

THEATER

Long Island's Favorite NY Shows Honored

By Iris Wiener
info@longislandernews.com

It's called the Golden Globes of Broadway, and every year it proves to be incredibly golden; from the designer dresses to the big stars, the 2007-2008 Drama Desk Awards was an exciting celebration of a year that truly venerates the experience that is New York theater.

The 2007-2008 season stood out due to a lack of one big-winning vehicle. There were no frontrunners, however there was a huge variety of shows from which the Drama Desk chose nominees. The Drama Desk was founded in 1949 to explore key issues in the theater and to bring together critics and writers in an organization to support the ongoing development of theater in New York. The organization began presenting its awards in 1955, and it is the only critics organization to honor achievement in the theater with competition between Broadway, Off-Broadway, and Off-Off Broadway productions in the same categories.

The first revival of *South Pacific*, starring Kelli O'Hara and Danny Burstein, headed the list of winners this year with five awards. Bartlett Sher was the first to visit the stage to accept his director's trophy for the hit musical.

It was a draw for the rest of the categories, as the comic drama *August: Osage County*, the Patti LuPone headed *Gypsy*, and the daring new musical *Passing Strange* each grabbed three awards throughout the night. Laura Benanti, who brings life and heart to the role of Louise in *Gypsy*, gave the most touching speech of the evening as she broke into



The cast of *The Homecoming* took the Outstanding Ensemble Award at this year's Drama Desk Awards.

tears over the honor.

"I've been dreaming of working with Patti LuPone my whole life, so this is just amazing, just amazing," she gushed to *The Long Islander* after her moving thank you. Her interview with *TLI* went interrupted as she screamed when LuPone herself won for her role as Mama Rose.

Other top acting wins included those for Deanna Dunagan in *August: Osage County*, Paulo Szot in *South Pacific*, and Mark Rylance in the matchmaking musical *Boeing, Boeing*.

The red carpet at the F.H. LaGuardia Concert Hall at Lincoln Center was filled with a very diverse group of New York's most talented. Harvey Fierstein loudly waltzed inside, dressed to the nines from head to...ankle. His big white sneakers were a show-stopper. James Earl Jones, a commanding force on the stage for nearly half a century, took a break from his intense performance in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* to accept one of the evening's top honors, The Drama Desk Special Award. Kris Andersson made a splash when he, dressed as his 'she' alterego Dixie, wowed



Star of *Gypsy*, and local gal Patti LuPone grabbed three awards throughout the night.

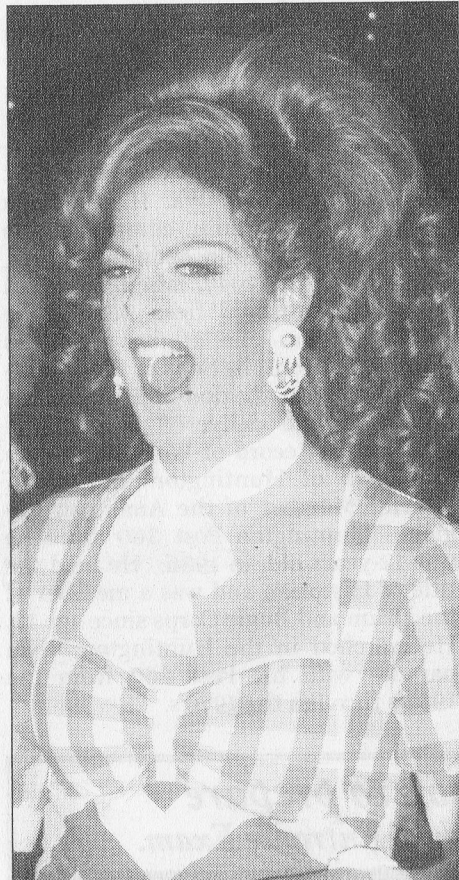
the carpet in his signature white heels and red wig. He was nominated in the category of Outstanding Solo Performance for *Dixie's Tupperware Party*. Andersson saw the award go to Laurence Fishburne for his acclaimed work in *Thurgood*, in which he plays Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. The

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At The 53rd Annual Drama Desk Awards

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cast of *The Homecoming*, winners of the Outstanding Ensemble Award (shared with the cast of *The Dining Room*), mugged for the cameras as they huddled together in their first moment reuniting



Kris Andersson makes a splash dressed as his alterego Dixie.

since the show closed in April. Raul Esparza, James Frain, Michael McKean, Ian McShane, and Gareth Saxe said that they truly felt as though they were at a homecoming.

In what was perhaps the most interesting award of the evening, Outstanding Actor nominee Bill Pullman presented a Drama Desk Special Award to Edward Albee, the famous playwright behind



Marisa Tomei was on hand at the awards as a presenter, and was also nominated for her role in *Top Girls*.

Seascape, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and *The Goat, or Who is Sylvia?* The 80 year-old writer, whose provocative plays, including this season's *Peter and Jerry*, was excited to be honored for a lifetime of work that he said "was not over yet!"

"I really feel like you have to go a long way to measure up to Edward, who is getting lifetime achievements now, but I think his benchmark of getting to 80 would be really great," said *Peter and Jerry* star Pullman to *The Long Islander*, when asked about what he would like to

have achieved in his own career at the age of 80. "That in itself, just to live and keep working, is all I could ask for."

The Drama Desk Awards often help to foreshadow who will be taking the stage at Radio City Music Hall when the Tony Awards commence. Based on the biggest awards of the night, Outstanding Play, Musical, Revival of a Play, and Revival of a Musical, it will be very difficult to obtain tickets to *August: Osage County*, *Passing Strange*, *Boeing, Boeing*, and *South Pacific*, the respective winners, come June 15.



Accepting the Drama Desk Special Award was James Earl Jones for his work in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.