

Golden Mask 2018: Sad and Hopeful

Russia's main theater awards were presented on Sunday night

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The actors Yulia Khlynina and Yegor Koreshkov were the evening's main presenters. **Dmitry Dubinsky**

On Sunday the 24th Golden Mask festival closed at a lavish ceremony at the number one theater in Russia — the Bolshoi. The Golden Mask is Moscow's largest festival devoted to theater, which is the lifeblood of the city's culture and possibly more important than cinema.

The festival lasts almost three months. In addition to performances by participating Moscow theaters, it gives Moscow residents and visitors a chance to see the most interesting productions of the last year from all over Russia. Productions chosen by experts from among last season's premieres are nominated in over 30 categories in all theatrical genres: drama, ballet, opera, operetta, musical and puppet theater.

A Ceremony Without a Hero

Kirill Serebrennikov took the center stage last night, albeit only in a metaphorical sense.

Serebrennikov, one of the most prominent theater and film directors in today's Russia, could not attend the ceremony. The director, as well as several of his colleagues, has been under house arrest for almost a year on charges of embezzlement.

Last year Serebrennikov did not attend the Golden Mask for a different reason: along with a fellow director Konstantin Bogomolov he declined to nominate any of his productions to protest the Ministry of Culture getting involved in nominating the jury members.

This year Serebrennikov received the best opera director award for "Chaadsky," while Alla Demidova was awarded best actress award for her performance in Serebrennikov's production "Akhmatova: Poem without a Hero." Gogol Center, the theater that Serebrennikov still officially heads, was awarded a special jury prize "for creating a space of creative freedom, and a bold search for the language of contemporary theater."

"We all believe that this injustice will be corrected and they will be with us here, free. Let's wish them to get their freedom soon," said Alexei Bartoshevich, chairperson of the Golden Mask, referring not just to Serebrennikov, but his colleagues, who face the same charges: Alexei Malobrodsky, Yury Itin and Sophia Appelbaum. These names were mentioned by almost every presenter on stage.

A Celebration of Diversity

Among other prominent winners was the Russian adaptation of "Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street" directed by Alexei Frandetti at the famous Taganka Theater, which seems to be making a comeback under the new director, actress Irina Apeksimova. "Sweeney Todd" got three awards: for the best musical, best director and best actor in a musical.

The best opera award went to the Bolshoi Theater for "Billy Budd," based on Herman Melville's novel and directed by American David Alden, while the Stanislavsky Music Theater was recognized for the best ballet, "Suite in White."

Greek Teodor Currentzis, who's been the resident conductor at the Perm Opera and Ballet Theater for many years, was awarded the best conductor in ballet award, while Slovak conductor Oliver von Dohnanyi, who conducts at the nearby Yekaterinburg Opera and Ballet, was recognized as the best conductor in opera. The opera he conducted, "The Passenger" by Mieczysław Weinberg about a holocaust survivor and her tormentor, got another award for best actress.

Lev Dodin from MDT, a theater in St. Petersburg, got the best drama award for "Fear. Love. Despair", while Yury Butusov, a fellow director from the northern capital, got an award for directing a new interpretation of classic Chekhov play, "Uncle Vanya."

Dmitry Danilov, a well-known writer and a finalist of "Bolshaya Kniga" (Big Book) award, got recognized as the best playwright for "The Man from Podolsk." Danilov dedicated his award to Mikhail Ugarov, artistic director of Teatr.doc and the director of his play, who unexpectedly died just two weeks ago.

Another name remembered at the ceremony was Oleg Tabakov, the late head of MKhT (the Moscow Art Theater), another pillar of Moscow theater community who passed away recently.

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