

## Laureled and hardy

Off-Off Broadway makes room for yet another theater award

By **Raven Snook**

**Y**ou've heard of the Tonys, but what about the Drama Desk Awards? Perhaps.

The OBIES? Vaguely. The OOBs? Wait, aren't they the OBIES? Actually, those last two are presented by *The Village Voice* and the online *Off-Off Broadway Review*, respectively. Let's put aside the other laurels distributed annually by the New York Drama Critics Circle, the Outer Critics Circle and the Lucille Lortel Foundation. Since myriad theater awards vie for the spotlight each year, it might seem like pure egotism to add another to an already glutted stage. But three young upstarts have not only launched a new nonprofit awards organization—the New York Innovative Theatre (NYIT) Awards, which celebrates Off-Off Broadway—they also hope to bring the far-flung scene together via the Internet. By NYIT's estimate, there are approximately 40,000 artists currently working Off-Off Broadway. "Our website helps connect the people in the community as well as bring recognition to their great work," says NYIT cofounder Shay Gines, a performer and producer with a long history in 99-seat venues. "It's like a community center online."

Unlike other awards organizations, NYIT has no nominating committee. Instead, all productions that meet certain criteria (a minimum of



**EVERYONE LOVES A WINNER** Jason Bowcutt, Shay Gines and Nick Micozzi, from left, search for shows to honor with the brand-new NYIT Awards.

eight performances, budget under \$40,000, etc.) can submit themselves for adjudication. The process is free and completed online, the one stipulation being that every registrant must designate someone from its creative team to join the NYIT Awards judging pool. That means the judged will also get a chance to judge. "Every show will be seen by three judges, each judge representing 25 percent of the total score, with the audience comprising the last quarter," Gines explains. And while the method may sound dizzying, Gines is confident about its egalitarianism. "We've been developing this for years," she says. "We even consulted with mathematicians to make sure we were doing it right."

Currently, only shows mounted in Manhattan can compete, but Gines and her cohorts—actors Jason Bowcutt and Nick Micozzi—have big plans for their little company, including expanding coverage to all five boroughs next season and producing their first awards show in September 2005. For now, however, they're just trying to get the word out to the theater community they love. "I have worked regionally and on TV, but I keep coming back to Off-Off Broadway," Bowcutt says. "It's the place to be risky, and one of the last places where you can still fail." Here's hoping that NYIT won't end up as one of those casualties.

For more information, visit [www.nyitawards.com](http://www.nyitawards.com).