

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Gabrielle Revlock

Rocky Awards Awash with Babies

by Lisa Kraus

Babies, babies, everywhere! At this year's Rocky Awards they were carried by choreographer moms or dads, bounced on laps and rocked and admired in the audience before and during the show, in the bellies of those watching and receiving awards and—really?-- in the “pregnant” hosts Annie Wilson and Christina Gesualdi. Turned out, as first Gesualdi then Wilson “gave birth” while announcing an award, they were playing on the family-friendly ethos of our Philly dance ecosystem and its plethora of dance kids.



Photo: Clayton A. Sweeney, Jr.

Kids anchored the show, with Sara Gladwin Camp's little Zoom Dancers taking a turn as the ocean wearing blue T's and holding

streaming ribbons. In the [Wide, Wide World of Dance video](#), Anna Drozdowski gave poker-faced and scholarly commentary on the meaning of the dancing of a gaggle of dancers' children (including a baby's minimalist rolling over). Made in cahoots with Les Rivera, this video deserves to go viral.

Fish and swimming were themes too. Alie Vidich and Christine Morano were revealed in the opener hanging from trapezes in spangly mermaid wear. Our hosts emerged first in swimsuits (and precipitously high heels). And the actual award presented to each recipient was a hand-blown fish bowl made by Carmichael Jones replete with colorful gravel and a happily swimming, but solitary, betta fish.



Photo: Clayton A. Sweeney, Jr.

Who was honored this year? Some choreographers gave awards to choreographers – Megan Mazarick to Beau Hancock, Katherine Kiefer Stark to Lela Aisha Jones, Greg Holt to Shannon Murphy. And dancer to dancer – Stephanie Demby to Roxanne Lyst. Behind the scenes efforts were honored when Vidich presented an award to lighting and tech pro Leigh Mumford, Elba Hevia y Vaca to me for curation and the hosts' award went to Drozdowski for the many hats she wears (running a space, curating, consulting, writing, and as a general creative force).

Between awards, Wilson and Gesualdi clowned and acted out– guzzling beer while “pregnant,” dispensing critiques of their own jokes and the award ceremony itself while at their virtual laptops, riffing on Philly’s absence of a culture of regularly taking technique class. Leading a wacky prayer to Dance/UP director Lois Welk. Some deliciously insider-y stuff, hitting the mark nicely.



Photo: Clayton A. Sweeney, Jr.

Performers in the entre'actes included Shannon Murphy with Michelle Tantoco, Keila Cordova Dance and the evening's tech crew. The finale, by Archedream of Humankind featured a giant frog puppet lit with spooky black light, scaring some of the smaller kids in the house. But the little girls I spoke to who had been part of the opening ocean dance thought the whole show was really fun. Me too.

Rocky Awards presented by DanceUSA/Philadelphia and FringeArts at Underground Arts, Sept. 9.

By Lisa Kraus
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