

Potomac Stages The Daily News

3-08 Port City Playhouse's *Betrayal* and The Arlington Players' *Kiss Me, Kate* Take Top Honors At WATCH Awards

The Washington Area Theatre Community Honors, celebrating outstanding work in community theaters in Washington, Maryland and Virginia, were awarded to 39 recipients for work on 19 shows at 14 theaters last night at a gala awards ceremony at the Birchmere in Alexandria.

The award for Outstanding Play went to Port City Playhouse's production of *Betrayal* which also garnered the award for outstanding direction of a play for Leslie A. Kobylinski. The Arlington Players' production of *Kiss Me, Kate* walked away with the award for Outstanding Musical and its director, John K. Monnett, won in a tie with Lisa Anne Bailey who directed *Suburb* at the Elden Street Players. Michael Nansel took home both the Outstanding Lead Actor in a Musical award for his role as Fred Graham/Petruchio in *Kiss Me, Kate* and the Outstanding Featured Actor in a Musical award for his performance as Juan Peron in the Montgomery Playhouse production of *Evita*. [Click here to see the entire list of award recipients.](#)

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Arlington Players, Port City Playhouse Given Awards

By Michael Toscano - Special to The Washington Post
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The Arlington Players and Alexandria's Port City Playhouse took top honors in the fourth annual Washington Area Theatre Community Honors (WATCH).

The Reston Community Players earned the most awards overall of the 19 eligible theater companies in Virginia, Maryland and the District, with six wins for three of its productions.

The awards covered community theater productions during 2003. They were announced Sunday at a ceremony at the Birchmere in Alexandria attended by 412 performers, producers, directors, designers and technical staff.

The Arlington Players' production of "Kiss Me, Kate" was named outstanding musical, while Port City Playhouse took the outstanding play award for "Betrayal."

The Reston group's awards were for the comedies "Proposals" and "Present Laughter" and the musical "Funny Girl." Herndon's Elden Street Players, who historically have won a large share of the awards, were almost shut out this year, taking home only one trophy, for Lisa Anne Bailey's direction of the new musical "Suburb."

"Kiss Me, Kate," the 1948 show featuring the music of Cole Porter, was the most honored individual production of the year, despite some less-than-glowing reviews from critics. In addition to best musical, it won outstanding direction of a musical (John K. Monnett), outstanding performance as a lead actor in a musical (Michael Nansel), outstanding performance as a featured (supporting) actress in a musical (Allison Gendusa Block) and outstanding achievement in stage combat choreography (Steve Lada).

Nansel was the most honored performer of the night, also winning the award for outstanding performance as a featured actor in a musical for his work as Juan Peron in "Evita," produced by Gaithersburg's Montgomery Playhouse at Asbury.

Harold Pinter's "Betrayal," chosen outstanding play, is the story of an affair and the many forms of duplicity it spawns among a woman, her lover and her husband. An unusual drama, it is notable for Pinter's sparse dialogue and the reverse chronological order of the story.

"I want to thank Port City Playhouse for continuing to do challenging works, plays that others are ignoring or are too scared to do," "Betrayal" producer Jennifer Lyman said at the ceremony. "Betrayal" director Leslie A. Kobylinski also won for outstanding direction of a play.

Port City Playhouse, which has been producing a series of demanding dramas in recent seasons, garnered the two top acting awards for plays. Joe Jenckes was cited for outstanding performance as a lead actor in a play for his role as Peter Ravenswaal, a blind and dying man in Gary Marshall's "Wrong Turn at Lungfish." Skye Henderson won outstanding performance as a lead actress in a play for her role as complex con woman Alexa Vere de Vere in Douglas Carter Beane's "As Bees in Honey Drown."

"Oh, my God," said a beaming Jenckes, 68, who won the best actor award for his work in Little Theatre of Alexandria's 2001 production of "On Golden Pond." He has been acting for 53 years. "I never believed this would happen again. I am the living example of what an old man can do in his dying years. It's never over. I'm just starting work on 'Sleuth,' and you just keep at it until you fall down dead."

Bailey, the "Suburb" director, mentioned the challenge of directing a new work when she accepted her award.

"It's very bizarre to do a show you've never seen before," she said. "If you do 'Oklahoma,' you've seen it and know how it works. But when you direct something you've never seen before, it just came out of the [stuff] in my head. Apparently, the [stuff] in my head is not so bad."

A total of 28 musicals and 51 plays were judged for the WATCH awards. Reston Community Players and Port Tobacco Players of La Plata drew the most nominations, tying with 23 each. Judges rated the shows using a point system for 28 categories. The top five vote-getters in each category were nominated for the final award, based on the average score of at least seven adjudicators.

Six additional theater companies have joined WATCH for consideration in 2004, including Aldersgate Church Community Theatre in the Alexandria section of Fairfax County and the Providence Players of Fairfax.

A complete list of winners is at www.washingtontheater.org