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Sideshow Alley, a musical by Gary Young and Paul Keelan set in a boxing troupe among “freaks, fighters and misfits”, has won The Pratt Prize, Australia’s richest music theatre prize.

Jeanne Pratt AC, announcing the winners of The Pratt Prize for Music Theatre in Melbourne today (Nov.28), said the success of the major new arts award had already been established.

“The purpose of this award is to stimulate the creation of music theatre,” she said. “When we began advertising for entries, late last year, we expected we would get perhaps a dozen or two. With six weeks to go before entries closed – June 30 – we had 10 or 12. But in the following final weeks another 132 entries came flooding in!

“Clearly, this award has been a powerful creative catalyst.”

Gary Young and Paul Keelan will share the cash prize of \$50,000, and *Sideshow Alley* will be staged by The Production Company in a workshop performance valued at \$30,000.

Colleen McCullough, Max Lambert, Johnny Chester, Alan Hopgood, Anthony Costanzo, David Sale, Anthony Crowley, Ron Creager, and MaryAnne McCormack were short-listed finalists selected from 144 entries nationally.

Sideshow Alley is set in a boxing troupe in an Australian travelling sideshow in the 1950s. “It’s a story of the human heart,” says Gary Young, “of love and forbidden love, life and death, the problems and prejudices encountered by the sideshow

‘freaks’...dwarves, giants, pygmies, blacks, whites, Orientals - the people involved in this strange and ostracised life.”

Lyricist Gary Young and composer Paul Keelan have collaborated on several projects. Young is one of Australia’s most respected music theatre directors, currently Associate Director for the Australian production of *Mamma Mia!*, and has worked around the world in theatre, cabaret and television. Paul Keelan, too, has worked in all forms of theatre and was a member of the highly successful a capella group, The Phones.

The Pratt Prize, for an outstanding new work that has the potential to attract a widespread audience, is an initiative of Jeanne Pratt and administered by The Pratt Foundation. “Music theatre writers and composers are perhaps the most neglected of all Australian artists,” she says. “At the same time this is the one area of theatre in which Australians have not made a mark.

“My intention is that The Pratt Prize will be as sought and as esteemed in its field - music theatre - as the Archibald and the Premiers’ Literary Awards, and that it will stimulate the creation of music theatre with wide appeal. The Pratt Prize, I’m delighted to say, has already had done that in its inaugural year.”

The judges of The Pratt Prize are: Jeanne Pratt AC, Ken Mackenzie-Forbes AM, Jonathan Mills and Michael Shmith.

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