

Dora Review Division: Theatre for Young Audiences Town Hall

Thursday, September 14, 2017, 10:00am – 12:30pm at Young People’s Theatre.

Moderator: Kelly Straughan

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

Introductions:

Kit Boulter, Dahlia Katz, M. John Kennedy, Andrew Lamb, Allen MacInnis, Anita Majumdar, Liza Mattimore, Katherine Sanders, Gabriel Vaillaint, Jim Aldridge, Margo Charlton, Annemieke Wade, Kelly Strachan, Alexis Da Silva-Powell, Jacoba Knaapen.

[Explanation of the review process by Margo Charlton]

[Review of documents and agenda by Kelly Strachan]

TYA division awards, 5 out of 48 total awards. 7 out of 47 active companies are TYA companies.

Agenda topics:

- Male/Female Outstanding Performance Awards
- Ensemble Category
- Design Awards
- Touring Award
- Dora statue (at the request of Dora Review Committee chair, Margo Carlton)- came up in both Independent and General Theatre Town Halls

Topics not on the agenda, brought up for discussion:

- Structure of Awards
- Eligibility

Male/Female Outstanding Performance Awards

TYA is the only division that does not have gendered performance awards.

- As someone who identifies as non-binary, it was difficult to sit through the Dora Awards, he and she are very heavy gendered pronouns.
 - Not only should the categories be genderless, the language used by presenters should be genderless.
- The work is more important than the person who is doing it regardless of their genitalia.
- How could the Dora's be more gender sensitive without making women feel like they're losing something?
- Ask the performer, "How would you like to be presented?"
- Would the jury be biased towards cis-white men?
 - Looking back over the past five years, the winners of the Outstanding Performance in a TYA Production Award have been quite gender-balanced.
 - The jury is very conscious of not wanting to pick the cis-gendered white male... maybe that isn't good, it shouldn't be what you're thinking of when judging performances.
 - It should just be about the best performance.
 - If the jury is diverse this should not be an issue.
 - Have two juries- one to choose nominees and one to choose winners.
- Dance lobbied for the gender division six years ago.
 - Shift in consciousness has been huge in the past six years.
- Removing gendered awards makes for less performance awards overall.
 - If we are collapsing awards, perhaps we can expand number of nominations.
 - Could add supporting award categories- featured performance. Distinguished by the performer's time on stage.
 - Keep two awards, just don't use gendered language.
- The optics of TYA hosting a genderless individual performance, in contrast to others, looks like we are just trying to collapse the number of awards. It doesn't show that TYA cares about gender or inclusivity.

Ensemble Category

- People are saying this award is starting to feel like a participation ribbon.
- In TYA ensemble is our other performance category. A lot of TYA shows are two-handers. Not many TYA shows look like a solo performance, backed up by an ensemble.
 - this award may disappear in other divisions but it shouldn't disappear from TYA
- Maybe we should be more discerning about what we consider an ensemble. No lead performance.
 - Having the flexibility to make that decision as a producer is valuable.
 - Varies from one division to another. For example, ensemble for opera may be the chorus for that show.

Design Awards

There is no Design Category in TYA.

- in TYA design is so incredibly important, it seems like a crime that it's not considered
 - TYA is seen as a lesser division.
- Add one design award for TYA
 - Producers decide what is best in their show and nominate it.
- Production Design could become a broad category, the designers could share the award.
 - The designers look at outstanding production as the space for their work to be recognized. Do the jurors see it that way?
 - Outstanding Achievement in Design is a better way of opening up what that can mean, producers can nominate an entire design team or an individual.
- Puppetry should have its own category.
 - Has been nominated under costume design before.
- Choreography also goes unrecognized. Could it be considered a part of design?
 - Or under direction instead? Create an ensemble option within all categories.

Outstanding Touring Production Award

- Should larger companies, that come in for one-offs, be eligible for this award?
- For the TYA division itself anything considered touring is only eligible for the Outstanding Production Award, similar to the Dance division.
 - Companies from outside Toronto (with lots of money) being compared to Toronto-based little guys
 - Comparing a ten-year-old touring production that has already won a million awards to a brand new, low-budget Toronto production is unfair.
 - Because the Outstanding Production Award is the only place that Touring Productions can be recognized, the jury ends up recognizing them. You can recognize the other productions in other categories. 40-60% of touring shows win.

- The Outstanding Production Award was thorny at one time, because it also came with a cash prize of \$10,000 (from The Canada Council for the Arts). This was contentious because there were no rules as to how much money the TAPA company receives versus the touring company.
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- What do the Dora's actually want to celebrate?
 - The Dora's are about Toronto
 - If we don't acknowledge touring productions we will become too navel-gazing.
 - Takes away our integrity if we don't include them.
 - It strengthens the Dora Awards to say, this is also what is on our stages.
- Add TYA to the Touring Production Award (currently in Musical/Opera Division)
 - Even more burden on jury
 - Jury just for touring productions
 - TYA only has approximately 5 Touring Productions per year.
 - Making outstanding production just for Toronto-based artists will legitimize TYA as "real theatre."

Dora Award Statue Design

- The statue is not representative of the artists we are today
 - certainly Euro-centric
- The cost of the statues is unsustainable, \$500 per statue.
 - Switch to a medal.
- Retire the statue at the Dora Award 50th Anniversary
- Some like the history of the statue, think the grotesque is beautiful.
- In the past there was a committee to change the statue, designers put forward new ideas but they could not reach an agreement so the statue stayed the same.

Overall Structure of Dora Awards/ Number of Awards

- Suggestion to remove competitive aspect of Dora's.
 - Switch to system similar to UNIMA Citations of Excellence.
 - Could add another stream of citations of excellence in areas that aren't currently evaluated.
- Streamline the awards show by dividing the awards into two events.
 - Opens up a host of problems.
 - Designers would not like that.
 - Economic problem, separating the community and artists.

TYA Award Eligibility

- Only companies with a mandate to produce work for young audiences should be eligible for TYA awards.
 - If you are assuming that excellent theatre for young people is just excellent theatre, then why can't TYA companies submit under General Theatre or Independent Theatre?
 - Productions are only eligible in the TYA division if the production is self-identified for young audiences.
 - Example of Peter Pan production put on in a brewery.
 - We don't want to create a rule around an atypical example
 - When the Tarragon Theatre does a musical they register as musical theatre even though they're not a musical theatre company.
 - In terms of numbers it is important to acknowledge that a lot of companies do a TYA show, so we are not just 7 out of 157 TAPA companies
 - 7 companies registered last year, but over 30 companies put on TYA shows regularly.
 - CONSENSUS: we all want Toronto companies to produce TYA even if they're not TYA companies
- Is there any confusion about what it means to be a TYA production? Do people take advantage because they believe it will be easier to win?
 - Scott would catch those, after him it would go through eligibility committee.
 - Then the next round is the jury- who would attend the performances and see no kids there.
 - Most people not concerned that this is a problem.
- We need a definition of TYA in terms of good housekeeping.
 - Why do we do the work that we do, and why do we call it what we call it?
 - We wouldn't end up creating something more than what we have already.
 - Don't want to put up fences where we don't necessarily need them.