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Outright International Annual Gala Honors Queer Cast of Star A Celebration of Courage For All

by Yanette Bruno | June 10, 2023 | 0 comment





*The Celebration of Courage Gala hosted by Outright International held their annual event at Pier Sixty at the Chelsea Piers complex in New York City. The #outrightproud celebration featured a blue carpet as special guests arrived at the waterfront venue, where LGBT+ and allies all came together to celebrate the courage and efforts of activists and d who continue to lend their voices and coins to the movement. *snaps**



Board Members of Outright International at 2023 Celebration of Courage

Outright International works with partners around the globe to strengthen the capacity of the LGBT+ human rights movement, document and amplify human rights violations, and advocate for inclusion and equality. Founded in 1997 with staff in over a dozen countries, Outright works with the United Nations, regional human rights monitoring bodies, civil society organizations, and corporate and philanthropic partners. Outright holds consultative status at the United Nations, where it serves as the secretariat of the UN LGBTI Core Group.

Outright International's Celebration of Courage audience attracts LGBT+ individuals and allies who care about rights and equality. Celebration of Courage welcomes some of the best and the brightest from the civil society, media, politics, business, and finance sectors. These stakeholders are Outright's top-level supporters and are among the world's and New York City's most influential philanthropists, industry, and civic leaders. Many guests have international connections and are deeply attuned to world affairs.





Melissa Navia, Jess Bush, Celia Rose Gooding

Celebrities and LGBT+ notables were present to honor the Queer cast and production team of Paramount+'s Star Trek: Discovery, the Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality (ECADE), and Google.org. The Knockturnal got a chance to speak with some of the special guests, which included gala honorees Wilson Cruz, Blu del Barrio, and Ant Rapp of Star Trek: Discovery, Jess Bush, Melissa Navia, and Celia Rose Gooding of Star Trek: Strange New Worlds, Ishaq Davis of RuPaul's Drag Race as well as board members of Outright International such as Kathy Teo, Elliot Valenzuela, and Rikki Nathanson who was a 2019 Celebration of Courage award recipient.



Rikki Nathanson



Mrs. Kasha Davis



Alyson Palmer and sisters Elizabeth and Amy Ziff of indie pop trio BETTY are also present. BETTY's lyrics explore longing, sex, food, heartbreak, and the universal clarity of human existence. BETTY uses music to channel their passion for fairness and equality. From the beginning, they have lent their voices to causes they fight for. In addition to creating their musical art since 1986, their humanitarian efforts with BETTY Effect's uses music and performance techniques to help others use their voices and join others in wanting to do the same inspiring social progress and peace, especially amongst women and girls and the LGBT+ communities.



BeBe Zahara Benet

The host of the evening was Cameroonian-born BeBe Zahara Benet. A contestant on RuPaul's Drag Race who was crowned America's first-ever Drag Superstar. BeBe reminded all in attendance that we are all the sugar honey iced and shared, "I found there is power and dignity in being able to live authentically, and most importantly, I found my community, my people. This is why Outright is so important."



auctioneer Harry Santa-Olalla

With the help of the hilarious auctioneer Harry Santa-Olalla, Outright reached their once-a-dream goal. He says, "The wild thing about giving back is that it's an amazing feeling. If you want to feel that feeling, all you have to do is give \$50,000. It's just one dollar a day for the next 50,000 days." By the end of the lively auction, they had reached \$975,000.00. Before heading to the dance floor for the evening, they received a pledge from Deutsche Bank to round them up to one million dollars! "It is not things that make us happy. It is doing something for someone else," says Olalla.

Outright has been hosting the Celebration of Courage for 27 years, and this year was the first time they raised a monumental one million dollars towards their continued global human rights effort. Olalla kept guests laughing and giving up their valuables without notice! He truly is a master at what he does. He has the passion and proven ability to help organizations raise the funds necessary to continue change where needed. It was the most spectacular and laugh-your-tush-off auction anyone present had probably ever been to.



Maria Sjodin

When executive director Maria Sjodin joined Outright, they hoped for the day the gala would raise the amount previously reached. Witnessing a dream come true in that room was truly extraordinary. We are sure all present felt equal pride and goosebumps. No words describe the happiness, and PRIDE felt in that room. So incredibly ecstatic for Outright who make up the team, and those who show up at the forefront worldwide.



Before becoming Executive director, Sjödin served as Outright’s deputy executive director, leading the work of the development and communications team. In this portion, they oversaw a period of extraordinary growth in visibility, diversification, increase in funding and launched groundbreaking initiatives. Sjödin’s heart is filled with gratitude for their community’s power and beauty. The LGBT+ community. They share, “Your generosity helps ensure that all LG can live with the peace and dignity they all deserve.”



ECADE receiving Felipa de Souza Award

The Felipa de Souza Award was presented by Julie Dorf to ECADE and accepted by Kenita Placide and Lysanna Ch. ECADE is the Eastern Caribbean Alliance for Diversity and Equality. They are an independent umbrella of human rights organizations representing the LGBT+ community, operating in the small islands in the eastern Caribbean from the Virgin Islands to Grenada. “It is only with the unwavering support of collaborators like Outright that we have met our objectives and continue working towards a better Caribbean for LGBT+ persons,” said Charles. Outright stepped in and allowed Placide to earn a paycheck and continue doing the work they love after working as an unpaid activist for several years. Outright and its partners allow ECADE and other organizations to change lives for the LGBTQ+ community throughout the Caribbean and do so very proudly.



James Heighington receiving Outstanding Award

The Outstanding Award was presented by Lanaya Irvin to Google.org and accepted by James Heighington, Google's Chief of Staff for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Heighington shares, "I'm particularly honored to be in the presence of many activists and leaders in the movement. In the corporate sector, this means recognizing that our responsibility is broader than revenue—that we can use our resources and platforms to impact the world positively."



Maria Sjödin, Anthony Rapp, Wilson Cruz, Blu del Barrio, and Russell Roybal

Russell Roybal, a long-time leader in the Latinx and LGBT+ movements and Outright board director, presented the Outspoken Award to the Queer Cast and crew of Star Trek: Discovery, directed by Lee Rose and executive produce Michelle Paradise. The team is awarded for their representation on the silver screen and fearless advocacy behind scenes.

Those who could not be on stage were recognized by Cruz, who plays the role of Dr. Hugh Culber, along with space Anthony Rapp and their intergalactic genius TV child Blu del Barrio accepted the award and were excited and proud to represent the entire LGBT+ cast and crew of Star Trek: Discovery. They are grateful to Outright for the recognition



Anthony Rapp, Wilson Cruz

Cruz shares, “On Discovery, we are the heroes of our own stories. No one saves us, we save our own lives, and in doing so, we inspire you to do the same. Remember who we are and commit ourselves to creating a multicultural and multi-ethnic world where everyone is respected, voices are heard, valued, and needed. Discovery teaches matters of the human experience and infinite diversity not just as a concept or idea but as an answer to their most pressing questions and dire needs. Leading to a boulder future and better LGBT+ lives tomorrow.”

Wishing all a happy PRIDE in this month of June and always.

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