless - Theatre Elision

Speechless - The Moving Company

The Wiz - Children's Theatre Company and Penumbra Theatre Company

Two Mile Hollow - Theater Mu and Mixed Blood Theatre

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SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Steve Busa & Miriam Must

Red Eye Theater

Patrick Scully

Patrick's Cabaret

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WHO DID WE MISS?

Stage Managers:

Suzanne Cross

Lee Johnson

Andre Johnson, Jr.

Dylan Nicole Martin

Stacy McIntosh

John Novak

Nancy Waldoch

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EXCEPTIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Q-Stage and The Naked I - 20% Theater Company

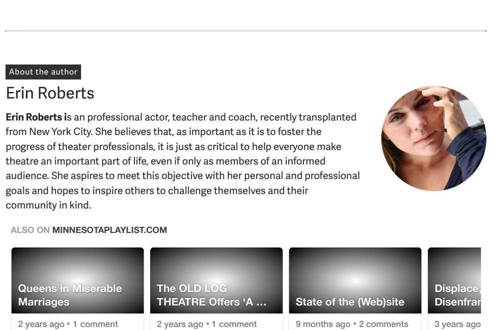
Blackout Improv - Blackout Improv

Radical Hospitality - Mixed Blood

Chicago Avenue Project - Pillsbury House Theater

Turtle Collective - Turtle Collective

For more info on the awards and lots of photos, please check out the website: https://www.mntheaterawards.com



About the author

Erin Roberts

Erin Roberts is an professional actor, teacher and coach, recently transplanted from New York City. She believes that, as important as it is to foster the progress of theater professionals, it is just as critical to help everyone make theatre an important part of life, even if only as members of an informed audience. She aspires to meet this objective with her personal and professional goals and hopes to inspire others to challenge themselves and their community in kind.

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