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Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Jerry Almonte

The Rocky Awards: Reborn for 2020

by Kristen Shahverdian

I performed at the 2006 Rocky Awards with the Reactionaries, teaching dance moves to anyone who wanted to join us onstage. I left the stage smiling broadly, proud to be a part of dance in Philadelphia.

The Rocky Awards happened from 2001-2017 as a decidedly Philly-style, gritty, do-it-yourself award show. (See [Becca Weber's](#) tD article from 2017 for more history). Instead of nominations and voting, the previous year's winners bestow the Rocky on anyone of their choosing, often another dancer or choreographer, but at times a designer, a devoted audience member, or a curator. For many years Dance/UP, a dance service organization that closed in 2015, produced the Rocky's. This year [Mira Treatman](#) (a writer for thINKingDANCE, among other activities) is stewarding them into the 2020s after a 3-year hiatus. As I think back on the Rocky Awards I attended (at least half of them), most of my memories are not of who won, but of sitting at the bar, socializing with other dancers, laughing with the hosts, and being introduced to many new performers. The Rocky Awards are one night to show up for Philadelphia dance.

This year, five awards will be passed on by the most recent Rocky awardees: Kyle "Just Sole" Clark, Jaamil Kosoko, Jumatatu Poe, Zornitsa Stoyanova, and Jessica Warchal-King. Event MC Lily Kind will also present a host award. The evening will include performances by [Almanac](#) and [Perphor|n](#), with special appearances by the [Urban Movement Arts](#) family.

Dancers honoring each other matters in an underfunded and underacknowledged field. At times, this personal connection can lead to jokes passing among friends and an "insider" feel at the show. Award shows suffer from the challenge of navigating who decides who makes it into the community. Treatman is addressing this through a wide range of performers. This year's Rocky Awards represents the rebirth of the award, both grounded in tradition and also a passing of the torch to a new generation: a new host, new performers, and new award winners. An event that allows us to think deeply about how we want our community to be remembered and honored is a worthy endeavor; all the better that it's wildly entertaining. (For more on this history, see [Anna Drozdowski's](#) tD article from 2012).

I spoke to Mira about her impulse to produce the Rocky Awards.

Mira Treatman: We need a social space to gather. To lift each other up, through gifting awards to peers. Where we are all equal participants of an event in the same room. I don't want to only interact with my immediate sphere of dance people I already know. No! While our access to resources

varies, we are in such proximity, doing the same thing—dance, in its broadest sense. I am producing this event because I was getting worried that this award show was never going to come back, and I felt compelled to steward it into the 2020s.

Kristen Shahverdian: How do the Rocky Awards fit into your mission that you want to live in a city where the “dancemakers come together to raise people up?”

MT: Peer-to-peer awards are in place to honor outstanding individuals or collectives without gifting funds. Yes, it would also be great for there to be funded awards for dance in our city (which I am working on too), but it is crucial to celebrate each other with the resources we do have today. I want to honor that “dancemaker” can be inclusive of everyone from choreographer to audience member to recreational dancer. I want to honor the smudged lines that exist across these categories because I do believe we all need each other.

KS: Can you speak on the insider quality of awards shows?

MT: I have experienced the show to be insider-y in the past, and I have made my best effort to widen the reach with care for the audience. Performance-wise, we are featuring immersive and experimental performance art, circus, lindy hop, waacking, house, dance-theatre, and clown, among others. Much credit for this is to our new host Lily Kind, who is amazingly networked to a really wide range of dancers through Urban Movement Arts. I am also really hoping audience members and non-performing members of our community will come and feel equally as entertained and welcomed.

The Rocky Awards exist to keep us—makers, performers, students, audience members, and supporters—together in celebration.

[The 2020 Rocky Awards](#), January 27, Rockies Happy Hour in La Peg, 5-7pm, Awards Show in FringeArts Theater, 7-9pm.

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