



*For Immediate Release*

# *The Bessies*

## **CHEERING AUDIENCE OF 850 RAISED A GLASS TO 2018 NEW YORK DANCE AND PERFORMANCE AWARD, BESSIE WINNERS ANNOUNCED TONIGHT, OCTOBER 8, AT SKIRBALL CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS**

The night remained forever young at this year's Bessies, what with live performances, videos, tearful and grinning thank you's, hugs and cheers for the new slew of winners, and a costume sashay thrown into wild mix of celebration that took place tonight, October 8, at the NYU Skirball Center for the Performing Arts. As a prelude to the goings-on inside, impromptu dance performances, including Simone Forti's "Huddle," took place outside. Ayodele Casel and Shernita Anderson hosted the evening.

Just prior to the awards presentation, at a cocktail party at NYU's Kimmel Center, Ted Striggles and Deborah Sale were honored with the 2018 Angel Award for their tireless work on behalf of dance. Following the Skirball celebration, the night's festivities continued with a party at the legendary Judson Church.

The list of this year's awardees, 20 in all, is as follows: Outstanding Production—David Thomson for "he his own mythical beast;" Marjani Forté-Saunders for "Memoirs of a... Unicorn;" Nami Yamamoto for "Headless Wolf, and Geoff Sobelle for "HOME" at BAM Harvey. Jane Comfort and Company received the 2018 Outstanding Revival Award for the company's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Retrospective at La MaMa. The four Outstanding Performer Awards were given to Germaine Acogny for her performance in Olivier Dubois's "Mon élue noire (My Black Chosen One): Sacre #2" and Elizabeth DeMent for Big Dance Theater's "17," while Courtney Cook and Sara Mearns each received

recognition for their sustained achievement for their outstanding performances through the years, Courtney Cook for her work with Urban Bush Women, Maria Bauman and Marguerite Hemmings, and Sara Mearns for her performances with New York City Ballet and various contemporary choreographers, as well as her interpretation of Isadora Duncan. Mimi Lien, Peiyi Wong, Tuçe Yasak, Meena Murugesan, and Richard Forté were tapped for their Outstanding Visual Design for “Memoirs of a... Unicorn,” and Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste received this year’s Outstanding Achievement in Music Composition Award for his work with choreographers Jaamil Olowale Kosoko, André M. Zachery/Renegade Performance Group, Jonathan Gonzalez, and Will Rawls. The awardees were selected from among 47 nominees; both awardees and nominees each received a \$500 honorarium, courtesy of a grant from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation.

The celebration at the NYU Skirball began with New York Dance and Performance Awards Executive Director Lucy Sexton, Managing Director Heather Robles and former Dance NYC Director Lane Harwell welcoming the audience of over 800 dance enthusiasts. Dwana Smallwood, Greg Miller, Kitty Lunn, Eduardo Vilaro, Taylor Mac, Jennifer Monson, Dean Moss, Dormeshia Sumbry-Edwards, and Dr. Donald J. Rose served as presenters.

Threaded through the festive evening was an excerpt from Robert Battle’s “Ella” by the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, with additional performances by Pooh Kaye, and Mariana Valencia.

Two previously announced awards were given to Marya Warshaw (Outstanding Service to the Field of Dance); and Simone Forti (Lifetime Achievement).

The evening also honored those who died in the past year. Okwui Okpokwasili created “A Song for Sam” to celebrate dance impresario Sam Miller; which was by performed Okpokwasili, Peter Born, David Thomson and Umechi Born in front of a scrolling list of names. Sylvia Waters spoke about Donald McKayle, Virginia Johnson spoke about Arthur Mitchell, and a short video of Paul Taylor was shown.

## **ABOUT THE BESSIES**

The Bessies were established by David R. White in 1984 at Dance Theater Workshop to recognize outstanding work in choreography, performance, music composition and visual design. Nominees are chosen by a Selection Committee comprised of artists, presenters, producers, and writers, which this year is comprised of Ronald Alexander,

Elise Bernhardt, Diana Byer, Tymberly Canale, Alexis Convento, Leah Cox, Parijat Desai, Maura Donohue, Boo Froebel, Angela Fatou Gittens, Diane Grumet, Brinda Guha, Joseph Hall, Irène Hultman, Celia Ipiotis, Koosil-ja, Matthew Lopez, Matthew Lyons, Lydia Mokdessi, Harold Norris, Craig Peterson, Doug Post, Rajika Puri, Susan Reiter, Ali Rosa Salas, Walter Rutledge, George Emilio Sanchez, Andrea Snyder, Carrie Stern, Risa Steinberg, Sally Sommer, Kay Takeda, Catherine Tharin, Muna Tseng, Eleanor K. Wallace, Martin Wechsler, Adrienne Westwood, and William Whitener.

Responsible for setting policy and providing ongoing oversight, the 2018 Bessie Awards Steering Committee is comprised of Cora Cahan, Beverly D'Anne, Lane Harwell, Jeanne Linnes, Stanford Makishi, Nicky Paraiso, Carla Peterson, Paz Tanjuaquio, Laurie Uprichard, and Sylvia Waters.

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**See attached sheet for citations for this year's Bessie winners.**

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## **CITATIONS FOR WINNERS OF 2018 BESSIE AWARDS**

### **OUTSTANDING 'BREAKOUT' CHOREOGRAPHER**

#### **Mariana Valencia**

**Presented in July 2018**

**For seamlessly blending ethnography, memoir, and observation of cross-cultural identities in choreography that engages from start to finish. For a unique vision that uses humor and sadness, reality and imagination, to push dance and performance into new territory.**

### **2018 BESSIES ANGEL AWARD**

#### **Deborah Sale and Ted Striggles**

**For a lifelong commitment to supporting dance**

**For working to better the lives of dance artists on and off the stage**

**For warmly gathering and connecting the dance-making community across decades**

### **OUTSTANDING PERFORMERS**

#### **Courtney Cook**

**For bringing a powerhouse presence and a soulful strength to every performance**

**A riveting performer of searing vocal work and sensuous explosive movement, who brings her rich range of dance forms and unique theatrical power to the work of Urban Bush Women, Maria Bauman and Marguerite Hemmings.**

#### **Germaine Acogny**

**For her fierce, fearless embrace of the "sacrificial one" in a reimagined Rite of Spring created especially for her. No longer doomed, she performs a powerful solo celebrating her heritages in dance, and women, and black women dancing.**

**In *Mon élue noire (My Black Chosen One): Sacre #2* by Olivier Dubois at BAM Fisher**

**Elizabeth DeMent**

**For her cool, intelligent presence, exquisite dancing, and ability to move seamlessly between spoken text and virtuosic dance.**

**For a brilliantly nuanced performance, comic and serious and continuously captivating as a 17<sup>th</sup> century woman and the narrator of the piece.**

**In *17C* by Big Dance Theater**

**BAM Harvey**

**Sara Mearns**

**Sustained Achievement in the work of New York City Ballet, Isadora Duncan, Jodi Melnick, Wang Ramirez and Matthew Bourne**

**For her work as a mesmerizing ballet dancer and insatiable dance explorer, known for consummate musicality, imagination, and theatricality. For an extraordinary season in which she boldly immersed herself in work by masters of hip hop, classic modern, experimental post modern, and theater ballet.**

## **OUTSTANDING PRODUCTIONS**

**David Thomson for *he his own mythical beast***

**Performance Space New York**

**For demolishing the idea of a 'neutral' body in a revelatory excavation of his own mythological identity as a dancer, performer, artist, man, person.**

**For the team creation of an inexhaustible, ecstatic, sweaty swirl of voice and movement addressing race, gender, and the many selves contained within a body.**

**Geoff Sobelle for *HOME***

**BAM Harvey**

**For exploring and exploding the relationship between house and home.**

**For collaborating with a brilliant team using dance, illusion, live music, scenic engineering and audience interaction to create a moving, poignant and zany theatrical work.**

**Nami Yamamoto for *Headless Wolf***

**Roulette**

**For an entertaining and profound journey through the range of human experience.**

**For interweaving five distinctive performers, a puppet, and yards of paper into a total work of theater, a contemplation of birth and death and all in between.**

**Marjani Forte-Saunders for *Memoirs of a . . . Unicorn***

**Presented by New York Live Arts at Collapsable Hole**

**For an installation and performance that digs underground to mine memory and mythology; For conjuring family, friends, and ancestors as she navigates a magical landscape, weaving intersecting tales into a collective memoir.**

## **OUTSTANDING REVIVAL**

***40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Retrospective***

**by Jane Comfort & Company**

**La MaMa**

**For a program highlighting four decades of illuminating work delving into politics, family, friendship, and pure dancing.**

**For a pivotal exploration of language, music and movement in pieces addressing social issues in ways that continue to have impact in the current moment.**

## **OUTSTANDING SOUND DESIGN OR MUSIC COMPOSITION**

**Jeremy Toussaint-Baptiste**

**For mobilizing the technologies of the age to conjure new worlds.**

**For bringing forth hidden languages and primal presences via layered soundscapes in his own work and in collaborations with Jaamil Olowale Kosoko, André M. Zachery/Renegade Performance Group, Jonathan Gonzalez, and Will Rawls.**

## OUTSTANDING VISUAL DESIGN

**Mimi Lien (set), Meena Murugesan (media), Peiyi Wong (installation), Tuçe Yasak (lights), and Richard Forté (set construction)**

***Memoirs of a . . . Unicorn* by Marjani Forte-Saunders**

**Presented by New York Live Arts at Collapsable Hole**

**For creating a mythical, multi-sensory and immersive design in the industrial basement space of Collapsible Hole.**

**For beautifully integrating all the visual elements in a way that heightened the emotional impact of the choreographer's journey through time and memory.**

## LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT IN DANCE

**Simone Forti**

**For her revolutionary, fearless, and widely influential approach to movement, pushing the boundaries of what dance could be-----in her dance constructions and improvised work.**

**For years of investigation into the human body in motion, finding poetry in gravitational forces, the movement of animals, and the natural world.**

## SERVICE TO THE FIELD OF DANCE

**Marya Warshaw**

**For her visionary work at the Brooklyn Arts Exchange creating a space for choreographers of all identities and backgrounds, and for students of all ages and incomes.**

**For finding new and comprehensive ways to support the long process of creation through pioneering residencies and by fostering a true home for dance artists and innovators.**