

# The Living Legends Foundation Star-Studded Awards Gala was a Huge Success with Celebrities from Music & Entertainment

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, October 7, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Living Legends Foundation, Inc. (LLF) held its annual awards dinner and gala on Friday, October 4. The sold-out star-studded event included celebrities from music, entertainment, film, television and sports including Sugar Ray Leonard, Jimmy Jam & Terry Lewis, Ray Parker Jr., David E. Talbert, Chanté Moore, Johnny Gill, Sylvia Rhone, and Jerome Benton (of The Time), who gathered to celebrate this year's honorees at the Taglyan Cultural Complex in Hollywood, California. Hosted by radio legend Skip Cheatham of MAJIC 94.5 in Dallas, Texas, with entertainment by DJ Battlecat, this year's dinner chairpersons are former Living Legends honorees Tracey J. Jordan and Lionel Ridenour.



Left to Right: Sugar Ray Leonard, Terry Lewis, Donnie Simpson, Jimmy Jam, Johnny Gill, Jerome Benton (The Time), and Harvey Mason jr. (Photo Credit: Arnold Turner)

"The room was filled with legends from celebrities to executives," says David C. Linton, chairman of the Living Legends Foundation. "On behalf of our board of directors, it's an honor to bring together the music and entertainment industries for an important cause benefiting the executives that have poured so much into the industry and more importantly the culture. Congratulations to this year's honorees. Thank you for making us proud."

Harvey Mason jr., the CEO of The Recording Academy® and MusiCares® was presented with the Living Legends Foundation A.D. Washington's Chairman Award, by David C. Linton, the organization's chairman, who commended Mason for his leadership and the overall growth and success of The Recording Academy.

In his acceptance speech, Mason said that he hopes to continue to provide opportunities and be

an example for others [referring to his work with The Recording Academy]. “I’ve done a lot of cool things [in my career], but I don’t think I’ve done anything better than to be helpful, and to be in service of others.”

Mason concludes, “I’m proud of the work that we are doing at The Recording Academy because what you all see is the trophies, you see the celebration, you see the nominations, but what you don’t see is the work that goes on with the organization. The [award] show gives us the money, the money then comes back into our community. The one thing I recognized when I took on this role is that there’s more work that needs to be done around the Black Music community. So, a lot of effort has gone into using the resources, platform, and the ability of the [Recording] Academy to continue to help all genres of music, but specifically some of the underserved communities.”

Ed Eckstine, filmmaker and television producer and former label president and music executive was the recipient of the Ray Harris Lifetime Achievement Award, presented by Ray Harris, LLF Chairman Emeritus and Vanessa Williams, Emmy, Grammy and Tony-nominated actor and recording artist. Williams sent a video message from London. She is currently starring in the musical *The Devil Wears Prada* on London’s West End. Eckstine was one of the key music executives responsible for breaking her recording career.



Left to Right: LLF Honoree Harvey Mason Jr. and LLF Chairman David C. Linton (Photo Credit: Maury L. Phillips)

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*David C. Linton, Chairman of  
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In his acceptance speech, Eckstine not only talked about his extraordinary life as the son of jazz giant Billy Eckstine and his family, but his life’s work under the guidance and teachings of two industry titans, Quincy Jones and Clive Davis. In 1990, he was the first African American to be appointed president of a major non-Black owned record company, an industry first.

“I do not have the words to describe the charmed life properly or adequately I led under the guidance and tutelage of “Q” [Quincy Jones],” said Eckstine. “He taught me so much about life, music, production, the chess game called the music business, global hustle, what and what

not to do and say. I was blessed to serve as his general manager at Quincy Jones Productions

from inception to what became the most commercially successful and creatively fertile period of his recording career and believe me when I say had I not graduated with honors from Quincy Jones University, I would not be standing before you today.”

Eckstine concludes: “My twenty months doing A&R and living in New York City working for Clive Davis exposed me on a corporate level, to activities and events I had not previously been privy to. Clive was a very precise and disciplined taskmaster who I learned a great deal from and am grateful for the brief tenure that I had under his leadership. After having attempted to grow and expand beneath the shadow of two very tall trees in “Q” and Clive, my life was forever changed.”

L. Londell McMillan, a longtime entertainment attorney, an entrepreneur, an advocate for music and entertainment creators and executives, and the chairperson of the NorthStar Group, is the recipient of the Kendall A. Minter Entertainment Advocate Award, renamed after Minter’s recent passing. Dr. Denise J. Brown, LLF general counsel presented his award.

L. Londell McMillan was a longtime friend of Kendall Minter and they both attended Cornell Law School, fourteen years apart. McMillan delivered a passionate, powerful, and profound speech that focused on the themes of transformative leadership and Black ownership within the music and entertainment industries.

“I went to law school because I wanted to be a civil rights lawyer,” said McMillan. I met a gentleman name Reginald F. Lewis, who had acquired McCall Pattern Company, before TLC Beatrice. When I met Reginald Lewis, he asked me ‘What do you want to do?’ I said, I want to be a civil rights lawyer because that is what’s in my heart and in my soul. Reginald Lewis said to me, ‘Young man for your generation, go into business, which will be the civil rights of your generation.’”

Donnie Simpson, legendary radio and television broadcaster was the recipient of the Jerry Boulding’s Radio Award. The award was presented by Skip Dillard, LLF board member and brand manager/format vice president of WXBK-FM Audacy New York, and Stephen Hill, executive vice president of Creative at MRC Live & Alternative.



Left to Right: Honoree Ed Eckstine and Ray Harris LLF Chairman Emeritus (Photo Credit: Maury L. Phillips)



Beaming with joy during his acceptance speech, Simpson acknowledged a host of people including his family, guests, and friends. He also shared how he got his start in radio. "Al Perkins [radio personality and producer who worked at WCHB] who hired me at 15 years old and turned the keys of a radio station over to a 15-year-old kid in Detroit, then the fifth largest market at the time, is phenomenal," said Simpson. "Also, [the late] Ken Bell [who was a top radio personality at WJLB], used to sneak me into the [radio] station at night and let me work out on the equipment and then he would critique my tape the next day, and that meant the world to me."

Gwen Franklin, founder and CEO of B. Lifted Up! Inc. is also the host of radio program, Your Guide To Living An Abundant Life on B. Lifted Up! Radio, in collaboration with the Mocha Podcasts Network. She is the recipient of the Mike Bernardo Female Executive Award, presented by Sheila Eldridge, LLF board member and CEO of Miles Ahead Entertainment.

In Franklin's elegant and gracious style, and her profound words, Franklin also shared her memories on the late Mike Bernardo and the path she helped to set for Black women in the music industry. She also touched on the importance of spirituality and health."

"Even before the Harvard Study [1972], Mike [Bernardo] paved the way for the advancement of Black women in the music industry," said Gwen Franklin. "An executive, a



Left to Right: LLF Honoree L. Londell McMillan and LLF General Counsel Dr. Denise J. Brown (Photo Credit: Maury L. Phillips)



Left to Right: LLF Honorees L. Londell McMillan, Donnie Simpson, Gwen Franklin, Ed Eckstine, Mike Kelly, Joi Brown, and Harvey Mason jr. (Photo Credit: Maury L. Phillips)

mother, a humanitarian, an advocate for foster care, she also did it with a smile. It is an honor to accept this award in her name. We had something in common; both understanding how it feels to sit on a keg of dynamite, [referring to the music projects they shared during their record label days], like the first solo Jeffrey Osborne album, or Janet Jackson's Control, or Vanessa Williams' The Comfort Zone projects prior to release.

Franklin concludes: "Life is short and stress kills. Your relationship with the divine, your higher power, is your light. Be resolute in understanding your purpose. When the light dims – pause – exercise patience and wait for the light. It will never leave or forsake you, because 'The Will of God will never take you where the grace of God will not protect you.'"

Joi Brown is the founder and CEO of Culture Creators and a former senior-level record label executive. She was presented with the first-ever Impact Player Award, presented by Shannon A. Henderson, LLF board member and director of marketing and community engagement at HBCUGO.tv.

In Brown's dynamic speech she reminds us of change, culture and the future. "We're not just here to create culture; we're here to shape the future," said Brown. "As Maya Angelou once said, 'You can't use up creativity. The more you use, the more you have.' This quote speaks to the essence of why we do what we do as culture creators. We are constantly pushing the boundaries, creating spaces for ourselves, and inspiring those who come after us. But let me be clear: it is our responsibility to ensure we occupy space—not to rely solely on company policies or DEI initiatives to make room for us. We belong here. We must stand tall among giants, not as guests, but as equals."

Brown concludes, "The future is not something to run from—it's something to run toward. Innovation and technology are not taking away our power; they're giving us new tools to expand it. We are the culture creators, and it's on us to use these tools to amplify our voices, to build platforms, and to tell stories in ways we never could before."

Mike Kelly is a veteran record label executive and a radio broadcaster. He currently works as a radio consultant with his company, Real One 24/7 Promotion and Marketing. He is the recipient of the Music Executive Award, which was presented by Azim Rashid, LLF president and the chief marketing strategist for The Alchemy Group LLC, along with legendary program director Melvin "Cookin'" Jones and Kelly's daughter Kiona Lewis.

When Kelly was growing up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, he suffered abuse by the hands of his stepfather. Jones said in his introduction speech about Kelly, "His life has all the attributes of a Disney movie. He endured mental, emotional, and physiological abuse."

Jones continues, "When I found out what was happening, I asked his mother if he could live with me, and she said, 'Yes.' I told his mother that I would make sure he stayed in school. I tried to instill in him values, like hard work, and being faithful to family and friends, and to love all

people, and to always stand on business, and that your word is bond. He [Mike Kelly] came to live with me at twelve years old. He was my driver at fourteen. I lived a rock and roll lifestyle in those days. He was exposed to the nightlife, but he was not that person. He stayed focused on school and basketball and was a good enough basketball player to receive a scholarship, but radio and records were his first love.”

In Kelly’s acceptance speech, he rendered special thanks to a room of music executives who supported him through various employment and promotion opportunities throughout his stellar career.

Chris Chambers is the founder and CEO of The Chamber Group and a former record label executive. Chambers was not able to attend the award ceremony to accept the Media Executive Award. In his absence, Vivian Scott Chew, LLF board member and partner at Chew Entertainment accepted his award and read part of his acceptance letter.

“I have been blessed with an incredible career for close to thirty years. I can say that I have worked with many of today’s superstars and major brands at all stages of their existence. PR isn’t a career that I sought out; rather, it sought me out and I very quickly recognized that I was good at it and could find untraditional and creative ways to do my job. Nothing was ever perfect or easy, but the obstacles that I look back on and remember fondly are very obviously part of who I am now. It’s true when they say everything happens for a reason as each experience was a piece of the puzzle that formed me today. As a Black executive in an industry that often tries to overshadow our contributions to the culture, I’m proud.

I encourage the next generation of executives in the ever-changing world of media to follow their heart. We are now faced with the challenge of thinking outside the box with shrinking newsrooms, fewer options for outlets and content creators becoming a large and important part of a press plan. The great thing about following your heart is that it won’t lead you astray – you might hit a speed bump or go on a detour, but you’ll always end up exactly where you were meant to be. Just like I did.”

Gwendolyn Quinn  
Living Legends Foundation Inc  
+1 917-769-7808  
[email us here](#)

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