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## The best and worst moments from the Tony Awards

By Thomas Floyd



*Death of a Salesman* won best revival of a play and *Schmigadoon!* claimed the coveted prize for best musical, but there was one letdown during the night.

A haunting revival of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* topped the 79th Tony Awards with six wins Sunday night, including best revival of a play, while the Golden Age love letter *Schmigadoon!* claimed the coveted prize for best musical.

*Ragtime*, a sweeping portrait of early 20th-century America, edged the joyfully reimagined *Cats: The Jellicle Ball* for best revival of a musical and also nabbed statuettes for leads Joshua Henry and Caissie

Levy.

*Liberation*, Bess Wohl's reflection on second-wave feminism, won best play weeks after earning the Pulitzer Prize for drama.

The *Death of a Salesman* haul included triumphs for director Joe Mantello and featured actress Laurie Metcalf. But Nathan Lane, the acclaimed production's Willy Loman, was bested for best actor by John Lithgow and his portrayal of Roald Dahl in *Giant*.

Here are some of the best — and worst — moments from the ceremony, hosted by Pink at RadioPo City Music Hall in New York.

### 'Schmigadoon!' nabs top prizes

The sidesplitting throwback *Schmigadoon!* edged the high-flying vampire spectacle *The Lost Boys* for best musical after starting the night with a bang — winning the bellwether categories of best book and score, as well as orchestrations — then waiting four hours for its next and final victory.

An adaptation of the Apple TV series, which ran for two seasons before it was canceled in 2024, *Schmigadoon!* staged its world premiere last year at the Kennedy Center before bringing its sly humor, pastiche tunes and wholesome heart to Broadway this spring.

"It means everything," producer Lorne Michaels said of the best musical win. "Sometimes singing, dancing, a lot of jokes and a happy ending is really all you need."

### Paul's wins relegated to preshow

The only letdown for *Schmigadoon!*: Cinco Paul, the playwright and composer who adapted the series he co-created, didn't get a moment at the mic during the CBS telecast. Although Paul did give a pair of speeches, those wins came during the "Act One" preshow hosted by actors Titus Burgess and Laura Benanti on the free streamer Pluto TV.

For a medium that lives off show tunes, you'd think the original score category would carry enough clout to escape the preshow. And Paul's second speech — in which he shined a light on the issues that resulted in a thin season for new Broadway musicals — was particularly deserving of a broader audience.

"There were only six new musicals this season — that is not enough," Paul said. "We need more new musicals on Broadway. I can't do that. There are people out here who can help make that happen. So I implore you: Please do all you can. There are amazing musical writers out there. Support new musicals."

### Pink leads an epic opening

Why was Pink hosting the Tonys? That was a question she seemed eager to address during a virtuosic opening number — penned by Oscar winners Benj Pasek, Justin Paul and Mark Sonnenblick — that established her Broadway bona fides by placing her alongside just about the entire Great White Way.

After Pink made her introduction high above the stage, donning Peter Pan garb while suspended from wires, former Tonys host Neil Patrick Harris interrupted to suggest a change of tack. ("Haven't you heard — the flying twinkles are all vampires now," he said in a *Lost Boys* quip.) Soon enough, Pink launched into the "Moulin Rouge!"-inspired ditty "Leading Lady Marmalade."

Cue cameos by a litany of in-character Broadway stars. Among the highlights: 96-year-old first-time Tony nominee June Squibb taking the mic to spit a verse; "RagtiPome" tyke Nick Barrington introducing a certain rap icon as "Megan, a Stallion from Thee"; and the wonderfully absurd lyric "Gitchi gitchi Lesley Manville."

### Revivals liven the telecast

The nominees for best revival of a musical — “Ragtime,” “Cats: The Jellicle Ball” and “The Rocky Horror Show” — each came through with performances that livened the telecast and splendidly sold the shows.

First, “Ragtime” let its scale shine with a grand rendition of the show’s opening number. “Cats” then delivered a jolt of ballroom-fueled exhilaration with “Jellicle Songs for Jellicle Cats” (complete with Anna Wintour and Andrew Lloyd Webber flashing “meow” and “purr” signs from the audience). And “Rocky Horror’s” mash-up of “Sweet Transvestite” and “The Time Warp” allowed Luke Evans’s strutting sexuality and Amber Gray’s gleeful mania to flourish onstage.

The night’s other musical highlights: A fittingly irreverent staging of “Man Up” from “The Book of Mormon” — featuring original stars Josh Gad, Andrew Rannells and Nikki M. James — and a rockin’ “Lost Boys” mash-up.

### **‘Cats’ is sold short**

The Lincoln Center’s revival of “Ragtime” is an unmitigated triumph that handsomely revitalizes a 1996 musical while tethering it to today. Henry and Levy’s powerhouse performances also can’t be denied. And Henry’s stirring speech was a highlight of the night. (“Every artist in this room, every artist at home: Fight, fight, fight to be heard,” Henry said.)

Yet it’s puzzling that voters gave the best revival prize to “Ragtime” over “Cats: The Jellicle Ball,” an overhaul that should endure as a model of musical reinvigoration. The production, which recast Lloyd Webber’s nonsensical classic as a voguing send-up to 1980s ballroom culture, even earned Tonys for directors Zhailon Levingston and Bill Rauch. So how, exactly, was their vision worthy of the win but the show itself wasn’t?

### **Lithgow bookends his legacy**

The night’s buzziest heavyweight bout came in best actor in a play, where Lithgow and Lane each aimed to bolster their towering legacies. And it was Lithgow who triumphed for his imperious performance as Dahl in “Giant,” a searing play that unpacks the “Matilda” author’s antisemitism. As the three-time Tony winner pointed out, the victory came 53 years after his first — a featured actor in a play prize for “The Changing Room.”

“In those years, I have worked with hundreds of just fantastic theater artists,” Lithgow said. “I’ve had dozens and dozens of ecstatic moments on the stage, but I have to tell you right now, this moment has got to be one of the best.”

### **Ehrenreich’s deserved win**

Featured actor in a play felt like a nail-biter between “Becky Shaw’s” Alden Ehrenreich and “Death of a Salesman’s” Christopher Abbott. Ultimately, Ehrenreich emerged victorious for his delicious portrayal of a smug money manager in Gina Gionfriddo’s twisty comedy.

After his time as a young Han Solo in the Star Wars universe went off the rails, Ehrenreich has quietly — or, perhaps now, not so quietly — reinvented himself as a sturdy character actor with stellar turns in the likes of “Oppenheimer,” “Fair Play” and “Weapons.” Now he can count a Tony among the feathers in his cap.

### **An ignominious streak ends**

When Wohl took home best play for “Liberation” — a worthy win, with all due respect to David Lindsay-Abaire’s whip-smart satire “The Balusters” — it marked the first time since 1989 that an American woman had earned that honor. The recipient back then: Wendy Wasserstein for “The Heidi Chronicles.”

“Tonight, I want to honor her,” Wohl said. “I want to honor women everywhere who have the courage to use their voice.”

### **A ‘Lost Boys’ supporting sweep**

“The Lost Boys,” an ambitious adaptation of the cult-classic 1987 movie, didn’t walk away with best musical but did snag a slew of trophies — including two acting prizes. Although Shoshana Bean was widely expected to claim the featured actress trophy, for a rousing portrayal of a single mother yearning for her youth, it was a pleasant surprise for co-star Ali Louis Bourzgui to join her among the winners.


“Cats” star André De Shields loomed as a formidable contender in the category, and Ragtime’s Ben Levi Ross also made a strong case. Yet Bourzgui’s transformative portrayal of a goth rock vampire terrorizing a California beach town proved too seductive for voters to resist.

### **Here is the full list of winners:**

Best musical: “Schmigadoon!”

Best play: “Liberation” by Bess Wohl

Best revival of a musical: “Ragtime”

 Best revival of a play: “Death of a Salesman”

Lead actress in a musical: Caissie Levy (“Ragtime”)


Lead actor in a musical: Joshua Henry (“Ragtime”)

Lead actress in a play: Lesley Manville (“Oedipus”)

Lead actor in a play: John Lithgow (“Giant”)


Featured actress in a musical: Shoshana Bean ("The Lost Boys")

Featured actor in a musical: Ali Louis Bourzgui ("The Lost Boys")

 Featured actress in a play: Laurie Metcalf ("Death of a Salesman")

Featured actor in a play: Alden Ehrenreich ("Becky Shaw")


Director of a musical: Zhailon Levingston and Bill Rauch ("Cats: The Jellicle Ball")

 Director of a play: Joe Mantello ("Death of a Salesman")

Original score: Cinco Paul ("Schmigadoon!")

Book of a musical: Cinco Paul ("Schmigadoon!")


Scenic design of a musical: Dane Laffrey ("The Lost Boys")

 Scenic design of a play: Chloe Lamford ("Death of a Salesman")

Costume design of a musical: Qween Jean ("Cats: The Jellicle Ball")

Costume design of a play: Jeff Mahshie ("Fallen Angels")

Lighting design of a musical: Michael Arden and Jen Schriever ("The Lost Boys")

 Lighting design of a play: Jack Knowles ("Death of a Salesman")

Sound design of a musical: Kai Harada ("Ragtime")

 Sound design of a play: Mikael Sulaiman ("Death of a Salesman")

Choreography: Arturo Lyons and Omari Wiles ("Cats: The Jellicle Ball")

Orchestrations: Doug Besterman and Mike Morris ("Schmigadoon!")

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