

A W A R D S



The cast and crew of "Dear Evan Hansen" pose in the press room with the award for best musical at the 71st annual Tony Awards on Sunday in New York. — AP/AFP photos



Wendy Orshan and the cast and crew of "Dear Evan Hansen" accept the award for best musical at the 71st annual Tony Awards.

Intimate, wrenching 'Evan Hansen' takes top honors at Tonys



Ben Platt accepts the award for best performance by an actor in a leading role in a musical for "Dear Evan Hansen".

An intimate, heart-wrenching musical about loneliness, teen angst and suicide in the age of hyper connectivity capped its unlikely journey to Broadway smash by winning top honors at the Tonys. "Dear Evan Hansen," starring 23-year-old Ben Platt in a breakout - and knockout - performance, took six awards Sunday evening at Radio City Music Hall, including best musical and best actor for Platt. It also won best score for its young composers, Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, already Oscar winners for the movie "La La Land."

Platt, in his acceptance speech, addressed young people who might be suffering some of the social anxiety faced by his character, high school senior Evan Hansen. "To all young people watching at home, don't waste any time trying to be like anybody else," he said, "because the things that make you strange are the things that make you powerful." Another memorable speech came from the night's other big musical star, Bette Midler, winning best actress (her first competitive Tony) for her lauded turn in "Hello, Dolly!" Midler took the stage in a sequin gown, and made it clear she wouldn't leave the podium until she was good and ready. When the orchestra tried to play her off, she didn't just speak over it - she shot back merrily: "Shut that crap off!"

Her speech provided host Kevin Spacey - who sang, did a little soft-shoe, trotted out his impressions, and was generally game for anything - with his best line of the night. Appearing as his "House of Cards" character Frank Underwood, he wisecracked that he'd better leave, "before Bette Midler thanks anyone else." In the highly competitive drama category, "Oslo," a three-hour play about the 1993 Middle East peace accords by J. T. Rogers, beat out a field that included "A Doll's House, Part 2" by Lucas Hnath, the Pulitzer-winning "Sweat," by Lynn Nottage, and "Indecent" by Paula Vogel. (In a new touch, all four playwrights personally introduced their work).

Stranded airline passengers

Unlike last year, when "Hamilton" dominated the show and won 11 Tonys, the wealth was spread out this time. "Hello, Dolly!" won four, including best musical revival and best featured actor for Broadway veteran Gavin Creel. And best director of a musical went to Christopher Ashley of "Come From Away," the crowd-pleasing show about the people of Gander, Newfoundland, who sheltered thousands of stranded airline passengers on Sept 11. The boisterous "Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812," which had 12 nominations, ended up

winning just two technical awards, for best set and lighting. It was clearly Evan Hansen's night.

The show's writer, Steven Levenson, won for best book of a musical, and Alex Lacamoire earned one for best orchestrations (after winning last year for "Hamilton.") And Rachel Bay Jones won her first Tony - featured actress - for her heartbreaking portrayal of a mother who struggles to understand and help her son, Evan, as he gets caught in a terrible lie that he cannot control. Jones spoke of her many lean years in the business, and thanked her "Nana" for selling her engagement ring so she could come to New York and pursue her dreams. In drama, top acting honors went to Kevin Kline for "Present Laughter" - his third Tony - and to Laurie Metcalf - her first - for "A Doll's House, Part 2." Best director went to Rebecca Taichman for "Indecent."

Kline made a point of thanking the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities, two organizations whose federal funding is threatened under President Donald Trump's administration. Cynthia Nixon won her second Tony, featured actress in a play, for Lillian Hellman's "The Little Foxes." Nixon was one of the most politically outspoken winners, giving a shout-out to people who refuse to just stand by and watch when bad things happen in the world. Another big name, Danny DeVito, favored for his entertaining work in Arthur Miller's "The Price," lost out to Michael Aronov, for "Oslo."

Self-deprecating humor

Other winners included August Wilson's "Jitney," which collected the Tony for best play revival. And in choreography, Andy Blankenbuehler joined his "Hamilton" colleague Lacamoire with a repeat win this year, this time for "Bandstand." Spacey peppered his routines - aided by Whoopi Goldberg and Stephen Colbert, to name a few guests - with a healthy dose of self-deprecating humor, making a storyline out of the fact that he wasn't the first choice for hosting duties. He also played with speculation about his sexual orientation as he sang the Andrew Lloyd Webber song "As If We Never Said Goodbye" from "Sunset Boulevard." Dressed as Glenn Close, who stars in that revival, Spacey sang, "I'm coming out..." and then added, "Of makeup..." Some of his most successful bits, judging by audience reaction, were his much-lauded impressions. How about: His impression of Bill Clinton even caught the fancy of a former vice president in the audience - Joe Biden.



Alex Lacamoire accepts the award for best orchestrations for "Dear Evan Hansen".



Rachel Bay Jones poses in the press room with the award for best performance by an actress in a featured role in a musical for "Dear Evan Hansen".



Michael Aronov accepts the award for best performance by an actor in a featured role in a play for "Oslo".



The cast and crew of "August Wilson's Jitney" pose in the press room with the award for best revival of a play.



Justin Paul, left, and Benj Pasek accept the award for best original score (music and lyrics) written for the theatre for "Dear Evan Hansen".



Kevin Spacey and the cast of "Dear Evan Hansen" perform at the 71st annual Tony Awards.



JT Rogers, foreground, and the cast and crew of "Oslo" accept the award for best play.