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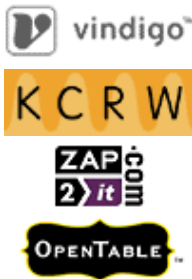
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Wednesday, November 14, 2001

'Lion King' Rules Ovation Awards; Solo Shows Also Honored

By DON SHIRLEY, Times Theater Writer

"The Lion King" won seven Ovation Awards on Monday--more than twice as many as any other show in this year's peer-judged theater awards.

The awards were presented in a snafu-studded ceremony at the new Kodak Theatre in Hollywood. It attracted an estimated crowd of 2,400 to the 3,500-seat venue, which opened last weekend and was built primarily as a home for the Academy Awards shows.

The awards for "The Lion King" included best musical in a large theater, best director, best choreographer, a supporting actor award and three design awards. The "Lion King" honors were so predictable and repetitive that co-producer Thomas Schumacher, accepting the show's final trophy for best musical, detected enough audible negative reaction from the audience that he began his remarks with "Thank you for your moan."

Nevertheless, "Lion King" failed to top the record number of Ovations ever won by a single show--eight for "Ragtime" in 1997.

Far less expected were the production awards for "A Huey P. Newton Story" as best play in a larger theater and the Actors' Gang's "Underneath the Lintel (An Impressive Presentation of Lovely Evidences)" as best play in a smaller venue.

Roger Guenveur Smith's "Newton," which was presented at Los Angeles Theatre Center, is an impressionistic glimpse of the African American activist, with a remarkably complex sound design by Marc Anthony Thompson that also won an Ovation. The show wouldn't even be eligible for its award if it had been staged in the new awards year that began in September, because next year a solo performance/writing category is being created that would separate "Newton" from the pack of larger shows.

Glen Berger's "Underneath the Lintel" examines a Dutch librarian's obsession with a book returned 200 years overdue. It also won awards for actor Brian T. Finney and director Brent Hinkley. Accepting his award, Finney noted the celebrity quotient of his competitors--Alan Alda, David Hyde Pierce, John Spencer and Smith--and said that if he had not won, he would have given up acting. The audience laughed as it absorbed his unspoken implication that none of the others will do the same, now that Finney has won.

Celebrity winners were few and far between this year. Perhaps the most famous of the acting winners, Laurie Metcalf, was not on hand to accept her award for "Looking for Normal." Gogi Grant, named lead actress in a musical for



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"Glad to be Unhappy," said her award proved that "if you live long enough, you see anything."

The large-cast "bare" took the nod for best musical in a small theater, but won no other awards. However, the "bare" cast performed an original arrangement of "America the Beautiful," against a video backdrop of waving flag colors, as the show's grand finale.

The evening was beset by technical problems, beginning with long lines for tickets and a last-minute decision to abandon reserved seating in favor of general seating in order to get the show started. Theatre LA, the sponsoring organization, accepted responsibility for the ticketing problems.

Co-host Bruce Vilanch joked that the box office staff consisted of the same people who counted votes last year in Palm Beach, Fla.

A series of images on a center stage screen was plagued with problems, from an initial absence of a soundtrack to horizontal lines across the screen that split the images until they were sometimes indecipherable. This even afflicted a presentation of photos and names of theater figures who had died during the year, so that some of them were not identifiable.

The show's director, Jon Lawrence Rivera, said the Kodak's crew began working on the screen display less than an hour before show time. He said Theatre LA was unable to pay for enough time for the crew in advance of the ceremony.

Kodak managing director Ed Murphy responded that a necessary videotape arrived only at 6 p.m. Monday--in the wrong format for the rented projection equipment. The Kodak's own projection equipment won't be installed until after Thanksgiving, he said.

One aspect of the staging that drew acerbic responses from some of the presenters and winners was the seemingly cryptic appearance of lines of young people moving in formation around the stage as the presenters entered. Presenter Pierce declared: "I'm frightened by the walking people." Rivera said the idea was to keep the stage fluid in the absence of moving sets.

A total of 292 shows were eligible for this year's Ovations, which were voted on by 120 theater professionals.

The winners:

Musical, larger: "The Lion King," Disney Theatricals at Pantages Theatre

Musical, smaller: "bare," God Help Productions at Hudson Mainstage Theatre

Play, larger: "A Huey P. Newton Story," Cultural Affairs Department at Los Angeles Theatre Center

Play, smaller: "Underneath the Lintel (An Impressive Presentation of Lovely Evidences)," Actors' Gang

World premiere: Jane Anderson, "Looking for Normal"

New translation/adaptation: (tie) Clara Bellar, Herb Mendelsohn, Gulu Monteiro and cast, "A Flea in Her Ear"; Rick Sparks and Gary Carter, "They Shoot Horses, Don't They?"

Director, musical: Julie Taymor, "The Lion King"

Director, play: Brent Hinkley, "Underneath the Lintel"

Lead actor, musical: Avi Hoffman, "Too Jewish?"

Lead actress, musical: Gogi Grant, "Glad to Be Unhappy: The Lyrical Life of Lorenz Hart"

Lead actor, play: Brian T. Finney, "Underneath the Lintel"

Lead actress, play: Laurie Metcalf, "Looking for Normal"

Featured actor, musical: Danny Rutigliano, "The Lion King"

Featured actress, musical: Meg Howrey, "Contact"

Featured actor, play: Leslie Jordan, "Southern Baptist Sissies"

Featured actress, play: Elizabeth Franz, "Death of a Salesman"

Ensemble performance: cast of "Night and Her Stars."

Choreographer: Garth Fagan, "The Lion King"
Set, larger: Richard Hudson, "The Lion King"
Set, smaller: Desma Murphy, "A Mislaid Heaven"
Lighting, larger: Donald Holder, "The Lion King"
Lighting, smaller: Fredrick Wenzlaff, "Infinity."
Costumes, larger: Julie Taymor, "The Lion King"
Costumes, smaller: Kara Feely, Paule Lemassow,
Norma Ramos, "Pathe-X"
Sound, larger: Marc Anthony Thompson, "A Huey P.
Newton Story."
Sound, smaller: Jef Bek and Eric Snodgrass, "Pathe-X"
National play award: Lexie LaBove, "Turning for Home"
Doolittle Award for leadership: Tom Ormeny
Career Achievement Award: Cathy Rigby

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