

And the Award Goes To ...

Three UC San Diego alumni earn Tony Award nominations



Mike Faist (left) and Ben Platt in a scene from “Dear Evan Hansen.” The musical earned nine Tony Award nominations including one for Best Direction of a Musical by Michael Greif—a Department of Theatre and Dance MFA directing alumnus ('85). Photos by dearevanhansen.com

UC San Diego takes the stage in many programs—its Department of Theatre and Dance easily commanding the spotlight. Proof positive are three recent Tony Award nominations earned by alumni Michael Greif (MFA directing, '85), nominated for Best Direction of a Musical, “Dear Evan Hansen;” Jefferson Mays (MFA acting, '91), nominated for Best Actor in a Leading Role in a Play, “Oslo;” and Paloma Young (MFA, costume design, '06), nominated for Best Costume Design of a Musical, “Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812.”

The 71st Tony Awards will be presented live on Sunday, June 11, at Radio City Music Hall. The ceremony, to be hosted by Kevin Spacey, will be broadcast at 5 p.m. PT on CBS.

The three UC San Diego nominees are no strangers to the Tony Awards— all have either earned nominations or won before. Jefferson Mays won a Tony for Best Actor in a Play 2004 for his role in “I am My Own Wife.” Paloma Young won a Tony for Best Costume Design for a Play in 2012 for “Peter and the Starcatcher”

Recently ranked among the top five acting programs in the world by Hollywood Reporter, students in the Department of Theatre and Dance graduate well-prepared for the theater profession. Cast with experience—due in part to a dynamic partnership with its acclaimed neighbor, La Jolla Playhouse—UC San Diego graduates consistently take the lead in television, film and stage careers.



Ben Platt (left), Jennifer Laura Thompson (center) and Michael Park in a scene from “Dear Evan Hansen.” The Tony Award-nominated production was directed by UC San Diego Department of Theatre and Dance alumnus Michael Greif ('85), also nominated for Best Direction of a Musical.



“In the past few years, the division has seen a substantial increase in its overall rankings from prestigious sources such as U.S. News and World Report global rankings,” said Division of Arts and Humanities Dean Cristina Della Coletta. The most recent accolade comes from the Hollywood Reporter. It is to be noted that UC San Diego is the only public university to be among the top five in the world. We are proud of our faculty, students and alumni who continue to win prestigious awards, such as Tony Awards, Emmy Awards and Princess Grace Awards.”

Charles Means, chair and professor of the Department of Theatre and Dance, credits the department’s excellence to the faculty—many of whom are alumni—who are working professionals and scholars with direct connections to the professional world. Means, himself, is headed to the

Jennifer Ehle (left) as Mona Juul and UC San Diego alumnus Jefferson Mays (MFA, acting, '91) as Terje Rød-Larsen in "Oslo." Production Photo by T. Charles Erickson. Photo by Broadway.com

Lincoln Center on Broadway in the fall as production stage manager on "JUNK," a play by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Ayad Akhtar that originated on campus at La Jolla Playhouse.

"There are several alumni currently teaching in the department, so the students see first-hand the work and achievements of our alums," said Means. "We host a number of alumni events throughout the year here in San Diego as well as in Los Angeles and New York. We also have a weekly [newsletter](#) posted on our website and an alumni [Facebook](#) page that details what our alumni are doing and their great successes." The department also invites industry professionals to campus to share insights with and impart advice to aspiring thespians and other theater professionals.

Means said faculty members understand what is required of working artists and build the foundation students will need in order to be successful in whichever profession they decide to conquer. "We also encourage our students to reach out to alumni to seek advice and guidance," he added. "Our alumni are very generous with their time and take our students under their wing."

Means also credits the department's residency program at La Jolla Playhouse as another aspect that makes the theater program unique. In fact, many students are participating in the playhouse's current season of productions. "Our students work alongside working professionals in the professional environment, while still a student. This level of mentorship and connection is vital to anyone beginning a career in the performing arts," Means noted.



Costume fitting for the character "Helene" in "Natasha, Pierre and the Great Comet of 1812." Photo by palomayoung.com

The Broadway-bound professor describes the theater training at UC San Diego as rigorous. "You need to be disciplined enough to endure the long hours and inevitable vulnerability it takes to train as a theater and dance artist. It requires a certain dedication and love for the

work. The students are in classes all day and then in rehearsals six days a week in the evenings,” he said. “This kind of dedication and rigor is needed to jumpstart and sustain a career in the performing arts.”

Several other shows with UC San Diego ties are also nominated for 2017 Tony Awards, including “Come From Away” and “Indecent,” both developed at La Jolla Playhouse, whose artistic director Christopher Ashley is also a 2017 Tony Award nominee.



From left, Michael Greif, Jefferson Mays, and Paloma Young

The three UC San Diego Division of Arts and Humanities nominees have been nominated for Tony Awards or won before.

Michael Greif

2009 – Best Direction of a Musical, Nominee, “Next to Normal”

2007 – Best Direction of a Musical, Nominee,

“Grey Gardens”

1996 – Best Direction of a Musical, Nominee, “Rent”

Jefferson Mays

2014 – Best Actor in a Musical, Nominee, “Gentleman’s Guide to Love and Murder”

2004 – Best Actor in a Play, Winner, “I am My Own Wife”

Paloma Young

2012 – Best Costume Design for a Play, Winner, “Peter and the Starcatcher”