

## Lifestyle | Awards



Bill Hader



British actress Jodie Comer



Michelle Williams



Alex Borstein

## 'THRONES' WINS TOP DRAMA EMMY AS 'FLEABAG' SPRINGS A SURPRISE

"Game of Thrones" took the top Emmy for best drama Sunday but dark British comedy "Fleabag" was the surprise big winner of television's glitziest night, dominating the comedy prizes at a star-studded ceremony in Los Angeles. "Thrones"—the most decorated fictional show in the history of the Emmys, television's Oscars—finished with 12 awards overall for its final season.

"Thank you to the hardest working crews in show business—the dragons who shot for 70 nights straight in freezing Belfast rain, the wolves who shot all around the world—you are amazing, all of you," said showrunner Dan Weiss. Peter Dinklage won his fourth best supporting actor statuette for his portrayal of sharp-tongued dwarf Tyrion Lannister.

But the blood-soaked fantasy epic's hopes of going out with a new record numbers of Emmys for a single season were dashed after it failed to convert nominations in directing, writing and the other acting categories. The divisive final run of "Thrones" enraged many fans—more than a million signed a petition for HBO to redo its conclusion. But the 10 nominated cast members of "Thrones" received a standing ovation as they gathered on stage.

pervy, angry, messed-up woman can make it to the Emmys," said Waller-Bridge.

"This is just getting ridiculous," she said upon winning the best comedy prize. "The journey has been absolutely mental." "Fleabag" was totally shunned by Emmy voters during its first run, failing to bag a single nomination. But the Television Academy's 24,000-plus voters changed their tune for its second season. Waller-Bridge has ruled out a third season, saying the irreverent series about a self-absorbed young Londoner has come "to a natural end."

### 'We all have the right'

Billy Porter made history as the first openly gay black man to win the best drama actor prize for FX show "Pose," which explores New York's underground ballroom culture in the 1980s. "I am so overwhelmed and so overjoyed to have lived long enough to see this day," said Porter, who turned 50 on Saturday, in his acceptance speech. "I have the right. You have the right. We all have the right," he added.

Jason Bateman was the surprise winner for directing Netflix's dark crime thriller "Ozark." Co-star Julia Garner



US actress Julia Garner

Program creator Ava DuVernay tweeted: "I hope this night makes you feel celebrated + seen." Bill Hader won for best actor for HBO's hitman comedy "Barry." The network pulled off another victory for "Succession," with Jesse Armstrong—one of the many British winners on the night-taking the prize for drama writing.

### Damn good

The glitzy 71st Emmys began at the Microsoft Theater in downtown Los Angeles with a comedy skit: a cartoon Homer Simpson was introduced as "host"—and quickly crushed by a falling piano. "Breaking Bad" star Bryan Cranston then appeared on stage to "rescue" the Emmys, delivering a tribute to television's so-called golden era. "Television has never been bigger. Television has never mattered more. And television has never been this damn good," said Cranston.

In the battle of traditional networks vs new platforms, HBO reaffirmed its supremacy over Netflix, finishing with 34 wins to the streaming giant's 27. But Louis-Dreyfus missed out on a ninth acting statuette—which would have been her seventh, and a clean sweep for every season, as foul-mouthed vice-president-turned-president Selina Meyer in HBO's "Veep." "I'm sorry, I was told I would be up here alone," she joked as she later appeared on stage with her co-stars to a standing ovation to present an award. —AFP



The cast of 'Game of Thrones' speaks onstage during the 71st Emmy Awards at the Microsoft Theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP photos

"I think all of us agree how amazing the entire last season was for us," said Sophie Turner, who played Sansa Stark. "Thrones" had already bagged 10 Emmys in lesser categories at last weekend's Creative Arts Emmys, including for the show's special effects and elaborate costumes. It ends its eight-season run with 59 Emmys, a record for a drama or comedy. Only variety sketch show "Saturday Night Live" has more.

In the night's biggest shock, "Fleabag" star Phoebe Waller-Bridge bested eight-time acting winner Julia Louis-Dreyfus ("Veep") before the show itself won for best comedy series. The BBC show—which has grown into a phenomenon on both sides of the Atlantic after being acquired by Amazon—also scooped awards for best comedy writing and directing on Sunday, and six overall. "It's just really wonderful to know and reassuring that a dirty,

won best supporting actress. Sandra Oh failed in her bid to become the first woman of Asian descent to win the leading actress in drama category, beaten by her co-star Jodie Comer in BBC spy thriller "Killing Eve."

The pair embraced before British star Comer, who plays an assassin, collected her prize and told the audiences she hadn't invited her parents to the ceremony "because I didn't think this was going to be my time."

"Chernobyl"—HBO's drama about the 1986 nuclear catastrophe—won the Emmy for best limited series. It faced off against "When They See Us," the searing true story of five New York teenagers wrongly accused of raping a Central Park jogger. One of the Netflix show's young stars, Jharrel Jerome, won the prize for best actor in a limited series, and paid tribute to the five men, who attended the ceremony.



US actor Billy Porter



Tony Shalhoub



US actor Jharrel Jerome

## Comedy's rising star Phoebe Waller-Bridge dominates Emmys

British actress and writer Phoebe Waller-Bridge was the explosive big winner at the Emmys on Sunday, as her offbeat and piercing creation "Fleabag" dominated the comedy awards at television's answer to the Oscars. The TV adaptation of her one-woman show about a disillusioned young singleton in London won best comedy series, while Waller-Bridge herself won best comedy actress and comedy writing statuettes. She defied predictions by besting eight-time acting winner Julia Louis-Dreyfus, who had won best actress for all six previous seasons of "Veep."

"Fleabag" started as a one-woman show in Edinburgh festival," said Waller-Bridge as she collected the top comedy prize at the gala in Los Angeles. "The journey has been absolutely mental." "It's just really wonderful to know and reassuring that a dirty, pervy, angry, messed-up woman can make it to the Emmys," she added, referring to her character. With further directing, casting and editing Emmy wins, it was a remarkable turnaround for "Fleabag," which received zero nominations for its first season.



British actress Phoebe Waller-Bridge poses with the Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Comedy Series, Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series and Outstanding Comedy Series for 'Fleabag' during the 71st Emmy Awards at the Microsoft Theatre in Los Angeles. — AFP

It caps a phenomenal rise for Waller-Bridge, 34, who also wrote the first season of award-winning spy thriller "Killing Eve," which she continues to executive produce, and has been called in to polish up the new James Bond script. The British actress and screenwriter is hard to miss, standing tall—literally, at five feet 10 inches—in the television landscape, with her brown bob, ready laugh and elegant nose as sharp as her wit. That wit is on full display in "Fleabag."

The show plays with convention by having the protagonist break the proverbial fourth wall and talk directly to viewers in her deep, staccato voice. In the BBC series, which was picked up internationally by Amazon and rapidly gained popularity across the Atlantic, Waller-Bridge serves up a cocktail of unfiltered humanity, along with dark, irreverent humor and sex—none of it gratuitous. "My original inspiration was to say the things that I feel like women normally only say in the shadows," she said in a March interview with the website Broadway World, ahead of a run of sold-out performances of the "Fleabag" play in New York.

"We sort of pretend that we're innocent and adorable and like these perfect little creatures," she said, "but actually we have many, many other layers." Titular character Fleabag, a young woman battling against the rules—and with herself—has a screw (or several) loose, and can veer towards the self-destructive, but never becomes a caricature. Instead, the character is a very British blend of impeccable manners and a keen sense of derision, just like her creator.

### Understanding of humanity

Waller-Bridge is "not apologetic about having a flawed heroine," Andrew Scott, one of the main characters in Season 2, told AFP in an interview earlier this year. All that has been enough for Waller-Bridge to be hailed as a feminist heroine, regularly compared to American screenwriter Lena Dunham, though their universes are fairly far apart. "Because it's written by a female, people point out that it's a feminist show, but I think sometimes that just undermines the actual work," said Scott. "I think her grace and gift is her understanding of humanity."

But the feminist theme is reinforced by Waller-Bridge's propensity to offer fellow actresses equally dense, complex roles—in "Fleabag." Olivia Colman—who won an Oscar for "The Favourite"—delights as the heroine's passive-aggressive stepmother. It's also clear in the offbeat thriller series "Killing Eve," starring Jodie Comer, who won the best drama actress Emmy prize Sunday, and Sandra Oh.

Waller-Bridge has been called upon to liven up the script for the 25th installment of James Bond's adventures, at the express request of 007 himself, actor Daniel Craig, who wanted to inject more humor into the film set for release next year. As for "Fleabag," Waller-Bridge has ruled out a third season of the series—at least for another 16 years.

Asked at a Los Angeles screening last month whether her upcoming reprisal of the original play in London's West End is the last we will see of "Fleabag," Waller-Bridge said the show had come "to a natural end." "I think it's time to go to the next chapter, and I'm so grateful for the character," she said. "I have a fantasy of bringing 'Fleabag' back when I'm 50," she added.—AFP