

Mystery Solved: 2007 International Mystery Writers' Festival wraps with top award going to Kentucky author

OWENSBORO, Ky. -- The first International Mystery Writers' Festival concluded with a gala awards party created by the associate director for Disney's Broadway hits "The Lion King" and "Tarzan."

The Angie Awards were presented at the RiverPark Center in 10 categories based on voting from the festival's audiences. The winners included Kentucky's Elizabeth Orndorff's "Death By Darkness" for best new work, Orndorff for best new playwright, "Albatross" by Lance Rucker and Tim Perrin for best screenplay, John Frazier for best actor in his role in "Death By Darkness" and Barb Wengard for best actress in her role in "Panic."

There was \$10,000 in prize money going for best new work, \$5,000 to the most promising new writer and \$2,500 to the outstanding screenplay or teleplay. Participants in the gala included Gary Sandy ("WKRP in Cincinnati"), who starred in one of the festival plays; Harry Anderson ("Night Court"), who performed in several screenplay readings; and Kentucky author Sue Grafton (Alphabet series).

Kentucky Gov. Ernie Fletcher presented actress Angela Lansbury with an award naming her the First Lady of Mystery. Lansbury, who is currently starring on Broadway and unable to attend the event, addressed the crowd from a giant video screen.

"Mystery and theater lovers from across the country came to Owensboro to participate in the birth of an event that I believe will bring the mystery play back to Broadway," said RiverPark President & CEO Zev Buffman, who produced 40 Broadway shows and 100 national tours. "They were able to watch performances from famous and soon-to-be-famous talent. In the intimate atmosphere of the festival, they also had the unique opportunity to get to know the stars from the stage, screen and literacy world."

The red carpet was rolled out for the event, which took place in a white tent on the plaza along the Ohio River.

Winners of the other categories were:

- Best director: Ron OJ Parson ("Columbo Takes the Rap");

- Best supporting actress: Debra Babich (“Widdershins”);
- Best supporting actor George Keating (“Columbo Takes the Rap”); and
- Lifetime achievement: Judith Walcutt and David Ossman.

“This has been overwhelming – beyond my wildest dreams,” said Orndorff, who lives in Danville, Ky., and wrote “Death by Darkness” specifically as an entry to the festival. “The cast blew my mind, and the whole operation was so classy. To have my first full-length play in this venue -- with these actors and technicians – is fantastic.”

The festival is one of only a handful in the United States dedicated to producing, staging and presenting new works for the general public and the entertainment industry. It already has drawn comparisons to the Sundance Festival in Utah.

There were 48 performances during the festival’s six days -- with visitors coming from as far away as Florida, Maine, Texas, California and Canada. More than 6,200 tickets were sold for the performances, the majority of which were sold out.

Festival-goers also had the chance to meet authors such as Grafton; Stuart Kaminsky, who has written more than 60 mysteries; and William Link, who was one of the creators of “Columbo” and “Murder, She Wrote.” Those authors stayed for the entire festival, participated in multiple book signings and taught master classes for aspiring authors.

The new festival received \$555,000 from the state and \$50,000 from Daviess County Fiscal Court to help launch this key economic development and cultural venture.

RiverPark already has received inquiries from tour groups who want to make arrangements for next year’s festival, which is planned for June 17 through June 22, 2008.

For award photos, please contact Bryan Leazenby at bryan@onsiteimages.biz.