

# Unmasked, Still Golden: Awards for Theater Elite

By [John Freedman](#)

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Galina Konovalova, standing at the microphone, was a cast member of “Landing Stage,” which won a special jury prize at the Golden Mask Festival. **Dmitry Dubinsky**

The 19th annual Golden Mask Festival award ceremony began with a drum roll and a walking bass line from the Oleg Lundstrem Jazz Orchestra and ended with standing ovations for six veteran theater artists who were honored with lifetime achievement awards.

As 47 awards were announced over the course of three hours on Tuesday evening in the beautiful main hall of the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich-Danchenko Theater, signs were abundant that Russian theater — or, at least, the Golden Mask's perception of it — is in transition.

Frequent winners, such as the Mariinsky Theater of St. Petersburg and Moscow's Bolshoi Theater won awards in the musical categories but not in their usual high numbers. In the drama category, almost everyone, young or old, was a first-time winner.

The 2013 Golden Mask Festival honored the makers of productions that premiered during the 2011–2012 season.

Moscow, with 15 awards, and St. Petersburg, with 12, led the field as always. Perennial winners Diana Vishneva, Dmitry Chernyakov, Teodor Currentzis, and the puppet wizards Ilya Epelbaum and Maya Krasnopol'skaya each bagged two awards.

"Vampire Ball" from St. Petersburg's Theater of Musical Comedy, was the evening's biggest winner, grabbing three of the distinctive glass and ceramic plaques bearing a winged mask. It was named Best Musical, while Manana Gogotidze and Ivan Ozhogin were respectively named Best Female and Best Male singers in a musical.

The only whiffs of scandal surfacing during the ceremony involved events outside the awards process.

Accepting the nod for Best Director of an Opera ("Ruslan and Lyudmila," Bolshoi Theater), Dmitry Chernyakov hinted at, but did not name, the infamous January incident in which the Bolshoi's artistic director Sergei Filin was doused with acid. Dedicating his award to the "incredible people" who work at the famed theater, Chernyakov said, "I would like this to belong to the whole theater. I want things to be well there. Long live the Bolshoi!"

Accepting the Best Opera award on behalf of the Stanislavsky and Nemirovich–Danchenko Musical Theater for Benjamin Britten's "A Midsummer Night's Dream," managing director Vladimir Urin referred obliquely to a scandalous accusation prior to the premiere in June 2012, that the show propagandized sex, drugs and alcohol among children. "This is a very important work for us," Urin said. "It caused mixed reactions among our bureaucrats. So it is all the more important that the jury found value in its artistic achievement."

For the record, once the production opened, the accusations proved to be unfounded and the scandal, which some suggested was exploited by the theater to increase public interest, died a quick death.

The city of Perm put on an especially good showing, grabbing five awards.

Boris Milgram was named Best Director of a musical for "Scarlet Sails" at Perm's Theater–Theater, while Nadezhda Kucher was cited Best Female Singer in an opera for her performance in "Medeamaterial" at the Tchaikovsky Opera and Ballet Theater. The Opera and Ballet Theater was given a special jury award for its exploratory work in musical theater.

Teodor Currentzis, the Greek-born conductor who studied in St. Petersburg in the 1990s and has worked in Russia since 2004, won his two plaques — Best Conductor of an Opera ("Cosi Fan Tutte") and Best Conductor of a Ballet ("Jester") — for his work at Perm's Opera and Ballet Theater. Accepting the latter, he stated that he hoped other provincial theaters and artists would win awards because he believed the provinces were "the future of theater."

Famed ballerina Diana Vishneva brought in two of three awards involving the Mariinsky Theater. Vishneva took Best Female Dancer for "Diana Vishneva. Dialogues," and the show itself won Best Ballet. Accepting the second award, Vishneva said, "You can't imagine how valuable this mask is for me. It means more than any other personal award."

Ildar Abdrazakov, named Best Male Singer in an Opera for his performance in "The Tales of Hoffmann," was the other Mariinsky actor cited.

The Dutch duo of Guy Weizman and Roni Haver were named Best Choreographers for ballet or contemporary dance for "The Story of a Soldier," a joint production of Platform project, TsEKh dance center and Club Guy and Roni of the Netherlands. "We are very proud and happy to be working here," Haver said in English upon accepting his award.

Best Contemporary Dance production went to "Eaters" by Moscow's Contemporary Choreography Theater Studio, while "Halfmoon," a musical work produced by Moscow's Territory Festival won the Experiment competition. Alexei Sysoyev took Best Composer for his work on "Halfmoon."

Awards in the field of drama induced the night's most emotional reactions.

Whoops and hollers greeted the announcement of Roza Khairulina as Best Actress in the title role of "Lear" by the Priyut Komedianta Theater of St. Petersburg, as they did the news that popular veteran actress Svetlana Nemolyayeva had won Best Supporting Role for her work in "Talents and Admirers" at Moscow's Mayakovsky Theater. Greeted by a standing ovation, Nemolyayeva gave an emotional speech in which she stated that "almost all" her family was with her. "I would like to share this with Alexander Sergeyevich Lazarev," she said of her equally famous and popular actor husband who died in 2011.

A special jury's award for the Vakhtangov Theater's "Landing Stage" raised the mark on the emot-o-meter. Much of the cast for this show, which was created using veteran actors, took the stage by storm and worked the audience for laughter and tears for 20 times beyond the 30-second speaking limit. Nobody complained.

At the center of attention was Galina Konovalova, who at the age of 96, has had a career resurgence in recent years. Referring to the fact she was nominated for Best Supporting Role, but did not win, Konovalova quipped, "Had I won, I would have dedicated this award to my lover, to whom I have never been unfaithful in 70 years: the great Vakhtangov Theater."

Yevgeny Marcelli's production of Anton Chekhov's early play, "Without a Title," for the Volkov Theater of Yaroslavl was named Best Large Scale Show, while its star Vitaly Kishchenko won the nod for Best Actor. Marcelli, who was hospitalized the day his show performed in Moscow last week, said briefly, "Thank you, Golden Mask, for this little great joy in our lives."

Marat Gatsalov, one of the top talents to have emerged in recent years, won the prestigious Best Director award for Tracy Lett's "August. Osage County" for the Globus Theater of Novosibirsk.

"Antibodies," a powerful documentary work based on the murder of an antifascist activist in 2005, won Best Small Scale Show and the Critic's Prize. The show's director Mikhail Patlasov thanked the jury for "paying attention to problems outside the walls of this theater."

Also noteworthy for its recognition of excellence among young artists was a jury prize given to director Dmitry Volkostrellov and designer Ksenia Peretrakhina for their highly stylized

production of "Haughty Girl," produced jointly by Post Theater and the Bryantsev Teatr Yunogo Zritelya of St. Petersburg.

Moscow absconded with all four awards in the field of puppetry.

The team of Epelbaum and Krasnopolskaya, winners of more Golden Masks than anyone in the history of the festival, won Best Puppet Director while their mobile project "Theatrical First Aid" for their Ten, or Shadow, Theater, won Best Puppet Production. Andrei Nechayev and Yevgeniya Shakhotko, working on "Snowman" for Moscow's Obraztsov Puppet Theater, won Best Actor and Best Designer, respectively.

*Other Awards: Alexei Lyudmilin, Best Conductor, Musical, "Scarlet Sails," Globus Theater, Novosibirsk; Oleg Gabyshev, Best Male Dancer, "Rodin," Boris Eifman Ballet, St. Petersburg; Irena Belousova, Best Costume Design, Musical Theater, "Count Ori," Yekaterinburg Opera and Ballet; Alexander Mustonen, Best Designer, Musical Theater, "Zolushka," Musical Theater of Petrozavodsk; Dmitry Chernyakov, Best Designer, Musical Theater, "Ruslan and Lyudmila," Bolshoi Theater, Moscow; Musical Theater Jury Prizes went to Yekaterinburg Theater of Opera and Ballet, and "Play About the Soul and Body," Natalya Sats Children's Musical Theater, Moscow; Maya Shavdatuashvili, Best Lighting Design, Drama, "Landing Stage," Vakhtangov Theater, Moscow; Sergei Barkhin, Best Designer, Drama, "Hedda Gabler," Alexandrinsky Theater, St. Petersburg; Life Achievement Awards went to Tatyana Doronina, Leonid Bronevoi, Zinaida Sharko, Alexander Belinsky, Ivan Bobylev, Robert Sturua.*

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