

## Zahra Stardust wins Open Pairs at Australian Pole Dance Championships

Written by zahra stardust

Saturday, 09 January 2010 09:11

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The Australian Sex Party Candidate for the Bradfield by-election Zahra Stardust, aka Marianna Leishman, has won the Open Pairs category of the Australian Pole Dance Championship in Melbourne with her doubles partner Stacey.

The inaugural Australian Pole Dance Championship is the first competition of its kind to offer a men's category, which Ms Stardust says 'provides a long-awaited place for Australia's talented male pole dancers to demonstrate their strength, artistry and skill, and rebut stereotypes that pole dancing only ever occurs in the context of female performers and male audiences.' The Championship offered four divisions, including both men's and women's categories, a pure pole division, a couples division and an artistic freestyle division, and aimed to give voice to the varied styles of pole dancing occurring around Australia, from the circus kind to the dance-based, fitness-oriented and striptease styles of pole. Ms Stardust said that these categories 'afford greater creative licence to all performers to express themselves on the pole the way they choose.'

Against common stereotypes of pole dancing, the pairs' winning video game show featured the

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music of Mario cart, Pacman and Tetris and a psychedelic, technicolour world in which their robotic characters malfunctioned and rebooted. Ms Stardust, who performed a French revolution narrative to Beethoven with Foxene the previous year and a voodoo 'living dead doll' theme to classical music and heavy metal in the finals of the solo category this year, said that 'Australian pole dancing has become renowned for its execution of all things magic in combination with theatricality, artistry, flexibility, agility, technique and superhuman strength.'

She continued, 'Patronised by an overwhelmingly female audience, pole dancing has been embraced for its fluid aesthetics and theatrical narratives along with its ability to engage audiences through the emotive language of dance.'

However, Ms Stardust used her win as an opportunity to speak about the number of competition rules, both domestically and internationally, that continue to be imposed upon pole dancers to reduce, regulate and police the types of female expression that are represented onstage. 'Despite the plethora of imaginative demonstrations of what pole can be, competitions both within Australia and internationally continue to impose rules defining what pole dancing should look like, what

*types*

of pole can be represented onstage, which

*shades*

of pole are thereby allowed to emerge, and which

*brands*

of pole are publicly validated', she said.

Further, Ms Stardust noted that many of the rules regulating pole dancing are largely inconsistent. On the one hand, it is now a requirement of Miss Pole Dance Australia for all competitors to wear 'high heels' (with further rules dictating the exact type of heels that are acceptable), reducing an ever expanding genre of performance into a particular and narrow mould of feminine and sensual pole display. On the other hand, the World Pole Dance Federation renounces any involvement with the sex industry and bans the winner from accepting any contracts that are erotic in nature, effectively reinforcing stigma against that same female sexual display that Miss Pole seeks to endorse.

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