# Broadway Dancers Bare All to Fight HIV

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

You may recognize my byline from the pages of POZ. I'm the science reporter who covers research about HIV treatment, care and prevention. You may also recall from a blog post I wrote last year that I have a side venture as a dancer and perform each June in a benefit for Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS called Broadway Bares.

This year marked the 25th anniversary of this singularly fantastic New York City event, which uses the razzle-dazzle and talent of the New York theater and dance community to put on an elaborate, one-night-only burlesque show for a crowd of thousands of screaming fans. This year's show was titled "Top Bottoms of Burlesque," a send-up of the classic musical 42nd Street.

I appeared in the opening number, which paid homage to 42nd Street's most famous image--the curtain rising to reveal a sea of tapping feet--by lifting the curtain on an expansive bevy of bouncing butts. A Chorus Line-style audition scene ensued as a cast of talented "bottoms" was selected for the show within a show. (The dance captain deemed the bossy bottoms too bossy and they got cut.)

The numbers that followed highlighted the talent, passion and, above all, sexiness of the cast of some 150 dancers. Far and away the most exciting part of the show was the appearance of Orange Is the New Black's Laverne Cox, who gave the Tina Turners and Béyoncés of the world a serious run for their money as she absolutely tore up the stage. The crowd went wild. (Backstage she was as divine as you would hope, and not an ounce the diva, chatting with us and obliging our eagerness for pictures with her.) The show also featured appearances by RuPaul's Drag Race winner Bianca del Rio and Hairspray's Harvey Fierstein.

Click here to see a wrap-up video of the show as well as Cox's incredible moves.

A seven-year veteran of Broadway Bares, I had my best experience in the show by far this year. The spirit of those involved has never been more passionate and committed to the larger cause, and the show has never been more spectacular, fully inhabiting our new space at New York City's Hammerstein Ballroom with lofty LED screens, an intricate set, and sophisticated lighting and sound. In addition, there were the eye-popping costumes (or lack thereof) as well as makeup (often covering just about every inch of our bodies) by a fantastic crew from MAC Cosmetics. (Almost all work on the show, even from the Teamsters who haul in the sets, is done on a volunteer basis.)

The show raised a record-breaking $1.6 million to support people living with HIV and other health initiatives. In the cast and crew's fundraising drive, known as the Stripathon, we collectively brought in over $585,000. I was very proud to raise $17,345 of that total myself, which made me the highest

fundraiser this year and landed me with the title of Mr. Stripathon 2015. It was an honor I'd not yet achieved during my years in the show, throughout which I've raised over $80,000. (If you'd care to donate to the cause or to learn more about where the money goes, you can click here. The show accepts donations through the end of the year.)

To think that I have the honor not only of working to combat HIV and support people living with the virus on print, but also on such a celebrated stage, is a pretty neat feeling and makes me very proud.

Below are pictures from Broadway Bares XXV, most of which I took during the dress rehearsal. (I also dabble in photography.)

Opening number. Photo by Jamal Shuriah.

Photo by Kevin Thomas Garcia.

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Benjamin Horen. Photo by Benjamin Ryan.

Casey Lee Ross. Photo by Benjamin Ryan.

Jakob Karr of So You Think You Can Dance. Photo by Benjamin Ryan.

Laverne Cox. Photo by Benjamin Ryan.

Bianca del Rio. Photo by Benjamin Ryan.

Nick Adams and cast. Photo by Benjamin Ryan.

Josh Green and cast. Photo by Benjamin Ryan.

Photo by Mat James.

Benjamin Ryan and Laverne Cox backstage.

Bravo’s Andy Cohen announces that Benjamin Ryan has raised the most money in the Stripathon.

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