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Defying Inequality

The Los Angeles cast of *Wicked* took to a cabaret stage Monday night to combat inequality and raise money for gay rights. *Wicked* casts in New York, Louisville, and Chicago did so as well.

By Ross von Metzke

An Advocate.com exclusive posted January 13, 2009

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With Wanda Sykes on hand to lend her support and a trio of *Wicked* divas whose careers have taken off because of composer Stephen Schwartz's runaway smash-hit musical, the cast of the Los Angeles production of *Wicked* descended on West Hollywood hotspot the Factory Monday night to raise money for a slew of gay charities.



Jason Graae and Megan Hilty

Eden Espinosa and Shoshana Bean (two big-voiced, soulful belters who have alternately played

Elphaba on Broadway and in Los Angeles) were joined by big-voiced, busty blond Megan Hilty (Glinda in L.A. and on Broadway) and a slew of *Wicked* castmates for the one-night-only event.

Like the L.A. cast, *Wicked* casts in New York, Chicago, and Louisville also performed in their respective cities to raise money for Empire State Pride Agenda, Equality California, Garden State Equality, and Vermont Freedom to Marry -- four charities working to legislate equality and protect civil rights for gays and lesbians.

The event drew a unusual crowd to the Factory, typically WeHo's after-hours dance club. *Wicked* fanatics joined theater queens on what usually serves as the club's dance floor to enjoy two hours of nonstop music, fun, and blow-the-roof-off vocals.

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Von Metzke is the editor for Advocate.com. Photos by Brian Putnam

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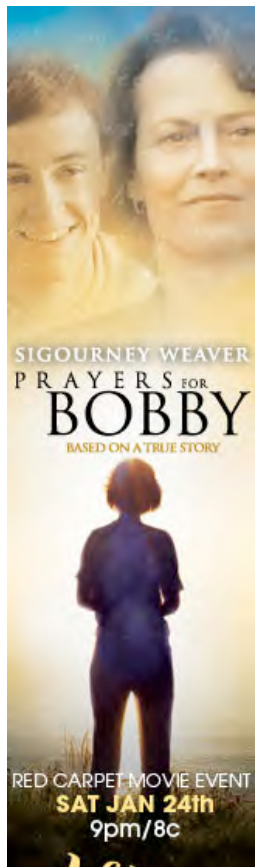


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Bean and Hilty kicked things off with a *très* gay performance of the Barbra Streisand-Donna Summer duet "No More Tears (Enough Is Enough)" before turning the mic over to Briana Yacovone -- L.A. point person for putting the extravaganza together -- for her rendition of "My (Guy) Gay."



Stephen Schwartz

Yacovone, clearly a WeHo staple, made it clear that she and her fellow straight *Wicked* castmates stood together with the mostly gay crowd in the quest for marriage equality.

She had help bringing the event together -- it was truly a community effort. L.A. club promoter Tom Whitman stepped in to pack the Factory to the brim. His events throughout WeHo have given L.A.'s gay scene a bit of a cultural bent in the past several months, from his monthly male burlesque revue to his weekly concert series at Here Lounge.

Mid show, Sykes took to the stage with *Noah's Arc* star Doug Spearman -- both are Equality California board members -- to thank the audience for coughing up cash for a good cause. Spearman credited the passing of Prop. 8 with galvanizing the gay community and prompting some people to come out (cue one of many standing ovations throughout the evening).

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A visibly moved Sykes told the crowd that Prop. 8 had made gay people good and mad -- and when we get mad, look out.

The evening hit many a high note -- Hilty, who heads off to Broadway now that L.A.'s production of *Wicked* has closed to resume her role as Doralee in the new musical *9 to 5*, hit a home run with her take on the Heart smash "What About Love"; Bean flexed her R&B vocal muscle with the lead single off her debut album, "Superhero"; and hottie Barrett Foa of *Avenue Q* and *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* fame charmed the crowd with a song and an impromptu shout-out to Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin -- the first same-sex couple to be married in the state of California.



Briana Yacavone, right, and back up

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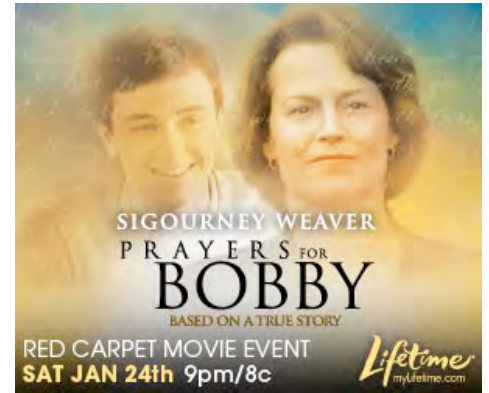
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Throughout the evening, the performers alternated between entertaining and reminding the audience what we were all there for.

Joanne Worley, of *Laugh In* fame and soon to be Madame Morible in the show's San Francisco production, lead a live auction for backstage passes to the S.F. production of the show with her trademark screaming of "Wiiiiiiiiiiiiicked."



Joanne Worely

Espinosa hit a particularly emotional note when, kneeling at the foot of the stage, she belted out the Judy Garland classic "Over the Rainbow." She was followed by Schwartz, who, after reminding the crowd that in his home state of Connecticut, same-sex marriage is legal, took to the piano and sang one of his tunes from *Godspell*, lifting his fist in the air at the end and telling the crowd that we will win this battle.

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Espinosa and Hilty, who closed the L.A. production of *Wicked* together as Elphaba and Glinda, took to the stage one last time to perform the musical's finale, "For Good," singing, "Who can say if I've been changed for the better? But because I knew you, I have been changed for good."

For an evening that spoke almost exclusively of friendship, support, and solidarity, the lyrics certainly rang true throughout the Factory.

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