

Best theatre performances of 2014: was Sofie Gråbøl your drama queen?

You've read the best of the year lists, but what about the actors and ensembles who deserve a nod for shining on stage during 2014? Share your favourites

- . Lyn Gardner's top 10 theatre of 2014
- . Michael Billington's top 10 theatre of 2014

Lyn Gardner

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Royal role ... Sofie Gråbøl in Rona Munro's *James III: The True Mirror*. Photograph: Murdo Macleod

So the best of the year lists are in, reflecting what critics - myself included - haven't seen as well as what we have. Nobody can see everything. Within those lists plenty of actors have had nods for brilliant performances, in particular Tim Pigott-Smith in *King Charles III*, Imelda Staunton in *Gypsy*, Kenneth Cranham as the old man in *The Father*, and Sofie Gråbøl in *The James Plays*.

The Observer's Susannah Clapp did her own top 10 of stand-out performances, which includes Gillian Anderson in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Carey Mulligan in *Skylight* and some rather more off-the-wall choices including beat-boxer Grace Savage in *Home at the NT*. I'd certainly go with the last of these. Savage was fabulous, too, in the uneven *Blind for Paper Birds*.

Great shows often breed great acting: but the actors who often get overlooked are those in shows that just miss or which are probably never going to make the best of lists. I'm thinking of performances like that of the luminous Tanya Moodie as the lonely black seamstress living in early 19th-century New York in Lynn Nottage's affecting *Intimate Apparel*, another hit for the very in-form Ustinov in *Bath*. If I'd done my Top 10 on another day, *Intimate Apparel* - along with 1927's dazzling *Golem* and Katie Mitchell's astonishing *The Cherry Orchard*, both at the Young Vic - may well have made the final cut. I loved Kate Duchene as

the grief-stricken Ranevskaya in the latter.



Perfectly cast ... Zoë Wanamaker (Stevie) in *Stevie* at Minerva theatre, Chichester. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian

I enjoyed Zoë Wanamaker, so perfectly cast in *Stevie* at Chichester, but equally adored Lynda Baron's performance as the "lion" aunt. *Stevie* is heading to Hampstead theatre in March. Noma Dumezweni and Matthew Marsh were brilliant adversaries in Nicholas Wright's *A Human Being Died That Night* at Hampstead. Lesley Manville was peerless in *Ghosts*, which I didn't see until this year when it transferred to Trafalgar Studios.

I also rated Eugene O'Hare and Alex Ferns, who made sense as the warring brother's in Sam Shepard's *True West* at the Tricycle. I loved the unaffected openness of Katie West in Simon Stephens' *Blindsided* at the Royal Exchange in Manchester and Ray Scannell as John in Chris Goode's *Infinite Lines* at the Tobacco Factory. And what about virtuoso solo performances such as Conor Lovett excavating wells of loneliness in Will Eno's *Title and Deed* (at the Print Room in January), Christopher Brett Bailey blistering in *This is How We Die* or *Scottee* in *The Worst of Scottee*?



Sibling rivalry ... Eugene O'Hare and Alex Ferns in *True West* at the Tricycle, London. Photograph: Tristram Kenton for the Guardian

There have been lots of terrific ensembles too: the wonderful young cast in *Turfed*, a show about football and young homeless people, at Hackney Downs Studio as part of LIFT, the cast of Sally Cookson's *Jane Eyre* at Bristol Old Vic (Craig Edwards wins the award for best dog of the year), the youngsters led by rising star Aoife Duffin in Headlong's *Spring Awakening*, both sets of PMs and Queens in *Handbagged*, the performers in *Blurred Lines* at the Shed, the cast of the mighty *Scottsboro Boys* at the Garrick, and all the children in *God*

Bless the Child at the Royal Court.

.Tell us your favourite performances and ensembles of the year and the performances that you think have been overlooked and deserve a call out.