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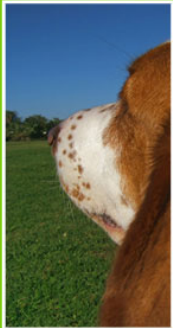
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Documentary about Broadway AIDS fundraisers premieres tonight on cable TV



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Written by Gregg Shapiro
Sep 12, 2011

"Heart of Broadway: The Ensemble Behind Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS" premieres tonight on here! TV and here! Online (premium.heretv.com).

At under an hour, this brief, original documentary avoids becoming a glorified info-mercial, thanks to the genuine and heartfelt quality of the interview subjects. We hear from Broadway actors Kathleen Chalfant, Lillias White, Denis O'Hare, Ann Harada, Billy Porter and Judith Light, as well as from playwright Terrance McNally, dancer and Broadway Bares creator Jerry Mitchell and others.

Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS director Tom Viola shares his memories about first hearing of AIDS in July of 1981 and how the Actors' Fund stepped up in the mid-1980s to create the HIV/AIDS Initiative. He pays an emotional tribute to the late Colleen Dewhurst, who, as president of Equity, created Equity Fights AIDS. Theatrical producers created its counterpart Broadway Cares.

Together the two groups have put on a variety of events, including the popular Broadway Flea Market in Shubert Alley, the Easter Bonnet Competition (in the spring), Gypsy of the Year and the Broadway Bares. Each event has raised substantial cash over the years, ranging from Broadway Bares' \$8 million total to Easter Bonnet Competition's \$46 million.

The Flea Market is not only notable for its selection of Broadway memorabilia but also for the celebrity table where performers sign autographs and take pictures for people who line up around the block.

The Season of Giving, which involves a curtain speech and red collection buckets in theater lobbies has come to inspire friendly competition among the shows, as each tries to raise the most money. Broadway Cares has also expanded its assistance, raising funds for such other crises as Hurricane Katrina and tsunami relief.

The documentary's most heart-tugging moments occur when the interview subjects talk about their personal losses due to AIDS. As Chalfant points out, the theatrical community was touched disproportionately by the epidemic. But she also says that the theatrical community has always taken care of its own. Now it can also take care of others.

Pictured are Matthew Morrison and Nick Adams at a Broadway Bares event.



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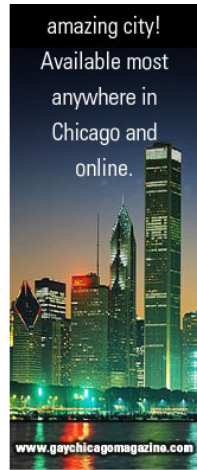
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