Life Ball 2018: $1.5 Million Raised to Fight HIV/AIDS [VIDEO]

Commemorating its 25th anniversary, the fundraiser will support U.S. HIV groups for the first time.

June 20, 2018 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

Life Ball—organized by LIFE+, an independent nonprofit organization based in Vienna, Austria—commemorated its 25th anniversary in 2018. The main event, which is held every year at Vienna's City Hall, took place on Saturday, June 2.

The event raised over €1.3 million (converted from euros, over $1.5 million) to fund HIV groups in Austria and around the world, according to an email to POZ from the Life Ball press office.

Celebrities from the worlds of fashion, entertainment and politics support Life Ball. To ensure media coverage, LIFE+ also invites journalists to attend. In fact, LIFE+ books an entire plane full of guests from the United States. I was honored to be on that plane this year.

To be sure, Life Ball was an amazing experience. From the celebrities to the party people, it would be difficult to say otherwise. Click here for a detailed account of all the hoopla as reported by W magazine. However, for me, as a person living with HIV, what truly made it special was that all this effort was being done to fight the virus.

The annual fundraiser has become one of the world's most important AIDS charity events. Proceeds support global aid projects, in collaboration with international partners. For the first time, HIV groups in the United States will also receive funding.

The main groups receiving support this year are: amfAR, The Foundation for AIDS Research; the Charlize Theron African Outreach Program; Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS; the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation; Sentebale; the Dream for Africa Foundation; and various local Austrian HIV groups.

This year's leitmotif (recurring theme) was an homage to the 1965 musical film The Sound of Music, which was shot on location in Vienna. Although the main event took place on Saturday, several related events took place days before and after the opening ceremony.

Oscar winner Charlize Theron received the Swarovski Crystal of Hope award on Thursday, May 31, in Vienna. She accepted the award on behalf of her namesake organization, the Charlize Theron

Africa Outreach Project, for its innovative HIV/AIDS work.

On Friday, June 1, Theron met participants of amfAR's Epic Ride to Life Ball for brunch in Salzburg. They began their four-day HIV/AIDS awareness motorcycle rally on Wednesday, May 30, in Zürich, Switzerland, and ended in Vienna on June 2.

After traveling over 700 miles, the riders participated in the Life Ball opening ceremony. Leading the ride was amfAR CEO Kevin Frost. He was joined by several other VIPs, actors and actresses, including Oscar winner Adrien Brody.

One of the projects Life Ball supports is amfAR's TREAT Asia Pediatric HIV/AIDS Initiative, which focuses on improving the health and lives of children and adolescents living with HIV across the Asia-Pacific region. LIFE+ has provided more than $6 million over the years to this initiative.

The opening ceremony showcased all sorts of theatrics inspired by The Sound of Music. They included a performance of "Do Re Mi" by a choir of boys and Patti LaBelle, who also sang "Lady Marmalade" with a choir of nuns. The performances were mixed with speeches and presentations.

One of the major initiatives LIFE+ conducts throughout the year is its Know Your Status awareness campaign. Regan Hofmann, policy officer at the U.S. liaison office of UNAIDS in Washington, DC, spoke about the campaign. (An unexpected bonus was POZ getting a shout-out, since she was introduced as POZ former editor-in-chief!)

Olympic skier Gus Kenworthy spoke in support of Broadway Cares/Equity Fights AIDS. Click here for a scrapbook of photos he took exclusively for OUT magazine.

Paris Jackson, daughter of Michael Jackson, represented her godmother's namesake charity, The Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation. She got the LIFE+ Award with Joyce Jere, the Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance (GAIA) country director in Malawi, on behalf of the GAIA Elizabeth Taylor Mobile Clinics.

After performances of "Edelweiss" (sung by Eurovision winner Conchita) and "Climb Every Mountain," the doors to City Hall were opened to all Life Ball attendees. For a recap of the partying, check out the video from Out magazine at the top of this post.

And in related gossip, click here for a recap from AOL of the brouhaha over Caitlyn Jenner not attending her son's wedding in favor of attending Life Ball.

For more detailed coverage of Life Ball 2018, stay tuned for a feature story in the September 2018 print issue of POZ magazine. Go to LifeBall.org for more information about LIFE+ and its programs.

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