

# Beacon on the scene

## Harlem School of the Arts Students excel at 2023 Annual Benefit Gala

By Audrey J. Bernard

**O**n Monday, May 1, 2023, the Harlem School of the Arts (HSA) hosted its Annual Benefit Gala at The Plaza Hotel consisting of a networking reception, dinner, entertainment, and awards presentations. Young people excelled throughout the event starting with an exciting welcome by budding HSA theater students Aimony Claire Erisnor and Harper Quill and Jayden Hairston. They were magnificent and provided a bright start to an excellent evening. The talented trio taught gala guests how to use QR codes to make their donations before turning the program over to co-hosts Tamron Hall and HSA President James C. Horton who started the program with a video extolling the important work of the premier arts school followed by an amazing awards program. Sekou Campbell presented

the Betty Allen Visionary Award to his mother Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, former President of Spelman College & Former Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. "Harlem School of the Arts I owe you everything," she said.

Music maestro Clive Davis presented the Trailblazers Award to Nat King Cole & Natalie Cole, accepted by Timolin Cole-Augustus and Casey Cole-Ray, founders of Nat King Cole Generation Hope, Inc. which matched the evening's donations with \$10,000 gift. "It is with profound joy that we continue the legacy of the Nat King Cole Foundation, providing access to the next generation," said Cole-Augustus. "We thank you to all those who have loved our father and our sister, and those who have continued their legacy." The Corporate Leadership Award was presented to American Girl and accepted by Casey

Cole, President of American Girl Brands. The distinguished President's Award was presented to actress, singer, director, and Dean of the Chadwick A. Boseman College of Fine Arts at Howard University Phylicia Rashad who said she was inspired by the gifted students. "What you pour into them, they give back to us." The MetLife Foundation received the Philanthropic Leadership Award.

Chairman of the Harlem School of the Arts Board Charles J. Hamilton, Jr.'s wife of 43-years, Pamela Carlton, surprised him by presenting his Lifetime Achievement Award. He later announced that as he transitions to Chairman Emeritus, he will be replaced by Co-Chairs, Kenneth W. Taber and Lisa Davis. He ended his acceptance by calling for a moment of silence for HSA advisory board member Harry Belafonte.

HSA student soloist Clara Ojeh thrilled guests with her



Co-Hosts James C. Horton and Tamron Hall

exquisite performance of "Naughty" from Matilda The Musical, while a short documentary about the visual arts offerings at HSA created and directed by Media & Design student Alexis Carson was highlighted. A surprise performance closed out the evening as HSA dance students took the stage to honor Phylicia Rashad's legacy and cultural impact with a moving com-

position to "All Good Things Will Be Added Unto You" with audio from Phylicia Rashad & Hillman College from The Cosby Show. Rashad was moved to tears. HSA student and the youngest Black male to win a Grammy, Russell Walter III was in attendance and received a standing ovation from gala guests. (Photo Credit: Harlem School of the Arts/Rob Kim for Getty Images)

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(L-R) Timolin Cole-Augustus, Casey Cole-Ray, Tamron Hall, James C. Horton



(L-R) Harper Quill, Aimony Erisnor, Jayden Hairston, James C. Horton



Dance students perform



Clara Ojeh performs



James C. Horton, Pamela Carlton, Charles J. Hamilton, Jr.



Tamron Hall, Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, James C. Horton



Audrey Smaltz, Gail Marquis (AJB)



Charles J. Hamilton, Jr., Sam Mattingly (AJB)



Vivian Scott Chew, Ray Chew (AJB)



James C. Horton, Phylicia Rashad



Jamie Cygielman, James C. Horton