



## It's 'Jersey Boys' and 'History Boys' at the Tony Awards

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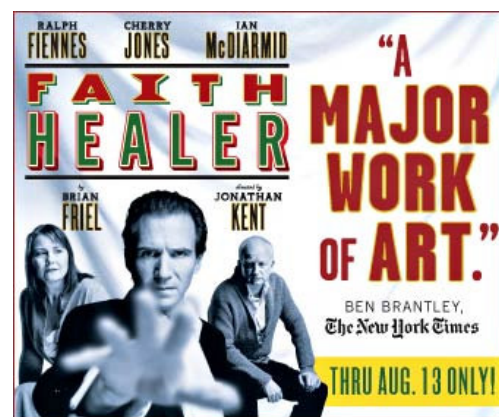
Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

Cast members performed a number from "Jersey Boys," which was named best musical. [More Photos >](#)

By **CAMPBELL ROBERTSON**  
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Despite the carping about jukebox musicals and a contest that seemed to gain heat by the minute, "Jersey Boys," the surprise hit about the Four Seasons as told through their songs, won the big prize — best musical — at last night's Tony Awards, as well as three more, including best actor for [John Lloyd Young](#) and, in one of the night's several upsets, best featured actor for Christian Hoff.

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"On behalf of the entire and most jubilant 'Jersey Boys' family, our profound thanks for this honor," said Michael David, president of Dodger Theatricals, a producer of the musical. Mr. David also thanked the three living members of the Four Seasons, onstage with him, who "actually lived the story we told."

"Many of you fought in the trenches with us this season fighting for your own dreams," Mr. David said to the audience. "We are most happy."

The show's main competitor, "The Drowsy Chaperone," a postmodern love letter to musicals of the 1920's that began as a skit at a bachelor party in Toronto, did not go home empty-handed. It picked up five awards, including best book, best score and best featured actress.

Mr. Young, who plays Frankie Valli — and, yes, he hits all those notes — came out on top in a tough category that included a major Broadway player in Michael Cerveris ("Sweeney Todd") and a concert star in Harry Connick Jr.

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Oprah Winfrey and Julia Roberts were among the presenters. [More Photos >](#)

Sara Krulwich/The New York Times

LaChanze won her first Tony for her role as Celie in "The Color Purple." [More Photos >](#)

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John Lloyd Young, who plays Frankie Valli in "Jersey Boys," was named

("The Pajama Game"). He also won over Stephen Lynch ("The Wedding Singer") and Bob Martin ("Drowsy"), who, like everyone in the category but Mr. Cerveris, were making their Broadway debuts.

His victory and the dominance of "The History Boys" in the play categories were predicted on Broadway, but in many ways the conventional wisdom turned out to be wrong, with upsets in three categories.

LaChanze won her first Tony for her role as Celie, the abused protagonist at the center of "The Color Purple"; it was the only Tony win for that musical, but it was not what many along Broadway were expecting.

"Oh, my God, I won it, I really won it!" LaChanze said, looking genuinely shocked. "I didn't rehearse the speech clearly."

After the usual thanks to her family and fellow cast members, she singled out one of the show's producers, saying, "I want to thank [Oprah Winfrey](#) for bringing this story not only to the country but to the world."

LaChanze won out over the favorite, [Patti LuPone](#) of "Sweeney Todd," and also Sutton Foster of "Drowsy," Kelli O'Hara of "The Pajama Game" and Chita Rivera of "Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life."

There was another upset in best musical revival, a category that was essentially a race between a radically redesigned thriller ("Sweeney Todd") and a nostalgically restored 1950's love story ("The Pajama Game"). "The Pajama Game" won and also took the prize for choreography. (The category also included a critically maligned production of "The Threepenny Opera.")

Mr. Hoff, who plays Tommy DeVito, a founding member of the Four Seasons, was the surprising victor for best featured actor in a musical, beating Jim Dale of "The Threepenny Opera," widely considered the favorite, as well as Danny Burstein of "Drowsy," Brandon Victor Dixon of "The Color Purple" and Manoel Felciano of "Sweeney Todd."

The upset seemed to catch Mr. Hoff by surprise as much as anyone else at the ceremony at Radio City Music Hall.

"God bless Broadway!" an emotional Mr. Hoff said onstage.

But to almost no one's surprise, "The History Boys," Alan Bennett's story of the students and dueling educational philosophies at a British secondary school, had an outstanding showing, picking up six prizes, including best play, best direction, best actor and best featured actress in a play.

"The History Boys" beat out two other British imports, Martin McDonagh's "Lieutenant of Inishmore" and Conor McPherson's "Shining City," as well as the one American nominee, David Lindsay-Abaire's "Rabbit Hole."

[Cynthia Nixon](#) was named best actress for "Rabbit Hole," and Richard Griffiths won best actor for "The History Boys."

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A number from "The Drowsy Chaperone" during the Tony Awards telecast. [More Photos >](#)

[Lincoln Center Theater's](#) "Awake and Sing!," Clifford Odets's drama of a struggling Jewish family in the Bronx, won best revival of a play over Brian Friel's "Faith Healer," W. Somerset Maugham's "Constant Wife" and [Edward Albee's](#) "Seascape."

"Way back in ancient history in 1935, when 'Awake and Sing!' had its original production, the Tonys hadn't even been invented yet," said Bernard Gersten, the executive director of Lincoln Center Theater. "So this is 'Awake and Sing!'s' first Tony, and a well deserved one it is."

For best featured actress, Beth Leavel won for playing the title role in "Drowsy," over Carolee Carmello in "Lestat," Megan Lawrence in "The Pajama Game" and Felicia P. Fields and Elisabeth Withers-Mendes in "The Color Purple."

John Doyle was named best director for his austere reimagining of [Stephen Sondheim's](#) 1979 musical "Sweeney Todd," in which the actors play the musical instruments onstage. He beat out Kathleen Marshall of "The Pajama Game," [Des McAnuff](#) of "Jersey Boys" and Casey Nicholaw of "Drowsy."

"Thank you to someone who I hope we all hold in a very, very special place on Broadway," Mr. Doyle said, "and that's, of course, the wonderful Stephen Sondheim."

Many Broadway pundits, self-appointed and otherwise, predicted that "The History Boys" would dominate the awards. Its director, [Nicholas Hytner](#), won for best direction of a play.

"Above all, I thank Alan Bennett," Mr. Hytner said, adding, "He is the best luck I've ever had."

Mr. Hytner won over Wilson Milam, director of "The Lieutenant of Inishmore"; [Daniel Sullivan](#) of "Rabbit Hole"; and Bartlett Sher of "Awake and Sing!"

For best featured actress in a play, Frances de la Tour, who played a teacher in "The History Boys," won over [Tyne Daly](#) in "Rabbit Hole," Alison Pill in "The Lieutenant of Inishmore," Zoë Wanamaker in "Awake and Sing!" and Jayne Houdyshell in "Well."

"The History Boys" also won for scenic and lighting design in a play, in a ceremony before the broadcast.

But [Ian McDiarmid](#) was named best featured actor in a play for his role as a sleazy show-business manager in "Faith Healer," beating Samuel Barnett from "The History Boys," Domhnall Gleeson for "The Lieutenant of Inishmore" and [Mark Ruffalo](#) and Pablo Schreiber for "Awake and Sing!"

Though Mr. McDiarmid has had a long career in Britain and on the screen, he made his Broadway debut in the revival of "Faith Healer," which had its own, unsuccessful Broadway debut in 1979.

"I'm really proud to be associated with its triumphant return and restoration," Mr. McDiarmid said of the play.

The categories for new musical were widely seen as a battleground with "Jersey Boys" versus "Drowsy." "Jersey Boys," which has already grossed almost \$30 million, was a surprise hit in this season of failed jukebox musicals. But the race tightened in the weeks leading up to the ceremony, particularly after "Drowsy," at first considered an underdog, picked up 13 nominations, more than any other production.

"Drowsy" won two early awards: best book (essentially, the story of the musical outside the music) and best score. In the book category, "Drowsy" beat its main rival, "Jersey Boys"; it also beat "The Color Purple" and "The Wedding Singer," which were both nominated for best score, along with [Andrew Lloyd Webber's](#) "Woman in White."

"This show expresses the voice of a group of writers and performers in Toronto, and we want to share it with them," said Bob Martin, who co-wrote the book for "Drowsy" and was a nominee for best actor in a musical. "Not literally," he added, "but figuratively."

Before the telecast, Norbert Leo Butz and Victoria Clark, both winners for their performances last year, presented several awards for orchestration (how the music is arranged for the voices and instruments in a musical) and technical achievement. "Sweeney Todd" won for orchestration.

"Drowsy" won for costumes and scenic design in a musical, "Jersey Boys" won best lighting in a musical, and "Awake and Sing!" won for costumes in a play.

There was no competition this year for special theatrical event, but Sarah Jones received a special Tony for her one-woman show, "Bridge & Tunnel." Harold Prince, the longtime theater director and producer, received a lifetime achievement award. (He already had 20 Tonys.) His award was presented in absentia because Mr. Prince was in Las Vegas working on a version of "The Phantom of the Opera" opening on June 24. In his honor, Howard McGillin gave a special performance of "The Music of the Night" from "Phantom."

The awards ceremony capped a financially flourishing season that set records in attendance (12 million) and grosses (\$862 million). It was also a season brimming with shows that had to jostle for available theaters. In another sign of Broadway's robust economic health, the seats were about 80 percent full for the season.

The Tony Awards are administered by the [League of American Theaters and Producers](#), the industry trade association, and the American Theater Wing, a charitable group that founded the Tonys.

The awards, voted on by 763 journalists, producers and other theater professionals, honor the work done at the 39 large theaters in the middle of Manhattan that make up Broadway. Off-Broadway theaters are excluded, as are regional theaters except for one each year, which is given an award for regional excellence. This year that award went to the Intiman Theater in Seattle, where the musical "The Light in the Piazza" had its premiere. The artistic director of the Intiman is Mr. Sher.

Nostalgia took a starring role last night. [Patricia Neal](#), who won a Tony at the first ceremony in 1947 that was soon stolen, was presented with a replacement. [James Earl Jones](#) and Ms. Nixon paid tribute to two enormously influential playwrights who died this season: [August Wilson](#) and [Wendy Wasserstein](#).

In lieu of a host, the ceremony featured 60 presenters, one for each year of the ceremony's history. The presenters included superstars like [Julia Roberts](#) and Ms. Winfrey, and some known almost exclusively for their work on Broadway.

Ms. Roberts, who was passed over by the Tony nominators for her performance in the revival of "Three Days of Rain," took a moment before presenting the award for best actor in play to say to the Broadway crowd, "You people are insanely talented people."

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