Broadway Bares XXIV: Rock Hard!

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By Benjamin Ryan (Editor-at-Large, POZ/AIDSmeds/Hep)

You may recognize my byline from articles in POZ, POZ.com, AIDSMeds.com and HepMag.com. With the official title of editor-at-large, I'm the science guy at the Smart + Strong publishing company, reporting on all the emerging research about HIV and hepatitis C.

I've been working or volunteering in the HIV field for just under two decades now. I started out as an intern at the Northwest AIDS Foundation (now Lifelong AIDS Alliance) in my native Seattle, and then was an HIV test counselor during my undergrad at Columbia University. For the past 13 years, I've covered the HIV epidemic as a reporter.

I also have a side life as a dancer, unusual as that may seem. I started studying jazz and theater dance 10 years ago and switched over to ballet seven years back. I recently spent a year studying intensively with Gelsey Kirkland's ballet studio here in Manhattan (while juggling duties at POZ--which was intense to say the least).

The highlight of my experience with dance has been the opportunity to perform in Broadway Bares, which is a lavish, glittering Broadway-style burlesque revue in New York City that benefits Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. Once a year a couple hundred dancers come together with hundreds of other choreographers, set and costume designers, and other crew members who all donate their time to create a one-night-only show unlike any other.

During my six years in Broadway Bares, the dancers have shown not just their astonishing talent, but their heart as well. They've become as passionate about fighting for the cause as they are about giving their all (and baring all) onstage. Leading up to the performance day, we participate in what is known as the "Stripathon," collecting donations for the cause. This year we raked in a record $430,000 toward the event's grand total of nearly $1.4 million.

As I was growing up, my parents--my father was a surgeon and my mother a teacher and academic--taught me two important qualities by their own example. One was to work as hard as you could on behalf of others' health and well-being, and the other was to jump at the chance to volunteer your time. Performing in Broadway Bares is uniquely meaningful to me because it dovetails my working and volunteering in the HIV arena with my passion for dance.

I took the following pictures backstage and during the dress rehearsals for Broadway Bares XXIV:

Rock Hard!, which went down on June 22 at Hammerstein Ballroom and had a rock ’n’ roll theme, taking audience members on a tour of classic artists such as Prince, Queen, Elvis, Michael Jackson and Led Zeppelin--but with a naughty edge!

Enjoy.

Ben Ryan backstage as a naughty beefeater from the Queen number

Chondra Profit as a “Black Cat” in the Janet Jackson number

Former Marine Alex Minsky in the Aerosmith number

Brandon Rubendall as Elvis

Casey Lee Ross in the Metallica number

Matthew Saldivar, Joey Taranto and the cast of the opening number, “Rock Hard!”

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