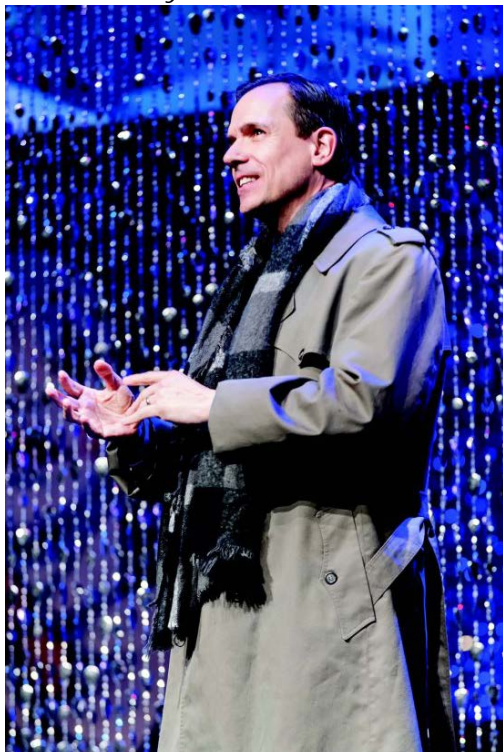


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Town Hall's 'Angels in America' wins Best Director, Best Actor awards

Submitted by Linda Drucker



Jeff Draper performs a monologue from Angels at the Shellies award ceremony. Photo provided

Town Hall Theatre of Lafayette was honored with two Shellie Awards for its 2016 production of Tony Kushner's cutting-edge drama "Angels in America: Perestroika." Town Hall's former artistic director Joel Roster received the Best Director award for his role in directing the Angels in America production and Jeffrey Draper received the Best Actor award for his role as the leading actor in the epic drama.

"Perestroika" is the second part of Tony Kushner's epic Pulitzer-winning masterpiece about the unfolding of the AIDS epidemic in America. In 2016, Town Hall previously won four Shellie awards for its production of the first part of the Angels series: "Angels in America: Millennium Approaches."

In accepting his award, Roster noted the unusual nature of the "Angels in America" production, which required a large ensemble cast of actors to commit to remain together for two separate productions over the course of two seasons. "I want to thank everyone associated with Town Hall Theatre, which was my artistic home for 14 years, for making this possible," he said.

In accepting his award, Draper commended Town Hall's achievement of producing such an ambitious work in a community theater. "It takes a lot of guts to put on an epic production in a tiny theater with a tiny budget," said Draper. He added that the "Angels" series was proof of the fact that "you can challenge your audience" and still create successful local theater.

"I'm thrilled that Town Hall was recognized with two such important awards - Best Director and Best Actor," said the President of Town Hall's Board Lauren Rosi. "I'm excited about the next two shows in our 2016-2017 season which continue with Town Hall's tradition of excellence."

The awards were bestowed at a lavish black-tie ceremony at the Leshner Center for the Arts in Walnut Creek on the evening of Saturday, Jan. 14. The ceremony was attended by numerous local government dignitaries including Lafayette Mayor Mike Anderson, along with the mayors of Walnut Creek, Concord, Brentwood, and the vice mayor of Clayton. The awards ceremony was a glitzy affair with men in tuxedos and women in full-length gowns and was followed by a sumptuous wine and dessert reception for the honorees.

One of the highlights of the evening occurred when the various theater companies performed scenes from their nominated productions. In addition to Draper's reprise of a monologue from his role in Angels, a company of 10 Town Hall actors and singers, led by Managing Director Dennis Markham, performed the song "There You Are," from Town Hall's production of the musical "The Mystery of Edwin Drood" in September 2015.

In addition to the two awards won by Town Hall, Walnut Creek actress Lynda Divito - who just joined the Town Hall Board of Directors - was honored as Best Actress in a Musical award for her role as Rose in Contra Costa Musical Theatre's production of "Gypsy."

Patterned after the Tony awards, the Shellies have honored outstanding achievement in the performing arts for the last 38 years in Contra Costa County. Town Hall, which has continuously operated as a theater for 73 years, proudly displays many of the Shellies it has won over the years in a showcase in the theater's lobby at 3535 School Street in Lafayette.

Town Hall's next production "Smokey Joe's Cafe," a musical revue featuring the songs of Jerry Stoller and Mike Lieber, begins previews March 2 and opens March 4. Tickets, which cost \$25 to \$32, can be purchased online at www.townhalltheatre.com or by calling the box office at (925) 283-1557.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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