

Celebrating the best in military community theater at the 2004 Army Europe

# Tournament of Plays

Giessen, Hanau and Wiesbaden thespians, directors and technical crews recognized for outstanding achievements

By Karl Weisel  
104th Area Support  
Group Public Affairs  
Office

They looked a little like Beyonce and Outkast at this year's Grammy awards. "They" were volunteers and staff of Giessen, Hanau and Wiesbaden community theaters, dressed to the nines while balancing golden statuette awards at the 2004 Army Europe Tournament of Plays awards show.

Like Broadway's Tony Awards, the annual Army in Europe awards show at Heidelberg's Village Pavilion April 24 recognized outstanding achievement in the dramatic arts—in this case, the best in community theater throughout U.S. Army Europe both onstage and behind the scenes. Twenty-five productions were screened by a panel of judges.

This year the 104th Area Support Group reaped a total of 18 awards including the coveted Best Comedy and Best Drama awards. The ASG theaters earned more than 70 nominations.

"We did surprisingly well," said



Photo by Martin Greeson  
Row upon row of "Topper" awards await their presentation during the annual recognition ceremony.

Charlie Fontana, entertainment director for the 221st Base Support Battalion. "We're all delighted."

Besides the **Best Comedy** award for "The Lilies of the Field," Wiesbaden's Amelia Earhart Playhouse took home golden trophies for **Best House Management** ("Lilies"), **Best Set Design for a Comedy** (Eric Robinson, "Lilies"), **Best Supporting Actor in a Comedy** (Carlos Cole Napoleo, "Lilies"), **Best Supporting Actress in a Drama** (Bobbie Lording, "The Elephant Man") and **Best Director of a Comedy** (Dr. Felicity Thoet, "Lilies").

"We're lucky to have so many great volunteers," said Fontana. "There would be no theater program without them."

Fontana praised the annual awards show, produced by James Sohre, entertainment chief for Installation Management Agency-Europe. "That's the wonderful thing about the Toppers — it's a room full of people who just

love theater. Another thing is that the Toppers really highlight all of those invisible people who put so much into a successful show."

"I'm proud of my cast," said Thoet, who directed the award-winning "The Lilies of the Field." "You win these things when you have a great cast."

A faculty development administrator for the University of Phoenix Overseas Programs and a former entertainment director, Thoet said getting involved in community theater has been an extremely rewarding experience.

"I think you cannot help but have fun. It's a very personal involvement with people. There's a great inter-dependency that draws you close," she said, adding

that "the joy of having an audience appreciate what you have done is very satisfying and pleasurable. It's wonderful fun and wonderful teamwork to be able to perform for others and make them happy."

"I say it every year — winning is great, but really it's the nominations that are a sign of excellence," said William Hauserman, 414th BSB entertainment director and winner of this year's **Best Technical Director for a Musical** award for his work on "Miss Saigon."

With the European amateur theater and Army-wide debut of "Miss Saigon," Hanau's Five Pfennig Theater was also crowned with **Best Orchestra**, **Best Stage Manager for a Musical** (Tawnysha Lynch), **Best Chorus Member** (Kim Barreto, in a tie with Vilseck's Tim Morse) and **Best Actress in a Musical** (Keyle Anderson), tied with SHAPE's Kalei Anderson).

"When we applied for the rights to do the show we didn't think we would get them because it is restricted," said Hauserman. "We



Photo by Martin Greeson  
Members of the 2004 Army Europe Tournament of Plays Singers perform excerpts from the season's hit shows during the awards show in Heidelberg.

were lucky to be the first ones."

The Hanau director praised the talents and hard work of Kosowsky, the lead in "Miss Saigon," and Lynch, the winning stage manager for a musical. "Without her (Kosowsky) talents we wouldn't have been as successful. And Tawnysha Lynch is really the best stage manager around," Hauserman said.

"Every success in the theater is because of them — the volunteers," he added. "The volunteers are the theater. Without them there would be nothing."

Getting involved in community theater is also "a great way to meet people," said Eric Danzeiser, winner of the **Best Stage Properties and Dressing for a Comedy** for his work on Giessen's "Murder By Misadventure."

"When I first got to Germany I didn't know anyone. The first place I went was to the community theater. It's a great place to meet English-speaking Germans and to become instant

friends. "You depend on each other in the theater — you count on each other and work as a team for six weeks," said Danzeiser, Friedberg Arts and Crafts director. "Not only is it a great way to meet a lot of people, but it's also great for your self-confidence. Nothing boosts your confidence like having a lot of people applaud you."

The theater experience is also a way for Soldiers, civilians and family members to keep their bodies and minds occupied during stressful times such as the current deployment of so many local Soldiers in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. "Everywhere I go, I go up to people and say, 'hey, have you ever thought about acting?' Even if you're too scared to go on stage start out backstage or with a small part and who knows where you might end up," he said.

In addition to Danzeiser's award and the **Best Drama** award (for "Another Antigone"), Giessen's Keller Theater was recognized with **Best Sound Design for a Comedy** (Moritz Essinger for "Murder By Misadventure"), **Exceptional Vol-**



Photo by Martin Greeson  
Bamberg's Stephanie Caswell (from left); Giessen's David Turner; Lt. Gen. William E. Ward, USAREUR deputy commander; and Dr. Felicity Thoet, director of Wiesbaden's award-winning "The Lilies of the Field" cut the traditional Toppers cake.

unteer Award (Kirsten Hecke), **Best Lighting Design for a Drama** (Michael Heck, "Another Antigone"), **Best Ensemble for a Drama** ("Another Antigone") and **Best Director for a Drama** (Mark Williams, "Another Antigone").

"It feels great," said Williams,

about winning the Best Director and Best Drama awards. "I had such a wonderful cast. It was the first time in my experience where the cast would get together to rehearse before rehearsal."

"When I first started out on 'Another Antigone' I thought I re-

ally got in over my head," said Williams, a teacher of English and history at Giessen Middle High School. "Theater director David Turner asked me if I would direct it. I hadn't directed a full-length play before and decided to try it."

"I had been involved in the theater since 1996. I started out strictly acting — they needed someone to walk the boards," he said, adding that after "four or five years" he decided to try his hand at directing one-act plays.

"I probably enjoy the acting a little bit more because I don't have that same off-stage anxiety as when directing," said Williams.

"I invite anybody who has an interest at all in the theater to get involved. It's an unforgettable experience. It's almost like a drug. Get involved and find out how enjoyable it is," he said, adding, "I'll be at the Keller Theater until they lock the doors."

**Upcoming productions**

While Giessen's theater has already held auditions for its upcoming production of "Baby," everyone is still invited to call or stop by the theater to see if backstage help



Photo by David Brown  
Bobbie Lording (right) portrays Mrs. Kendal in Wiesbaden Amelia Earhart Playhouse's "The Elephant Man," earning her a Best Supporting Actress in a Drama Topper.



Photo by Martin Greeson  
Nancy Morris (from left), Annie McManners and Julie Hodge sing the title song from the "Little Shop of Horrors" during the Topper awards presentation in Heidelberg.



Photo by Kristin Lynch  
Jeremy Vargas (left) and Bernd Roder appear in the Hanau Five Pfennig Theater's production of "Miss Saigon." The debut Army theater production earned Hanau's theater five Topper awards for achievement.

is needed. "We'll need help with costumes and other backstage help," said Danzeiser. Call the theater at mil 343-6515 for more information.

Wiesbaden's Amelia Earhart Playhouse staff is looking forward to hosting the comedy "Art" May 28 and 29 at 7:30 p.m., the Army Soldier Show at Wiesbaden's Taunus Theater May 23 at 7 p.m. and its Children's Summer Theater Workshop production in late July.

Call the playhouse at mil 343-2473 or civ (0611) 816-2473 for details.

Hanau audiences should stay tuned for the Five Pfennig Theater's upcoming production of the Cole Porter musical, "Anything Goes," which opens in June. "We could use a few more men for the production," said Hauserman. "It's a very funny Cole Porter musical, and it's going to be a terrific show as well." Call mil 322-8725 for ticket reservations.