



*CHICAGO CELEBRATES THEATER EXCELLENCE WITH ANNOUNCEMENT OF
THE 52ND ANNUAL EQUITY JEFF AWARDS*

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Editor's Note:

A complete list of recipients can also be found online at the Equity section at www.jeffawards.org.

NOVEMBER 9, 2020 – CHICAGO – In its 52nd annual celebration of theater excellence, the Jeff Awards has recognized 39 recipients for the 2020 awards, selected from among 142 theater artist nominees across 30 artistic and technical categories. Award-winning Chicago actor, singer and teaching artist Michelle Lauto hosted the online awards announcement program and tribute to the theater community that featured work of many of the nominated productions and more than a dozen local theater artists as presenters. The program can be accessed for free on the [Jeff Awards YouTube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJfAwards) at <https://bit.ly/JeffAwards>.

Drury Lane Productions captured the most honors this season, with five awards going to “An American in Paris,” including Production – Musical (Large) and Choreography, and three for “The Color Purple,” which spotlighted Lili-Anne Brown as Director - Musical. Windy City Playhouse garnered five awards, including four for the play “The Boys in the Band” highlighting Midsize Production, Director and Scenic Design, as well as Ensemble, which it shared with “The Leopard Play, or Sad Songs for Lost Boys” at Steep Theatre Company.

“King Hedley II” at Court Theater was awarded both Production – Play (Large) as well as performer honors for Kelvin Rostin, Jr. in a Principal Role and A.C. Smith in a Supporting Role. Porchlight Music Theatre collected awards for this season’s musical revue “Duke Ellington’s Sophisticated Ladies” with honors for Ensemble - Musical, Musical Direction by Jermaine Hill and Lorenzo Rush, Jr. as Performer in a Revue.

Steppenwolf Theatre’s production of “Bug” drew three honors including Performer in a Principal Role for Carrie Coon, and technical awards for scenic and lighting design. Awards for “Kill Move Paradise” at TimeLine Theatre Company recognized Wardell Julius Clark for Director – Play (Large) and Artistic

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Specialization of Breon Arzell for inventive movement choreography. As part of its final bow, the recently closed Mercury Theater Company took home two awards for midsize theater, recognizing “Monty Python’s Spamalot,” for Production – Musical and L. Walter Stearns as Director – Musical.

Additional performance awards were presented to Rebecca Spence in “Every Brilliant Thing” at Windy City Playhouse and Deanna Reed-Foster in “The First Deep Breath” at Victory Gardens Theater. Four performers in Drury Lane Productions were also recognized, including Josh Drake and Skyler Adams (“An American in Paris”), and Nicole Michelle Haskins and Eben K. Logan (“The Color Purple”).

Among the technical awards, Mikhail Fiksel in Sound Design and Steve Cuiffo, as Illusion and Lip Sync Consultant within Artistic Specialization, received recognition for their work in “Dana H.” at Goodman Theatre. Other honors went to designers Mike Durst (Lighting) and Jeffrey Levin (Sound) for “Grey House,” Joe Schermoly (Scenic) for “The Gulf” at About Face Theatre, William Boles (Scenic) for “The Boys in the Band,” and Kevan Loney (Projection) for “An American in Paris.” Costume design awards went to Theresa Ham for “Beauty and the Beast” at Paramount Theatre and Kristy Leigh Hall for the Remy Bumpo Theatre Company production of “Howards End.”

The Jeff Awards New Work category this season honored three authors and their productions including Lee Edward Colston II for “The First Deep Breath” at Victory Gardens Theater, A Red Orchid Theatre’s Levi Holloway for “Grey House,” and Loy A. Webb for her play “His Shadow: A Parable” performed by 16th Street Theater. Ladysmith Black Mambazo also received the award for Original Music in a Play for “Lindiwe” at Steppenwolf Theatre Company.

The traditional Equity season runs August 1st through July 31, however ended this year on March 13 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Over the course of the 2019-2020 season, Jeff Awards members attended the openings of 78 productions. From these, 64 productions became “Jeff Recommended.” With two productions having runs so short (due to the pandemic shutdown), a total of 62 productions became eligible for 2020 award nominations.

The 2020 Equity award recipients are:

Production – Play (Large)

- “King Hedley II” - Court Theatre

Production – Play (Midsize)

- “The Boys in the Band” - Windy City Playhouse

Production – Musical or Revue (Large)

- “An American in Paris” - Drury Lane Productions

Production – Musical or Revue (Midsize)

- “Monty Python’s Spamalot” - Mercury Theater Chicago

Ensemble – Play

- “The Boys in the Band” - Windy City Playhouse
- “The Leopard Play, or Sad Songs for Lost Boys” – Steep Theatre Company

Ensemble – Musical or Revue

- “Duke Ellington’s Sophisticated Ladies” - Porchlight Music Theatre

New Work

- Lee Edward Colston II - "The First Deep Breath" - Victory Gardens Theater
- Levi Holloway - "Grey House" - A Red Orchid Theatre
- Loy A. Webb - "His Shadow: A Parable" - 16th Street Theater

Director – Play (Large)

- Wardell Julius Clark - "Kill Move Paradise" - TimeLine Theatre Company

Director – Play (Midsize)

- Carl Menninger - "The Boys in the Band" - Windy City Playhouse

Director – Musical or Revue (Large)

- Lili-Anne Brown - "The Color Purple" - Drury Lane Productions

Director – Musical or Revue (Midsize)

- L. Walter Stearns - "Monty Python's Spamalot" - Mercury Theater Chicago

Performer in a Principal Role – Play

- Carrie Coon (Agnes White) - "Bug" - Steppenwolf Theatre Company
- Kelvin Roston, Jr. (Hedley) - "King Hedley II" - Court Theatre

Performer in a Principal Role – Musical

- Josh Drake (Jerry Mulligan) - "An American in Paris" - Drury Lane Productions
- Eben K. Logan (Celie) - "The Color Purple" - Drury Lane Productions

Solo Performance

- Rebecca Spence (Narrator) - "Every Brilliant Thing" - Windy City Playhouse

Performer in a Revue

- Lorenzo Rush, Jr. (The Raconteur) - "Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies" - Porchlight Music Theatre

Performer in a Supporting Role – Play

- Deanna Reed-Foster (Pearl Thomas) - "The First Deep Breath" - Victory Gardens Theater
- A.C. Smith (Elmore) - "King Hedley II" - Court Theatre

Performer in a Supporting Role – Musical

- Skyler Adams (Adam Hochberg) - "An American in Paris" - Drury Lane Productions
- Nicole Michelle Haskins (Sofia) - "The Color Purple" - Drury Lane Productions

Scenic Design - Large

- Takeshi Kata - "Bug" - Steppenwolf Theatre Company

Scenic Design - Midsize

- William Boles - "The Boys in the Band" - Windy City Playhouse
- Joe Schermoly - "The Gulf" - About Face Theatre

Costume Design - Large

- Theresa Ham - "Beauty and the Beast" - Paramount Theatre

Costume Design - Midsize

- Kristy Leigh Hall - "Howards End" - Remy Bumpo Theatre Company

Sound Design - Large

- Mikhail Fiksel - "Dana H." - Goodman Theatre

Sound Design - Midsize

- Jeffrey Levin - "Grey House" - A Red Orchid Theatre

Lighting Design - Large

- Heather Gilbert - "Bug" - Steppenwolf Theatre Company

Lighting Design - Midsize

- Mike Durst - "Grey House" - A Red Orchid Theatre

Choreography

- Lynne Kurdziel-Formato - "An American in Paris" - Drury Lane Productions

Original Music in a Play

- Ladysmith Black Mambazo - "Lindiwe" - Steppenwolf Theatre Company

Musical Direction

- Jermaine Hill - "Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies" - Porchlight Music Theatre

Projection Design

- Kevan Loney - "An American in Paris" - Drury Lane Productions

Artistic Specialization

- Breon Arzell (Movement Choreographer) - "Kill Move Paradise" - TimeLine Theatre Company
- Steve Cuiffo (Illusion and Lip Sync Consultant) - "Dana H." - Goodman Theatre

By Company with multiple nominations:

- Drury Lane Productions – 8
- Windy City Playhouse – 5
- Steppenwolf Theatre Company – 4
- A Red Orchid Theatre – 3
- Court Theatre – 3
- Porchlight Music Theatre – 3
- Goodman Theatre - 2
- Mercury Theater Chicago – 2
- TimeLine Theatre Company – 2
- Victory Gardens Theater – 2

By Productions with multiple awards:

- "An American in Paris" – 5
- "The Boys in the Band" – 4
- "Bug" – 3

- “Duke Ellington's Sophisticated Ladies” – 3
- “Grey House” – 3
- “King Hedley II” – 3
- “The Color Purple” – 3
- “Dana H.” – 2
- “Kill Move Paradise” – 2
- “Monty Python’s Spamalot” – 2
- “The First Deep Breath” – 2

2020 Honor Roll Awards

In addition to the traditional Jeff Awards, six Chicago-based organizations that have made extraordinary efforts to support the arts and artists during the pandemic were recognized. The Jeff Awards Honor Roll spotlights the work of groups in 2020 which have taken their passion for Chicago theater to another level to ensure the arts community survives and thrives. They are:

- [League of Chicago Theatres](#)
- [The Arts for Illinois Relief Fund](#) - administered by Arts Alliance Illinois in partnership with 3Arts and Arts Work Fund
- [Chicago Theatre Relief Fund](#) - developed by the League of Chicago Theatres and seeded with a generous grant from the Saints
- [Season of Concern](#)
- [The Chicago Theatre Bike Ride](#)
- [The Show Will Go On!](#) – A Youth Benefit Concert to Support Chicago Theatres

SPECIAL NOTICE TO NEWS MEDIA

You may contact theaters and artists directly for interviews. If you would like to include a quote or an interview with a member of the Jeff Awards committee, please call or e-mail Suzanne Ross at 312-953-6987 or media@jeffawards.org.

The Jeff Awards website, www.jeffawards.org, lists all the current and previous award recipients, as well as other Jeff Awards information and news.

ABOUT THE JEFF AWARDS

Promoting excellence in Chicago theater, The Jeff Awards began its annual recognition program in 1968. In 1973, it expanded its scope to establish the Non–Equity Wing to celebrate outstanding achievement in non–union theater. Members include 54 individuals representing a wide variety of backgrounds in theater (including producers, directors, actors, playwrights, designers, professors of theater, entertainment lawyers and agents, and theater lovers), the Jeff Awards is committed to celebrating the vitality of Chicago area theatre by recognizing excellence through its recommendations, awards, and honors. Opening night judges include both the members as well as Artistic and Technical theater volunteers (the “AT Team”), representing Artistic Directors, producers, directors and artists from Chicago theaters. The Jeff Awards fosters the artistic growth of area theater companies and artists, and promotes educational opportunities, audience appreciation, and civic pride in the achievements of the theater community.

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