

ARTS & POP CULTURE

Announcing the 2026 Houston Theater Awards

A season overflowing with wonderful work



BY D. L. GROOVER, JESSICA GOLDMAN, DONI WILSON AND MARGARET DOWNING

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BEST NEW PLAY/PRODUCTION

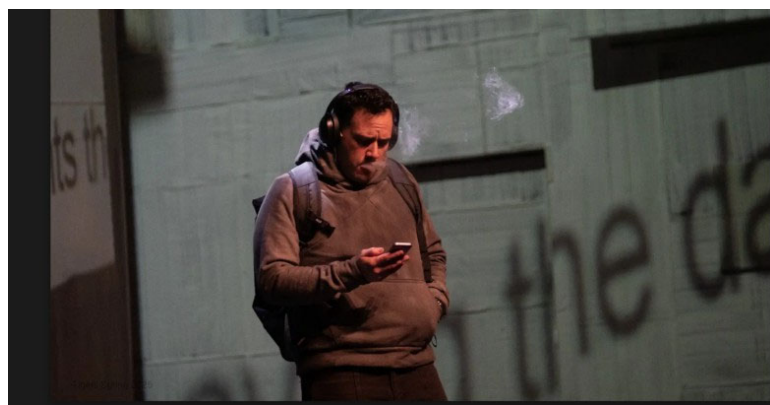
Winner: *Crime and Punishment: 2026* by Jayme McGhan, A.D. Players

What do you do with a classic of Russian literature that's thick as a Kremlin wall and is renowned for its psychological insight and deals heavily with murder, the aftermath of crushing guilt, and redemption?

If you're artistic director at A.D. Players, you just sit right down and adapt it. That's exactly what Jayme McGhan did, and his "favorite book" turned into a majestic theatrical experience that brilliantly encapsulated Fyodor Dostoevsky's 1866 novel *Crime and Punishment*. Appending "2026" to his title, McGhan overlaid the adaptation with state-of-the-art projections and Kirk A. Domer's abstract cubist set that had panels raised to reveal rooms behind, or Raskolnikov's impoverished apartment bedroom that slid out above the stage, teetering on the edge like our anti-hero. Projections of cityscapes, tech info, and blurred action zoomed around the set, the impoverished Russians used cell phones, and everyone was dressed in contemporary grung.

A technical wonder, yet grounded under McGhan's sterling sense of drama, the exuberant actors doubled, even tripled up, for the myriad characters in this teeming work, but the intimacy of family, friends, and nemeses was never short-changed. You knew who they were, yet the switching of actors gave potent meaning to Raskolnikov gradual madness and isolation. The entire show bubbled with invention and discovery, very now and very hot, unlike any other prior production from A.D. Players, all sublimely directed by the sure and steady hand of Sophia Watt of Rec Room Arts fame. It was a mighty production, beautifully conceived and executed. With judicious pruning, the show should go to Broadway; it was that exceptional.

Finalists: *Dear Alien* by Liz Duffy Adams (Alley Theatre), *That Drive Through Monterey* by Matthew Paul Olmos (Stages) and *The Body Snatcher* by Katie Forgette (Alley Theatre).



Ronald Roman-Melendez in the A.D. Players production of *Crime and Punishment: 2026*, written by Jayme McGhan.
Credit: Miranda Zaebst