

**Dora Review Division: Dance Town Hall**

Wednesday, September 13, 2017 3:00pm – 5:30pm at Crows Theatre

Moderator: Jennifer Brewin

Full transcript is available upon request, what follows is a brief outline detailing important conclusions and points of contention during the meeting.

Introductions:

Kate Cornell, Graham Curry, Amelia Ehrhardt, Patricia Fraser, Maxine Heppner, Peter Kelly, Andres Roberts, Robert Sauvey, Brodie Stevenson, Christopher Stowell, Jennifer Watkins, Gein Wong, Cindy Yip, Andrea Vagianos, Jim Aldridge, Margo Charlton, Shana Hillman, Jennifer Brewin, Alexis Da Silva-Powell, Scott Dermody, Chris Goddard, Jacoba Knappen.

Margo: Introduction to process

JB: review of documents, process and agenda

Topics not on the agenda, brought up for discussion:

- Dora Eligibility (re: number of performances, TAPA membership)
- Costume design is unacknowledged
- Only opening night cast can be nominated

Agenda topics:

- Touring
- Design awards
- Ensemble category
- Male/Female outstanding performance awards
- Dora statue design

## Touring Award

SD: Some of the feedback we've been receiving is that it is difficult to adjudicate for the jurors, where it's a bit of a mixed bag, quote/unquote straight plays, versus musicals, versus multidisciplinary work and it's like comparing apple to oranges. Secondly, that the idea of recognizing artists that aren't in Toronto, or that they're imports basically... and some people have responded saying they aren't so sure that's necessarily a great idea- maybe we should be Toronto centric.

JK: Just to point out that there is also that TYA has a different touring definition, dance has a different touring definition and then there is a touring category that currently sits in the musical/opera/theatre division... so, it's not complex, but it is a bit complicated...

SD: Correct. Currently if there is a show that is identified as a touring production, so a TAPA member company presenting a non-member company from elsewhere, then it would be classified as a touring production and only eligible for the outstanding production category within the dance division.

The Dora's Should Celebrate Canadian Work Only:

- The Dora's should be celebrating Canadian work and there's lovely works that tour to Toronto but I don't think they should be receiving Toronto awards.
- It's sometimes unfair that a touring production that has more resources available to them can win an award when those resources aren't available to local companies.
- Toronto work stands in high regard across work that comes from all over the world, across the country and I think that's something to, to aspire to, I think that's something to pat ourselves on the back about
- The value ascribed to the Dora's has more currency within a local setting.
- If Toronto artists or Ontario artists can go out into the world and get awards other places, then the Dora's should be able to give an awards to touring productions.

Add a Separate Touring Award:

- You can fix the problem having an outstanding touring award and an outstanding production award. The people who are touring cannot be adjudicated in the outstanding production award, they have a separate award.
- Do not want to add more awards.
- The Dance Division only has seven awards, much less than other divisions.

#### Budgetary Issues:

- The jurors that are chosen should be skilled enough to distinguish between a large-scale production in a huge theatre with all the fancy lights as opposed to the small studio, with hardly any lights. Best production should have nothing to do with who has the fanciest lights.
  - This has to do with the touring issue because the touring companies in dance come here with a great deal more resources than just about any of us, including the bigger companies in Toronto.
- Part of the thing we're grappling with is- what is the intention of the award? If it means best production values- so most money spent on lighting, set, and costumes, then most productions in Toronto won't stand a chance against a touring company.
- What actually are the indicators that we're looking for in calling something outstanding?
- The community trusts the nominated jury members to make these decisions.

#### Dora Eligibility

(re: number of performances, TAPA membership)

- Confusion as a community member about eligibility.
  - Not understanding that companies weren't nominated for Dora's because they weren't eligible for whatever reason
- A lot of the excellent work that's being produced and presented here is not part of the award possibilities.
- Issues for some companies about the value of joining TAPA.
- Three performance minimum is a challenge for many companies (filling the house three nights in Toronto).
  - Challenge for juries to attend productions with such limited numbers of performances.
  - Would increase problems with juror attendance, which has gotten much better over the last six years.
- Could a preview performance count as one of the three, for eligibility purposes?
- Dance could just have its own award show, would not need to deal with TAPA eligibility.
  - Having dance as part of the Dora Awards allows dance to be recognized as part of the larger performing arts community.
- What do companies actually get out of TAPA membership? Many people unclear, believe TAPA is not geared towards dancers.

## Design Awards

JK: We had a community convening for the designers and one thing that they seemed to have shared agreement on was the desire to have a design award that recognized video projection and multimedia instillation and whether that gets wrapped up into scenic, scene design, or lighting design. They are not TAPA members to be clear, and there seems to be a disconnect with some of the designers and the producers, they've shared that theory.

Rename the Lighting Design Award:

- Currently the Lighting award includes video.
- Could call it visual design or environment design instead.
- The idea of an environmental design award is a good way to encapsulate the visual aspects of a production. Many lighting designers are working in video and building spaces and it can also include outdoor spaces and other theatre situations that do not have lights that are currently ineligible.
- It would be confusing if from year to year people working in different disciplines won, for example, a costume person one year, and a lighting designer the next.
  - Adding awards is contentious. Goes back to earlier argument that the Dance division only has seven awards.
- Should be able to nominate a team of design people for one design award. They function together and the production would not be the same without all the individual design aspects.
- Currently you can nominate a lighting team or a sound design team (but it does not include anything else)
- Prefer the term visual design, environment is confusing because it sounds like climate change.

Costume Design is Unacknowledged:

- Currently you can nominate a lighting team or a sound design team, but it does not include costume designers or other visual aspects.
- If we called the award outstanding visual design, and the included costume design within that, it would be a contentious topic- a lot of designers feel that it's very separate.
  - Currently, there is no award available to costume designers in the dance division.
  - Many dance companies do not have a costume designer. Who would they nominate?
  - You do not have to nominate anyone in that case.

- It would be nice to recognize costumes somehow. Especially with how people are creating their work.
- If there's a costume or construction that completely transforms the body, is that not visual design?
- If the title of this award is changed to environmental design, then what a performer is wearing is a very important aspect of design, and could be seen as part of the environment. If TAPA is trying to keep the same number of awards then I think costumes can be part of the visual aspects, whether it's the production elements or not.

### **Outstanding Performance, Ensemble**

JK: This award came as a result of the review six years ago. The dance division had an outstanding performance award, and then it expanded to outstanding performance ensemble, outstanding performance male, and outstanding performance female.

Have Individuals Nominated in both Categories:

- Why can't we put everybody on the ensemble and then say, this is my soloist?
  - Nominate an individual under both categories.
    - We had complaints from the members, that people were double-dipping and it was changed so individuals could not be nominated twice for the same performance.

Change Registration Protocol:

- Confusion about registration. Some members unaware that they could change from individual to ensemble or vice versa.
  - Changes can be made up until the show is open.
- Make the jurors decide who is ensemble and who is individual.
- In general, for respect for the producers who are investing the money in the production, that decision needs to be made by them, not by some potentially subjective group.

Logistics of Programs and Cast Boards/Uncredited Work:

- Regardless of what the producer presents to you as their choice, the work that you see in front of you doesn't always match.

- When not familiar with the whole company a juror may have no idea who they are looking at as the soloist.
- Many dance companies do not have programs
  - Or programs with no photos of the performers.
  - No cast board in the lobby of the performance space.
- TAPA should require programs.
  - Not just because the juror can't identify whose dancing in front of them, but dancers, visual artists, choreographers, need to be credited for their work.
  - What if a company decides to put on an anarchist performance against convention? TAPA should not be making these rules. Artistic directors need to be able to make their own decisions.
  - Company with no programs should supply jurors with information in advance.
  - Could require TAPA companies to have programs available online.
    - Some companies have no website/online resources.
  - It's an advocacy point that everyone involved in a production should be credited.

Consensus to Keep the Ensemble Award:

- The spirit of the ensemble award is really valuable. In the dance community, the ensemble work that happens on stage in any performance is really essential.
- A lot of choreographers are crediting their ensemble as creators. That's a whole other topic, but that's also part and parcel of this conversation- how are ensembles creating, how are ensembles performing, how is that reflected in the Dora's?

## Outstanding Performance Male/Female

JB: Are those two categories a useful representation of what's happening on our stages? Are they still valuable?

JK: TAPA participated in Modern Times Stage Companies' three-day symposium called Beyond Representation. We had a panel discussion that was chaired by Brendon Pealey and there were three people on the panel including Gein Wong, who is here today with us, regarding casting on-stage, as well as how the art form is changing, and check boxes and check lists and how we can hear and understand that that is changing.

GW: Two points that were really important came out of it, well first of all, the whole issue came from a dancer registering in dance, this had come from the field, and for me one of the things that I observed is that, in terms of time, that if you look at 15-year-olds right now, the issue of a gender binary, of male and female, it's not an issue. The idea of gender-fluidity is very, commonplace. When these 15-year-olds become professional dancers in five, ten, years, there's going to be more and more conversations about male and female, about binaries, it's a conversation that will continue to grow. We are in a position right now, to lead with decision-making in that way. For me personally, as an indigenous artist, what's also really important is that the gender binary is a product of colonization, on this land, male and female did not exist the way it does right now. Talking about this is also a part of decolonizing how we are and how we are as artists on this land.

### Concerns About Moving to a Single Performance Award:

- What happens if we go to non-binary but we have five men nominated in Best Performance? How to allow for some equity in the choices for best performance?
  - If the jurors put forward a list of nominations that included exclusively white people, that there'd be somebody in the room that would object to the situation. If we moved to a gender non-specific performance category or categories, that again, there would be somebody in the room, who would object to all five nominees being male.
  - We need to trust the jury of our peers, to be able to really make that decision, to the best of their ability, to determine who is the most outstanding performer and hope that equity is considered in their decision-making process.
  - The jurors are extremely thoughtful and really, profoundly think through these questions.
- Losing a dance award that was hard-fought to get during the last review.
  - Have a soloist award.

- Vast majority of contemporary dance doesn't have soloists.
  - Still have two awards, both gender non-specific.
  - Same exact award, just given to top two nominees.
- Consensus that they want to eliminate the gendered language around the award.

#### Only Opening Night Cast Can be Nominated:

- Often times if a performer doesn't do the opening night it's because they're making their debut in something. They've really, made immense strides and huge impact, and that should be recognized.
  - There's a logistical trick to that which is to make sure then that your jurors see the nights of all the different casts.
- It came out of the review from six years ago that it was a problem for jurors to be able to compare two different casts against each other and have two different casts eligible for the same thing, within the same category. It became very problematic- it was addressed this way.
  - More than one dancer was nominated for the same production on different evenings?
  - That could've happened and it could happen also in TYA, child performers, where Jane Doe would perform on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays, and Jen Doe perform Thursday, Fridays, and Saturdays.
- It is also an issue of Jury capacity and how many times one can see the same piece.

#### Dora Awards Statue

The Dora statue originally designed by John Romano in 1979. It is a Commedia del Arte figure. This figure was on Dora Mavor Moore's letterhead and he was inspired. 10 years ago, Philip Aiken tried to get rid of it. Doesn't reflect the different disciplines or creators. There was a working group but they came to no agreement.

- Some cannot identify its gender, consider that a bonus.
  - Technically a male figure.
    - Represents European, patriarchal society.
    - Commedia del Arte not representative of dance.
- Too expensive.
- Suggestion of an image of Dora Mavor Moore.
- Something abstract.
- Ditch the statue, use a disc.