

Dora Review Division: Musical/Opera Town Hall

Tuesday, September 12, 2017 3:00pm – 5:30pm at Theatre Passe Muraille

Moderator: Jenny Ginder

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

Introductions all around:

Bronwen Bradley, Jennifer Brewin, Regine Cadet, Jenna Douglas, Shawna Green, John Karastamatis, Rachel Krehm, Keith Lam, Christina Loewen, Jonathan MacArthur, Allen MacInnis, Mitchell Marcus, Andy McKim, Michael Mori, Alexandra Skoczylas, Brett Randall, Amy Mushinski, Jim Aldridge, Annemieke Wade, Gein Wong, Alexis Da Silva-Powell, Scott Dermody, and Jacoba Knaapen.

Scott plays slideshow, there is an explanation of the review process by Scott and Jacoba.

JG: review of documents, process and agenda

Topics not on the agenda, brought up for discussion:

- Combination of opera and musical in one division, they share seven awards
- Sound design as a topic, a separate award
- Independent Theatre has a category but Independent Opera does not

Agenda topics:

- Male/Female Outstanding Performance Awards
- Ensemble Category
- No spot for projectionists in the design awards
- Dora statue (at the request Dora Review Committee chair, Margot Carlton)- came up in both Independent and General Theatre Town Halls

Musical Theatre and Opera Sharing a Division

JK: The combination of Musical Theatre and Opera sharing a division came out of the last Dora Review Cycle which took place six years ago. There was no Musical Theatre Division at that time. About 27-28 years ago there was a musical theatre review and then they stopped being done. So that is part of how it evolved over the last three decades and Opera only started to exist about 17 years ago as a Division. They collapsed into each other about six years ago, so it's quite new, that's the context.

Judging Musical Theatre and Opera together:

- Hard to judge a musical against an opera
- Opera has a tradition of remounting shows, musical theatre is more often new work
 - Currently we have a very specific definition regarding remounts and technically a remount itself cannot be considered twice during a five year period.
 - Six years is okay providing they didn't win any awards. If you won any award in any category then you are no longer eligible for that category after the five year period with the same production.
- Jurors with musical theatre backgrounds don't know enough about opera to judge it and vice versa
- Which awards are more easily combined?
 - Perhaps design
 - Definitely not production
- Musical Theatre and Opera are not combined in any other awards (this will be checked against research)
 - Olivier Awards in London have a separate opera division, though it only has one award, Best Opera Production
- Jury Selection: Not enough jury members have opera background
 - The jurors are cast through a Dora recruitment committee, which is chaired by someone on the TAPA board of directors. As part of the review six years ago, we opened it up so that anyone can nominate anyone as a juror. They are cast very strategically for range of experience as well as a balance of gender as well as a balance of discipline, a balance of race, etc.

Scales of Production:

- Difficult to judge an opera with a small budget against a big budget opera
- Could split them into categories based on budget.
 - There are only two big budget opera companies, COC and Opera Atelier
- Small producers of opera and musical theatre have more in common with the independent theatre division than their larger counterparts.
- Producers could have the option to put their independent opera under the Independent Theatre Division instead of the Opera Division (this is currently not possible).

- Before the last review, if you were a company of a certain size, you had to be in the Independent Theatre Division and it was uncomfortable to be the odd one out.

The Most Important Awards:

- New Musical, New Opera is most important award because it provides a boost to shows that need it the most.
- People would love to add more awards but worry over the length of the Doras already
- Suggestions to move technical/design awards to another night
 - This would need further discussion and would potentially insult designers
- At one time there was only one direction award, no musical direction
- At one time there was only one design award, outstanding design

Male/Female Outstanding Performance Awards

Right now there are two separate awards for male and female. I think the question is generally, is that the right way to be going now? Should there be a single performance award?

Voice Type:

- For Opera, you can be any gender you wish, but you belong to a specific voice type.
- For Musical Theatre, at the moment for the art that's being created, male/female is delineated by vocal type, agree with Opera
- Could you delineate them by type of voice instead?
 - categories based upon soprano, alto, tenor, baritone, bass
- If judging between a soprano and say a tenor is a difficult thing to do, then isn't judging between a tenor and a bass also a challenge? Vocal type is not a strong enough argument to keep male and female categories

Forcing People to Identify as one Gender:

- You should not force someone to make a decision to identify as male or female
- Offensive for the person who is identifying in a certain way, if they identify as male and are then put into the female category
- Ask the performer to choose where they identify more strongly
 - What if they don't identify as male or female?
- What if they were put into categories based on their roles?
- You judge a performance on its own merits. Either someone gives a very strong performance or interpretation of a role or they don't. It doesn't matter whether they're male or female.

If Just One Award:

- How do you deal with the politic of the combined if a jury one year decides that the five best performances in musical theatre were all men, or were all women, or it's been a man every year for five years
- If only one category for Best Outstanding Performance, have ten nominations.
- Performers may not be pleased about loosing an award.
- We need to pay attention to gender equity if we combine them.
- Add a "Featured Performance Award."

Ensemble Category

One of the changes made after the last Dora Review was the Ensemble category. So there's Outstanding Performance for an Ensemble, for both the Musical Theatre and the Opera Division.

What it Means:

- This category is strange because it means something different in different divisions.
 - lack of clarity in terms of what it is to be used for, when it comes to this division
- The producer has three options under the current system. You can choose to register every performer as an individual, you can choose to register every performer as a group/an ensemble, or you can do a mix where some individuals are an ensemble and other individuals are broken out of that group and are considered as individuals.
- In Musical Theatre it is most often used for the chorus.
- Others use it for both situations, appreciate flexibility
 - a) an ensemble show where it was hard to pick who was the lead, everyone nominated as the ensemble
 - b) where there were leads and a clear chorus
- General confusion over the name of the category, what is considered an ensemble and what is not.
- The last Dora Review Committee, had a notion that ensemble reflected a certain way of working- in the creation and the performance of it- that reflected something, where the whole was greater than the sum of its parts.

Replace Ensemble Category with Featured Performance:

- In the past you could nominate a group under this category
- So the producer could nominate either someone in a featured role or the entire ensemble
- The jury might be looking at this solo performer is really good and this ensemble and now I'm struggling to judge between them because it looks like a different kind of work

Eliminate the Award Completely:

- I can't think of many musicals where we would treat the leads as an ensemble, and recognizing the chorus feels lovely but, I don't see the parallels in other awards
- Did the Ensemble category happen across all divisions at once?
 - Yes, it was an attempt to reflect the practice that the committee was seeing and the feedback that we had and I think there was a conscious decision that if we are going to make a change to the dance category maybe we should make a change across all divisions and that's why there is an ensemble performance in all divisions.
- This category makes a lot of sense in like the General Theatre Division where you're dealing with two or three people in a production. The Musical Theatre/Opera Division is a loophole where we have enough people working on our shows that we can be in all categories, it is ultimately not meant for us.
- Some companies disagree and believe much of their work (especially in Opera) is ensemble based and they want to continue to acknowledge that.

Design Awards

No Sound Design Award:

- In Musical Theatre sound design would be of equal or of greater importance to costume, lighting, and set design. It is really an important art and it currently does not have an award.
- There is a Musical Direction award

Projection:

- Designers wanted to incorporate projections into some of the current design awards. And there were a lot of people that felt they could be either incorporated in lighting or in set design and scenic design, so they recommended that we have some language in there to accommodate the new use of projections.
- allow producers to register two people for outstanding scenic design, one person who designed the hard sets that were built, and another who designed the projections
- Do not want to add another award
- If it continues to grow we can create a separate award in the future
- If it can be identified within either scenic design or lighting design then it gives some flexibility
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Amount of Design Awards:

- Do not want to increase number of awards
- Possibly increase number of nominees

Touring Production Award

This jury includes general theatre (excludes dance and TYA)

- it's a catch-all, that it's really difficult to adjudicate on the one hand because you've got quote/unquote straight plays up against a musical against multi-disciplinary multimedia pieces
- like taking fruit and comparing it to bicycles
- they don't have any, they don't have any artistically unifying thing.
- different scales, different art forms completely
- Remove Touring as an award, but make touring productions eligible for best production award.
 - it wouldn't take away from divisions to do it that way
 - Mirvish what would likely happen is we wouldn't want to nominate these touring productions... let's get rid of this category
 -
- we should be recognizing Toronto-based artists only

Dora 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.

- Statue is too expensive (\$500 per statue)
- Switch to a medal or a pin
- There is something to the continuity of a thing. Can't change every 5 years, it will diminish its value
- Change the statue for Dora's 50th birthday
- Everyone agrees that statue should be changed