

AWGIES 2013: Brandising the sword of truth

by: David Tiley

Screen Hub

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At the 46th Annual AWGIE Awards held in Melbourne, the night belonged to Alana Valentine, with a side order of an enormously tall playwright and a Federal Minister of the Arts with a short speech.

Alana Valentine was nominated for a Radio: Adaptation Award, and for Theatre: Community and Youth Theatre. She won for the latter and was then coshed from behind not once but twice, with the inaugural David Williamson prize for outstanding theatre writing, for which she probably pinched herself 25,000 times, once for every dollar in the cheque. Then she bookended the night with the Grand Prize, often a trap for a writer who has already taken to the bottle to celebrate an earlier victory.

But Alana remained perfectly composed, and told an appreciative audience that her theatre work is dedicated to confronting the real experience of ordinary lives, and articulating the realities of our times. She works very closely with particular communities, and is a relentless researcher. In screen terms, this is Loach rather than Luhrmann.

The fact that the cheque was given by the aristocratic Conservative Senator George Brandis is either an accidental irony or a tribute to the pluralism and tolerance which should underpin the management of the arts.

Brandis paid appropriate tributes to the skill and importance of writers, who are "crafting the great stories of our nation." Nod, nod, we went. Support for the arts should be "both bipartisan and enthusiastic". Nod, nod again.

He said he had been the Minister of the Arts for a short time in the Howard Government. In some circles that would have led to foot-stomping applause. Silence from the writers, who were determinedly polite to him, and to each other. As Brandis had already noted, voters from both sides were in the room.

It may be that this tiny pause signalled a deep change in our collective attitude to the relationship with government. I remember a ghastly moment at an AFI Awards night in the Melbourne Town Hall where the Minister, Robert Alston, was booed. They were incendiary times, but that was politically very bad.

Prominent in the rest of his slight but positive speech was his reference to intellectual freedom, as in "nowhere is intellectual freedom more important than the creative arts." Personally I would have put science, academia and the law ahead of the arts, but it is nice to know he might hesitate to kick the populist can over luvvies and the chattering classes... Although some in the audience claimed it was code for making

sure the owners of Australian media should have free reign to tell their versions of our national stories, without quite Alana's commitment to the truth.

There was one very odd moment in his speech. He is proud of the fact that five Cabinet members are published authors, which "demonstrates our commitment to the published word and the craft of writing." Good to know that our new Prime Minister spent long months in his exile from power opening his veins over a keyboard, refusing to have anything to do with his speechwriter, his image-makers and even a ghostwriter.

One thing about writers' events that never fails to charm the audience - they can all pen a decent paragraph, and they know how to read aloud. Guy Rundle gave a cracker of a speech to accept the Fred Parsons Award for Services to Comedy, which managed to be acerbic but inoffensive to those present, except perhaps to a federal politician who had already committed himself to free speech.

The Foxtel Fellowship for a significant body of work in television was given to Jacquelin Perske, gun television writer and producer responsible for projects like *Spirited* and *Love My Way*. She also wrote *Little Fish*, which didn't count in this particular situation. If she spends her \$25000 on a room in a mountain retreat to write poetry, many people would be displeased.

The Dorothy Crawford Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Profession was graciously accepted by Neil Armfield, theatre and film director. "It is our privilege to serve the writer", he said, and he didn't mean a custard pie in the kisser.

The Hector Crawford Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Craft via a Body of Script Editing Work was given to Kym Goldsworthy, who started working on *Hey Dad*, and has recently script edited *a gURLs wURLd*, via a few televisual trinkets like *Packed to the Rafters*, *Erky Perky* and *McLeod's Daughters* glittering in between.

The John Hinde Award for Excellence in Science Fiction Writing may have seemed like wishful thinking when it started in 2007, but is now increasingly competitive. It was [carried off](#) by Shayne Armstrong and Shane Krause. They tried very hard not to be frightening on the podium.

The Richard Lane Award for Outstanding Service and Dedication to the Australian Writers' Guild has many potential winners, since the Guild has seen a LOT of people on the barricades with copies of the National Executive minutes neatly typed and underlined in the right places. This year's winner is Simon Hopkinson, immediate past-President of the Guild, who took it through four difficult years to grow and stabilise financially.

The speeches for these awards tended to be longer, and crafted with care, punctuated

only by the distant sounds of a giant ape on the rampage. Yes, the Plaza Ballroom is cut into the bedrock directly under King Kong playing at the Regent Theatre.

Speeches for the competitive categories were supposed to be 45 seconds long. The musical director had special chords on the piano to signify displeasure. The stage writers expected flexibility, the film writers knew that every moment is precious, and the television writers kept going right up to the next commercial break.

In the Telemovie: Adaptation category, only two projects were nominated, though they both added stature to the category in Australia, and pointed once again to the value of the form for writers. Robert Connelly took the prize for *Underground: The Julian Assange Story*, beating Blake Ayshford's *An Accidental Soldier*.

Television: Miniseries Original pitted Kris Mrka's *Devil's Dust* against two episodes of *Underbelly*. The Badness team of Niki Aken, Peter Gawler, Felicity Packard and Jeffrey Truman set fire to a toy panda to celebrate their win.

In Feature Film: Screenplay Adaptation, Andrew Bovell's *A Most Wanted Man* was up against *Lore* from Cate Shortland and Robin Mukerjee. The combo won, but Andrew is used to honours anyway - nine AWGIES at the last count.

Feature Film: Screenplay Original is always a test for the judges. Here we saw crime drama *Felony* by Joel Edgerton pitted against surf film *Drift* from Morgan O'Neill, and *The Rocket* carved in gunpowder and sweat by Kim Mordaunt.

It was won by Kim Mordaunt.

The evening itself was a ripper, with an edge of Hollywood Gothic. The Plaza Ballroom is so Thirties Hollywood kitsch it is easy to imagine Erroll Flynn swinging from the mock-oak rafters to skewer a plagiarist with a rapier. The candelabra with the proper flames was a nice touch, and everyone frocked up naicely.

Sammy J was terrific as the host, though even he couldn't stop a long evening of awards from sagging as the second act never really found a turning point.

Jon Stephens produced and demonstrated once again just how good he is at live entertainment. Though he mourned his failure to find a slot for his favourite troupe of dancing girls, he provided a lovely cabaret motif with a couple of deft songs about the travails of writing. The hymn to procrastination was particularly apt.

What was different this year? I have a sense that the generations are slowly changing, with more younger people getting key roles behind the computer.

I wasn't the only one to notice that everyone has started to thank their agents. That is

a sign of the times.

I found four Frenchwomen who work in fashion - there to support a daughter who writes screenplays - and badgered them into a commentary on the clothes. They pointed out that riding a bicycle in a dinner suit makes the back of my jacket sag like an old elephant's bum, but then retreated to diplomacy. Veterans of Africa and Canada as well as metropolitan France, they can't understand why we wear so much black.

The answer? Because it makes us look glamorous, and that my dear we do give a damn about.

The AWGIES Winners are:

DAVID WILLIAMSON PRIZE

Alana Valentine

MAJOR AWGIE

Alana Valentine

DOROTHY CRAWFORD AWARD: For outstanding contribution to the profession
Recipient: Neil Armfield

RICHARD LANE AWARD: For outstanding service and dedication to the
Australian Writers' Guild
Recipient: Simon Hopkinson

HECTOR CRAWFORD AWARD: For outstanding contribution to the craft via a
body of script editing work
Recipient: Kym Goldsworthy

FRED PARSONS AWARD: For outstanding contribution to Australian Comedy
Recipient: Guy Rundle

MONTE MILLER AWARD: LONG FORM

Fury - Charlotte McConaghy

MONTE MILLER AWARD: SHORT FORM

Trunk - Derek Foster

SHORT FILM

The Amber Amulet - Genevieve Hegney and Matthew Moore

INTERACTIVE MEDIA

The Opera House Project – Sam Doust

ANIMATION

The Adventures Of Figaro Pho: Fear Of Unfamiliar Toilets - Bruce Griffiths

DOCUMENTARY: PUBLIC BROADCAST

Red Obsession - David Roach with Warwick Ross

DOCUMENTARY: CORPORATE & TRAINING

Your Choice – Ken Wallace

TELEVISION: SERIES

Rake 2: R v. Floyd - Andrew Knight

TELEVISION: SERIAL

Home & Away 5714 - Gary Sewell

RADIO: ORIGINAL

See How The Leaf People Run - Michele Lee

RADIO: ADAPTATION

Cross Sections – Suzie Miller

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION: P CLASSIFICATION

Guess How Much I Love You: I Promise - David Evans

CHILDREN'S TELEVISION: C CLASSIFICATION

Dance Academy: A Perfect Storm - Samantha Strauss

THEATRE: CHILDREN'S

Starchaser - Lally Katz

THEATRE: FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

Truck Stop - Lachlan Philpott

THEATRE: COMMUNITY & YOUTH THEATRE

Grounded - Alana Valentine

COMEDY: SKETCH OR LIGHT ENTERTAINMENT

Good News Week: The Second Going - Mat Blackwell, George Dodd, Simon Dodd, Warwick Holt, Paul Livingston and Ian Simmons

COMEDY: SITUATION OR NARRATIVE (JOINT WINNERS)

A Moody Christmas: Separate Seats - Phil Lloyd and Trent O'Donnell

Please Like Me: Portuguese Custard Tarts - Josh Thomas with Liz Doran and Thomas Ward

THEATRE: STAGE

Medea - Kate Mulvany and Anne-Louise Sarks

TELEMOVIE: ADAPTATION

Underground: The Julian Assange Story - Robert Connolly

TELEVISION: MINI-SERIES ORIGINAL

Underbelly: Badness - Niki Aken, Peter Gawler, Felicity Packard and Jeffrey Truman

FEATURE FILM: ADAPTATION

Lore - Cate Shortland with Robin Mukherjee

FEATURE FILM: ORIGINAL

The Rocket - Kim Mordaunt

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