

Theatrical magic keeping Broadway going

As Broadway fights virus surge, unsung heroes find spotlight

NEW YORK, Jan 10, (AP): The theatrical magic keeping Broadway going during the latest coronavirus surge has been the unheralded performers ready to step into any role in an emergency. Then there's Carla Stickler, who had actually left show business but returned to rescue "Wicked."

Stickler, who had launched a new career as a software engineer in Chicago three years ago, canceled her winter vacation and returned to New York to star as the green-skinned Elphaba while the cast was ravaged by illness. She may have been playing a wicked witch, but Stickler's effort was all good.

"It was like riding a bike," she says. "I got out there and I was like, 'Oh, I remember this. This is really special, and I'm just going to try to enjoy every second of it.'"

Her effort is just an extreme example of the work Broadway's understudies, standbys and fill-ins have made to keep shows open, often learning multiple roles with little formal rehearsals.

The stress on companies has been enormous, with many shows kept open by the skillful folk listed deeper in the Playbill. Hugh Jackman, who before he contracted COVID-19, took a moment at a curtain call to honor the multiple understudies who kept his revival of "The Music Man" open for as long as it did.

"It's been such a really exciting moment to see understudies and standbys and swings get this kind of recognition for the hard work that they do," Stickler says. "I think they sometimes get overlooked. And so it's been really emotional to see the outpouring of love for all what they do."

Stickler wasn't the only former performer pressed into service. At one point over the holidays, eight of the 12 actors in Broadway's

"Come From Away" were substitutes, including two — Pearl Sun and Holly Ann Butler — who had left the show, as well as Marika Aubrey who was drafted from the national tour.

"Everybody kind of had to come together — the music department, hair, wardrobe, stage management, lighting, sound. Everybody to make this baby work," says Josh Breckenridge, the show's dance captain who wrangles all 12 roles and is a standby for five of the six male roles, who each involve multiple parts.

"It really took a village and it was a beautiful village and it delivered. So I'm very proud of us for nailing it. And the audiences were wonderful and with us every second. It really was a beautiful triumph."

Experience

Breckenridge, who has been on Broadway with "The Scottsboro Boys" and "The Ritz" as well as toured with "The Book of Mormon," hopes Broadway's latest harrowing experience will lead to structural changes, like investing in more standbys and fill-ins during vacations.

"I hope that producers out there notice and start to hire more coverage so that we can avoid moments like this and be ready and not have to cancel on audiences," he says. "We're literally the reason for the phrase 'the show must go on,' right?"

Stickler was one reason "Wicked" could go on this holiday season. She was driving with her husband and dog on Dec. 27 for a week's vacation in Michigan with friends when she got an urgent request to return to Oz. The cast was stretched and they needed her skills.

She had last performed the role on Broadway in 2015 but had been a swing — someone who covers a show's ensemble roles — up until

2019. She had spent a decade in the Broadway company of "Wicked" and starred in a national tour, too.

"Elphaba is just kind of something that lives in my body, and I think a lot of other understudies will say the same thing," she says. "You build up those neural pathways and they're super strong, and all you have to do is kind of recall them."

While her husband continued driving on, she flew to New York during a long, treacherous travel day dodging flight cancellations. She saw the show that night and then rehearsed over the next few days. She went on as Elphaba on Saturday night and the Sunday matinee.

"I think everybody is really doing the best they can," she says. "I do think the fact that the show has been able to stay open is a testament to how devoted the actors are to the show and how great and talented the group of people that they have hired over the years are."

While casts and backstage personnel up and down Broadway are all vaccinated, wear masks when not onstage and get tested daily, breakthrough infections have still spread. Several productions, including "Aladdin," "Hamilton," "Dear Evan Hansen" "The Lion King" and "Six," suspended performances due to breakthrough cases.

Stickler is sticking around this week just in case "Wicked" needs her help. She'll then fly back to Chicago, but she won't ever rule out a return if the show needs her again.

"I've gone and done a lot of things last minute for the show in my life, and I would not put it past myself to do it again. I would do it again in a heartbeat. I love the show," she says.

"I swear I'm going to be able to do this role on my grave. She's so ingrained in my body. If I turn 100, I'll do it at my 100th birthday party."

Variety



This image released by Netflix shows Kirsten Dunst in a scene from 'The Power of the Dog.' (AP)

Awards

'West Side Story,' 'The Power of the Dog' among big winners

Golden Globes go on, without stars

BEVERLY HILLS, Calif., Jan 10, (AP): The Golden Globe Awards, Hollywood's so-called biggest party that regularly drew 18 million television viewers, was reduced to a live-blog Sunday night for its 79th edition.

The embattled Hollywood Foreign Press Association proceeded with its film awards Sunday night without a telecast, nominees, a red carpet, a host, press or even a livestream. Instead, members of the HFPA and some recipients of the group's philanthropic grants gathered at the Beverly Hilton Hotel for a 90-minute private event, announcing the names of the film and television winners on the organization's social media feeds.

Steven Spielberg's "West Side Story" won several big awards, for best picture comedy or musical, best actress for Rachel Zegler and best supporting actress for Ariana DeBose.

Netflix's gothic Western "The Power of the Dog" was named best picture drama, along with other honors for Jane Campion's direction and Kodi Smit-McPhee's supporting performance.

Other film winners included Will Smith for "King Richard," Nicole Kidman for "Being the Ricardos" and Andrew Garfield for "tick, tick...BOOM!" The Japanese film "Drive My Car," also a critics' group darling, got best non-English language motion picture, while "Encanto" won for animation.

Though announcing winners on social media might seem like a straightforward task, those following along on Twitter only might have been somewhat confused at times. The tweets often left out exactly which project a person had won for.

To announce the winner for best actor, motion picture musical or comedy, the organization tweeted, "It takes 43 muscles to smile. Thanks for the workout Andrew Garfield and congratulations for taking home the #GoldenGlobe for Best Actor-Motion Picture-Musical/Comedy," failing to mention that the award was for his turn in "tick, tick...BOOM!"

Other times, the tweets were just downright baffling. In announcing the "West Side Story" win, the group initially wrote, "If laughter is the best medicine @WestSideMovie is the cure for what ails you" about the drama that's full of death and tragedy. They later deleted the tweet and wrote a new one about "music" being the best medicine.

Television winners included: Sarah Snook and Jeremy Strong for "Succession," which won best television drama, Jean Smart for "Hacks," which also won best television comedy, Jason Sudeikis for "Ted Lasso," Kate Winslet for "Mare of Easttown," O Yeung-su for

"Squid Game" and Michael Keaton for "Dopesick." Barry Jenkins' "The Underground Railroad" got best limited series. The group said on its website that "Pose" star Michaela Jaé Rodriguez became the first trans person to win a Golden Globe.

None of the winners appeared to be present at the event, nor did they immediately comment on their awards.

Jamie Lee Curtis, however, chimed in with a video message shared on the group's Twitter, talking about the HFPA's charitable work.

"I just wanted to honor and stand with them in this continued advocacy," Curtis said. "I'm proud to be associated with them in this venture."

The HFPA enlisted leaders of the groups it has given grants to to announce the winners. Arnold Schwarzenegger chimed in with a video message as well, thanking the group for recognizing him as the "new star of the year" in 1977.

Surprise

That the organization proceeded with any kind of event came as a surprise to many in Hollywood. The HFPA came under fire after a Los Angeles Times investigation revealed in February ethical lapses and a stunning lack of diversity — there was not a single Black journalist in the 87-person group. Studios and PR firms threatened to boycott. Tom Cruise even returned his three Golden Globes, while other A-listers condemned the group on social media.

They pledged reform last year, but even after a public declaration during the 78th show, their longtime broadcast partner NBC announced in May that it would not air the 2022 Golden Globes because "Change of this magnitude takes time and work." The broadcaster typically pays some \$60 million for the rights to air the show, which ranks among the most-watched awards shows behind the Oscars and the Grammys.

Though often ridiculed, Hollywood had come to accept the Golden Globes as a legitimate and helpful stop in a competitive awards season. And for audiences around the world, it was a reasonably lively night, with glamorous fashion, major stars, the promise of champagne-fueled speeches, and hosts — from Tina Fey and Amy Poehler to Ricky Gervais — that regularly poked fun at the HFPA.

After the NBC blow, it was widely expected that the HFPA would simply sit the year out. Hollywood studios and publicists also largely opted out from engaging with the group as they had in years past, with some

declining to provide screeners of films for consideration. When nominees were announced last month, few celebrated publicly.

The press association claims that in the months since its 2021 show, it has remade itself. The group has added a chief diversity officer; overhauled its board; inducted 21 new members, including six Black journalists; brought in the NAACP on a five-year partnership; and updated its code of conduct.

List of winners at Sunday's 79th Golden Globe Awards:

Movies

- Best picture, drama: "The Power of the Dog"
- Best picture, musical or comedy: "West Side Story"
- Best actress, drama: Nicole Kidman, "Being the Ricardos"
- Best actor, drama: Will Smith, "King Richard"
- Best actress, musical or comedy: Rachel Zegler, "West Side Story"
- Best actor, musical or comedy: Andrew Garfield, "tick, tick...BOOM!"
- Supporting actress: Ariana DeBose, "West Side Story"
- Supporting Actor: Kodi Smit-McPhee, "The Power of the Dog"
- Animated: "Encanto"
- Non-English Language: "Drive My Car," Japan
- Screenplay: Kenneth Branagh, "Belfast"
- Director: Jane Campion, "The Power of the Dog"
- Original song: "No Time to Die," Billie Eilish
- Original score: Hans Zimmer, "Dune"

Television

- Drama series: "Succession"
- Comedy series: "Hacks"
- Limited Series: "The Underground Railroad"
- Actress, drama series: Michaela Jaé Rodriguez, "Pose"
- Actor, drama series: Jeremy Strong, "Succession"
- Actress, comedy or musical series: Jean Smart, "Hacks"
- Actor, comedy or musical series: Jason Sudeikis, "Ted Lasso"
- Actress, limited series: Kate Winslet, "Mare of Easttown"
- Actor, limited series: Michael Keaton, "Dopesick"
- Supporting actor: O Yeung-su, "Squid Game"
- Supporting actress: Sarah Snook, "Succession"

OXFORD, Miss: An author whose debut novel in 2020 received awards and critical acclaim will write and teach at the University of Mississippi in the spring.

Raven Leilani has been announced as the John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence at the University of Mississippi. Her first novel, "Luster," won



Kruger



Cruz

the Center for Fiction First Novel Prize. "Luster" is about "a young Black woman striving for the right to make art and inhabit the full, complex spectrum of her humanity," according to a university press release.

Leilani's work has also been published in Granta and The Yale Review literary journals and The

Cut, a blog hosted by New York magazine. She is a National Book Foundation 5 under 35 honoree and recipient of the Kirkus Prize, Dylan Thomas Prize and NBCC John Leonard Prize.

"Raven is a fresh, exciting new face in literary fiction, a writer whose career is just taking off, and we are honored to have

her as our Grisham Writer-in-Residence for the spring 2022 semester," said Matt Bondurant, director of the University of Mississippi master's program in creative writing.

A native New Yorker, Leilani received her master's degree in creative writing from New York University in 2019. (AP)