

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Clayton A. Sweeney, Jr.

Rocky Fun

by Lisa Kraus

Pictured on homepage L to R: Annie Wilson, Christina Gesualdi, Dito van Reigersberg and Christina Zani

Pictured above L to R: Donna Faye Burchfield, Terri Schockley, Linda Caruso Haviland, Miriam Giguere and Lois Welk

I haven't felt the pulse of many other dancing cities besides Philly and New York, but it's hard to imagine that any gathering like our Rocky Awards ceremony could top the unabashed feeling of lovefest we have here. The Rocky's are presented from one dance practitioner to another, with no intermediate panel of judges, so the underlying attitude is of personal gratitude for work well done, performances inspiringly performed and presenting contexts well-crafted.

Throughout the evening we're reminded why we appreciate each other: for boldness, perseverance, outrageousness, communicativeness, elegance. For looniness, intelligence, vision, community-mindedness. There's celebration of both burgeoning new talent and longstanding Philly dance figures.

In fine form, Annie Wilson and Christina Gesualdi reprised their co-host roles this year, again with multiple costume changes from spangly evening wear to mountaineer's flannel (get it—the Rocky's). The evening opened with some of Philly's esteemed elders dancing a snippet of *Rosas danst Rosas* orchestrated by Anna Drozdowski, including a sashaying entry by Susan Hess to a Beyoncé soundtrack. Other danced interludes included a pair of narwhals complete with tusks and flowing gray wigs (Grace Mi-He Lee and Leslie Elkins), a pair of very young Bharatanatyam dancers (Amala Vilizalam and Shrija Krishnam) in eye-popping colors, and the inimitable duo of Dito van Reigersberg and Christina Zani as Martha Graham and Liza Minelli, respectively, giving the co-hosts some tips to improve their "floppy" choreography.

Terry Fox of Philadelphia Dance Projects crafted a song and dance with Dan Martin and Michael Biello highlighting the valuable Local

Dance History Project. And the program closed with new talent—recent UArts grad Katrina Atkin's group choreography.

Fun was the watchword, extending to the awards themselves—large cardboard replicas of trophy cups patterned with colorful dots or stripes and crafted by Alex Stadler.

Who were this year's recipients? Hua Hua Zhang for her emotionally resonant mixture of dance and puppetry/objects, Julie Diana for her gorgeous dancing for Pennsylvania Ballet, Annie Wilson for curating the innovative Remix Festival, Tony Bobby Rhodes for his powerhouse dancing with Eleone Dance Theatre, and Judy Williams for her work over the decades facilitating dance at the Painted Bride and the Performance Garage.

A standout presentation was for DaDa Dance Project (Eun Jung Choi and Gulliermo Ortega Tanus): Beau Hancock, presenting their award, screened his antic video made with Scott McPheeters to the song "Happy Together," featuring the two brushing teeth and cooking breakfast when glommed together within one bathing suit.

In a surprise turn, Bob Oliveti was given an "audience award." Attending about 100 dance shows over the last season, he was saluted as an outstanding audience member. He said that he finds the works of Philadelphia dance artists "extremely original and creative. I really enjoy them."



Pictured: Bob Oliveti and Julie Diana

Rocky Awards presented by Dance USA/Philadelphia, FringeArts, September 16.

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