

Bessie Awards Honor a Wide World of Dance

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In recent years, [the Bessies](#), or the New York Dance and Performance Awards, have become a yes-to-everything kind of institution. Yes to all dance forms, from tap to kathak, from ballet to movement that barely moves. Yes to all performers, be they stilt-walkers or starlets of contemporary dance. Yes to Megan Fairchild, the New York City Ballet principal, and Crazy Legs, the Bronx-born break dancer, presenting an award side by side. Yes to technical difficulties and no technical difficulties. Yes to free pizza for everyone after the show.

Such was the guiding philosophy on Monday at the Apollo Theater, where the Bessies, named for the beloved choreography teacher [Bessie Schonberg](#), celebrated a 30th anniversary. The ceremony, produced with [Dance/NYC](#), was a lot like last year's: haphazard, fun and occasionally mystifying. Two titans in the field were honored: [Arthur Mitchell](#), the founder of Dance Theater of Harlem, with a lifetime achievement award; and [Chuck Davis](#), the founder of DanceAfrica, for service to the field of dance. Four very different productions, out of 12 nominees, won for outstanding production; likewise for outstanding performers.

The atmosphere, even for dance enthusiasts, was at times overwhelmingly dance-positive. But then again, on what other night can we appreciate artists as distinct as [Stuart Singer](#) and [Linda Celeste Sims](#)? Both were anointed outstanding performers, he for his dancing in John Jasperse's "[Within Between](#)," she for her work with a much larger enterprise, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. With its radically inclusive ethos, the Bessies prioritizes common ground over aesthetic camps, thrusting far-flung pockets of the dance world into close contact. Maybe everyone in the theater saw something new.

There was, however, at least one self-proclaimed outsider. "Good evening people of the dance: I am not one of you," said the actress and playwright [Lisa Kron](#), our exceptional host. Her nightlong juggling act — cue cards one hand, mic in the other — was nearly Bessie-worthy in itself.

Introductions begat introductions. Ms. Kron's came after remarks from New York City's first lady, Chirlane McCray ("dance is the most beautiful art"), which came after remarks from the Bessies director Lucy Sexton and her fellow producers, which came after an opening shebang by Jennifer Miller and Circus Amok. There were also performances by Megan Williams (in Mark Morris's "Bijoux," a 1984 Bessie winner), Michelle Dorrance, Urban Bush Women and, more informally, Mr. Davis, who danced at the center of an onstage drum circle and got the rest of us, briefly, up and moving.

The awards for outstanding production — presented by, among others, Wendy Whelan, just 48 hours after [her last dance at City Ballet](#) — went to Okwui Okpokwasili's "[Bronx Gothic](#)," Akram Khan's "[Desh](#)," Mr. Jasperse's "Within Between" and Camille A. Brown's "[Mr. TOL E. RAnCE](#)." The other outstanding performer awards went to [Aakash Odedra](#) of "James Brown: Get on the Good Foot" and [Rebecca Serrell Cyr](#) for her performance in Donna Uchizono's "Fire Underground." The duo [Brennan Gerard and Ryan Kelly](#) received the juried Bessie. The previously announced winners in the emerging choreographer category, [Jen Rosenblit](#) and [Jessica Lang](#), were also honored.