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South Park Mormon Musical Nominated

By The Moscow Times

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NEW YORK — Who says Broadway won't take a risk? "The Book of Mormon" and "The Scottsboro Boys" — two very different musicals with very different fates — have emerged with the most Tony Award nominations this season.

"Mormon," which induces giggles with its diarrhea jokes and songs about body parts, and "Scottsboro," a searing look at a racial injustice that featured a graphic whipping, clearly pushed the boundaries of traditional Broadway fare. One paid off, the other did not.

"People are excited when they sit down in those seats because they don't know what's going to happen," said Rory O'Malley, whose turn in "Mormon" earned him a nomination for best featured actor in a musical. "This is dangerous in the best sense."

That could also sum up the sentiment created by John Kander and Fred Ebb's "Scottsboro," based on the real story of nine black teenagers wrongly put on death row in the 1930s for allegedly raping two white girls. It closed abruptly in December after playing just 49 performances and 29 previews.

“Mormon,” which received 14 nominations, and “Scottsboro,” which got 12 nods, face competition for the title of best musical from two shows inspired by movies: “Catch Me If You Can” and “Sister Act.”

With “Scottsboro” closed, though, the odds are against it winning.

The four nominated plays include the heartwarming human-puppet hybrid “War Horse,” which was a huge hit in London; David Lindsay-Abaire’s blue-collar “Good People;” Jez Butterworth’s vanishing English tale “Jerusalem;” and Stephen Adly Guirgis’ searing recovery story “The Motherf----- With the Hat.”

Among individual actors who earned nominations were Al Pacino, who played Shylock in “The Merchant of Venice,” Vanessa Redgrave in “Driving Miss Daisy,” Edie Falco in “The House of Blue Leaves” and Ellen Barkin in “The Normal Heart.”

With 14 nominations, “The Book of Mormon” takes its place among Broadway musicals with the most Tony nominations, just below “The Producers” and “Billy Elliot,” which each won 15 nominations.

About two Mormon missionaries who find more than they bargained for in Africa, the musical was written by Trey Parker and Matt Stone, the creators of Comedy Central’s irreverent “South Park,” and Robert Lopez, co-creator of the equally irreverent Tony Award-winning musical “Avenue Q.” All got nominations for the music, book and lyrics. Casey Nicholaw won a best choreography nomination for the show and shared honors with Parker for best direction of a musical.

As for the real Mormons, the church would not add to the comment they first issued when the musical opened: “The production may attempt to entertain audiences for an evening, but the Book of Mormon as a volume of scripture will change people’s lives forever by bringing them closer to Christ.”

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