

For IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **SMCLO Receives 8 NAACP Theatre Award Nominations**

The Santa Monica Civic Light Opera's acclaimed production of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" has received eight nominations for the coveted NAACP Theatre Awards, marking a significant milestone in the organization's evolution.

SMCLO's "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," staged last summer, was recognized for virtually all aspects of the show, earning NAACP Theatre Award nominations for outstanding Production, Direction, Ensemble, Playwright, Set, Costumes, Lighting, and Sound.

Nominations were made public yesterday [[[Thursday, January 13]]] at a Los Angeles press conference called by the venerable civil-rights organization. NAACP Award winners will be announced at ceremonies at the Vision Theatre in Los Angeles on Feb. 21.

The Santa Monica Civic Light Opera joins the elite ranks of other nominated theatre productions, including offerings from the Geffen Playhouse, the Theatre at Boston Court, Troika Entertainment, and the Mark Taper Forum/Center Theatre Group.

"We wanted to challenge the audience, and I guess we succeeded," said Dr. Frank X. Ford, SMCLO Artistic Director, who also directed "Cuckoo's Nest."

"We've always believed that we put on some very special productions," said Brett Fisher, SMCLO Producer and Managing Director, "and we're gratified that the NAACP has honored us with this recognition."

"Washington Mutual is proud to be the presenting season sponsor of the Santa Monica Civic Light Opera, and we are very pleased the NAACP is honoring them for their contributions to the arts and our community," said Terri Decker, First Vice President, Senior Regional Manager of Washington Mutual in Los Angeles.

SMCLO nominees include Dr. Ford, for Best Direction; Jo Oppenheimer Davis, for Best Costume Design; Mike Goode, for Best Set Design; Chuck Schuman, for Best Lighting Design; Sean Phillips, for Best Sound Design; and Dale Wasserman, for Best Playwright.

The entire "Cuckoo's Nest" acting company, acknowledged with a nomination

for Best Ensemble, included Austin Kemie, Tony Brown, Michelle Johnson, Max Baumgarten, Forest Erickson, Leonard Kelly-Young, Eugene Lebowitz, Omar Leyva, Karlie Mossman, Joe Nowlin, Cynthia Marty, Steve Seagren, Lisa Valenzuela, Jackson van Houten, David Wells; Daytime Emmy-Award winner Stuart Damon; Molly Cookson, also a producer on the show; and Ryan D. Hurst, a Santa Monica High School alumnus well known for his film performances in "Remember the Titans," "We Were Soldiers," and "The Ladykillers," who played the lead role of Randall McMurphy and also served as one of the "Cuckoo's Nest" producers.

The "Cuckoo's Nest" cast included Santa Monica High School students Stephanie Evans and James Costello, now seniors, who were also nominated as members of Best Ensemble.

"One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," nominated for Best Production, was produced by Cookson, and SAMOHI alums Hurst, Fisher and Jayme Mechur, in association with The Viking Underground.

Dr. Ford said he was pleased that Tessa Thompson, an alumna and former student, was nominated by the NAACP for Best Leading Actress for her role as Juliet in "Romeo and Juliet" at the Theatre at Boston Court.

The NAACP Award nominations were an occasion for Dr. Ford to reflect on his decades as a director. "From the day I started 36 years ago, I always believed in non-traditional casting," he said. "I think a play happens in the imagination of the audience, in the communication between storytellers and audience members, and it has nothing to do with 'looking' like the part is allegedly supposed to look. A good actor can make us believe anything.

"So non-traditional casting has an effect that is only positive," Dr. Ford said. "It doesn't diminish our emotional response and it only helps our intellectual response."

The Santa Monica Civic Light Opera, a sponsored activity of the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District, serves as the educational partner to the school's Theatre Arts Program, enhancing the student experience through mentoring by alumni and theatre professionals and developing productions for the Humanities Center and Barnum Hall stages.

SAMOHI is proud of its illustrious alumni, including actors Glenn Ford, Gene Nelson, Oscar-winner Gloria Stuart, Oscar-winner Sean Penn, Oscar-nominee Robert Downey, Jr., Rob Lowe, Charlie Sheen, Emilio Estevez, Holly Robinson, Dean Cain, Ryan D. Hurst, Wallace Smith, Matt Walker, Keith Coogan, John Augustine, Amber Tamblyn, and Colleen Ford; and

writers/producers Meredith Stiehm, and Zack Estrin — among many others.

The 2004-05 SAMOHI/SMCLO season includes a stunning array of musicals, comedy, and bonus productions that continues the award-winning tradition of excellence.

Meredith Wilson's *The Music Man*, the next SMCLO/SAMOHI show, will play on an epic scale, with a production ensemble of more than 200, including cast, full orchestra, chorale, and marching band. Performances are March 3-12, 2005, at the newly restored Barnum Hall, the Art-Moderne campus landmark that has recently undergone an \$8.1 million renovation. Tickets are \$20.

The SMCLO/SMHS season also includes bonus productions of Edward Albee's searing drama, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, playing May 19-28, 2005, and the selected One-Act comedies of David Ives, playing June 3 and 4, 2005, both in the Humanities Center Theater. Tickets are \$10-15.

*My Fair Lady*, the grandest of the Lerner and Loewe musicals, gives the season its grand finale — an SMCLO production featuring talented alumni, working professionals, and accomplished high school students. The show heralds the return of the blockbuster musical to Barnum Hall. *My Fair Lady* runs July 14-30, 2005. Tickets are \$15-30.

The Santa Monica Civic Light Opera is grateful for the support of many community partners, most notably Presenting Season Sponsor Washington Mutual, and season sponsors Loews Santa Monica Beach Hotel, and Gramercy Partners, Inc., the publishers of Santa Monica Magazine and Santa Monica Business.

Tickets for all remaining '05 productions are available at the SMCLO Box Office in the Humanities Center Theater, by phone at 310-458-5939, or on the web at [www.smclo.org](http://www.smclo.org). Group discounts are available.

For more information about the Santa Monica Civic Light Opera, contact Brett Fisher, Producer and Managing Director at 310-458-5939.

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