

Critics Awards for Theatre in Scotland 2011

Catherine Wheels today emerged as the leader at this year's Critics' Awards For Theatre In Scotland ceremony at Edinburgh's Festival Theatre. The children's theatre specialists – who are also based in the capital – secured victory in an impressive three of the ten categories overall – with their show *White* winning Best Production For Children And Young People, Best Technical Presentation and Best Design.

✖ Ankur Productions/Pachamama Productions received six nominations for their hard-hitting, site-specific play *Roadkill* which dramatically explored the growing problem of sex-trafficking in Scotland. Cora Bissett's bold and uncompromising piece took the coveted award for Best Production while Mercy Ojelade's powerful depiction of the play's central character Mary won her the top honour in the Best Female Performance category.

The Traverse Theatre scooped two awards for their bawdy but brilliant Christmas show *The Three Musketeers And The Princess Of Spain*, which edged out strong competition to win the Best New Play and Best Ensemble sections.

Dundee Rep, nominated in five categories, clinched the winning Best Male Performance for a second year running. David Birrell picked up the award for the title role in *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber Of Fleet Street*. Meanwhile, Hilary Brooks picked up a second award for the Rep and *Sweeney Todd*, as, for the first time, the honour for Best Music And Sound was awarded jointly to two productions. Alasdair Macrae shared the commendation for his work on the National Theatre of Scotland's *The Strange Undoing Of Prudencia Hart*, penned by ten-time nominee David Greig.

In one of the most fiercely-contested categories, Muriel Romanes was named Best Director for *The Age Of Arousal*, a co-production between Stellar Quines Theatre Company and the Royal Lyceum Theatre Company.

Now in its ninth year, The Critics' Awards For Theatre In Scotland took place today during a glamorous ceremony hosted by the multi-talented Scottish entertainer Clare Grogan. Now well established as a highlight in the theatrical calendar north of the border, the event was attended by some of the leading figures in Scottish theatre who celebrated alongside passionate theatre lovers.

Co-convener Mark Fisher, said: "The range of winners demonstrates the breadth and ambition of high-quality theatre in Scotland. The list embraces musicals, site-specific drama, children's shows and main stage theatre – each winner brilliant in their own distinctive way.

"We'd like to add a big thank you to all our sponsors, without whom the awards would not be possible. As well as STV sponsoring best female performance, Northern Light sponsoring best technical presentation and W&P Longreach – Theatre Insurance Brokers sponsoring best new play, we are particularly delighted to welcome Equity as sponsor of the best ensemble award. In addition to this, we are very grateful to The List for producing the programme, Appetite Direct for the catering and the Festival Theatre for hosting the ceremony and providing invaluable support. Naturally, the event would not have been the same without guest presenter Clare Grogan and the Jazz Bar Quartet."

The CATS judging panel for 2011 is made up of: Mary Brennan (The Herald), Mark Brown (The Sunday Herald and the Daily Telegraph), Neil Cooper (The Herald), Michael Cox (onstagescotland.co.uk), Robert Dawson Scott (The Times), Thom Dibdin (Edinburgh Evening News and The Stage), Mark Fisher (The Guardian), Joyce McMillan (The Scotsman), Gareth K Vile

(The Skinny) and Joy Watters (The Courier).

CATS WINNERS 2010 – 2011

BEST MALE PERFORMANCE: sponsored by W&P Longreach, Theatre Insurance Brokers

David Birrell as Sweeney Todd, Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street, Dundee Rep Theatre.

CATS co-convenor and theatre critic for The Guardian, Mark Fisher said: "Played by David Birrell, Sweeney Todd was a figure of unruffled determination: cool, enigmatic and self-contained. He was all the more chilling because he took no pleasure in his victories. And he sang beautifully."

BEST FEMALE PERFORMANCE: sponsored by STV

Mercy Ojelade as Mary, Roadkill, Ankur Productions/Pachamama Productions

Theatre critic for The Herald, Neil Cooper said: "It's easy to fake things on stage, but every second of Mercy Ojelade's performance as Mary, the young Nigerian girl trafficked in Roadkill, Ankur Arts and Pachamama's harrowing site-specific piece, was utterly, heartbreakingly believable. The transformation from a wide-eyed innocent arriving in a strange land to a brutalised young woman forced to grow up too soon was at times painful to watch, but Ojelade's fearless and unflinching performance was a captivating experience that audiences will never – and, in light of similar real life situations going on right now, must never – forget."

BEST ENSEMBLE: sponsored by Equity

☒ The Three Musketeers And The Princess of Spain, Traverse Theatre Company/Belgrade Theatre, Coventry/English Touring Theatre

Theatre critic for the Sunday Herald and Daily Telegraph, Mark Brown said: "It is no exaggeration to describe this show as the most brilliant piece of Christmas theatre to have been staged in Scotland in a generation, and that is down, in very

large part, to the immense talents, and the boisterous, comic energy, of the ensemble. One might have taken particular pleasure in Peter Forbes's apparently pregnant Porthos or Cliff Burnett's Aramis – who one still remembers as a “cross between Arsene Wenger and Peter Stringfellow” – but the truth is that this extraordinary production had kids and adults in raptures because every actor in Dominic Hill's superb ensemble was so wonderfully in tune with both Chris Hannan's fantastic script and the actors around them.”

BEST DIRECTOR:

Muriel Romanes, *Age Of Arousal*, Stellar Quines Theatre Company/Royal Lyceum Theatre Company

Theatre critic for *The Skinny*, Gareth K. Vile, said: “The diversity of approaches taken by this year's nominees represents the imagination and dynamism of Scottish theatre, from re-imagining of a classic through to a site-specific examination of a very contemporary problem. Yet our winner, Muriel Romanes, for *Age of Arousal* by Stellar Quines Theatre Company and the Royal Lyceum Theatre Company, demonstrated how the historical can shed light on the modern, and that political seriousness need not mean humourlessness.”

BEST DESIGN:

Shona Reppe (set and costumes) and Craig Fleming (lighting), *White*, Catherine Wheels Theatre Company

Theatre critic for *The Evening News* and *The Stage*, Thom Dibdin, said: “Great theatre design does not just illuminate its text, it adds to it. Shona Reppe's design and costumes for Catherine Wheel's *White* went one step further again. She created a white world of such invention that it could have existed on its own. But then you would have missed each intricate new detail as the show developed, the discoveries in each birdbox, the hilarity of using a toilet pedestal mat as an apron. Lighting white can be hell and Craig Flemming's simple design ensured that the lighting waxed and waned with

the passing of the day, Reppe's birdhouses lit up from the inside and a mirror-ball moon threw slivers of reflected light across the scene."

BEST MUSIC AND SOUND:

Hilary Brooks, Sweeney Todd, Dundee Rep Theatre

Alasdair Macrae, The Strange Undoing Of Prudencia Hart,
National Theatre of Scotland

Theatre critic for The Times and STV, Robert Dawson Scott, said: "We often end up comparing apples and pears but in the case of the music category this year it was more extreme than ever. How do you separate the challenge that Hilary Brooks had at Dundee, faced with one of the most demanding scores in all musical theatre to the challenge of writing new music, and combining that with much loved existing music to make something as wittily brilliant and contextually clever as Alasdair Macrae managed for Prudencia Hart. In the end, they were both tremendous achievements and we have decided that the Best Music And Sound category this year should be shared between Hilary Brooks and Ally Macrae."

BEST TECHNICAL PRESENTATION: sponsored by Northern Light White, Catherine Wheels Company

Theatre critic for www.onstagescotland.co.uk, Michael Cox, said: "White's technical artistry was not only a marvel to watch but was integral to the overall success of the production. From its sleight-of-hand tricks to its moving conclusion of seamlessly turning a white set into a massive celebration of colour, White's technical execution not only proved that small effects can have a large impact but that excellence in technical presentation is as important to the success of a production as any other component."

BEST PRODUCTION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE:

White, Catherine Wheels Company

Theatre critic for The Herald, Mary Brennan, said: "Good

theatre is good theatre – whatever age group it's intended for. White captivated pre-school tots with its ravishing transformation of an all-white world into a rainbow landscape. And if adults read the arrival of colour as a profound reflection on social values – well they too were totally smitten by the magical beauty of this show. How did they do it? It still remains a mystery – but it's a winner."

BEST NEW PLAY: sponsored by W&P Longreach, Theatre Insurance Brokers

The Three Musketeers and the Princess of Spain, Traverse Theatre Company/Belgrade Theatre, Coventry/English Touring Theatre

CATS co-convenor and theatre critic for The Guardian, Mark Fisher said "Chris Hannan's version of the famous Alexandre Dumas adventure stories was anarchic, witty, intelligent, rude, irreligious and coarse. It had all the swashbuckling sword fights and knockabout humour you could wish for, but it also told a story of self-discovery that was deeply moving. It was a script that was genuinely for all the family."

BEST PRODUCTION:

Roadkill, Ankur Productions and Pachamama Production

CATS co-convenor and theatre critic for The Scotsman, Joyce McMillan, said: "In the end, despite a terrific shortlist, there was no doubt about the outstanding choice as Best Production of 2010-2011. Roadkill, created by Cora Bissett and written by Stef Smith for Ankur Production and Pachamama, is a show that achieves the highest artistic standards in every area, from writing, acting and directing to design, sound and technical co-ordination. Even more importantly, though, it draws that artistic energy from the company's passion for its subject, and from their shared determination to make us aware of the scandal and tragedy of people-trafficking in our time – not as some distant problem in faraway places, but as something that is happening now, in the very fabric of our own

cities, and perhaps even in the flat next door.”

