How HIV Is a Part of the “Hamilton” Message to Pence

November 21, 2016 By POZ Staff

It was inevitable that Vice President–elect Mike Pence’s attendance at a performance of the hit Broadway show Hamilton: An American Musical on November 18 would make headlines. But it’s what happened after the performance, as the audience was filing out of the Richard Rodgers Theatre that set social media ablaze (including a rebuke from the Twitter account of President-elect Donald Trump).

Although Pence was booed by some as he made his way to his seat before the start of the show, with the exception of an unexpected standing ovation for the line “Immigrants we get the job done” from the song “Yorktown (The World Turned Upside Down),” Friday’s performance played much like the hundreds that preceded it. That is, until the show’s end, when the African-American actor who plays Vice President Aaron Burr, Brandon Victor Dixon, flanked by the rest of the cast, read a statement from the stage addressing the future vice president directly, saying in part:

“Vice President–elect Pence, we welcome you and we truly thank you for joining us here at Hamilton: An American Musical, we really do. We, sir, we are the diverse America who are alarmed and anxious that your new administration will not protect us—our planet, our children, our parents—or defend us and uphold our inalienable rights, sir. But we truly hope that this show has inspired you to uphold our American values and to work on behalf of all of us. All of us.

Again, we truly thank you for sharing this show. This wonderful American story told by a diverse group of men [and] women of different colors, creeds, and orientations.”

Heres a tweet from the cast:

Tonight, VP-Elect Mike Pence attended #HamiltonBway. After the show, @BrandonVDixon delivered the following statement on behalf of the show. pic.twitter.com/Jsg9Q1pMZs

— Hamilton (@HamiltonMusical) November 19, 2016

Pence stood in the hallway outside the entrance to the auditorium for the duration of the statement and was seen smiling as he left the theater; he later praised the musical and recommended that people try to see it. But Trump was not as gracious and the next morning tweeted: “Our wonderful future V.P. Mike Pence was harassed last night at the theater by the cast of Hamilton, cameras blazing. This should not happen!” And in a second tweet he called the cast “very rude” and ended with a call to “Apologize!”

The cast’s statement was conceived as a response to the divisive rhetoric of Trump’s campaign, which seemed to disparage minorities, notably those in the African-American, Latinx and Muslim communities. Lead producer Jeffrey Seller told The New York Times, “The election was painful and crushing to all of us here.… We are honored that Mr. Pence attended the show, and we had to use this opportunity to express our feelings.”

The cast’s statement was written by the show’s creator, Lin-Manuel Miranda; its director, Thomas Kail; and producer Seller with input from cast members. Widely shared on social media at Dixon’s behest, the statement was a rare political and surprisingly direct plea from a Broadway stage that went viral. But its message isn’t exactly shocking given that Hamilton celebrates diversity and the role of immigrants in the founding of the United States and features a diverse cast that includes Latinx and African-American actors in the roles of America’s founding fathers.

What many people may not know is that the diversity of the cast extends beyond race and ethnicity and into the HIV and LGBT communities. Javier Muñoz, who plays the lead role of Alexander Hamilton, is an openly gay Latino living with HIV. He was on the cover of POZ this fall and is an outspoken advocate for the HIV community (read our interview with him here).

That’s why we’re certain that when Hamilton’s cast speaks of a diverse America, they’re including those of us living with HIV.

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