

Big Ivey wins for small theaters

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Small theaters made big inroads at the 2008 Ivey Awards, which were handed out during a ceremony Monday night at the State Theatre in Minneapolis.

Four of the five productions receiving Iveys — which honor excellence in local theater — were staged by companies with micro-budgets, some of which don't even have homes to call their own.

Workhouse Theater Company's production of "**Night, Mother**" and **Open Eye Figure Theatre's** "**A Prelude to Faust**" were Ivey winners for overall excellence. Neither company works out of a neighborhood that is generally considered an aesthetic hotbed: Workhouse began producing in 2006 in the Camden neighborhood of North Minneapolis; Open Eye was founded in 2000 and opened its first permanent performing space in Minneapolis' West Phillips neighborhood last year.

Frank Theatre received a statuette, acknowledging the emotional impact of its production of "The Pillowman." The company, led by founding artistic director Wendy Knox, has been on the local scene since 1989. Its award-winning production was staged at the Guthrie Theater, but Frank's previous venues have included decrepit office buildings, mill buildings and the Minneapolis Public Works yard.

"**Broken Brain Summit**" received Ivey honors for its innovative concept and idea. The production was staged by Interact Center, a Minneapolis arts organization that uses performers with a spectrum of physical, developmental, mental and behavioral disabilities.

The only large-theater production to collect an Ivey was the **Ordway Center for the Performing Arts**. Its production of "Cabaret" was lauded for its costume design, scenic design and choreography.

Acting awards went to the ensemble cast of Gremlin Theatre's production of "**Orson's Shadow**" and to **Jarius Abts**, who played the transsexual title role in the Jungle Theater's production of "Hewdig and the Angry Inch."

James A. Williams, the co-host of last year's Ivey ceremony, took home an award this year for his turn as Troy Maxon in Penumbra Theatre Company's production of "Fences." The only Ivey-winning production that's still running. "Fences" plays at Penumbra through Oct. 19.

Kate Eifrig was also honored for her performance in the Guthrie's production of "9 Parts of Desire," a one-woman tour-de-force.

Choreographer **Tamara Kangas** received the only individual Ivey this year given to a non-performer. Kangas, the regular choreographer at Chanhassen Dinner Theatres, was cited for her work on that theater's production of "42nd Street."

The emerging artist award went to **Matthew Amendt**, a 2004 BFA graduate of the University of Minnesota/Guthrie Theater Actor Training Program. Amendt is probably best known locally for creating the role of Nick Carraway in the Guthrie's 2006 production of "The Great Gatsby." This summer, Amendt also wrote and starred in the ambitious "The Comedian's Tragedy" at the Minneapolis Theatre Garage.

The fourth annual Ivey Awards presentation was capped with a tribute to **Don Stolz**, an actor, writer, producer, director and winner of this year's Lifetime Achievement Award.

Stolz is best known as the head of the Old Log Theater in Excelsior. His association with the theater goes back almost to its beginnings in 1940. In addition to running a theater that estimates its cumulative audiences at 6 million, Stolz is also a radio veteran and a television pioneer, having produced including

the first full-length play ever televised on WCCO-TV. The Ivey joins will share space on Stolz' mantle with his 2006 induction into the Pavek Museum of Broadcasting's Hall of Fame.

The Ivey Awards are based on the recommendations of more than 100 volunteer evaluators who fanned out to see scores of shows produced by participating Twin Cities theaters in the last year. Unlike other such awards, there are no formal categories and no pre-announced nominees for the Iveys. Theater representatives and the general theater-going public voting at the Ivey's Web site also have a voice in determining the awards.

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