Beyoncé Gets Emotional as She Honors a Gay Uncle Who Had HIV [VIDEO]

But does a powerful speech at the GLAAD Media Awards make her and Jay-Z powerful allies?

March 29, 2019 By Trent Straube

When it was announced that Beyoncé and Jay-Z would be the Vanguard honorees at this year's GLAAD Media Awards, I figured naysayers would question what, exactly, the power couple have been doing all these years in the spotlight to promote the understanding, visibility and acceptance of LGBT+ people (to paraphrase the media watchdog's motto). I also knew folks would criticize GLAAD for honoring big-name celebrities over in-the-trenches activists.

If you're not familiar with such arguments, get a crash course by reading the comments section of this Facebook post from fellow POZ writer Tim Murphy.

Such dialogues have been riling people up since before Beyoncé was born. But I gotta say, after watching Jay-Z and Beyoncé's speech at the awards, the couple won me over.

To be honest, although I admire both artists, I'm not a stan who goes ape shit over their every haircut and Insta post. Which is to say that the couple might very well be doing excellent, hard work for LGBT+ equality and it could be off my radar. And yet I did know that in recent years, Jay-Z had been supportive of and vocal about his mom coming out as gay and that back when same-sex marriage equality was being debated, he spoke out on the side of equality. As for Beyoncé, back in 2003, when I was the editor of HX magazine, a weekly gay entertainment guide to New York, we ran an exclusive cover story with her—it was a HUGE scoop for us—and she did talk openly about a beloved gay uncle who helped raise her. And she always seems to acknowledge and appreciate her legion of gay fans, including the drag queens.

That's all great, but does it elevate Bey and Jay-Z to Vanguard status? That's not my call to make, but I will say that judging by all the headlines following the awards show, millions of people now know that Beyoncé was deeply influenced by a cherished uncle who had HIV. "Witnessing his battle with HIV was one of the most painful experiences I've ever lived," she said from the podium as she teared up and her husband rubbed her back in a gesture of support. "I'm hopeful that his struggle served to open pathways for other young people to live more freely."

.@Beyonce takes her turn at podium, saying she's "overwhelmed" and has a run in her stocking thanks to epic medley by @itsSHANGELA. That's great but so is this: "we're here to promote love for every human being and change starts w/ supporting people closest to you." #GLAADAwards pic.twitter.com/rR44Bfoed6

— Chris Gardner (@chrissgardner) March 29, 2019

I was moved by her brief but powerful remembrance and I appreciate that she translated a heartbreaking life experience into a message of acceptance and love of everyone, whether you're gay or gangsta, or living with HIV or not.

Below is the full transcript of Bey's and Jay-Z's speeches. It's cribbed from the Hollywood Reporter's excellent roundup of the gala event. You can read Chris Gardner's full article and watch even more of his video tweets here. And in case you're wondering, other big winners of the night were Queer Eye, Vida and Love, Simon. HIV advocate and blogger Mark S. King, whose byline you surely recognize from POZ, is nominated for Outstanding Blog (another round of awards will be presented in May in New York, where another icon, Madonna, will receive the Advocate for Change Award). For King's take on the awards, read "A Review of the HIV/AIDS GLAAD Award Nominees."

> Jay-Z: "Thank you, thank you. Make some noise for those incredible, incredible, incredible people. Thank you GLAAD for this amazing honor and [for] having us here this evening. You know life, this journey is filled with highs, lows and a lot of learning. This is a momentous night and I also want to — because I didn't do it last year — is honor my mother who received the award last year. Following her footsteps of spreading love and acceptance and her beautiful speech at the end of the song, "Smile," and for her allowing me to tell her story. So I want everyone to acknowledge her and her strong message of love who you love and souls that connect. And now the soul that my soul connected to, B."
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> Beyoncé: "Well, first of all, I'm overwhelmed. We were not expecting those incredible presenters. I'm just super honored and overwhelmed. I've already cried, put a run in my stocking from Shangela. I would say that one of the most beautiful memories of my tour was looking out from the stage every night and seeing the hardest gangster trapping out right next to the most fabulous queen — full out — respecting and celebrating each other. [Responding to audience member: That's how we do!]

That's the beauty of a great partnership — connecting people who at first glance seem to be worlds apart. Whether it's our fans or our family, the LGBTQIA community has always supported us and lifted us up and we thank you guys. We're here to promote love for every human being and change starts with supporting the people closest to you. So let's tell them they are loved. Let's remind them they are beautiful. Let's speak out and protect them, and parents, let's love our kids in their truest form. We'd like to request that we continue to shift the stigmas in this community — especially the stigmas in black families towards accepting queer black and brown men and women around the world.

Lastly, I want to dedicate this award to my uncle Johnny — the most fabulous gay man I've ever met who helped raise me and my sister. He lived his truth. He was brave and unapologetic during a time when this country wasn't as accepting. Witnessing his battle with HIV was one of the most painful experiences I've ever lived. I'm hopeful that his struggle served to open pathways for other young people to live more freely.

LGBTQIA rights are human rights. To choose who you love is your human right. How you identify and see yourself is your human right. Who you make love to and take that ass to Red Lobster is your human right.

I just wanna say to you, Jay, that I'm so proud of you for making the incredible strides towards changing stigmas in the hip-hop community. It's a privilege to watch you take those steps and to stand right next to you. I love you. And we're super grateful and honored. Thank y'all."

Powerful ending to @Beyonce #GLAADAwards speech as she reveals her uncle Johnny died after HIV battle. As she tears up, @S_C_ rubs her back ... then pumps his fist when she mentions @redlobster. "Who you make love to and take that ass to Ted Lobster is your human right." pic.twitter.com/zNsbNY5OGI

— Chris Gardner (@chrissgardner) March 29, 2019

For other GLAAD news in POZ, read "Behind the Tearful HIV Reveal on 'How to Get Away With Murder.'"

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