



News Release

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58th ANNIVERSARY JEFF AWARDS FOR EQUITY THEATERS ANNOUNCED

Prestigious awards honor Chicago theater excellence among more than 40 dedicated artists, behind the scenes teams and theater companies during the 2025-26 Equity season

Editor's Note:

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

SEPTEMBER 14, 2026 – CHICAGO – At the 58th anniversary celebration of Equity theater excellence, the Jeff Awards recognized 41 award recipients selected from among 209 nominees across 37 categories of excellence in theater production among shows from 30 producing entities. The awards show was co-hosted by award-winning Chicago entertainers Michelle Duffy and James Earl Jones II, with actor Janet Ulrich Brooks as announcer, in a program featuring performances from nine nominated productions and many local theater artist couples as presenters. Ray Frewen directed the awards program with music direction by Michael Mahler.

Writers Theatre was recognized with the most awards (five) for its production of “Leopoldstadt”, which received honors for Production (Play – Large), Ensemble, Director (Carey Perloff), Costume Design (Alex Jaeger) and Hair, Wig and Makeup Design (Tom Watson). Raven Theatre also garnered five awards for two productions including “Octet” and “Oak”.

A Red Orchid Theatre’s “Birds of North America” received four awards for Production (Play – Midsize), Director (Kirsten Fitzgerald) and Sound Design and Original Music in a Play (both by Ethan Korvne). “Octet” from Raven Theatre also received four awards for Production (Musical – Midsize), Ensemble, Director (Keira Fromm) and Music Director (Nick Sula). And the Short Run Production (nine to 17 performances) of “The Movement You Need: An Evening with Brendan Hunt”, produced by Tiwary Entertainment Group, also received four awards for Short Run Production, New Work and Performance (both Brendan Hunt) and Lighting Design (Nick Solyom).

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"A Little Night Music" at Marriott Theatre received awards for Production (Musical – Large) and Supporting Performer Veronica Garza. Paramount Theatre's "Come From Away" received the award for Director (Trent Stork).

Performance awards were given to Al'Jaleel McGhee for "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" (Goodman Theatre), Gwendolyn Whiteside in "Come Back, Little Sheba" (American Blues Theater) Cody Combs in "Dear Evan Hansen" (Paramount Theatre), Allsun O'Malley in "South Pacific" (Paramount Theatre), Audrey Francis in "Catch As Catch Can" (Steppenwolf Theatre Company), Wesley Taylor in "Holiday" (Goodman Theatre) and Claudia Quesada in "On Your Feet!" (Drury Lane Productions).

Kelvin Roston, Jr. received the Solo Performance award for "Twisted Melodies" (Northlight Theatre).

Black Ensemble Theater was honored with three awards for its production of "Men of Soul": Production – Revue, Director Daryl D. Brooks and Performer Maxel McCloud Schingen.

Among technical awards, "Paranormal Activity" from Chicago Shakespeare Theater in co-production with Center Theatre Group, American Conservatory Theater, and Shakespeare Theatre Company garnered three for Anna Watson (Lighting Design), Gareth Fry (Sound Design) and Artistic Specialization for Chris Fisher (Illusion Design). Additional awards were presented to "Dear Evan Hansen" (Paramount Theatre) for Projection Design (Anthony Churchill), "Georgiana and Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley" (Buffalo Theatre Ensemble) for Costume Design - Midsize (Aly Greaves Amidei), "Holiday" (Goodman Theatre) for Scenic Design – Large (Walt Spangler), "Oak" (Raven Theatre) for Lighting Design – Midsize (Eric Watkins), "On Your Feet!" (Drury Lane Productions) for Choreography (Luis Salgado) and "Things With Friends" (American Blues Theater) for Scenic Design – Midsize (Grant Sabin).

The Jeff Awards New Work category recognized authors of two new productions including Marco Antonio Rodriguez ("The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" at Goodman Theatre) and James Sherman ("The First Lady of Television" at Northlight Theatre).

The 58th Equity Special Award was presented to Black Ensemble Theater, honoring its 50 year legacy of historic arts leadership and creative achievements that was born from a simple but powerful belief: that the arts can heal, unite, and transform. What began as a place where Black voices could shine with truth, dignity, and joy, Black Ensemble Theater has grown into a nationally celebrated institution committed to eradicating racism and elevating the brilliance of shared humanity.

Caitlin I. Quinn from Buffalo Theatre Ensemble received the Equity Jeff Impresario Award, honoring excellence in stage management. This is the second year for this new award and was based on nominations by theater companies to recognize this key role that has been a vital part of the behind-the-scenes work bringing Chicago productions to life over the last season.

In its 58th Anniversary season, July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026, the Jeff Awards membership judged the opening nights of 85 Equity productions. From these, 72 productions became "Jeff Recommended" which made them eligible for award nominations.

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The 58th Anniversary Equity Jeff Award recipients are:

Production – Play (Large)

- "Leopoldstadt" - Writers Theatre

Production – Play (Midsize)

- "Birds of North America" - A Red Orchid Theatre

Production – Musical (Large) - The Susan and Harlan Haimes Award

- "A Little Night Music" - Marriott Theatre

Production – Musical (Midsize)

- "Octet" - Raven Theatre

Production - Revue

- "Men of Soul"- Black Ensemble Theater

Director – Play (Large) - The Michael Maggio Award

- Carey Perloff - "Leopoldstadt" - Writers Theatre

Director – Play (Midsize)

- Kirsten Fitzgerald - "Birds of North America" - A Red Orchid Theatre

Director – Musical (Large)

- Trent Stork - "Come From Away" - Paramount Theatre

Director – Musical (Midsize)

- Keira Fromm - "Octet" - Raven Theatre

Director - Revue

- Daryl D. Brooks - "Men of Soul"- Black Ensemble Theater

Ensemble – Play

- "Leopoldstadt" - Writers Theatre

Ensemble – Musical

- "Octet" - Raven Theatre

Performer In A Principal Role – Play

- Al’Jaleel McGhee - "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" - Goodman Theatre
- Gwendolyn Whiteside - "Come Back, Little Sheba" - American Blues Theater

Performer In A Principal Role – Musical

- Cody Combs - "Dear Evan Hansen" - Paramount Theatre
- Allsun O'Malley - "South Pacific" - Paramount Theatre

Performer In A Revue

- Maxel McCloud Schingen - "Men of Soul" - Black Ensemble Theater

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Solo Performance

- Kelvin Roston, Jr. - "Twisted Melodies" - Northlight Theatre

Performer In A Supporting Role – Play

- Audrey Francis - "Catch As Catch Can" - Steppenwolf Theatre Company
- Wesley Taylor - "Holiday" - Goodman Theatre

Performer In A Supporting Role – Musical

- Veronica Garza - "A Little Night Music" - Marriott Theatre
- Claudia Quesada - "On Your Feet!" - Drury Lane Productions

New Work - The Libby Adler Mages Award

- Marco Antonio Rodriguez - "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao" - Goodman Theatre
- James Sherman - "The First Lady of Television" - Northlight Theatre

Choreography

- Luis Salgado - "On Your Feet!" - Drury Lane Productions

Original Music In A Play

- Ethan Korvne - "Birds of North America" - A Red Orchid Theatre

Music Direction

- Nick Sula - "Octet" - Raven Theatre

Scenic Design (Large)

- Walt Spangler - "Holiday" - Goodman Theatre

Scenic Design (Midsize)

- Grant Sabin - "Things With Friends" - American Blues Theater

Lighting Design (Large)

- Anna Watson - "Paranormal Activity" - Chicago Shakespeare Theater in co-production with Center Theatre Group, American Conservatory Theater, and Shakespeare Theatre Company

Lighting Design (Midsize)

- Eric Watkins - "Oak" - Raven Theatre

Costume Design (Large)

- Alex Jaeger - "Leopoldstadt" - Writers Theatre

Costume Design (Midsize)

- Aly Greaves Amidei - "Georgiana and Kitty: Christmas at Pemberley" - Buffalo Theatre Ensemble

Sound Design (Large)

- Gareth Fry - "Paranormal Activity" - Chicago Shakespeare Theater in co-production with Center Theatre Group, American Conservatory Theater, and Shakespeare Theatre Company

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Sound Design (Midsize)

- Ethan Korvne - "Birds of North America" - A Red Orchid Theatre

Projection Design

- Anthony Churchill - "Dear Evan Hansen" - Paramount Theatre

Artistic Specialization

- Chris Fisher - Illusion Design - "Paranormal Activity" - Chicago Shakespeare Theater in co-production with Center Theatre Group, American Conservatory Theater, and Shakespeare Theatre Company
- Tom Watson - Hair, Wig and Makeup Design - "Leopoldstadt" - Writers Theatre

Short Run Production

- "The Movement You Need: An Evening with Brendan Hunt" - Tiwary Entertainment Group

Short Run Production - Performer

- Brendan Hunt - "The Movement You Need: An Evening with Brendan Hunt" - Tiwary Entertainment Group

Short Run Production - New Work

- Brendan Hunt - "The Movement You Need: An Evening with Brendan Hunt" - Tiwary Entertainment Group

Short Run Production - Design

- Nick Solyom - Lighting Design - "The Movement You Need: An Evening with Brendan Hunt" - Tiwary Entertainment Group

Special Award

- Black Ensemble Theater

Impresario Award, Honoring Excellence in Stage Management

- Caitlin I. Quinn, Buffalo Theatre Ensemble

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Multiple Award Recipients

By Theater

Raven Theatre	5
Writers Theatre	5
Goodman Theatre	4
Paramount Theatre	4
A Red Orchid Theatre	4
Tiway Entertainment Group	4
Black Ensemble Theater	3
Chicago Shakespeare Theater in co-production with Center Theatre Group, American Conservatory Theater, and Shakespeare Theatre Company	3
American Blues Theater	2
Drury Lane Productions	2
Marriott Theatre	2
Northlight Theatre	2

By Production

"Leopoldstadt"	5
"Birds of North America"	4
"Octet"	4
"The Movement You Need: An Evening with Brendan Hunt"	4
"Men of Soul"	3
"Paranormal Activity"	3
"Dear Evan Hansen"	2
"Holiday"	2
"A Little Night Music"	2
"On Your Feet!"	2

By Individual

Brendan Hunt	2
Ethan Korvne	2

About The Jeff Awards

The Jeff Awards is one of the most active and engaged theater awards organizations in the country evaluating hundreds of theatrical productions annually and holding two awards ceremonies highlighting work over the past Equity and Non-Equity seasons. Through our recommendations, awards, fellowship grants and honors we help foster the growth of companies, encourage artists, bring new appreciation for diverse storytelling, and cultivate civic pride in the achievements of the Chicago theater community. Originally chartered in 1968 to recognize Equity productions, the Jeff Awards Non-Equity Wing was established in 1973 to celebrate outstanding achievement in non-union theater. The Jeff Awards is professionally independent and voting members of the committee are unaffiliated with any theater companies or producing organizations.

For more information, visit www.jeffawards.org.

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NOTE FOR MEDIA:

*Photos from the event will be available on our website at www.jeffawards.org for download and use. Please credit **Jennifer Heim Photography**.*

The Jeff Awards website lists all the award recipients and nominations as well as other Jeff Awards information and news. Visit www.jeffawards.org.

The Special Awards category has been presented since 1969. Learn more [here](#) about previous recipients.

Names of award recipients were released immediately following the program on September 14th by email and on our website under Equity Awards at www.jeffawards.org.

Media may contact theaters and artists directly for interviews. For quotes or an interview with any Jeff Awards committee members, please call or e-mail Suzanne Ross at 312-953-6987 or suzanne@suzanne-ross.com or media@jeffaward.org.

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