

The Phantom of the Opera celebrates double victory at West End Eurovision 2019

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The cast The Phantom of the Opera pictured with UK Eurovision star Graham Norton and 1998 Israeli Eurovision winner Dana International Photo: Nicolas Chinardet zefrographica.co.uk

The glitzy and glamorous 2019 charity event of the West End Eurovision song contest was held in the Adelphi Theatre on The Strand which is currently the home of the Musical *Waitress*.

The aim of the event is to raise money for the charity Mad Trust – Make a difference Trust which was founded in 2008 by David Pendlebury, together with Melanie Tranter and Julian Bird, and was initially known as West End Cares & subsequently Theatrecares. It raises much-needed funds to help people living with HIV and Aids in the U.K and Sub-Saharan Africa. Last year's event saw them raise over £400.000.

The evening's event consisted of seven acts by West End musical companies running at the current time. These were *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* – the 2018 Israel entry Toy, *Wicked* – the 2004 Ukraine entry Wild Dances, *Mamma Mia* the 2010 Iceland entry Je Ne Sais Quoi, *The Phantom of the Opera* – 2015 Italian entry Grande Amore, *Aladdin* – Finland's 2018 entry Monsters, *Only Fools and Horses* – 2007 Ukraine entry Dancing Lasha Tumbai and *Follies* – 1977 French entry L'oiseau et L'Enfant.

Our four celebrity judges were Wayne Sleep, Bonnie Langford, Tim Vincent and Amber Davies. There was some great camaraderie between the four celebrities and Wayne Sleep flirted outrageously with the host and Tim Vincent.

The host for the evening was Richard Gauntlet who is no stranger to West End musicals. His combination of wit and antics on stage made him an excellent choice to entertain the audience and introduce the acts. There were a few in-house jokes thrown in.

The most rapturous applause of the night went to the star of *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* – Layton Williams. Wearing a very skimpy bodysuit, his extremely well-toned abs and physique left very little to the imagination. However, anyone who can jump into the splits as he did deserves the accolade he received.

The theatre was treated to an incredible performance by the 2019 United Kingdom Eurovision candidate Michael Rice. He has an amazing voice with plenty of wow factor and the song is extremely good. Taking the Eurovision politics to one side this candidate would certainly be in with a good chance of winning the competition.

Graham Norton the regular Eurovision host since the departure of Terry Wogan was on the stage at the end to present the award to the winner of the evening.

Dana International performed two numbers and the stunning slate grey glitzy catsuit style outfit added a real touch of showbiz bling to the performance. The winners of the evening's overall performance was ***The Phantom of the Opera***'s brilliant rendition of Italy's 2015 Eurovision entry of Grande Amore. The level of professionalism was everything you expect from a long-standing West End musical.

"Spectacular performance" Tim Vincent enthused during the judges comments backed up by Wayne Sleep swooning *"... vocals sent me crazy"*. Bonnie Langford captured the whole performance by simply claiming *"Brilliantly Theatrical"*.

The immaculate matching black outfits were absolutely stunning and the men in their dinner suits looked fabulous. However, the multicoloured sparkling dresses worn by the ladies towards the end were amazing. The true winners from this amazing glitzy gala night are the people who will now go on to be helped by the money raised at this great fundraising event. Both in the UK and Africa.

This was the first time in the 9-year history of West End Eurovision that the top prize has been won by the same show in successive years.

The Phantom of the Opera was also awarded the new Outstanding Gorgeousness prize, judged by award-winning Set and Costume Designer Fly Davies and Jamie Campbell, whose story inspired 'Everybody's Talking About Jamie'.

The Best Creative prize – decided by the judging panel of West End star Bonnie Langford, dancer, choreographer, director and actor Wayne Sleep, OBE, 'Blue Peter' legend Tim Vincent and Love Island winner Amber Davies (currently playing Judy Bernly in '9 to 5' at the Savoy Theatre) – went to the cast of Wicked performing 'Wild Dances' (Ukraine's 2004 winning entry).

The third trophy of the night, the Best Ident, voted for by public text vote, was won by Everyone's Talking About Jamie.

The final result was:

1. The Phantom of the Opera – 88 votes
2. Follies – 80 votes
3. Wicked – 62 votes
4. Aladdin – 52 votes
5. Mamma Mia! – 42 votes
6. Everyone's Talking About Jamie- 40 votes
7. Only Fools and Horses- 16 votes

Melanie Tranter, chair of the Make A Difference Trust said: *"Last night's event was a testament to the generosity of the amazing people in the theatre community coming together to support the Trust."*

The funds raised will help us to continue our work supporting those living with or affected by HIV and AIDS. Congratulations to The Phantom of the Opera for a well-deserved win. We all look forward to them defending the trophy next year."

Since the first West End Eurovision contest was staged in 2008, the event has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds to support the MAD Trust. The Trust works with its partners to support HIV and AIDS projects both in the UK and Sub-Saharan Africa building awareness and providing care support and education.

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