ROBERT MERRITT AWARDS HANDBOOK

ROBERT MERRITT
AWARDS

In Effect January 1st, 2026 onwards

ROBERT MERRITT AWARDS
RULES AND REGULATIONS

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REGISTRATION

Please be sure to read the criteria within this handbook or online prior to registering a production.

To be sure a production can be considered by the jury, please complete the online Production Registration form at www.theatrens.ca/robert-merritt-awards/production-submissions

Theatre Nova Scotia members are encouraged to register their productions as soon as they announce them or as early as possible.

Production registration must be completed and received by Theatre Nova Scotia six weeks (6) in advance of the show's OPENING night.
Specific roles, categories and team members may be amended on the Ballot anytime before the first public performance of the production, but initial notification of the show's dates and times must be submitted and communicated to the jury 6 weeks in advance.

It is solely the responsibility of the producing theatre to make sure they request the jury at their production, by applying online by the deadline through the link above.

Submission of the production does not automatically guarantee a production for consideration. While TNS staff will make every reasonable effort to send jurors to all shows, factors such as short runs, juror conflict of interest, or juror availability may prevent some shows from having sufficient juror attendance.

Note that productions that have a show run of only one week or less are incredibly difficult to ensure sufficient juror attendance. Wherever possible, producers who can make at least two week/weekends of showtimes available for jurors to attend will see greater attendance.

The information provided by the Producer in the production submission form will appear exactly as submitted on Merritt Ballots unless otherwise updated by the Producer.
In January of the following year, Theatre Nova Scotia staff will distribute a confirmation Producer Ballot to the producer for each production submitted. Producers may review this Ballot and flag any errors or amendments.

Upon receipt of this final ballot, (or beyond the deadline to review and amend them) Theatre Nova Scotia is not responsible for inaccuracies or errors in production information. Names and roles will be taken directly from the Ballot, as reviewed by the Producer.

REGULATIONS

Producers must be Theatre Nova Scotia company or ad hoc group members in good standing prior to submitting a production registration.

Only productions of professional theatre companies or ad hoc groups/artist collectives are eligible.

In the case of a co-production with a non-TNS member, the Theatre Nova Scotia member company must be intrinsically and continuously involved in order for the production to be considered for nomination. Cast and Crew contracts for the production must bear the name of the Theatre Nova Scotia member company.

Producers must register their productions a minimum of 6 weeks in advance of Opening Night. Provide accurate and detailed information on the registration form for jurors. Changes to the information provided must be sent to Theatre Nova Scotia. Ballots are created directly from information provided on the registration form.

Productions must take place in Nova Scotia, between January 1st to December 31st.

All productions to be juried will make two (2) complimentary available tickets to their productions for each jury member.

A jury list will be maintained on the Theatre Nova Scotia website.

Producers are NOT to contact jurors directly.

Theatre Nova Scotia shall rule on any questions regarding the Merritt regulations.

ELIGIBILITY

Only productions of Theatre Nova Scotia current professional theatre member companies or ad hoc groups/artist collectives are eligible.

Production registration must be submitted six (6) weeks in advance of Opening Night. Late submissions will still be shared with the jurors, but there is no guarantee to the Producer that sufficient juror attendance can be arranged. Producers are NOT to contact jurors directly.

Professional Productions
Theatre productions must be professional - where the majority (60%+) of a project's artists are defined as "professional".

Theatre Nova Scotia adopts the Canada Council definition of 'professional artist':
A professional artist is someone who:

- has specialized training in the field (not necessarily in academic institutions),
- is recognized as such by peers (artists working in the same artistic tradition),
- has a history of public presentation or publication,
- has the intent to make a living from their craft.

Ad hoc Group/Artist Collective
Ad hoc groups/artist collective will be eligible to be reviewed by the jury if a minimum of 75% of the artists in the group are professional artists and those artists are individual members in good standing of Theatre Nova Scotia. The same ad hoc group/artist collective may be reviewed as such for two years.
Application to Theatre Nova Scotia must be made by an ad hoc group/artist collective eight (8) weeks in advance of the first scheduled public performance and must include:

- A letter describing the artistic scope of the ad hoc group/artist collective
- Bios of all [principle] artists who make up the ad hoc group/artist collective
- The title and dates of the production

Nova Scotian Playwrights
Nova Scotian Playwrights are eligible to be nominated in the categories of Outstanding New Play by a Nova Scotian Playwright, and Outstanding New Adaptation by a Nova Scotian Playwright.
For the purposes of the Merritt Awards, "Nova Scotian" is defined as a person who was born in Nova Scotia, or has had permanent residence in Nova Scotia for at least two (2) years.

Producers determine to which categories they are submitting. Producers determine who is considered for any and all award categories.

Producers will be responsible for collecting and submitting artist information as required by the Merritt Awards for the purpose of award eligibility.

A production may only be eligible for one (1) of the Outstanding Production Awards:

- Outstanding Production,
- Outstanding Independent Production,
- Outstanding Emerging Production.

Producers may initially submit to any/all three of these categories that they may qualify for.
The following year when Jurors tabulate their scores, if after the first round of voting a production is found to have advanced into more than one of these categories, the producer will be contacted and asked to choose which category they wish to move forward in.
The Producer may only choose one category to advance in, and choosing a category does not guarantee the production will advance further beyond the initial round of voting and be successfully nominated.

A production may be considered for both 'Outstanding Theatre for Young Audiences Production', along with another Outstanding Production tier category.

Productions produced as part of the Halifax Fringe Festival will be considered, but are subject to the same rules and timelines for eligibility as all other productions.

Community Theatre productions, Educational programs and productions, Workshops, fundraisers, excerpts, and training productions are not eligible for the Merritt Awards.

No remount production can be eligible if it has been considered by a jury within the past five (5) year period. This includes remounts and continuous runs.
A "remount" is defined as a production which, once closed, is remounted using the stage manager's copy of the prompt script, and any of the following elements;

- the original production's set designs
- the original production's costume designs
- 50% or more of the original cast
- 50% or more of the original creative team

No award winner in any category, may be nominated again for the same production, part, or design in subsequent years.

Theatre Nova Scotia shall rule on any questions regarding the eligibility of a production or person. Producers are encouraged to contact the Staff or Board of Theatre Nova Scotia with questions or if unsure.

AWARD CATEGORIES

Juried Awards (Awards scored and decided by the Merritt Jury)

Each category for the Juried Merritt Awards requires a minimum of 6 annual candidates to move on to Nominations (with the exception of Outstanding Emerging Production)

In the event of few candidates in a Category, jurors will only score productions that they considered Outstanding (and do not need to score 5 productions if they only considered 4 or fewer to be 'Outstanding').

1. Outstanding New Play by a Nova Scotian Playwright*
2. Outstanding New Adaptation by a Nova Scotian Playwright*
3. Outstanding Direction
4. Outstanding Musical Direction
5. Outstanding Choreography
6. Outstanding Costume Design
7. Outstanding Scenic Design
8. Outstanding Lighting Design
9. Outstanding Sound Design
10. Outstanding Original Score or Composition*
11. Outstanding Projection Design
12. Outstanding Fight Direction
13. Outstanding Performance in a Leading Role (2 winners)
15. Outstanding Performance in a Supporting Role (2 winners)
17. Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble*
18. Outstanding Theatre for Young Audiences Production*
19. Outstanding Production*
20. Outstanding Independent Production*
21. Outstanding Emerging Production*

**See Category Criteria and Information below*

Nomination Awards (Nominations reviewed by a panel of Merritt Ad Hoc committee members)

The following awards are categories deserving of recognition but not able to be scrutinized by a Jury. Instead a panel is assembled by the Theatre Nova Scotia board, consisting of members of the Professional and Merritt Ad Hoc committees. Details on the award applications and annual deadlines for submissions can be found on Theatre Nova Scotia's website.

These awards may not be presented every year, if TNS receives no submissions for them.

All Nomination Awards & Scholarship Prize submissions are reviewed and winners chosen by a selection panel made up of Theatre Nova Scotia board members. Except for the April Hubbard Creative Access award, which is chosen by a panel of members of the Disabled and Mad community.

21. April Hubbard Creative Access Award
22. Theatre Nova Scotia Legacy Award
23. Outstanding Emerging Artist
24. Outstanding Stage Manager
25. Outstanding Technician
26. Outstanding Volunteer
27. Outstanding Media Outlet/Media Coverage

More information on the criteria and application process for these awards can be found online.

CATEGORY CRITERIA AND INFORMATION

Outstanding New Play by a Nova Scotian Playwright

"Outstanding New Play" is a playwriting award, defined as the Nova Scotian premiere of an original script written by a Nova Scotian playwright.
For the purposes of the Merritt Awards, "Nova Scotian" is defined as a person who was born in Nova Scotia, or has had permanent residence in Nova Scotia for at least two (2) years.

Outstanding New Adaptation by a Nova Scotian Playwright

"Outstanding Adaptation" is a playwriting award, not a production award. It is defined as extensive changes to the original material to explore new meaning. This of course includes adapting a play from a novel or another non-theatrical source.
The award is meant to celebrate script adaptation and playwriting (is this a new script, or is the script exploring something new?) Rather than for Directorial choices where largely the same text is used (such as taking the same script and setting it in a new location, or a new concept).

For the purposes of the Merritt Awards, "Nova Scotian" is defined as a person who was born in Nova Scotia, or has had permanent residence in Nova Scotia for at least two (2) years.

Outstanding Original Score or Composition

"Outstanding Original Score or Composition" is defined as newly created music, lyrics, and/or sounds conceived of and recorded by a composer, specifically for a particular production.
If submitting for both Original Composition as well as Sound Design, Producers are encouraged to list their Composer and their Sound Designer, as well as detail what elements of the production will be score/composed, versus the sound design (so the jurors may listen for it and discern the two).

"Outstanding Sound Design" is defined as creating, acquiring, editing, and implementing the complete audio elements of a theatre production.

Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble

“Outstanding Ensemble" is defined as a production with a cast that has relatively equal shares of performance presence, and the production is Outstanding due to their work collectively. Rather than a casting model where a few lead characters drive the story, with the rest of the cast serving in supporting roles.

Productions may submit for both Outstanding Lead and Supporting performance as well as the Ensemble award if so desired.

Producers are encouraged to list who they mean when they say ‘Ensemble’, for Juror’s clarity.

Outstanding Productions

A production may only be eligible for one (1) of the Outstanding Production Awards:

- Outstanding Production,
- Outstanding Independent Production,
- Outstanding Emerging Production.

Producers may initially submit to any/all three of these categories that they may qualify for.

The following year when Jurors tabulate their scores, if after the first round of voting a production is found to have advanced into more than one of these categories, the producer will be contacted and asked to choose which category they wish to move forward in.

The Producer may only choose one category to advance in, and choosing a category does not guarantee the production will advance further beyond the initial round of voting and be successfully nominated.

A production may be considered for both ‘Outstanding Theatre for Young Audiences Production’, along with another Outstanding Production tier category.

Outstanding Emerging Production

The production must still meet the definition of ‘Professional’ under the eligibility criteria above.

This award is open to groups in which 75% of total artists involved in the production have 5 years or less professional theatre experience.

This category may have fewer than 5 nominees each year. However if this category receives only 2 or less nominees, the successful Emerging nominees will be folded into the ‘Outstanding Independent Production’ category, and jurors will rescore with this lens.

Outstanding Independent Production

Payment of all personnel is required for Outstanding Independent Production.

This award is open to groups that use any theatre working agreement beneath the CTA (Canadian Theatre Agreement).

Outstanding Production

Payment of all personnel is required for Outstanding Production.

This award is open to any interested parties.

THE MERRITT JURY

There will be one (1) annual jury.

The jury will be composed of at least eight (8) people. An effort will be made to include theatre practitioners of different fields of practice and levels of experience.

Jurors are expected to attend all eligible productions and shall be required to retain ticket stubs or proof of attendance to each production. Jurors will be asked to submit ticket stubs in order to verify attendance.
Please note that there is a significant requirement for travel throughout Nova Scotia during the year, particularly in the summer months as productions take place throughout July and August.

If for whatever reason a juror cannot continue their duties throughout the year, TNS staff will endeavour to find a replacement, and then that juror's ballot will be filled out jointly by the original juror and their replacement.

Theatre Nova Scotia requires that all jurors are able to see at least 75-85% of eligible productions (approximately 27-30 productions annually). This minimal expectation has been set based on the abilities of past working juries to see eligible productions.
A juror who does not attend 75% of eligible productions may at the discretion of the Theatre Nova Scotia Executive Director be dismissed.

Jury members must declare if they have a conflict of interest with any production.

Jury members may not vote for a production they have not attended, or have a conflict with.

Jury members may not abstain from voting.

In order for a production to be considered properly evaluated for the Merritt Awards, it must be seen by a minimum of three (3) jurors.

In the circumstance that an eligible production submitted with sufficient notice has not been seen by at least 3 jurors (representing 3 separate ballots), the Producing company will be informed and the Board of Directors and will determine if there can be an alternate procedure to ensure that the production is able to be evaluated in a fair and equitable manner.

Producers agree to provide each juror with two complimentary tickets to each of their eligible production, or indicate a maximum cap of tickets they would like to make available.

Theatre Nova Scotia will reimburse jury members for travel and accommodation expenses on a per-diem basis, using forms submitted in advance of travel and expenses.

Jurors must arrange their own travel logistics.

MERRITT JURY BALLOTS

The information for the ballot is drawn directly from the information submitted through the initial production submission form.

At the end of each performance year, Theatre Nova Scotia will distribute to each producer a Production Ballot for each of their eligible productions in the year, including all roles, names, and information submitted.
The responsibility for verifying the information (including proper titles and spelling of Names) on the ballot lies completely with the producer, and any amendments must be received back by the deadline provided by Theatre Nova Scotia.

Theatre Nova Scotia staff will use these Producer Ballots to draw up initial scoresheets for Jurors in early January.

Upon receiving the first scoresheet ballots, the jury will have the opportunity to verify that all names, productions, and categories are listed as they expect. If there are any anomalies, the producer(s) will be notified and asked to clarify. The producer has the authority over how their productions and personnel are listed.

Categories that do not have at least 6 candidates to vote on are liable to not proceed forward to a ballot or voting process to determine nominees. (With the exception of 'Outstanding Emerging Production'). This decision will be at the discretion of the Merritt Jury of that year.

Each juror will be asked to complete scoring for all categories on their Ballot presented to them, to help determine nominees for each category.
Upon receiving scores from all Jurors, TNS staff will assemble all scores to determine the top-ranked candidates. The candidate list will be pared down to those top-ranking candidates to move forward to the next round, and Jurors will meet to review these top candidates before moving on to a subsequent round of voting.

Jurors will be asked to continue to vote on a series of ballots, including ballots to break ties and/or to determine nominees and winners.

Theatre Nova Scotia will retain all ballots for a period of three months after the awards ceremony. All ballots will then be destroyed. No part of any ballot will be made public.

Once voting has begun, any candidate or producer wishing to remove themselves from any category, will be done so without substitution. In the event that nominations have already been announced, the candidate will not be replaced.

VOTING

All juror voting is confidential.

Theatre Nova Scotia shall not disclose the votes given to any candidate. A juror may not vote on a production with which he/she has a conflict of interest. A juror may not vote on a production they did not see.

Jurors may not abstain from voting for a category, or vote for fewer than the prescribed number of nominees in any one category unless they are abstaining due to:

- a conflict of interest
- they were unable to attend the production
- they do not consider a full five candidates as 'outstanding'

Each juror will select **up to** five (5) or ten (10) candidates as per the instructions of the category. Jurors do not have to select a full roster of candidates, if they do not consider a full roster of candidates 'Outstanding'.

First Ballot

The jurors will receive a ballot by email/online containing the full list of eligible productions and candidates within each category.

Each juror will complete the ballot privately. Each juror will select their top five (5) or ten (10) candidates as per the instructions of the category, assigning points in descending order *(1st place will receive 5pts, 2nd place will receive 4pts, etc.)*

The Theatre Nova Scotia staff will review and tabulate the votes of the jury in every category.

Every candidate named by every juror will be included on the second ballot.

Jury Review Meeting

A jury meeting will then be held to review the assembled candidates prior to the second round of voting.

In order to preserve our blind-ballot method of voting, Jurors will not be able to see exact final scores, or the order of successful candidates, but will be provided an alphabetized list of all successful candidates who have moved on to the second round in each category.

Jurors will have the opportunity to discuss each category and its current list of candidates, and determine collectively if any amendments are required before moving forward.

Second Ballot

A subsequent ballot will be prepared and distributed to each juror following this review meeting. The jurors will receive the second ballot by email/online.

On the second ballot, jurors will again rank their choices, select their top five (5) or ten (10) candidates as per the instructions of the category, assigning points in descending order *(1st place will receive 5pts, 2nd place will receive 4pts, etc.)*

Jurors may not assign the same ranking to more than one candidate.

The votes will be tabulated by Theatre Nova Scotia staff to determine an average score for each candidate.

Productions are weighted on attending jurors, to ensure that productions which received fewer juror attendees are not automatically penalized.
(For example, a production that received 6 jurors attending, will total up all points received, and divide its total points score by 6, to receive an average score. A production that was seen by 4 jurors will have its points divided by 4.)

See the example scoresheet provided below:

Didn't See | Conflict of Interest

Category:	Outstanding Costume Design										
				Juror 1	Juror 2	Juror 3	Juror 4	Juror 5	Juror 6			
#	Title of Production	Producing Company	Costume Designer	5 to 1 pts	5 to 1 pts	5 to 1 pts	5 to 1 pts	5 to 1 pts	5 to 1 pts	Total Score	# of Jurors who saw it	Average
1	A Midsummer Night's Dream	Aardvark Theatre	Aaron Aaronsen	3			4	0	1	8	4	2
2	Hamlet	Bumblebee Productions	Blake Birmingham	0		5	0	0		5	4	1.25
3	Julius Caesar	Calico Cat Playhouse	Charles Conrad		0		3	0		3	3	1
4	King Lear	Deep Valley Theatre	Danielle Danforth	0	0		2	4		6	4	1.5
5	Macbeth	Emphasis!! Productions	Earl Ellington	4	1		5		3	13	4	3.25
6	Much Ado About Nothing	Firecracker Theatre	Fran Flemmington		0	4		2		6	3	2
7	Othello	Good as Gold Productions	Gertrude Gunderson	5	5		0	1	5	16	5	3.2
8	Romeo & Juliet	Hello There Theatre Company	Haven Harlow	2	2		0	0	4	8	5	1.6
9	The Merchant of Venice	Illicit Productions Theatre	Idris Inglewood	0	3		1	0	2	6	5	1.2
10	The Winter's Tale	Juxtaposition Productions	Jackie Jomp				0	3		3	2	1.5
11	Titus Andronicus	Kangaroo Theatre	Kaylen Kronkite	1	4	3	0	5		13	5	2.6

Using the Average score for candidates, the top two-thirds of the candidates will advance to the third ballot.

Jury Review Meeting

A second jury review meeting will be held to review the assembled candidates prior to the third round of voting. Jurors will not see final scores or the order of successful candidates, but will be provided an alphabetized list of all successful candidates who have moved on to the third round in each category.

Jurors will have the opportunity to discuss each category and its current list of candidates, and determine collectively if any amendments are required before moving forward.

Subsequent Ballots

The process will continue until a final list of 5 or 10 nominees is established for each category.

On average the process will see 3 rounds of meetings and ballot-voting. However additional rounds may be needed to break ties in categories to take the final list down to 5 nominees.

Jurors will be given a chance at their final meeting to confirm as a group that each category's nominations are appropriate, or discuss if any require amendments.

The jury has the right to release no fewer than three (3) or no more than five (5).

In the case of Outstanding Performance in a Leading Role and Supporting Role, the jury has the right to name up to ten (10) nominations.
No more than 50% of the nominations of each of these two categories can be cisgendered men.

The jury has the right to decide if any category should receive nominations or an award in a given year.

The jurors will maintain the confidentiality of the nominees.

Final Ballot

The final ballot will include only the final nominees, and jurors will rank each nominee as per the prior ballots.

There can be no ties. In cases where a tie exists and cannot be broken by the jury, Theatre Nova Scotia staff and board will appoint appropriate (and unbiased) representation to break the tie.

In the case of 2 categories only, Outstanding Performance in a Leading Role and Supporting Role, the jury will determine two (2) winners. No more than 50% of the winners of each of these two categories can be cisgendered men.

The jury has the right to determine if they would like to name an award recipient in a category that did not meet the 6-candidate minimum.

The names of the winners shall not be made public until the time of the awards. The jury will keep these names confidential until that time.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Policies

Policies for the Merritt Awards are decided on by the Merritt Awards Ad Hoc Committee. This committee is composed of members of the 'Professional Committee' of Theatre Nova Scotia, which includes Professional producing members of Theatre Nova Scotia from across the province.

This committee is convened on an as-needed basis, and the Staff and Board of Directors for Theatre Nova Scotia are responsible for reviewing policy and procedure to ensure that the processes of the Merritt Awards are carried out as responsibly and as fairly as possible.

The theatre community is welcome to submit requests and input regarding the Merritt Awards by contacting the Executive Director or a TNS Board member. The Merritt Awards are often discussed at the Professional Committee and any business arising will be reviewed by the Board and brought forward to the Professional Committee.

Regular scrutinizing and refreshing of the Merritt Awards criteria and regulations is expected every 3-4 years.

Jury

Individual members of Theatre Nova Scotia are eligible to participate in the annual jury. Interested members can contact the Executive Director of Theatre Nova Scotia, or wait for TNS' annual call out in October/November each year.
A jury member is responsible for seeing all eligible professional productions from January to December. The number of productions in a year ranges from 35-50. The voting process will take place throughout January/February of the following year and the awards show will take place in late March.
If the number of interested jurors exceeds the number of jury positions, a committee will convene to review and make decisions using a scoring rubric. If the number of interested jurors is insufficient to fill the jury spots, the Executive Director will solicit targeted members.

Panels

Upon receipt of the nominations for the special awards, a panel will be convened to review and decide upon the recipients. The panel will include the Executive Director, at least one (1) Board Director and at least two (2) members of the theatre community.

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