



Rufus, Cyndi Highlight Gay Inaugural Ball

by Kilian Melloy/EDGE Contributor
Wednesday Jan 21, 2009

Like the rest of the nation, GLBT Americans celebrated the inauguration of the 44th President of the United States with a series of parties, balls, and galas in the capitol city that stretched over the weekend and into the evening of Inauguration Day, Tuesday, Jan. 20.

Weekend festivities included the Stonewall Democrats throwing two parties in at a Washington, D.C., venue on Jan. 16, even as an "Inauguration How Down" was taking place at another establishment in the city, according to a Jan. 16 article in the Washington Blade.

Even GLBT bookstore Lambda Rising hosted an event, with lesbian performer Catie Curtis belting out tunes from "Sweet Life," her most recent CD, for an appreciative audience

On the more formal side was the "We Are One: The Obama Inaugural Celebration at the Lincoln Memorial," presided over by openly gay Episcopalian Bishop Gene Robinson on Sunday evening. The event was also scheduled to include Beyonce, Mary J. Blige, and Sheryl Crow, the Blade article said.

Another toney Sunday evening event was the Obama Inaugural Gayla, which took place at the Historical Society of Washington.

Monday brought the community events such as "Yesterday's Dream to Today's Change," hosted by the National Black Justice Coalition, and "The Obama Inaugural Lesbian Gayla."

But Tuesday night was the focal point of the celebrations. Following the Inauguration earlier in the day, the Human Rights Campaign threw a pair of parties: Cyndi Lauper performed for the crowd at the "Dance for Equality," while the "Equality Ball" featured Melissa Etheridge, Rufus Wainwright, Dave Koz, Sir Ian McKellen, and others.

The New York Times covered the "Equality Ball" in a Jan. 21 article, reporting that Lauper popped up at the "Equality Ball" as well as headlining the "Dance for Equality."

Those who believe in President Obama's promise of change, and of a greater unity of purpose in America, are ready to move on from weary complaints to new initiatives; looking forward to life after Proposition 8, the California ballot initiative that saw voters take away marriage rights from gay and lesbian families in that state, Wainwright rewrote the words to one of his songs, the Times noted.

Wainwright sang, "I'm so tired of Rick Warren," the megachurch pastor who campaigned for the anti-gay initiative and then went on to deliver the Inauguration's invocation.

Continued the re-purposed Wainwright song, "I'm so tired of California," The New York Times reported.

Even so, attendees at the "Equality Ball" offered their post-Inauguration observations about the appearance of Rick Warren, whose participation in the much-heralded event drew sharp rebuke from many in the GLBT community.

The New York Times quoted administrative law judge Robert Gould, who was at the Inauguration and then at the ball with boyfriend Jerome Riesterer, a Paris resident who needed some explanation as to who this Rick Warren was.

Said Judge Gould, "I translated to Jerome that it was a controversial character."

Warren, who presides over the massive evangelical congregation of Saddleback mountain church in California, sent out his invocation "to everyone," the article said, an utterance that, observed Judge Gould, prompted people in the crowd to mutter the words, "Except for gays."

Another person in the crowd who saw Pastor Warren deliver the invocation was Denise Sudell, who was quoted in the article as saying, "I was the only person in my vicinity who turned my back when Rick Warren gave his invocation."

Observed Sudell, "I was also struck by the fact that no one on stage mentioned gay people.

"I do fear that we're going to be excluded" by the new administration, Sudell continued, adding, "I would've thought that, at least as a goodwill gesture, we would've been mentioned."

But others in the GLBT community are more optimistic, seeing the inclusion of Pastor Warren as an olive branch to the religious right but not as a bar on the door against GLBT equality.

Local GLBT publication the Metro Weekly, in an article from last December, reported on still another gala scheduled among the Inaugural events, "Out for Equality," which was mounted by a coalition of GLBT groups, including the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Action Fund; Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG); the Gay & Lesbian Victory Fund; Freedom to Marry; Servicemembers Legal Defense Network; and a host of other organizations.

The Fund's executive director was quoted in that article as saying of the then-upcoming Obama administration, "This is the dawn of a new political era of hope and engagement in the life of this country.

"A new administration brings a promise for a sea change in the tenor of the national dialogue on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues."