

EMBARGOED UNTIL 11PM SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2018 - THE 40TH ANNUAL AWARDS CELEBRATE THE STRENGTH OF THEATRE IN AND AROUND NEWCASTLE

2018 CONDA AWARDS 40TH ANNUAL PRESENTATION OF THE CITY OF NEWCASTLE DRAMA AWARDS WESTS NEW LAMBTON
DECEMBER 1 2018 EMBARGOED UNTIL 11PM SATURDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2018 More info: Ken Longworth, 0402 356 399 THE 40TH ANNUAL AWARDS CELEBRATE THE STRENGTH OF THEATRE IN AND AROUND NEWCASTLE TWELVE very different shows shared the trophies in the 23 categories in this year's CONDA Awards, with the musical *The Drowsy Chaperone*, which is subtitled "A Musical Within a Comedy", topping the wins with six awards. And the way the production teams handled the very demanding formats and kept audiences engrossed underlined the impressive growth of theatre in and around Newcastle in the 40 years since the awards began. Thirteen diverse companies and groups were involved in putting together the winning shows, among them a schools training group and experienced opera singers and performers. Likewise, shows that once would not have been considered as attracting audiences played to packed houses and had watchers repeatedly applauding. *The Drowsy Chaperone* was the first major production of a new company, High Street Productions. It won the trophies for Best Musical Production, Male Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical – Tyran Stig, Female Actor Under 18 – Zoe Walker, Ensemble Acting, Director of a Musical – Robert Stuart, and Musical Director or Vocal Director – James Laundon. And the quality of the works staged in the judging year – from November 1, 2017, to October 31, 2019 – was reinforced by the judges - Shane Bransdon, Michelle Gosper, Carl Gregory, Ken Longworth, and Guilherme Noronha – also awarding a Musical Director or Vocal Director CONDA to Mercia Buck, the musical director of Opera Hunter's *The Sound of Music*. The other shows to win CONDAs were *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (The Lowbrow Outfit), *Dark Matter* (Aspire: Catholic Schools Office), *Constellations* (Newcastle Theatre Company and Seated Ovation), *We Will Rock You* (Metropolitan Players), *I Love Books* (JD's World of Magic), *A Mystery Musical – "The Addams Family"* (The Very Popular Theatre Company), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Upstage Theatre), *Year of the Rooster* (Knock and Run Theatre), *Cock* (Stooged Theatre), and *Disney's Aladdin Jr* (Hunter Drama). The judges noted in their citation for *The Drowsy Chaperone's* Best Musical Production Award that "All elements of this musical production were in delightful harmony, perfectly balanced and timed, supporting and enhancing the charmingly wry atmosphere of this show within a show parody". The musical had an old man who was a musical fan playing an old recording of his favourite show, *The Drowsy Chaperone*, which premiered in 1928, with the actors coming alive as he recalled the story and occasionally made errors, so that the cast amusingly brought to life his mistakes. The production's director, Robert Stuart, won the Excellence by a Director – Musical award, with the citation saying that he "commanded and managed a production that rollicked along with snappy and clever set changes, a hugely talented cast, a visual feast of costuming and props and a uniformly indulgent sense of parody and fun from all". Tyran Stig collected the Excellence by a Male Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical trophy for his role as the man about to become a bridegroom, which had him roller skating while blinded by a towel in one scene as the old man confused the events, swiftly followed by a tap dancing routine. The judges said that "Tyran demonstrated enormous skill and talent in bringing the character of Robert Martin to life, making him a lovable, genuine, lively, entertaining and humorous oil tycoon while still maintaining the sense of parody of the American Musical of the 1920s". Zoe Walker won the Excellence by a Female Actor Under 18 category playing the bride-to-be, bringing "skill, maturity and talent to this deceptively complex and demanding role. She was the true triple threat, singing, acting and dancing her way through this musical in a manner that was completely appropriate for the stylistic demands of the show." And the show's award for Best Ensemble Acting showed the strength of all the performers, with the citation noting that it had "a brilliant cast of singing, dancing, blind roller skating, slapstick playing talent. All were having a marvellous time with such infectious joy and pure showmanship that audiences were bedazzled, highly entertained and satisfied that they had been in the hands of masters of their craft." And the same citation given to *The Drowsy Chaperone's* James Laundon and *The Sound of Music's* Mercia Buck for their Excellence by a Music or Vocal Director awards noted that "The orchestra and vocals were all in perfect pitch and balance throughout the entire production, taking us on an emotional and entertaining journey with aplomb and style". A second award for *The Sound of Music* went to Rachel Davies, for Excellence by a Female Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical. The musical is based on the story of the Von Trapp family of singers, who were forced by the Nazi invasion of Austria in the 1930s to flee the country. Rachel played a postulant nun, who was having trouble taking on a religious role, and was sent to look after the children of the wifeless head of the Von Trapp family, and eventually married him. The judges noted that "The role of Maria is a complex and demanding one and Rachel inhabited it with confidence, skill and abundant talent. She brought a genuine warmth and truth to a well known character, ensuring audiences were charmed and convinced by the determination and intelligence of Maria von Trapp". Two productions each collected three trophies: *The Lowbrow Outfit's* *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and the Catholic Schools Office performing arts training group *Aspire's* *Dark Matter*. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* won the awards for Best Dramatic Production, Male Actor in a Leading Role in a Drama or Comedy and Set and Props Design. And *Dark Matter* collected those for New Play or Musical Written for a Newcastle Company, Ensemble Acting Under 18, and Excellence by a Choreographer. *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* is a dark comedy by Irish playwright Martin McDonagh about a former rebel who returns to his small rural community to bury his pet cat after it dies and faces execution by his one-time

associates. The judges noted that "From the moment of entering the improvised theatre space at the Art Incubator and being handed a poncho the audience was captivated, appalled and delighted by this production. The stylised and functional set, simple but atmospheric lighting, glorious splattering of fake blood and body parts and marvellously energetic performances all combined to bring to life this black comedy classic." Lindsay McDonald, who won the leading male acting award, was praised for giving watchers the character Padraic, "the cat loving 'mad' leader of the Irish National Liberation Army with an insanely violent temper and a willingness to kill extending even to his own father, in all its paradoxical glory. He plunged into the violence and mayhem of this black comedy with unbridled energy and commitment to the macabre contradiction of a terrorist who could be emotionally distraught over a cat." And Cooper McDonald and Donny McDonald, who designed and created the set and props, were hailed for delivering "a stunning example of less is more," with a bare-framed set using trolleys and other simple devices to contain the action that "rollicked along with much torture and fake blood over everyone and everything".

Dark Matter, which was written by its director, Anna Kerrigan, looked at what happened in a secondary school that was put into an unexpected lockdown, with the students, teachers and assistants having very diverse reactions. The Best New Play citation noted that "Anna's script presents a complex narrative that gives insight into the various characters that inhabit a school setting, exposing the myriad of fears, anxieties and difficulties that many individuals and groups face on a daily basis. It cleverly provides a platform for diverse theatrical techniques and styles as well as keeping plots and subplots rollicking along".

The Best Under 18 Ensemble Acting category is a new one, introduced this year in view of the impressive work done by actors in very different works staged by theatre youth groups and schools. The judges said that "Every member of this challenging work brought strong commitment and belief to the stage, pushing past stereotypes and delivering real and individual characters with maturity, true emotion and depth." And Lauren Wheatley's choreography was noted as "edgy, challenging, exciting and highly physical. She worked brilliantly with the set and costuming, constantly surprising and engaging with completely original and inspired moves. The choreography in the girls' toilets invoked a feminist strength and determination that enhanced the themes and tone of the script."

Constellations, a play by English writer Nick Payne that looked at the different ways a couple who met at a barbecue reacted to each other or could have reacted was staged by Seated Ovation in association with Newcastle Theatre Company and collected two CONDAs, with Emily Daly winning for Excellence by a Female Actor in a Leading Role in a Drama or Comedy and Sebastian Winter for Excellence in Sound Design. Emily Daly's citation said "The rapid fire shifts in script, mood and intention required for the role of Marianne were brilliantly managed and delivered by Emily. She demonstrated an inspirational level of emotional, physical and vocal control, commanding the stage with confidence and aplomb." And Sebastian Winter, who played a piano onstage behind the two actors, was praised for "The subtle compositions he created and performed on stage which underscored and enhanced the mood, tone and atmosphere of this complex and rapidly shifting play, thus creating a dynamic that completely supported the stylistic demands of the work."

The Metropolitan Players musical We Will Rock You, set in a future world where popular music is banned, won two technical awards, with George Francis honoured for Excellence in Hair, Makeup and Wigs and Jacob Harwood for Excellence in Lighting and Audio-Visual Design. The judges said that "This production was greatly supported by George Francis' elaborate hair, wigs and make-up. The Killer Queen's towering red beehive, the platinum wigs of the conformist students, Buddy's hippy locks and the Bohemians' shaggy creative hairdos and wigs all assisted to create the futuristic dystopian world of iPlanet." And that Jacob Harwood made "This a visual feast of lighting that enhanced, supported and transported watchers through the epic journey of the Bohemians in a futuristic Orwellian techno world where Rock music is forbidden. From gentle night time forest scenes, to Killer Queen's futuristic lair and a derelict Tottenham Station, the lighting developed mood, shadows, focus and shape, culminating in a final audience blinding moment of theatrical rock showmanship."

Renowned Newcastle magician Joel Howlett won the Best Special Theatrical Event category with I Love Books, which he presented through his company JD's World of Magic. The judges noted that "Joel has created a unique and clever travelling special event for young people that incorporates magic, audience interaction, education, live animals and lots of puns and humour into a show that cleverly informs, motivates and engages his young audiences in an educational context."

The awards for actors in supporting roles went to performers in two very different shows. Phil McGrath collected the trophy for Excellence by a Male Actor in a Supporting Role for his character Uncle Fester in The Very Popular Theatre Company's A Mystery Musical, with that work turning out to be The Addams Family. His citation pointed to "Uncle Fester's Song to the Moon being an absolute delight in a role that Phil clearly totally enjoyed playing. His focused facial and physical command and subtle humour gently pulled us into his masterful and engaging performance." And Karen Lantry, winning the trophy for Excellence by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role for her performance as Dogberry in Upstage Theatre's presentation of the Shakespeare comedy Much Ado About Nothing, was acclaimed for making the dim-witted character a delight and captivating for audiences through her impressive command of physical comedy, strong sincere characterisation, and sharp comedic timing.

Will Parker collected the Excellence by a Male Actor Under 18 trophy for his role in Knock and Run Theatre's Year of the Rooster as a troubled young man living in a small country town where cock-fighting continues to take place. His citation said that "Will took us on a complete character journey arc, from gormless and downtrodden to confident and cocky, then finally somewhat defeated, yet changed. It was a humorous and skilful performance that demonstrated a mature understanding and command of the stylistic demands of the play."

Mathew Lee was named for Excellence by a Director – Drama or Comedy for his staging of Stooged Theatre's Cock, a comedy-drama by England's Mike Bartlett that looks at the relationships between a young man who is increasingly unsure of his sexuality, his gay male partner, and a woman he meets while travelling to work, with the pair attracted to each other. The judges said "Mathew kept this play on its toes by stripping the set to a stark bare space with minimal props, thus essentially removing any chance to relax. Hence, the characters prowled and circled one another in a beautifully evocative and playful manner, creating spaces, simulating sexual encounter and creating constant tension and surprise."

Jennifer Ellicott collected the award for Excellence in Costume Design for her work on Hunter Drama's Disney's Aladdin JR. The judges noted that watchers "were immediately transported into the world of a mythical, cartoon Arabia by the brilliant costumes. Individually tailored and detailed, all costumes had to be

adaptable to support multiple casts yet still create unique characters for every member of the production. Fabrics and accessories were evocative and finely detailed, and everything worked together to create a flowing swirl of colourful fun.” The Award for Outstanding Contribution and Achievement in Newcastle Theatre was presented by the judging team to Out of the Square Media (OOTS), a Newcastle promotional company which recognises the cultural and economic value of our local theatre industry and the need for local businesses to provide support for and promotion of the performing arts. Their philanthropic contribution to the industry has taken many forms. In 2016 OOTS used its professional personnel to develop, launch and manage TheatreNewcastle, a website platform that broadcasts all local productions, auditions and supports practitioner profiles. Since 2014, OOTS has provided the video packages, voiceovers and audio visual elements for the CONDA Awards Ceremony. In 2018 they designed and developed the re-branding of CONDA in conjunction with the launch of the new trophy. They provided an expert on social media to deliver a professional development course at this year’s CONDA Summit. And they have pledged a dollar-for-dollar match for an industry campaign to promote our theatre industry and increase the audience base. The team at Out of the Square are role models amongst the business community. Their contribution and community-minded leadership is inspirational. This award, acknowledges their significant contribution to the Newcastle theatre industry. The awards night also saw the announcement of two CONDA Youth Ambassadors aged 18 or under, one male and one female, under a program that was introduced in 2016 to give younger performers a broader outlook on the role theatre plays in the lives of participants and community members. Thirty-four applicants, all with impressive theatre credits, applied to be youth ambassadors in 2019. The new ambassadors, chosen by the CONDA judges, are Laura McKay and Will Parker. Laura McKay has developed her skills in drama, dance and music, and has a great passion and appreciation for the arts, having worked in all aspects of theatre production for a variety of theatre companies. She demonstrates strong leadership qualities, is confident, reliable and dedicated and regards theatre as an inspiring art form that benefits many lives. Laura believes that youth should be included in the planning for more theatre opportunities and have a greater understanding of how the CONDAs operate and provide opportunities for performers across the region. Will Parker has extensive experience in the region working with a variety of youth and adult companies. He demonstrates strong commitment to and expertise in performance skills and actively seeks and undertakes leadership opportunities in the performing arts arena, having already directed a major production. He wants to gain a deeper appreciation for the skill and dedication of his peers and friends in the Newcastle theatre community and to become more aware of the work of the Newcastle CONDA community with the view to building even stronger working relationships and to become a conduit for the voices of his peers. The Youth Ambassador Program, supported financially by Newcastle theatre promoter Don Mitchell, enables the recipients to attend local theatre company shows on a complimentary basis, be observers at CONDA Inc meetings to learn how the organisation operates, and attend other CONDA functions and the awards ceremony. Support from the theatre industry for young performers is also given by Music Theatre International (Australasia) which sponsors the two CONDA Awards for performers aged under 18. This year’s CONDA Awards were dedicated to the memory of 10 Newcastle region theatre participants who died in the past 12 months: Scott Allan, Luka Burt, Linda Cox, Victor Emeljanow, Carole Frazer, Isaac Lourie, Robyn Thomas, Robert Walker, Ken Walmsley, and Gillian Worthington. The City of Newcastle Drama Awards are presented by CONDA Inc (the City of Newcastle Drama Association) THE 2018 CONDA WINNERS Outstanding Contribution and Achievement in Newcastle Theatre: Out of the Square Youth Ambassadors: Laura McKay and Will Parker Dramatic Production: The Lieutenant of Inishmore, The Lowbrow Outfit Musical Production: The Drowsy Chaperone, High Street Productions Special Theatrical Event: I Love Books, JD’s World of Magic New Play or Musical Written for a Newcastle Company: Dark Matter, by Anna Kerrigan (Aspire: Catholic Schools Office) Male Actor in a Leading Role in a Drama or Comedy: Lindsay McDonald, The Lieutenant of Inishmore (The Lowbrow Outfit) Female Actor in a Leading Role in a Drama or Comedy: Emily Daly, Constellations (Newcastle Theatre Company and Seated Ovation) Male Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical: Tyran Stig, The Drowsy Chaperone (High Street Productions) Female Actor in a Leading Role in a Musical: Rachel Davies, The Sound of Music (Opera Hunter) Male Actor in a Supporting Role: Phil McGrath, A Mystery Musical – “The Addams Family” (The Very Popular Theatre Company) Female Actor in a Supporting Role: Karen Lantry, Much Ado About Nothing (Upstage Theatre) Male Actor Under 18: Will Parker, Year of the Rooster (Knock and Run Theatre) Female Actor Under 18: Zoe Walker, The Drowsy Chaperone (High Street Productions) Ensemble Acting: The Drowsy Chaperone (High Street Productions) Ensemble Acting Under 18: Dark Matter (Aspire: Catholic Schools Office) Director (Drama or Comedy): Mathew Lee, Cock (Stooged Theatre) Director (Musical): Robert Stuart, The Drowsy Chaperone (High Street Productions) Musical Director or Vocal Director: Mercia Buck, The Sound of Music (Opera Hunter) and James Laundon, The Drowsy Chaperone (High Street Productions) Choreographer: Lauren Wheatley, Dark Matter (Aspire: Catholic Schools Office) Costume Design: Jennifer Ellicott, Disney’s Aladdin Jr (Hunter Drama) Hair, Make-up and Wigs: George Francis, We Will Rock You (Metropolitan Players) Set and Props Design: Cooper McDonald and Donny McDonald, The Lieutenant of Inishmore (The Lowbrow Outfit) Lighting and Audio Visual Design: Jacob Harwood, We Will Rock You (Metropolitan Players) Sound Design: Sebastian Winter, Constellations (Newcastle Theatre Company and Seated Ovation)

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