

December 12, 2014

HUFF
POST

ENTERTAINMENT



Liz Smith

Columnist

♥ Become a fan ✉



The Dance Magazine Awards

Posted: 12/12/2014 2:20 am EST | Updated: 12/12/2014 2:59 am EST

13

23

0

1



Share



Tweet



Pin it



Comment

"IS IT because the dance is silent that dancers talk so much?!"

That's what a pal of mine muttered after the conclusion of the Dance Magazine Awards the other night at The Ailey Citigroup Theater in Manhattan.

•OKAY -- don't ask me how I was roped into this. I'm not especially a fan of "the dance" and have always felt the New York Times spends an inordinate amount of time covering "the dance." But, that is just my opinion. Not shared by millions.

I'd never been to the Dance Magazine Awards and it was quite an experience. First of all, dancers are really a breed apart from other artists. Perhaps because their careers are so brief, usually, and so fraught with injury. When you walk into a room full of dancers, you know it. Something in everybody's posture, how they gesture, how they talk (Oh, how they talk!) There is an almost sexual, incestuous quality -- you don't get it from a room full of actors or writers or even opera singers -- and that lot are pretty over-the-top too. Dancers exist in their own painful, beautiful world of movement. It is movement that they know right from the start is limited in time -- you can be a fifty year old singer or actor; your art undiminished. Dancers? Get it while you can. And then -- teach.

•THE CEREMONY honored six persons for their various contributions -- Brenda Bufalino...Tony Waag...Larissa Saveliev...Wayne McGregor...Luigi, and Misty Copeland. Of these six, I knew only of Luigi, a great dancer and teacher. I knew him via the references of Liza Minnelli. She has worked with Luigi for decades and credits him with influencing, enhancing and saving her. Liza contributed a sweet audio tribute to Luigi, not being able to attend herself because she is in L.A. But she does her Luigi-taught moves every day, come rain or come shine.

Choreographer Wayne McGregor, in Europe working, also sent a video. He said thanks for his award. He was extremely boyish, enthusiastic, impressive.

The show itself was ramshackle, awkward and over-long. But nobody (except me) seemed to mind. The dance community is en famille and forgiving.

Four beautiful (I must admit!) performances enhanced the night and I am going to give space and name to the dancers: Felipe Galganni...Lynn Schwab...Sarah Lane...Sterling Baca...Akua Noni Parker...Jeroboam and Misty Copeland. Bozeman...Alexandre Hammoudi. Maybe I don't love "the dance," but I know talent when I see it. They were all splendid.

- FOR ME, unfamiliar with the dance community and its legends, a lot of the night went over my head. But I was mighty impressed by three women who stood on the stage at various points.

There was Brenda Bufalino, tap dancer extraordinaire, who created the American Tap Dance Orchestra. She has been around for a while, having worked with the late great Charles "Honi" Coles. She spoke with gusto about her career and the long journey it has taken for tap dancing to be considered seriously. She reminded me, in her candor and all-American no-nonsense attitude of the late movie-queen tapper, Ann Miller, who always emphasized the art of tap and how much it was underrated and underappreciated.

And then Bolshoi ballet's rebellious and independent Larissa Saveliev who founded the Youth American Grand Prix competition. Larissa, who had one great lock of long brunette hair obscuring her eyes, and sports a strong, charming Russian accent, was very funny in thanking a magazine: "I want to thank American Dance Magazine for 'taking a meeting' with young Russian girl who knew nothing!"

- THE piece de resistance was the appearance of Raven Wilkinson, who presented ballet's young queen, Misty Copeland with an award. Wilkinson, at age 20, became the first African American woman to receive a full-time dancing contract at the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo of New York. Wilkinson, who is pale skinned, "passed" for a number of years, at least onstage. But when her race was publicized, she was never hired by another American ballet company. Europe was her work refuge. Hers is quite a tale.

The honoree, Misty Copeland is also African-American and feels similar pressures from ballet enthusiasts ("go into jazz, do contemporary dance!") But she has risen to the top of her chosen field as a classic ballerina. Her performance that night was extraordinary!

Raven, who for some reason was seated way at the top of the Ailey auditorium, making her descent to the stage unnerving, gave Misty the most fulsome intro of the evening. At one point, when she paused, somebody attempted to step in, but Miss Wilkinson said: "Oh, but please allow me my quote from Eleanor Roosevelt!" She gave the quote--and then some.

However, to listen to this woman speak about ballet -- even if you don't know ballet -- was a ravishing experience.

Misty, when she finally got to the podium -- out of her dancing costume, now dressed in a stunning little cocktail dress -- was brief, articulate and emotional.

•WILL I ever attend another Dance Magazine Awards event? Probably not. They have budget issues that interfere with a reasonably seamless night. Even the printed program was rather threadbare. BUT -- I don't regret this intimate, emotional interaction with dancers.

I was reminded of the great exchange between Marius Goring and Moira Shearer in the fabulous ballet soap opera "The Red Shoes."

Goring asks: "Why do you want to dance?" Shearer replies, "Why do you want to live?"
Fini.