



Local News

GAPA & API Wellness Center Honored By Mayor Newsom

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The Gay Asian Pacific Alliance (GAPA) and Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center (A&PIWC) were recognized on June 8 by SF Mayor Gavin Newsom for their contributions to the Asian-Pacific Islander LGBT community. This historic mayoral tribute to API LGBT culture and history, called "Rainbows and Rice," took place in the San Francisco City Hall Rotunda. The Mayor made remarks highlighting the cultural impact that the API LGBT community has made in San Francisco. He also bestowed two Lifetime Leadership Awards to both GAPA and A&PIWC.

Accepting the awards on behalf of their organizations were Robert Bernardo for GAPA and Tita AIDA for A&PIWC.



API Wellness Project Executive Director John Manzon-Santos, Mayor Newsom and GAA Co-Chair Robert Bernardo at the City Hall ceremony. Photo by Rink

"This ceremony marks an important time in API LGBT history," said A&PIWC representative Tita Aida. "This special ceremony is just one of many ways to build an ongoing dialogue in the broader API community about LGBT issues. On behalf of the A&PIWC, I am honored to be here and accept this tremendous honor." As part of the mayoral tribute to the API LGBT community, performers joined the ceremony and provided the evening's entertainment. The diverse line-up of entertainers included Asian lesbian comedian Jennifer Lin; the GAPA Men's Chorus; Nguyen Dance Company; classical flutist Cameron Yeong Jang; Tinkletoes; and The Ladies of Passion. GAPA in the SF Bay Area is an organization dedicated to furthering the interests of gay and bisexual Asian/Pacific Islanders by creating awareness, by developing a positive collective identity, and by establishing a supportive community. Founded in 1987 as a grassroots response to the HIV/AIDS crisis in communities of color, A&PIWC is the oldest nonprofit organization in North America focusing on A&PI communities concerning sexual health and HIV/AIDS services.

Emcee Tita Aida introduced John Manzon-Santos, executive director of A&PIWC, which is celebrating its 20th year of community service. "We want to publicly thank Mayor Gavin Newsom for writing the history books with us around same-sex marriage and fighting homophobia and heterosexism," he said. "We thank him for his leadership in championing our HIV/AIDS services in San Francisco that benefit all people, restoring the budget by \$1.5 million." He said, "We all—gay and straight—play a role in fighting the stigma, discrimination, violence, and shame around HIV in the API community.."

Tita Aida introduced Donald Masuda, GAPA co-founder, who said, "We really didn't expect to be here in 25 years, and it is in sadness that we mark the 25th anniversary of HIV. But in adversity it's amazing how humankind comes together and helps one another." He spoke of GAPA forming in January 1988, after other similar API agencies had transitioned, and expressed grief that so many members of GAPA had lost the battle with AIDS. He noted that A&PIWC emerged from GAPA in 1996. Tita brought to the attention of the audience the Asian Grand Marshals for the June 25th Pride Parade: Robert Bernardo of GAPA; Cecilia Chung of Transgender Law Center; longtime activist for civil rights, Marion Abdullah; and lesbian couple advocating for marriage equality, Lancy & Christy.

Assessor/recorder Phil Ting said, "The fight for marriage equality is not just for the API community or the LGBT community, but it's really a fight for everyone for civil rights." He brought

commendations to both organizations. Supervisor Fiona Ma said she would be fighting for marriage equality whenever possible. She brought commendations from Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi. From Senator Jackie Speier's office, district representative Josh Laney presented a commendation and commented, "Two of the most important solutions to the HIV/AIDS problem are education and action, which is exactly what these two organizations are all about."

Tita Aida brought the Mayor to the stage to address the crowd. "Happy Senate defeat!" he shouted, regarding the day prior's ending of the debate to pursue the Federal Marriage Amendment in the Constitution. "Man, when will they learn?" He said, "We're very proud of this event that marks a milestone, and we hope it's one of many events to come to celebrate the remarkable diversity that makes San Francisco a great place to live, and an example for the rest of the world." He added, "I'm proud of this City and the GLBT community as well. What's right about this City is the Asian and Pacific Islander community and the gay community. That pretty much sums up why I love San Francisco." He expressed his appreciation of the two organizations by presenting certificates of honor to both. He summed up, "Have a great Pride Month and keep believing in yourselves! Keep living life out loud!"

The entertainment began with the Ladies of Passion, who say they are a metaphor for the combination of love, hope, and compassion that we bring to our thoughts and actions. "When we realize the power of passion, we realize that happiness alone is not our goal," they say. "Our goal is to live the fullest life possible, to harness our potential, and use it to enrich the world."

These lovely transgender women descended from the grand staircase in beautiful tropical attire and flowers in their hair to perform the hula and other exotic island dances. Classical flutist Cameron Yeong Jang has studied the flute at Jefferson Elementary School and has spent the last eight years participating in various API events. She looks forward to entering Giannini Middle School in the fall as a new 6th grader. She lives with her two moms, Crystal and Sydney. Jang performed a beautiful flute solo, including the French can-can song and the theme from The Flintstones cartoon show.

Asian lesbian comedian Jennifer Lin, who calls herself "The Asian Poster Bride for Marriage Equality," was born in Taiwan and grew up in a small town in Ohio, where she says she learned English watching The Brady Bunch reruns. She shared her comedic insights by laughing at how silly the way things are in real life. She joked about the increasing cases of Asian men who are married and seeing other men on the down low. "You know what that's called?" she queried, and then sang to the tune of "Secret Agent Man:" "Secret Asian Man, you're on your way to rendezvous with a rice queen or two." She said now that she's married, she wants to bring back some of the Chinese traditions that have been lost over time. "So I'm looking for a second wife," she joked.

Nguyen Dance Company is a multicultural performance troupe featuring dancers, musicians, and visual artists. Founded in 1999, NDC aims to create, develop, and promote contemporary expressions of American culture, highlighting the Asian-American experience. Danny Nguyen and Tiffany Barbarash of NDC infused modern dance with Vietnamese aesthetics in an athletic yet graceful style to high opera music. Tinkletoes, founded by Rann Shinar, is a Bay Area dance group of gay South Asians who portray complex, personal, and social issues using the Indian classical dance form of "kathak." Four of the troupe—Ganesh, Champa, Chameli, and Krishna—performed a dance based on a 2,000-year tradition..

The GAPA Men's Chorus was formed in 1989 to provide a showcase for the vocal music talents of gay and bisexual Asian Pacific men. For the perfect closing act of "Rainbows and Rice," they sang a cappella "Aloha Oe" and "I Left My Heart in San Francisco."