



2019 Awards

[Feb. 10, 2020] — The San Diego Theatre Critics Circle is pleased to announce the winners of its 2019 Craig Noel Awards. Now in its 18th year, the Craig Noel Awards honor the achievements of professional theaters in San Diego County.

This year's 29 awards were presented before an audience of nearly 500 guests at the annual ceremony on Feb. 10, 2020, at the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation, 404 Euclid Ave., San Diego.

La Jolla Playhouse's "Cambodian Rock Band" won the year's Outstanding Dramatic Production award, while The Old Globe's "Almost Famous" won the award for Outstanding New Musical. Moonlight Stage Production's "West Side Story" is the year's Outstanding Resident Musical. And playwright Miranda Rose Hall's "The Hour of Great Mercy" was named Outstanding New Play in its world premiere at Diversionary Theatre.

Backyard Renaissance Theatre Company was singled out for the annual Don Braunagel Award for Outstanding Achievement by a Small Theater Company for its body of work in 2019.

The rarely-presented Director of the Year honor went to Rob Lutfy, who helmed four strong productions in 2019 at Cygnet Theatre, where he serves as associate artistic director.

The 2019 Actors of the Year are Cashae Monya and Michael Cusimano, who both performed impressively in four or more productions last year.

The year's Outstanding Ensemble award went to the cast of Cygnet Theatre's "Angels in America," Parts 1 & 2: Connor Sullivan, Wil Bethmann, Alex Bodine, Rosina Reynolds, James Newcomb, Rachael VanWormer, Kevane La'Marr Coleman and Debra



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Wanger. And the year's Outstanding Solo Performance award went to Ryun Yu, who starred in "Hold these Truths" at San Diego Repertory Theatre.

The first-ever Outstanding Specialty Artist award went to dialect and accent coach Vanessa Dinning who worked on eight productions at six San Diego theaters in 2019. And the year's Outstanding Young Artist is 12-year-old Catalina Zelles.

This was the first year the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle presented non-gender-specific awards in all of its performance categories.

The 2019 awardees were chosen by a nine-member body of professional critics who write for San Diego newspapers, magazines, online publications and blogs.

The 2019 Craig Noel Award recipients are:

Outstanding Dramatic Production

"Cambodian Rock Band," La Jolla Playhouse

Outstanding New Musical

"Almost Famous," The Old Globe

Outstanding Resident Musical

"West Side Story," Moonlight Stage Productions

Outstanding New Play



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“The Hour of Great Mercy” by Miranda Rose Hall, Diversionary Theatre

Don Braunagel Award for Outstanding Work by a Small Theater Company

Backyard Renaissance Theatre Company

Outstanding Director of the Year

Rob Lutfy (“The Virgin Trial,” “The Last Five Years,” “Pride and Prejudice,” “Marie and Rosetta”)

Actor of the Year

• Michael Cusimano (“Girlfriend,” “The Last Five Years,” “A Jewel in the Crown City,” “Lamb’s Players Festival of Christmas,” “The Tale of Despereaux”-swing)

• Cashae Monya (“Hedwig and the Angry Inch,” “Intimate Apparel,” “A Jewel in the Crown City,” “Little Shop of Horrors”)

Outstanding Young Artist/Sandra Ellis-Troy Scholarship

Catalina Zelles – “Gabriel,” North Coast Repertory Theatre

Outstanding Specialty Artist

Vanessa Dinning (dialects/accents/musical performance)



Outstanding Direction of a Play

Chay Yew – “Cambodian Rock Band,” La Jolla Playhouse

Outstanding Direction of a Musical

Barry Edelstein – “Life After” – The Old Globe

Outstanding Musical Direction

Bryan Perri – “Almost Famous,” The Old Globe

Outstanding Choreography

Colleen Kollar Smith – “Matilda the Musical,” Moonlight Stage Productions

Outstanding Scenic Design

Tony Cucuzzella – “An Experiment with an Air Pump,” Backyard Renaissance Theatre Company

Outstanding Sound Design

Steven Leffue – “Angels in America,” Parts 1 & 2, Cygnet Theatre

Outstanding Costume Design



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Elisa Benzoni – “Amadeus,” North Coast Repertory Theatre

Outstanding Lighting Design

Japhy Weideman – “Life After” – The Old Globe

Outstanding Projection Design

Blake McCarty – “ 33 1/3 House of Dreams,” San Diego Repertory Theatre

Outstanding Ensemble

“Angels in America,” Parts 1 & 2, Cygnet Theatre

Outstanding Solo Performance

Ryun Yu – “Hold These Truths,” San Diego Repertory Theatre

Outstanding Lead Performance in a Play

• Tamara McMillian – “Intimate Apparel,” New Village Arts

• Andrew Oswald – “The Hour of Great Mercy,” Diversionary Theatre

Outstanding Featured Performance in a Play



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• **Jessica John – “An Experiment with an Air Pump,” Backyard Renaissance Theatre Company**

• **Daisuke Tsuji – “Cambodian Rock Band,” La Jolla Playhouse**

Outstanding Lead Performance in a Musical

• **Sophie Hearn – “Life After” – The Old Globe**

• **Jeremy Wilson – “Hedwig and the Angry Inch,” Diversionary Theatre**

Outstanding Featured Performance in a Musical

• **Courtney Arango – “West Side Story,” Moonlight Stage Productions**

• **Charles Evans, Jr. – “Million Dollar Quartet,” Lamb’s Players Theatre**

This year’s awards ceremony was organized by event chair Julie Sarno. Financial support was provided by individual donors Larry and Dawn Alldredge; Lon and Denise Bevers; Stanley Cohen; Jay and Julie Sarno; Bill and Judy Garrett; Harvey and Sheryl White; Dea and Osborn Hurston; Weston Anson; Wendy Nash; Jerry Buckley; Nancy Richards; Ralph Johnson; Arthur and Marilyn Neumann; and Darlene Davies. The event was also underwritten by sponsors: the Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation; UC San Diego and Mike Napoli & Performing Arts Live.

Founded in 1983 and re-established in 2002, the San Diego Theatre Critics Circle is an independent, nonprofit organization of print and online theater critics dedicated to open and honest dialogue about theater in San Diego County and to honoring artistic excellence. The members of our organization are professional critics writing for daily



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newspapers, magazines, entertainment trade publications and websites in San Diego County. In 2002, the awards were renamed in honor of Craig Noel, longtime artistic director at San Diego's Old Globe Theatre and the founding father of San Diego's theater community, who passed away in 2010.