

The Titanium Awards Brought a Breath of Fresh Air to Hollywood

Canadian film and television star Lisa Jai produced the first annual Titanium Awards in Los Angeles honoring performers with disabilities earlier this year.

LOS ANGELES, USA, May 21, 2015 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On March 23 the first annual Titanium Awards honored disabled performers in the entertainment industry at the Secret Rose Theater in North Hollywood, California. Internationally acclaimed actress Lisa Jai spearheaded the program in order to recognize actors with extraordinary talent who, due to their disabilities, often go unnoticed in the entertainment community.

Comedian Nik Keswani, actress Joan Marlowe and actor Paul B. Stevens were chosen out of dozens of submissions as the top three finalists of the awards. The awards were hosted by actor Adrian Jam, and included a panel of judges comprised of filmmaker Kevin Greene, casting director Victoria Cardoza and actress Lisa Jai.

Each finalist performed a monologue during the event where they were judged on their performance using a point system, with Paul B. Stevens being chosen as the 2015 Titanium Award winner!

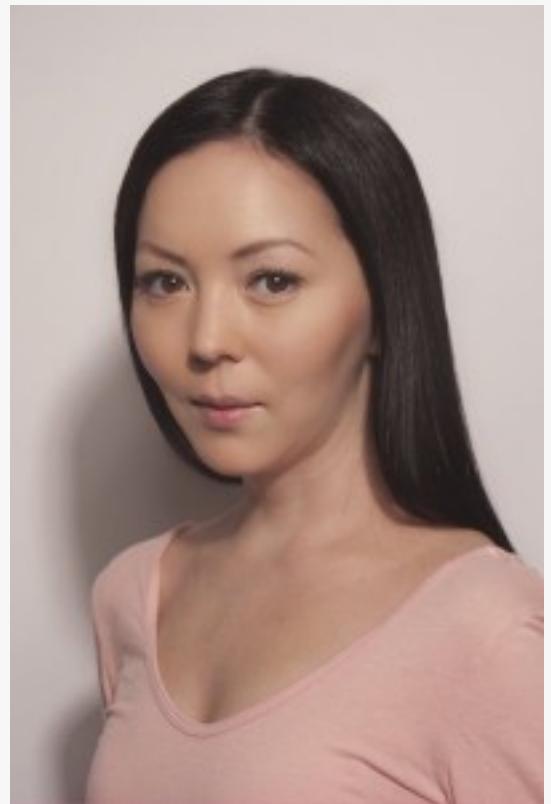
"It was such a thrill to be judged on my acting ability, and to feel this was a competition of actors, not 'handicapped' people," says Stevens. "Lisa has nothing but my utmost respect for this chance that she has given to me to show that no actor is handicapped unless that's what the part requires."

Thanks to Lisa Jai and the incredible performers who submitted monologues for consideration, the Titanium Awards were so successful that preparations for the second annual awards program are already underway.

Beyond being personally invested as the producer and one of the judges of this year's Titanium Awards, Lisa Jai herself is painfully aware of the plight performers with disabilities face.

Diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis at the age of four, Lisa has continued to enjoy incredible success as an actress, but having a disability has not made it an easy journey.

She admits, "In the past I have been labeled handicapped, crippled, or disabled, as the pre-cursor to my title – actor. I'd like to shift the focus to simply 'actor' as the precursor to labels."



Actress Lisa Jai shot by Joshua Cobos

Originally from Canada, Lisa's career began taking off in 1988, when she landed the role of Megan on the two-time Golden Reel Award winning television series "My Secret Identity" starring Jerry O'Connell, and Kim on "T and T" starring Mr. T. In 1989 she landed the starring role of Isabelle in the hit children's series & feature film "Babar."

As the "dis-ease", as she calls it, began causing unpredictable flare-ups in her teenage years, Lisa devoted herself to voice-over roles. She had resounding success landing starring roles in an impressive list of television shows including the lead role of Wanda in "The Magic School Bus" from 1994-1997, Ashley in "Stickin' Around" from 1996-1998, and several lead characters on "Tales from the Cryptkeeper," "Rupert," "Monster Force," "The NeverEnding Story," "Medabots," "The Busy World of Richard Scarry" and many more.

While becoming one of Canada's most sought-after voiceover actors, Lisa also built a reputation as a pioneer advocate for physical diversity and those suffering from disabilities. In 2012, she received the prestigious Unsung Hero Award, given by the Mayor of the City of Toronto (the notorious Rob Ford) to those who advocate for people with disabilities within their field of work.

Lisa started her advocacy career when she was elected as a member of Toronto's ACTRA (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists) Diversity Committee, being voted into council by members. This was the steppingstone towards Lisa's election to ACTRA's National Diversity Committee, an organization that focuses on the importance of authentically representing the diverse community in which we live within the media. The organization advocates an inclusive working environment that includes all "types" of people regardless of labels.

Because of Lisa's high profile advocacy work in Canada, she was invited to join the "Advisory Committee" for the global "Inclusion in the Arts & Media of People with Disabilities" (I AM PWD) campaign. The group met monthly with the heads of casting at all major Hollywood studios to educate casting personnel about the needs of disabled performers.

Advisory Committee members required vetting and approval by the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), the Alliance of Film, Television and Radio Artists (AFTRA), and Actors Equity, the organizations that founded Advisory Committee. Adding Lisa to the committee, as a representative of ACTRA, brought the organization and its movement onto the international stage.

RA has given Lisa Jai visible physical deformities like "Swan" fingers, an abnormal flection at the base of each of finger; but in spite of it all, her acting prowess has made it possible for her to compete for able-bodied roles alongside the industry's best performers.

Lisa received rave reviews for her performance as Isela, the star of the Cornerstone Theater's production of "The Unrequited," as well as Fiona in Kim Rosenstock's (writer of the TV Series *New Girl*) play "99 Ways to F*ck A Swan" at the Illyrian Player's Theatre Company.

She went on to play another leading role in a highly controversial vaudeville-style production of "Titus Andronicus: A Vaudeville," which was based on Shakespeare's classic "Titus Andronicus" and ran at the historic Stella Adler Theater in Los Angeles.

Last year she starred as Birdie in the Ovation Recommended production "What of the Night?" at the acclaimed Vagrancy Theatre in LA.

Lisa Jai's positive attitude and her dedication to being the best actress possible regardless of her disadvantages have clearly paid off. She is not only an inspirational example for all those living with disabilities who want to realize their dreams, but the Titanium Awards are yet another example of her

long list of contributions to the film industry and arts community. Lisa Jai breaks down barriers wherever she goes, and has earned her place as a shining star and inspiration to physically diverse actors everywhere.

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