

HCC's Theater Department wins two Kennedy Center awards

HOLYOKE — The Holyoke Community College Theater Department's fall 2018 production of Lin-Manuel Miranda's "In the Heights" was recognized earlier this month with two awards at the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival.

The HCC production, co-directed by theater professor Patricia Sandoval and HCC music professor Ellen Cogen, won awards for outstanding ensemble work and choreography.

The awards were announced at the end of the KCACTF Region I festival, which was held at Cape Cod Community College from Jan. 29 to Feb. 3. Eleven HCC students and two HCC theater faculty members attended.

KCACTF Region I includes colleges and universities in northern New York and all six New England states. Awards are based on the recommendations of respondents, who travel around the country to view college theater productions and offer critiques.

Receiving the award for outstanding ensemble work was particularly rewarding, Sandoval said. "It's an incredible honor because it recognizes the work that the actors, dancers, singers and production staff did together," Sandoval said. "That is the purpose of theater - creating art together."

She said credit for the choreography award goes to choreographer Tiffany Joseph, of Amherst, who is now a member of HCC's adjunct faculty, teaching communication and movement. Joseph also played the role of Graffiti Pete in the production, which included community members and Holyoke High School students, as well as HCC students, alumni and staff.

HCC presented the show seven times over two weekends in November. All but one performance was sold out; one night there was a snowstorm.

Through a combination of music and dance, "In the Heights" tells the story of a bodega owner and other residents of a mixed Latino community in

the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan. The performance blends salsa, hip-hop, rap, and traditional Broadway-style ballads.

Sandoval began planning for the show last spring and held auditions over the summer to allow for more rehearsal time.

"It was a lot of work, and the intention of it worked, I believe," she said. "The show was a success on many levels - bringing in the community and getting them to recognize the college, the Theater Department, and how the college is holding true to its promise to include the community, which is predominantly Latino. We were the perfect institution to do that."

The HCC Theater Department has had tremendous success in recent years at the Kennedy Center festival, winning eight awards over the last seven years in categories including outstanding ensemble acting, dedication to a script, stage managing and best original music, among others.

"I continue to be impressed with the

accomplishment of our Theater program in these competitions," said Monica Perez, vice president of Academic Affairs. "It speaks volumes about the quality of the program and our faculty."

The HCC Theater Department puts on two full stage productions each academic year, one in the fall and one in the spring. In addition, HCC students take part in the annual alumni-sponsored 24-Hour Theater Festival in September, a festival of one-act plays in the spring, and No Shame Theater, a periodic ad hoc event where students gather to write, rehearse and perform short plays in one evening.

Rehearsals are now underway for the HCC Theater Department's spring 2019 production - "Ugly Lies the Bone," by Lindsay Ferrentino, about a female soldier who returns home from war severely disfigured. The show, directed by HCC theater professor Tim Cochran, will be presented in HCC's Leslie Phillips Theater from April 25 through April 27.