



Genesis at the Crossroads' Autumn Gala to Benefit International High School for Global Leadership

Legendary musician Peter Yarrow Joined Saffron Caravan

CHICAGO – On Thursday, October 14, 2010, Genesis at the Crossroads, a 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit organization whose mission is to bridge cultures in conflict through the arts and to create innovative arts education and humanitarian programs around the world, held its first Gala at The Peninsula, Chicago.

An intimate gathering of about 100 glittering donors and supporters, the evening featured performances by legendary guest artist, Peter Yarrow (of Peter, Paul and Mary) and the *Saffron Caravan Quintet* – members of the Genesis World Music Ensemble, one of the most unique collections of musicians ever found together, committed to bridging humankind through art and serving up an engaging model for others to follow.

Accompanied by a silent auction, the pre-dinner cocktail hour was abuzz with an outpouring of support for the Genesis International High School for Global Leadership (GIHS), a model for an educational paradigm shift predicated on experiential learning, creative self-actualization, visionary initiative, innovation, and independent and critical thought.

Alison Cuddy, award-winning broadcast journalist and current host of WBEZ Chicago Public Radio's award-winning weekday newsmagazine, *Eight Forty-Eight*, served as Mistress of Ceremonies. In talk-show format, Cuddy set the tone of the evening, with recapitulation of the history and mission of Genesis at the Crossroads, through the vision of Wendy Sternberg, MD, Founder and Executive Director of the organization.



Peter Yarrow - of Peter Paul and Mary, and Wendy Sternberg, MD Founder and Executive Director of Genesis at the Crossroads. *Photo courtesy of Megan Bearder / Megan Bearder Photography.*

They discussed the importance of education in the face of global conflict escalating and the urgent need to nurture the leaders of tomorrow. Sternberg further described the GIHS plans that call for a green building, reflecting a core value of sustainability. The student body, comprised in thirds from abroad, at-risk, inner city Chicagoans and other Americans, will live in a 360 degree living-learning boarding community, emphasizing the belief that a great deal of learning goes on as much inside as outside the classroom setting.

“One of the elements that makes GIHS well situated in Chicago is the fact that children can thrive within the intellectual and artistic vibrancy of this multi-faceted city, coupled with the seamless interchange among the community, students, teachers, administrators and teaching-artists themselves,” noted Sternberg.

One of the more poignant and touching parts of the program took place when Sternberg introduced 23-year-old Aayisha Chanel, a former Genesis Chicago Public School student star pupil who was the lead of the GATC music theater program in 2003. Ms. Chanel summarized what the work of Genesis at the Crossroads meant to her, as an adolescent African-American inner city youth living in a shelter with a single parent, with no formal educational direction. On a path to nowhere, as she described it, Genesis helped her turn her life around, as she completed high school and worked her way up the ranks of the Chicago theater system. She is currently a Junior in the Theater Department of Columbia College and is also an actor with the Piven Theater Workshop Ensemble.

“It is so gratifying to see how Genesis has helped nurture the leadership potential in people like Aayisha, who came to us with raw talent and left with a clear direction for her life. She is the epitome of what is possible for youth through Genesis,” continued Sternberg.

Following dinner, the audience was treated to *Saffron Caravan* performing a medley together as a quintet - comprised of Grammy-award winner Howard Levy of Chicago, piano and diatonic harmonica prodigy, also the musical director; Cantor Alberto Mizrahi, world-renowned Greek-born American vocalist; Humayun Khan, Afghan vocalist and harmonium musician; Kiu Haghghi, Iranian santour virtuoso; and Jean-Christophe Leroy, American/Canadian percussionist. They later handed off to each other an opportunity for brief solo performances, showcasing each artist's instrumental talent as much as their individual, personal and cultural/ethnic identity.

Then, the evening's intimate tone was augmented when music legend Peter Yarrow performed “Don't Laugh at Me,” a song about understanding the differences we all have as a common humanity, as he eloquently described.

“His performance and involvement with Genesis at the Crossroads could not have been more timely to further help raise social consciousness,” commented Sternberg. “With so much posturing, bullying, and profiling, it is through music which binds and connects us all, that we can all realize that we are *all* fundamentally the same.”

Yarrow is a committed artist and driving force behind his foundation Operation Respect, a project based on his passionate belief that the power of music to build a community and be a catalyst for change can also be a powerful educational tool and source of inspiration for both children and educators.

“We feel as if Peter Yarrow and Genesis are speaking the same language with the goal of utilizing social and emotional development curricula in combination with music for tomorrow’s leaders,” continued Sternberg.

The combined performance with Yarrow and *Saffron Caravan* illustrated how Genesis carries tremendous power to connect people of various faiths and cultures in the stirring space provided by the arts, inspiring a shift to a new mode of thinking based on cooperation.

Before the evening’s festivities came to a close, additional monies were raised via a live auction for a hand-signed, autographed guitar by Yarrow, when Yarrow took a moment to address the crowd: “We need to educate children not only for their intellectual development, but also for the development of their compassion, humanity and goodness of heart. The music of *Saffron Caravan* opens the hearts of adults and children alike, perhaps more powerfully than any other cultural experience I have ever encountered. They have found *the* critical key to addressing the great challenges of our time. The world needs to use this key and replicate it wherever possible.”

Yarrow further emphasized, “You are in the presence of an organization that has a unique capacity to move society forward. With an opportunity like this, we must not fail to act by supporting the work of Genesis at the Crossroads and *Saffron Caravan* as an absolute priority.”

Genesis at the Crossroads’ model marries *Saffron Caravan* performances with arts-education initiatives by prolonging artist stays in each country visited, creating wider opportunities for engagement through small class instruction and a series of artists-in-residence master classes. Sternberg is now in the planning stages with multiple conflict areas in the Middle East, North Africa and the United States to continue the model of open dialogue.

Genesis at the Crossroads’ brand of arts diplomacy has garnered the attention of the U.S. Department of State through the allocation of funds from its prestigious *Performing Arts Initiative* as well as the *Illinois Arts Council’s Ethnic and Folk Arts Division* and their *Governor’s International Arts Exchange Program*. Genesis at the Crossroads is currently looking for additional private donations, corporate sponsors and underwriters in order to build this high school and simultaneously continue to provide world-class, culturally diverse programs interwoven with arts education and humanitarian initiatives. For more information, visit: www.gatc.org.