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U.S. | NEW YORK | NY HEARD & SCENE

## Bringing a Broadway Event Together

Tina Fey, Jane Krakowski, Darren Criss and others come out for Broadway benefit for foster children



Tina Fey and Jane Krakowski at Voices for the Voiceless, which raised over \$500,000 for foster children. *PHOTO: JENNY ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES FOR VOICES FOR THE VOICELESS*



By

**MARSHALL HEYMAN**

June 30, 2015 5:28 p.m. ET

You may know the actor, composer and musical director Seth Rudetsky from his various involvements in musical theater.

Most notably, on his radio show on the On Broadway channel on Sirius XM radio, he interviews various celebrities who love musicals, some of them as much as he does. He often uses words like “brava” and “ah-mah-zing” when he gets particularly excited.

Now Mr. Rudetsky can add event planner and fundraiser to his already multi-hyphenated mix of skills. On Monday, at the St. James Theatre, the current home of “Something Rotten!,” he and his husband, James Wesley, hosted Voices for the Voiceless. They described the evening as an “enormous Broadway benefit” and raised more than \$500,000 for foster kids, with proceeds benefiting the Council on Adoptable Children and the organization You Gotta Believe, which, in particular, finds permanent homes for older children.

Messrs. Rudetsky and Wesley had the idea for the event two months ago as they were beginning the process of adopting a second child. Many people told the couple that they didn’t have enough time to produce such a large event.

“They said it couldn’t be done,” said Mr. Wesley. As it turned out, they were wrong.



Hosts James Wesley and Seth Rudetsky *PHOTO: JENNY ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES FOR VOICES FOR THE VOICELESS*

The theater producer Carl Daikeler (“The Visit”) and his company, Beachbody, gave \$50,000 off the bat, and matched an additional \$50,000 when the comedian Caroline Rhea raised yet another \$50,000 onstage Monday. Jujamcyn donated the use of the St. James.

Tina Fey, Jane Krakowski, Darren Criss, Antwone Fisher and Megan Hilty all signed on to participate, and, much to Mr. Wesley’s excitement, since he grew up in Texas, Charlene Tilton from “Dallas.” (Ms. Tilton spent much of her childhood in and out of foster homes.)



Charlene Tilton and Megan Hilty PHOTO: JENNY ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES FOR VOICES FOR THE VOICELESS

This being a Broadway benefit, there were show tunes, of course. Eden Espinosa, for instance, sang “Defying Gravity” from “Wicked,” the lyrics of which took on a deeper meaning in the context of the issue at hand.

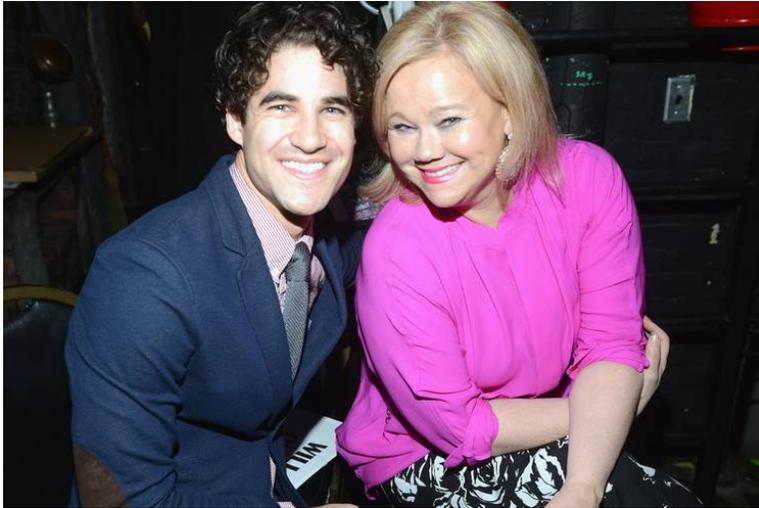
The Asian comedian Alec Mapa spoke about adopting a black child with his white husband. “People ask, ‘Is he from Malawi?’ ‘Is he from Rwanda?’ No, he’s from Compton,” Mr. Mapa said. “You don’t have to go to Africa to adopt a black child.”

Mr. Mapa added that others often wonder if he was afraid his adopted child would have “issues.”

“Yeah, because children who were raised with both parents from the time they were born to the time they leave—they don’t have any issues,” Mr. Mapa said. He was raised that way and “I still came out crazier than a rat in a coffee can. I’m a bottomless pit of need.”

Ms. Rhea led a particularly amusing live auction; one lot involved Mr. Criss serenading a guest onstage. That guest turned out to be a bespectacled 7-year-old girl. The song: “Teenage Dream,” which Mr. Criss acknowledged, humorously, was likely a totally and completely inappropriate selection.

Mr. Rudetsky has become known for his “deconstructions” of Broadway vocals, and Ms. Krakowski and Ms. Fey closed out the show with a deconstruction of Melissa Manchester’s song “Don’t Cry Out Loud.”



Darren Criss and Caroline Rhea *PHOTO: JENNY ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES FOR VOICES FOR THE VOICELESS*

A party with lots of sliders and spicy tuna rolls followed at Blue Fin a couple blocks away. As he embraced many of his friends who attended, Mr. Wesley explained further the inspiration behind the benefit.

“I’m just a New Yorker who cared about these kids,” he said.

Mr. Rudetsky said that he has been involved in a “million benefits.” For Monday’s, his goals included trying to “keep it as if it was in your living room, you know, chitty chat-chitty chat.” Only celebrities and foster kids would speak. There would be no long speeches.

“I wanted it to be entertaining, not boring,” Mr. Rudetsky said.

When prodded, he explained that his expression “ah-mah-zing” came from a friend of a friend years ago.

“It’s a catch phrase like Fonzie’s ‘Eyy,’ ” Mr. Rudetsky admitted. “I just say it to be funny.”

That said, Mr. Rudetsky occasionally still employs the word “amazing.” But, he added, ‘ah-mah-zing’ is “a heightened version of amazing.”

So was this evening amazing or ah-mah-zing, we asked.

“It was definitely ah-mah-zing,” Mr. Rudetsky responded.

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Tony Shellman and meteorologist Janice Huff *PHOTO: JENNY ANDERSON/GETTY IMAGES FOR VOICES FOR THE VOICELESS*

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