

Here Are the 2016 AriZoni Theatre Awards Winners

BY LYNN TRIMBLE

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Tonantzin by artist Colette Crutcher created for *Guadalupe: The Opera*.

Colette Crutcher/Photo by Sean Hoyer

The 26th annual AriZoni Theatre Awards took place Monday, September 19, at **Tempe Center for the Arts**. More than 20 theaters, in addition to several youth theaters, participated in this year's awards – which are meant to honor excellence in local theater.

Awards for general (rather than youth) theaters were presented in about two dozen categories recognizing achievement in performance, production, and new works development. For many categories, two winners were selected. Recipients were selected by adjudicators who saw and

ranked various snows throughout the 2015-16 season.

Mesa Community College Theatre and Film Arts was the big winner with 11 awards. ASU Lyric Opera Theatre and Mesa Encore Theatre earned 5 awards each.

Mesa Community College Theatre and Film Arts split the overall production award for a play with Fountain Hills Theater. The former won for *Three Sisters*, and the latter for *Any Number Can Die*.

For overall production of a musical, the winners were Mesa Encore Theatre's *Sweeney Todd* and Theater Works' *Man of La Mancha*.

The **results look far different than they did last year**, in part because several theater companies opted not to participate this year – including Phoenix Theatre, Southwest Shakespeare Company, and Childsplay. Other well-known theaters that don't take part in the AriZoni Awards include Arizona Theatre Company and Black Theatre Troupe. Neither do Space 55, iTheatre Collaborative, Teatro Bravo, Orange Theater, nor Theatre Artists Studio. Last year's big winner, with 19 awards, was Phoenix Theatre.

On the other hand, Stray Cat Theatre and Nearly Naked Theatre do take part. And neither left Tempe Center for the Arts Monday night empty handed. In fact, they split the award for actress in a major role in a musical – which went to Johanna Carlisle for Nearly Naked Theatre's *Next to Normal* and Brittany Howk for Stray Cat Theatre's *Heathers the Musical*.





Cast members for Stray Cat Theatre's production of *Heathers The Musical*.

John Groseclose

Best director awards went to Matthew Wiener, formerly artistic director for **the now defunct Actors Theatre** of Phoenix, and D. Scott Withers, who performed for many years with Childsplay. Wiener directed the play *Three Sisters*, which was one of the night's top nominees, for Mesa Community College Theatre and Film Arts. Withers directed the musical *Man of La Mancha* for Theater Works, where **Dan Schay was executive director** until his death earlier this year.

Robert Kolby Harper, best-known as associate artistic director for Phoenix Theatre, was also honored with a best director for a musical award for ASU Lyric Opera Theatre's *The Drowsy Chaperone*. And another best director for a play award went to Seth Reines for Hale Centre Theatre's *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

James DeMars received the original music composition award for *Guadalupe: The Opera*, a world-premiere opera presented last season by ASU's Lyric Opera Theatre. And he shared the original script award for the same work with Robert Esteva and Graham Whitehead.

Choreography awards went to Lynzee J. Foreman and T.A. Barrows for *Smokey Joe's Cafe* at Desert Foothills Theater, and Cambrian James for work with Hale Centre Theatre in Gilbert.

A full list of nominees and winners is available on the **[AriZoni Awards website](#)**.

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