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the arts

2010 B. Iden Payne Awards

Among nominees, 'Murder Ballad' scores a big hit

BY ROBERT FAIRES, FRI., OCT. 8, 2010

The ghost-faced killers of *Murder Ballad Murder Mystery* left a long line of bodies across the swamp, but the list of nominations their show racked up for the 2010 B. Iden Payne Awards looks to be even longer. The Tutto Theatre Company/Vortex Repertory Company co-production received 11 nominations, the most of any show this year, for the annual awards handed out by the Greater Austin Creative Alliance (formerly the Austin Circle of Theatres). *Murder Ballad* earned recognition for production of music theatre; Dustin Wills' direction; the performances by Florinda Bryant, Robert Pierson, Content Love Knowles, and the ensemble; the designs by Lisa Laratta (set), Megan M. Reilly (lighting), and Kim H. Ngo (costumes); and the original score and musical direction by Mark Stewart and Andy Tindall. It was one of two homegrown musicals mounted by the Vortex that earned a lot of love from the awards nominating committee. The company's remount of *Sleeping Beauty*, as adapted by Artistic Director Bonnie Cullum and Knowles, scored eight nominations, including nods for production of a musical, Knowles' original score and musical direction, and Cullum's direction. The Vortex's 19 nominations were the most for any producing organization this year.



Murder Ballad Murder Mystery

PHOTO COURTESY OF KIMBERLEY MEAD

Other nominees taking top honors: Trouble Puppet Theater Company's adaptation of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* with seven noms (production of a drama; the script, set design, and direction by company Artistic Director Connor Hopkins; Stephen Pruitt's lighting design; Eliot Haynes' sound design; and Justin Sherburn's original score), plus a special certificate for the puppetry work; the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin's production of G&S operetta *The Yeomen of the Guard* with seven (production of music theatre, Ralph MacPhail Jr.'s direction, Jeffrey Jones-Ragona's music direction, and acting by Patricia Combs, David Fontenot, Michelle Haché, and Holton Johnson); Zach Theatre's staging of the faux Twenties musical *The Drowsy Chaperone*, also with seven (production of music theatre, Nick Demos' direction, acting by the full cast, Allen Robertson's music direction, Robin Lewis' choreography, Susan Branch Towne's costume design, and Craig Brock's sound design); and Breaking String Theater's production of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, with six (production of a comedy; Graham Schmidt's direction; performances by Matt Radford, Liz Fisher, and Nigel O'Hearn; and Adam Hilton's sound design), plus a special certificate for Schmidt's original translation of the script.

Overall, 56 productions mounted from September 2009 to August 2010 received nominations, which are made by a committee of volunteers who regularly see productions throughout the year. The awards are determined by a vote of members in the alliance, which receives ballots that are tabulated by the accounting firm of KPMG and held in secret until the ceremony. This year's will be Monday, Nov. 1, 7pm, in the Rollins Studio Theatre of the Long Center for the Performing Arts. In addition to the presentation of the regular awards, the ceremony will include presentation of the Special Recognition Award, given annually by the organization's board to an individual or entity that has made exceptional contributions to Austin theatre. This year's honorees are the Rude Mechanicals. Improvisation

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guru Les McGehee will serve as emcee. The public is welcome. For more information, including the full list of nominees, visit www.austincreativealliance.org.

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