

# Party lines: *people, p*

Irina Koval, a Helen Hayes Award nominee for the Stanislavsky Theater's production of Chekhov's "The Seagull," and Synetic Theater's Mark Kelner (center) visited with Shakespeare Theatre Artistic Director Michael Kahn during the pre-awards reception in the Kennedy Center Atrium.



James R. Brantley/The Washington Times

## D.C. actors delight over Hayes Awards

By Ann Geracimos  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

**“Wow.” “Yo.” “Ya.” “Incredible.”** Normally articulate theater denizens proved themselves nearly speechless as they were called in turn to the Kennedy Center Concert Hall stage Monday evening to be honored for “outstanding” work in 23 performance categories by equally talented presenters representing the Washington Theatre Awards Society.

**Molly Smith**, artistic director of Arena Stage, which garnered the largest number of prizes overall — eight for three company productions — summed up the emotion present in a poignant line: “We overcame a thousand no’s with a single yes.”

Round House Theatre won three awards, as did Studio Theatre and the National Theatre (the latter for so-called nonresident productions). A very vocal clique greeted every mention of the small non-Equity Toby’s Dinner Theatre. Local playwright Ken Ludwig was hailed in the category of “outstanding new play or musical” for “Shakespeare in Hollywood” at Arena.

“I wish I had seen some of these,” commented Shakespeare Theatre’s (two awards) Managing Director **Nicholas Goldsborough** at one point, referring to the burgeoning number of local theaters that make it a near impossibility to attend every worthwhile offering.

New York playwright **Terrence McNally** (of “Master

Class” and other much-heralded plays), who received a special tribute during the ceremonies, praised the advances made here in extensive personal remarks.

“I do remember when Washington was not a theater town,” he said. “I think you should be proud of what you have done these past 35 years.”

Presentation of the honors, known formally as the Helen Hayes Awards after the renowned late actress, was whipped into fast-paced shape for this 20th anniversary celebration by Signature Theatre (two awards) Artistic Director **Eric Schaeffer**. In true Academy Awards style, eye-catching stage effects and entertaining vignettes from some of the past season’s offerings alternated with the recital of names and titles, backed by a lively 10-piece band.

The event is the local theatrical profession’s most notable networking occasion, with a nominees’ reception beforehand and a large, lively “cast party” afterward.

Slim, doe-eyed **Irina Koval**, 29, stood by Synetic Theater’s **Mark Kelner** at the pre-show gathering. The Russian-born actress had been nominated in the best-supporting-actress category for her role in “The Seagull” at the Stanislavsky Theater.

“We want to meet **Joy Zinoman**” (Studio Theatre’s artistic director), said the white-tuxedo-clad Mr. Kelner, looking around eagerly. “She’s doing a Russian festival next season.”