



OverviewNewsMayor's BioOfficials

First Lady Chirlane McCray Delivers remarks at Doing Art Together Benefit Gala

March 24, 2014

CONTACT: pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov, (212) 788-2958

Thank you, Elena!

A year ago, if you told me that I'd be here, sharing a microphone with all of you, I would not have believed it.

The mayoralty, this first lady gig, is all pretty surreal and crazy – but in the best possible way. It is such an honor to be here with all of you.

I bring you greetings from my husband – our Mayor Bill de Blasio.

I know he's a little jealous that I get to attend this sexy-and-dope event without him. But he asked me to thank all of you for supporting Doing Art Together. And he extends his congratulations to tonight's honorees, Darryl McDaniels and Erin Gore.

Darryl, you've been a New York City legend since you were 20, when Run D.M.C.'s debut album hit the streets.

It's a legend that grows larger with each passing year, and I'm not just talking musically. In my eyes, what makes you truly heroic is your work on behalf of foster children, and on behalf of children who are adopted. You bring the same energy and passion to these children as you do to your lyrics – and that's saying something.

Erin, you have worked so hard to help build a more effective and fair education system, both in your day job and with your work with Doing Art Together. Behind every successful school and nonprofit is a team of hardworking, often unheralded financial professionals.

And they are professionals like you. In you, our young people have a powerful advocate with a long track record of using that power for good.

Darryl and Erin, both of you are living proof that superstars can also be selfless. And we thank you.

We all come to this work we do with our stories – or more accurately, BECAUSE of our stories.

I'm here because I am the granddaughter of immigrants. My maternal great grandmother, my maternal grandfather AND my maternal grandmother all traveled from Barbados to the United

States.

And since my father's parents came from the south, I guess you can say my parents had a mixed marriage.

They brought me up in Springfield and Longmeadow, Massachusetts. And when I was born, in 1954, they called me Choo Choo because I was only 4 and a half lbs – no bigger than two puffs of smoke.

Even though I was so tiny, they had big dreams for me. And key to those dreams was a good education and exposure to the arts. To get that good education, they moved to a neighborhood where the schools were all white. So, I was always the only black student in my class. And there was a stretch when I was the only black student in the entire school.

It was tough – emotionally and psychologically. But I was the first girl in my family to go to college.

But how did I make it through – emotionally and psychologically? My parents kept me very busy. I had afterschool and weekend activities – West African and jazz dance and theatre at the Dunbar Community Center, sewing at the YWCA and Girls Club, I was in the school chorus, and every week, I had piano lessons. My father, especially, made sure we were always able to make music – singing or playing our instruments together. Also every week, we'd go to the library, where I'd find refuge in the tall stacks of books.

And there were adults who encouraged me. Not just one. And no ONE adult in particular. But they were there, and I drew strength from them.

In high school, I started writing. Poetry. The writing became my way of communicating and it sustained me. But let me tell you. I don't know what I would have done if I could not sing, or play the piano, or design with fabric and... To channel my emotions, to create, it was my outlet. But it was more. And it still is.

I have a Tumblr now and it's called FLOW-NICE. The initials F. L. O. N. Y. C. stand for First Lady of New York City. In poetry, pictures, video, and story, #FLONYC (FLOW-NICE) is an interactive multimedia blog about my work as First Lady and the people I meet. And you can find it at F-L-O-N-Y-C dot tumblr dot com.

Please, when you get a chance, check it out! One of the things you'll see is that my husband and I are fighting for our children to have the same opportunities we had when we were growing up. We want to create a city in which, regardless of zip code, the neighborhood public school is a great option. We want every 4-year-old to have a seat in a prekindergarten class. And we want every middle school student to be able to attend an after-school program.

Right now, even though we know how important early education is, we reach our children too late. And we don't keep them in school long enough each day. We don't make sure that the very best teachers stay in the teaching profession, and we don't engage our parents in a systematic way to help uplift their children.

Those are all foundational problems. Problems you won't read a lot on the front pages of our

papers. And you won't see the solutions either. But we KNOW how to fix these problems.

We know that nothing would help our children more than reaching them earlier with full day pre-K. Unfortunately, nearly 50,000 kids across the five boroughs don't have access to the full-day pre-K programs they need.

We know that nothing would help our children more than extending the school day for after-school, so they're learning more, they're safe and secure, and they're getting tutoring and homework help enrichment. And the kind of opportunity I had to learn about art in a safe environment and share that experience with caring responsible adults.

That's why Bill recently released a plan to provide nearly 120,000 of our children with high-quality after-school programs.

There is a movement growing, and the way we think about education, the way we approach education, is about to change.

And it's not primarily because of any one elected official in office.

It's because of all of you. Everyone here. It's because the people of this city are demanding it. Because you care so much, and you believe we can do something better.

When you support Doing Art Together, you are supporting the next generation of artists. And I'm not just talking about the children who will grow up to be artists with a capital "A."

I'm talking about every child. Every child who is blessed with the opportunity to participate in Doing Art Together – is more likely to embrace creativity as a central part of her life. And, be engaged, proactive, and productive members of their community.

Tonight, I thank you, thank you, thank you – for all you've done... for all you're doing... and for all you will do. Good night.