



BEHIND THE MUSIC of the ROCK 'N' GALA

Revelers rock out for the cause at the annual gala of the Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS/Chicago. BY SELENA FRAGASSI

PHOTOS COURTESY OF: RANDY MICHAEL KORWIN PHOTOGRAPHY.

WHAT COULD BE MORE ROCKSTAR THAN GATHERING FOR A GOOD CAUSE? Such was the idea behind the Believe Rock N Gala, the 23rd encore of the Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS/Chicago (DIFFA) annual gala and live auction where, on June 11, 600 attendees converged on the Chicago Marriott Downtown Magnificent Mile to rock around the clock and raise funds to advance the fight against HIV/AIDS through outreach, education and research.

"The idea for the next six years is to create a series of galas that focus on DIFFA/Chicago's grantees and tradition of giving," says Richard Cassis of not-for-profit sparc, inc. and DIFFA/Chicago Gala co-chair. "A major area of giving is directed toward fellowship, and this year's rock theme evolved as a way to describe our honorees, the Northwestern Memorial Foundation Fellows, whom we see as true rock stars in the fight against AIDS."

Playing on that theme, the all-night event featured stellar performances by '90s band the Lemonheads (best know for their "Mrs. Robinson" cover) as well as DJ Jesse De Le Pena and the grooving J. Davis trio, who feted revelers as the cocktail hour got underway.

"The addition of a rock-music focus culminated by a live performance is an exciting twist to anything we've offered in the past—and one that we hope to build on in the coming years," notes Cassis of the addition of a live band to DIFFA/Chicago's fundraiser evening.

All who were invited—mostly designers, architects and design industry leaders—were encouraged to wear their hottest rockstar outfit or creative black tie, and many got in spirit with fringey Tina Turner dresses, rocker sunglasses and lots of punk-inspired faux hair extensions. Party greeters even got in the spirit with Michael Jackson's trademark silver gloves.

Inside the ballroom, Kehoe Designs (assisted by Total Event Resources), continued the theme by turning the ballroom into a concert venue complete with hand-painted tables and gothic white, red and black décor accented by glitter skulls and pillar candles. The high-gloss, black lacquered dance floor was "tattooed" by a glowing phoenix symbol while a sculpture made of percussion instruments and electric guitars set the center focus of the room.

Guests noshed on an eclectic menu, provided by the Marriott, which featured baby argula salad with


fennel, orange and mint; a main entrée of gorgonzola-crusted petite filet, seared halibut, smoked onion whipped parsnips and asparagus; and two dessert stations focused on chocolate and honey.

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After the formal dinner, live auction and awards ceremony were completed, guests were invited to the first-ever ROCK ON! afterparty, which featured an exciting set of live music from renowned DJ Jesse De La Pena and the headlining act the Lemonheads. The public was also invited to this separate event as a way to expand the mission of the foundation and its cause.

"We've always wanted to get more people to celebrate with us on the occasion of the Gala, and the after-party allowed us to reach more people who might not want to do a black-tie dinner but still wish to participate in the evening and get a sampling of the Gala," explains Cassis.

In addition to the 600 gala guests who attended, an additional 75 guests bought tickets specifically for the afterparty after they were alerted to the festivities by social media tactics, e-blasts, an email campaign, press and old-fashioned word-of-mouth.

All in all, the event was a huge success raising \$385,000 for DIFFA/Chicago who, since the beginning of their foundation in 1984, have tallied over \$38 million that is directly distributed to Chicago area HIV/AIDS service agencies that provide direct service, preventative education and outreach to people who are HIV positive, living with AIDS or at risk for infection. 

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