

Diversity Representation Hits Record High on New York Stages

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'The King and I'

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An annual report covering the 2014-15 theater season showed increased hiring of non-white actors at the city's top non-profits, even if Broadway experienced a dip.

The New York theater community is breathlessly awaiting the announcement of the 2016 Tony Award nominations Tuesday morning, when actors of color are expected to post a robust showing, particularly in the musical fields.

Meanwhile, an annual report released Monday by the Asian American Performers Action Coalition shows that the 2014-15 theater season was the most diverse year on record. AAPAC has been studying the ethnic breakdown of casting across the industry for the past nine years, covering Broadway as well as the city's top 16 non-profit theaters.

The survey found that 30 percent of all roles went to actors of color, up from 24 percent the previous year, and from the nine-year average of 23 percent.

But the news wasn't entirely upbeat. While off-Broadway's non-profit theaters drove the upward trend, filling 38 percent of all available roles with actors of color (a jump of 13 points from the previous year's 25 percent), Broadway slipped in the same frame, down to 22 percent from 24 percent the previous year. The decline was particularly bad for African-American actors, dropping from 21 percent in the 2013-14 season down to just nine percent, one of the worst showings on record.

However, that figure and those for all ethnicities look to climb considerably next year given the prevalence of shows with multiracial casts this season, including *Hamilton*, *The Color Purple*, *Allegiance*, *On Your Feet!* and *Shuffle Along*.

The large number of contracts signed for *Hamilton* during its pre-Broadway downtown run early last year helped make the Public Theater the most diverse company in terms of casting. The study found that 62 percent of available roles at the Public were filled by actors of color, boosted by shows such as the David Byrne musical *Here Lies Love*, which had an all-Asian cast.

The least diverse company for the 2014-15 season was found to be off-Broadway's MCC Theater, a star-magnet address whose co-artistic director, Bernard Telsey, is a leading theatrical casting agent. While his firm, Telsey + Company, is responsible for casting several racially diverse shows currently on Broadway, MCC was the sole non-profit studied that hired no actors of color.

The AAPAC study showed overall that 70 percent of roles for the season went to white actors, 17 percent to African-American actors, three percent to Latino actors, nine percent to Asian-Americans and less than one percent to other minorities, including actors with disabilities.

One of the largest increases was made by Asian-American actors on Broadway, jumping from two percent to 11 percent. That was thanks primarily to Lincoln Center Theater's Tony-winning revival of *The King and I*, which has a cast of 50 and only a handful of Caucasian roles.

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