



AUDREY'S SOCIETY WHIRL: Oprah Winfrey attends unveiling of friend Cicely L. Tyson's Community School of Performing and Fine Arts

By Audrey J. Bernard, Lifestyles/Society Editor
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*Nothing could keep media titan Oprah Winfrey from attending the star-studded unveiling of her dear friend Cicely L. Tyson's Community School of Performing (CTS) and Fine Arts in East Orange, New Jersey on Saturday, October 24, 2009.

Themed "All Things are Possible, Only Believe," the event was a dream come true for the Emmy winning and Oscar nominated Ms. Tyson who always wanted to have a place that would glorify her art. The new state-of-the-art \$143 million complex is the pride of East Orange.

This was truly a wonderful day filled with pomp, pride and promises of what's to come for this bustling East Orange community. "This has been a wonderful journey," said Laura Trimmings, who has served as the principal of the school's Elmwood location since its inception 22 years ago.

"I have watched many children grow and develop into wonderful human beings and working artists using the foundation we have laid for them. I look forward to continuing this important work in surroundings that reflect our true commitment to these young people," Ms. Trimmings concluded.

The event kicked off with ravishing red carpet arrivals that included NJ Governor Jon Corzine, Hon. David Dinkins, Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin, Bill Haber, Terrence Howard, designer b michael, Mark Anthony Edwards, Susan L. Taylor, Tamara Tunie and Gregory Generet, Hon. Diane Watson, Hon. Bonnie Watson-Coleman and Ambassador Andrew Young.

CNN's Soledad O'Brien served as the Mistress of Ceremony. The Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts, Pastor, The Abyssinian Baptist Church, provided the invocation. Noted philanthropist Reginald Van Lee, senior vice president, Booz Allen & Hamilton, Inc., was the event's benefactor.

In addition to Ms. Trimmings other prominent speakers featured on the evening's program included remarks by Ms. Tyson, East Orange Mayor, the Honorable Robert L. Bowser, and Dr. Clarence C. Hoover, III, Superintendent of Schools, City of East Orange.

In addition, gospel great BeBe Winans performed with the CTS Mass Choir, harpist Jeff Majors performed with CTS students, cellist Jessie Smith and soloist William Morrison. The CTS Dance Ensemble also performed.

Other special highlights of the evening included a performance by Terrence Howard who sang an original song inspired by his dad and played his guitar accompanied by a CTS student on piano. Angela Bassett paid homage to Ms. Tyson with a moving story about how the award-winning actress had inspired her acting career.

Guests dined on scrumptious hors d'oeuvres followed by a formal dinner prepared by Spoonbread Catering that included Pesto Shrimp on Lollipop Sticks, Crab Cakes with Caviar, Creme Fraiche and Dill, California Chicken Salad with Papaya in Endive, Petals and Jicama, Goat Cheese with Peppers Provençal in Won Tons, Chilean Sea Bass with Roasted Tomatoes, Black Olives and Capers, Brazilian Rice with Orange Zest and Brazilian Nuts, Sweet Potatoes Rosettes, Sugar Snap Peas, Haricot Vert and Patty Pans in Shallot Butter.

After dinner the dressed to the nines guests participated in a live auction chaired by designer b michael who raised an impressive \$23,000 to benefit CTS that included two signed tennis rackets from Serena and Venus Williams, a special invitational package from President Bill Clinton, two airline tickets from Continental Airlines, an original artwork by Fabrice, and other specialty items.

“Ms. Tyson is not just this school’s namesake,” said Honorable Bowser. “She is a living example of what it means to make a living as a performer and the hard work and dedication it takes to ones’ craft to get there. Her commitment to the success of every student is real and her support of the school’s work will not only help the students, but the entire East Orange community.”

During the past seven years, Ms. Tyson has invited and welcomed friends to speak with the students who have included the likes of Dr. Maya Angelou, Rosa Parks, Wynton Marsalis, Ruby Dee, Judith Jamison, Tyler Perry, Michael Eric Dyson, Tania Leon and Les Brown.

The Cicely L. Tyson Community School of Performing and Fine Arts and the Washington Academy are located at 35 Winans Street in East Orange. The new state-of-the-art campus includes four buildings and will occupy a 309,000-square-foot facility. The \$143 million campus will accommodate some 1,300 students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade.

The idea to build CTS was developed almost seven years ago and construction began in 2005 on the project with funding from the State's School Development Authority. Built with the idea of revitalizing key neighborhoods in East Orange, the complex was created as a shared-use facility.

The school reflects a system of formal academic instruction undergirded by an intense arts curriculum. The academic/performing and fine arts curricula have been designed to allow students to be artistically creative in a field of their choosing; yet the academic program remains the foundation of all educational development. Ms. Tyson accepted the offer to have the school named in her honor on the condition that she be actively involved.

The new school is one the most technologically advanced schools ever built in the state of New Jersey, with extensive performing arts facilities with two theatres - one with 800-seats and the other with 400-seats built to Broadway standards in terms of sound, lighting, and acoustics.

“These children have God-given artistic talents that we can now properly nurture and train,” said Ms. Tyson who was drop dead gorgeous in a b michael original design featuring three printed fabrics of textured yarns on a silk canvas in shades ranging from golden wheat to brown with a fitted torso opening from the waist to a full circle floor length sweep.

michael told admirers of Ms. Tyson’s one of a kind design that he was inspired by his dear friend and client to create a dress that best exemplified his respect and admiration for her. “I was looking to create something that had substance and character – just like my dear friend Cicely.”

“It is my hope that we will provide them with a foundation that will allow them to become productive members of the creative class and that their works will tell our stories for generations to come” said the glamorous movie star Tyson. “I am pleased that the City of East Orange has chosen to invest in our

collective cultural future.”

Built with the idea of revitalizing a key neighborhood in East Orange, the complex was created as a shared-use facility. After school hours, residents in the surrounding community will be able to use the school's library, media centers, gymnasiums, cafeterias, music and art rooms and health and dental clinics.

The Terrie Williams Agency/Studio9 Global's non-profit youth initiative, I AM Media WorldWide -- a new media, vocational training program for youth ages 13 and up -- has selected several CTS students who will conduct interviews with a cross-section of the invited celebrity guests.

The national youth program, I Am Media WorldWide, which creates opportunities for youth behind the camera, chose several CTS students to conduct interviews with selected guests on the importance of education. I Am Media Worldwide, under the direction of Xavier Artis, is an initiative of the not-for-profit Stay Strong Foundation.

For information on The Cicely L. Tyson Community School of Performing and Fine Arts, please visit: http://www.jingoli.com/cicely_tyson_school.html. (Photos by Kenthephotographer)



Cicely Tyson and CTS school prinicipal Laura Trimmings



Cicely Tyson Performing Arts School Dance Ensemble



Cicely Tyson, Oprah



Hon. Andrew Young, Oprah, Jeff Majors



New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine, Angela Bassett, Cicely Tyson, Mayor David N. Dinkins



Soledad O'Brien, Reginald Van Lee, Cicely Tyson

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