

Kidman and McAvoy take top awards as stars come out in force

WILLIAM MCLENNAN

Nicole Kidman, who first wowed the West End critics in 1998, sealed a triumphant return to the theatre last night by scooping the Best Actress honour in the *London Evening Standard* Theatre Awards.

She picked up the Natasha Richardson Award for best actress at a ceremony at the Old Vic theatre for her role as the pioneering genetic scientist Rosalind Franklin in *Photograph 51*. The play shows how the female researcher faced institutional sexism and was written out of history despite her pivotal role in unlocking the code of DNA.

Kidman, 48, who has picked up dozens of awards over a career spanning nearly three decades, topped a shortlist of actresses less familiar with the silver screen, including Denise Gough, Gugu Mbatha-Raw and Lia Williams.

Photograph 51 explodes the popular misconception that recognises the role only of Francis Crick and James Watson in the discovery of DNA. Along with Maurice Wilkins, they shared a Nobel Prize in 1962.

Kidman won rave reviews for her role and has been playing to full houses at the Noel Coward Theatre from September until the end of the run this week. She was greeted with a standing ovation on

the first night and awoke to glowing descriptions from theatre critics.

The New York Times said she was “pretty close to perfect.”

while *The Independent's* Paul Taylor said her “glorious” performance had been both “compelling and subtle”.

At the *Harper's Bazaar* Women Of The Year Awards earlier this month she won the Theatre Icon award for the performance, her first turn on a West End stage for more than 17 years.

James McAvoy was among the fellow winners last night and was presented the Best Actor award by Gillian Anderson for his performance in *The Ruling Class* at Trafalgar Studios. McAvoy, who is perhaps also better known for his film roles, including *The Last King of Scotland*, saw off an all-star shortlist, beating Ralph Fiennes and Simon Russell Beale.

The 61st occasion of the annual awards was hosted by the owner of the *Evening Standard* and *The Independent* Evgeny Lebedev, alongside two British icons of the stage and screen, Dame Judi Dench and Sir Ian McKellen. It was presented by the comedian Rob Brydon.

Imelda Staunton, who was given an award for Best Musical Performance for her leading role in *Gypsy*, played one of the show's headline songs,

“Everything's Coming Up Roses”. Pixie Lott also performed “Moon River” from a forthcoming production of *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which opens at the Haymarket Theatre Royal next year.

Molly Davies received the Charles Wintour Award for Most Promising Playwright for *God Bless the Child* at the Royal Court Upstairs. Davies is a product of the Royal Court Theatre's programme for developing young playwrights and her debut play, *A Miracle*, was produced there in 2009 as part of the National Young Writers' Festival.

The Royal Court picked up the most awards for a single venue, with Anna Fleischle winning the Best Design Award with her set for the world première of Martin McDonagh's *Hangmen*.

The Editor's Award, in partnership with The Ivy, was presented to veteran of the stage Vanessa Redgrave. She was given her award by her daughter Joely Richardson and Ralph Fiennes.

The Lebedev Award was presented by Dame Judi and Sir Ian to the award-winning music legend Stephen Sondheim who celebrated his 85th birthday this year.



Kidman was described as 'pretty close to perfect' by one paper



THE WINNERS LONDON EVENING STANDARD THEATRE AWARDS

Best Actor: James McAvoy, 'The Ruling Class', Trafalgar Studios

Natasha Richardson Award for Best Actress: Nicole Kidman, 'Photograph 51', Noël Coward Theatre

Best Play: 'The Motherfucker with the Hat', Stephen Adly Guirgis, National Theatre's Lyttelton

Milton Shulman Award for Best Director: Robert Icke, 'Oresteia', Almeida Theatre &

Trafalgar Studios

Best Design: Anna Fleischle, 'Hangmen', Royal Court

Charles Wintour Award for Most Promising Playwright: Molly Davies, 'God Bless the Child', Royal Court Upstairs

Emerging Talent Award in Partnership with Burberry: David Moorst, 'Violence and Son', Royal Court Upstairs

Best Musical Performance: Imelda Staunton, 'Gypsy', Savoy Theatre



Vanessa Redgrave won the Editor's Award

Newcomer in a Musical: Gemma Arterton, 'Made in Dagenham', Adelphi Theatre
Evening Standard Radio 2 Audience Award for Best Musical (voted for by the public): 'Kinky Boots', Adelphi Theatre

Beyond Theatre: 'Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty'
Editor's Award: Vanessa Redgrave
Lebedev Award: Stephen Sondheim



Main: James McAvoy, winner of best actor, with his wife, Anne-Marie Duff, at the London Evening Standard

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Theatre
Awards
last night,
hosted by
(left) Evgeny
Lebedev,
Dame Judi
Dench
and Sir Ian
McKellen.
Below:
Gemma
Arterton,
winner
of best
newcomer in
a musical
**PA; DAVE
BENETT; AP**