

# Gary Smith's top performers of 2014

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**Lyla**

Photo courtesy, Brian Gedcke  
*Lyla Miklos's performance at The Staircase was a highlight of the year.*

So many performers were standouts in 2014, it's hard to choose 10. So here's an even dozen.

**Louise Pitre:** In "**Company**" as the blowsy broad Joanne, Pitre was sensational. When she sang The Ladies Who Lunch at Berkeley St. Theatre, the song stayed sung. Later in the year, in a not so hot show called "What Makes A Man A Man," at the same venue she showed audiences what makes a star a star, no matter what she's in.

**Chilina Kennedy:** A brave, sweet, wide-eyed Nellie Forbush in Drayton's "South Pacific," Kennedy sang the socks off Rodgers and Hammerstein's wonderful songs. She also acted the heart out of the story, finding a way to make Nellie her own. Later in the year, Kennedy nailed "Mary Poppins" at Theatre Aquarius, proving she's got the acting chops for just about anything. Is Broadway looming?

**Sarah Murphy-Dyson:** Dyson's performances in "The Naked Ballerina" and "Parents' Night" at The Pearl were superb. This former ballerina has found her voice and it's terrific. Murphy-Dyson finds the emotional peaks and valleys in the characters she plays. She's just terrific.

**Harrison James:** This handsome lad stepped out of the corps de ballet to play Des Grieux in The National Ballet's production of the ballet "Manon." He danced like a dream, but also found depths of acting talent that eluded many of the National's principal dancers. Why aren't we seeing more of him?

**Seanna McKenna:** She's been wonderful in many productions, but "Mother Courage" has to be counted a highlight of her busy career. McKenna found the pain and the passion in Brecht's great anti-war drama at Stratford.

**Fiona Reid:** She's one of Canada's national treasures. Almost every time she steps on stage, she startles you with her range of acting powers. At Shaw, in both "The Sea" and "The Charity That Began at Home," Reid once again proved she's one of our best. There's no one better.

**Colm Feore:** He can be excessive at times, but he knocked "King Lear" across the Avon at Stratford where his performance rivalled those of former greats William Hutt, Christopher Plummer and Peter Ustinov in the Lear role. Feore gave such a clean, clear reading of the role it was impossible not to feel his pain.

**James Earl Jones:** Ever since "The Great White Hope," James Earl Jones has been so at home on the stage he amazes you with the way he inhabits a character. As Grandpa in the wonderful Broadway comedy "You Can't Take It With You," he created a man with hopes, dreams and a simple philosophy of life.

**Robert Robinson:** This brilliant young Stuttgart Ballet dancer was amazing in Marco Goeke's stunning solo "Affi" at his own Gala on the Isle-of-Wight. Robinson is a star in the making. It was a thrill watching him create dance magic to the music of Johnny Cash.

**Pamela Gordon:** Sally Bowles in "Cabaret" has never been better in any production I've seen anywhere, including the New York original. Gordon nailed everything about this woman that breaks your heart. Talk about shiver time.

**Natalie Daradich:** Here's the one who stepped out of the chorus to become a Stratford star. When Chilina Kennedy gave up the role of Polly in Stratford's "Crazy for You," Daradych took over. She danced and sang like she belonged at centre stage. Let's hope she stays there.

**Lyla Miklos:** I don't usually include non-professional performers in this list, but Lyla Miklos' cabaret performance at The Staircase in Hamilton forces an exception. Miklos sang a concert that included opera, Broadway and American Songbook standards. It was so daring, so rich, so full of personal passion I could have listened to it all over again.

Gary Smith has written on theatre and dance for The Hamilton Spectator for more than 30 years.

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