Cultural Daily

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The David Desk Awards plus Thoughts on B'way's Future

David Sheward · Wednesday, June 10th, 2020

Normally this would have been one of the best weeks of the year for theater lovers. The Tony Awards for Broadway's best would have presented on Sunday June 7. But because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Broadway theaters have been shut down since March 12 and are not likely to reopen until January 2021 at the earliest. (The Metropolitan Oper recently announced it would not reopen until New Year's Eve and the New York Philharmonic has suspended performances until Jan. 5.) In a May 25 interview with Tim Teeman of the Daily Beast, Broadway League president Charlotte St. Martin was cautiously optimistic about the Main Stem lights being relit. But she stressed social distancing and playing to half-empty housing would not fit with the Broadway economic model which requires packing in as many bodies as possible for maximum profit. A few shows such as *Plaza Suite, MJ: The Michael Jackson Musical* and *1776* have announced opening dates for the spring of 2021, but those may be aspirational like Trump saying he wanted packed churches on Easter.

An empty Times Square. Photo taken by David Sheward

Without a vaccine or even treatment for the coronavirus, theatergoers will probably be reluctant to return. Earliest estimates for the development of a COVID vaccine are the end of the year, but then it would take months to be mass produced and made available to the general public.

What would Broadway look like without a vaccine? It might mean closing the entire Times Square area off from cars so that the side streets from 42nd to 50th could be used for long lines of patrons to get their temperatures checked and handed face masks (if they didn't bring their own) as well having their bags searched. (The latter practice started just a few years ago in the wake of various terrorist threats.) Getting into the theater could become just as time-consuming as going to the airport with patrons being advised to show up two-to-three hours before curtain time.

There's also the threat to performers. Will actors have to wear face masks and maintain a separation of six feet? The British play *Lungs* will be presented online with the only cast members Matt Smith and Claire Foy keeping well apart. But that's a two-character play. How will huge cast musicals function? Singing at full volume causes potentially virus-laden droplets to be propelled to cast mates. A church choir practice was one of the super-spreader events in the early stages of the American outbreak. The choreographer of *Mrs. Doubtful* recently posted she was restaging all of that show's dances with social distancing. But will that be enough?

In addition to no Tony Awards, the digital versions of the Drama Desk and Obie Awards, as well

as several digital Tony tribute substitute programs and theater benefits, have been postponed because of the nationwide protests against racial injustice and the murder of an unarmed African-American man, George Floyd, at the hands of police officers. The DDs were going to be handed out on NY-1 on Sunday May 31, but the local all-news channel opted (correctly) to run ongoing coverage of the demonstrations. Drama Desk co-presidents Charles Wright and David Barbour issued a statement in support of the protests and Black Lives Matter. The DDs will be now be presented on Sat., June 13. The Obies were to be presented online on June 4 and their presenters came to a similar decision. There has been no new date announced for the Obies at press time.

So with no Tonys, and delayed Drama Desks and Obies, here are my personal choices for the best of the truncated on and Off-Broadway season. I call them the David Desk Awards:

Michelle Pawk, John Zdrojeski, and Zoe Winters in *Heroes of the Fourth Turning*.
Credit: Joan Marcus

Play

72 Miles to Go.. (Hillary Bettis)

Eureka Day (Jonathan Spector)

Heroes of the Fourth Turning (Will Arbery)

The Inheritance (Matthew Lopez)

Linda Vista (Tracey Letts)

Musical

Jagged Little Pill

Soft Power

A Strange Loop

Musical Revival

West Side Story

Actor (Play)

Ian Barford, *Linda Vista*

Frances Jue, *Cambodian Rock Band*

Kyle Soller, *The Inheritance*

James Cromwell and Jane Alexander in *Grand Horizons.*
Credit: Joan Marcus

Actress (Play)

Jane Alexander, *Grand Horizons*

Liza Colon-Zayas, *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven*

Judith Ivey, *Greater Clements*

Actor (Musical)

Joshua Henry, *The Wrong Man*

Larry Owens, *A Strange Loop*

Isaac Powell, *West Side Story*

Conrad Ricamora, *Soft Power*

Adrienne Warren in *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical.*
Credit: Manuel Harlan

Actress (Musical)

Alyse Alan Louis, *Soft Power*

Beth Malone, *The Unsinkable Molly Brown*

Karen Olivo, *Moulin Rouge*

Shereen Pimentel, *West Side Story*

Elizabeth Stanley, *Jagged Little Pill*

Adrienne Warren, *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*

Featured Actor (Play)

Edmund Donovan, *Greater Clements*

Paul Hilton, *The Inheritance*

Samuel H. Levine, *The Inheritance*

Featured Actress (Play)

Julia McDermott, *Heroes of the Fourth Turning*

Lois Smith, *The Inheritance*

Jennifer Van Dyck, *The Confession of Lily Dare*

Zoe Winters, *Heroes of the Fourth Turning*


Jay Armstrong Johnson in *Scotland, PA.*
Credit: Nina Goodheart

Featured Actor (Musical)

Jay Armstrong Johnson, *Scotland, PA*

Christian Borle, *Little Shop of Horrors*

Danny Burstein, *Moulin Rouge*

Featured Actress (Musical)

Yesenia Ayala, *West Side Story*

Kathryn Gallagher, *Jagged Little Pill*

Lauren Patten, *Jagged Little Pill*

Director (Play)

Stephen Daldry, *The Inheritance*

John Ortiz, *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven*

Director (Musical)

Stephen Brackett, *A Strange Loop*

Phyllida Lloyd, *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*

Diane Paulus, *Jagged Little Pill*

Leigh Silverman, *Soft Power*

Ivo van Hove, *West Side Story*


Moulin Rouge, Set by Derek McLane, Costumes by Catherine Zuber, Lighting by Justin Townsend
Credit: Matthew Murphy

Set Design

Derek McLane, *Moulin Rouge*

Clint Ramos, *Soft Power*

Narelle Sissons, *Halfway Bitches Go Straight to Heaven*

Costume Design

Anita Yavich, *Soft Power*

Catherine Zuber, *Moulin Rouge*

Lighting Design

Justin Townsend, *Jagged Little Pill, Moulin Rouge*

Hugh Vanstone, *The Height of the Storm*

Video/Projection Design

Luke Halls, *West Side Story*

Choreography

Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, *Jagged Little Pill*

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker, *West Side Story*

Travis Walls, *The Wrong Man*

An earlier version of this article appeared on the David Desk blog and Theaterlife.com.

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