

People & Places

Awards

Hosts WSF awards

Laila 'salutes' social activism of athletes

NEW YORK, Oct 15, (AP): Laila Ali is applauding athletes who speak out about social issues. She thinks her father would, too.

Ali was to host the virtual Women's Sports Foundation awards on Wednesday night, recognizing athletes and leaders working toward social justice and racial equality.

"I think all people should take a stand," Ali told The Associated Press. "Whether they're an athlete or not or a celebrity or not. Our voices, collectively, are what's going to make a difference."

WNBA players will receive the Wilma Rudolph Courage Award for raising awareness about the police killing of 26-year-old Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, the hometown of her father, Muhammad Ali.

"I think he'd have similar feelings that I have," Ali said. "I never like to speak for him. But I think he spoke so much for himself, that you can imagine how he would feel and what he would say. I think it is great athletes now are aware they can use their voice and they can make a difference."



Laila Ali

Former Xerox CEO Ursula Burns was honored for her leadership in corporate America, along with Tampa Bay Buccaneers coach Bruce Arians for his inclusive hiring practices. The event will also celebrate the 50th anniversary of the "Original 9," Billie Jean King and eight other women who broke away from the tennis establishment to turn pro and help start the WTA Tour.

King created the Women's Sports Foundation in 1974. The organization provides sports programming and grants for young athletes.

Normally, the annual WSF awards dinner would be held in New York. Ali, who went 24-0 with 21 knockouts in her boxing career, remembers fighting in front of her father at Madison Square Garden in 2006.

"Any time he was there, it was extra, extra special," she said. "I could see that light in his eyes."

Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the award winners will be celebrated in a virtual event available for streaming on Yahoo Sports at 8 p.m. ET. It will feature Candace Parker, Tom Brady and Natalie Portman, a part-owner of the new National Women's Soccer League franchise in Los Angeles.

Here are more thoughts from the 42-year-old Ali, who was featured on "Home Made Simple" on the Oprah Winfrey Network and is married to former NFL player Curtis Conway. They have two children and live in Los Angeles.

AP: The WNBA players spent their season highlighting the Black Lives Matter movement and seeking charges in Taylor's death. What are your thoughts on athletes taking a stand on social justice issues?

Ali: A lot of times, when you disrupt the system that's been in place many years, there's going to be some noise, some people against. But as long as you're doing the right thing, I believe you stand strong. That is how change has always been made. If nobody says anything, if nobody puts anything on the line or uses their platform, then change isn't going to happen. So, I applaud all the women of the WNBA and encourage them and anybody else who wants to take a stand.

AP: It seems athletes can bring an awareness to a diverse audience that might otherwise not be in tune with the struggles of other people. Your father took a stand against the draft in the 1960s, citing his religious beliefs, and wasn't allowed to box for several years in his prime.

Ali: You look at Colin Kaepernick, when nobody was on the same page with him. That was a tremendous amount of courage that he had - he lost his livelihood for it. Now people are applauding him, but nobody is offering to give him his job back and all the money he lost for trying to do good. Every piece of the puzzle is going to make a difference. I think my dad would definitely have something positive to say about the athletes that are taking a stand.

AP: You have a long history with the WSF - on the board of trustees, a past president. Talk about the WSF programs throughout the country, especially in communities of color.

Ali: I do understand the importance of sports and how it uplifts us as people. I want women and girls to have all the same opportunities as anyone else. The WSF is really about unlocking the potential of every girl and woman through the power of sports. It resonates through me so deeply. So much comes from playing sports, the discipline, confidence, learning how to harness that power within to be successful in life.

AP: What are your workouts like now and what projects are you working on?

Ali: I have a heavy bag in my home gym. I'm actually going to the boxing gym lately, doing some sparring. Sometimes I get the urge to do a full boxing workout. The muscle memory is incredible. Sometimes, you kind of gauge yourself to see if you still got it. I found that I do. (laughs).

I did enjoy "Home Made Simple" for three seasons, the show went away unfortunately, with COVID-19. I'm focusing on my brand Laila Ali Lifestyle, nutrition products, skin care and spices. That keeps me really busy, on top of being a mom, having kids home and homeschooling. I do a lot of speaking and luckily, I've been able to do a lot of virtual speaking. We've got some shows we're pitching. But the landscape right now is so crazy, you just don't know what's going to happen. So I'm kind of OK being home and focusing on things I haven't been able to put my time and efforts into.

Also:

LOS ANGELES: CBS' "The Amazing Race," with its especially welcome promise of armchair adventure, returns 9 p.m. EDT Wednesday. Eleven teams, including former NFL players DeAngelo Williams and Gary Barnidge and paired Olympians Kellie Wells-Brinkley and LaVonnie Idlette, dash from locations in France, Germany, Kazakhstan, Brazil and elsewhere in the quest for bragging rights and a \$1 million prize. The 32nd edition of the contest, taped before the coronavirus outbreak, pushed the series to the milestone of 1 million miles of worldwide travel.



Host Kelly Clarkson performs at the Billboard Music Awards. (AP)



Luke Combs performs 'Better Together' at the Billboard Music Awards. (AP)



Kane Brown performs 'Be Like That' at the Billboard Music Awards. (AP)



Demi Lovato performs 'Commander in Chief' for the Billboard Music Awards. (AP)



Sheila E. performs 'Higher Love' at the Billboard Music Awards. (AP)



Brandy, (left), and Ty Dolla \$ign perform for the Billboard Music Awards. (AP)



Lizzo accepts the award for top song sales artist. (AP)



Khalid accepts the award for top R&B artist. (AP)



Billie Eilish accepts the award for top Billboard 200 album. (AP)



Lil Nas X accepts the award for top hot 100 song. (AP)



This image released by Amazon Studios shows Heidi Schreck in a scene from 'What the Constitution Means to Me.' (AP)

Film

Schreck's play continues to be relevant

'Constitution' streams in time for election

NEW YORK, Oct 15, (AP): Most playwrights want their works to remain relevant for decades to come. Not Heidi Schreck, not with "What the Constitution Means to Me."

"I often say that I can't wait until the play is obsolete. I'm always like a little shocked by how it continues to be relevant," she says. "I would love for it to be a relic."

"What the Constitution Means to Me" draws on Schreck's own experiences as a high-school debate champ and the lives of her female relatives to explore America's principles and the struggle women and minorities have faced to be heard and protected by its founding document.

In the work, Schreck focuses on the Ninth and Fourteenth Amendments and calls the Constitution "a living, warm-blooded, steamy document," but one in which women's bodies were left out "from the beginning." Schreck even uses a snippet of a Ruth Bader Ginsburg address. The play ends with the audience deciding whether to keep the imperfect but alterable Constitution or to rip it up and start over. Most audiences have voted to stick with it, a decision Schreck endorsed.

"I think we need the Constitution more than ever right now. I'm deeply grateful it exists. And I think we're going to need to rely upon it," she says.

"However, performing the show over these past many years has made me feel that the project of reimagining some fundamental things about our country is a crucial one. And I think we're seeing that happen right now."

The play premiered off-Broadway and went on to a five-month Broadway run in 2019. It was a Pulitzer Prize finalist and was nominated for two Tony Awards, including best play. Schreck estimates she's performed it over 200 times. This month, it's landing on Amazon Prime Video. Filmed over two performances and a rehearsal during the last week of the show's Broadway run, the streaming version represents the biggest potential audience for her work and Schreck at her most emotionally wide open.

"Each time it moves to a bigger stage, I would feel more vulnerable about telling those stories," she says. "I do remember both of those times feeling maybe more emotional than on another eight show week."

Fight

It arrives less than a month before Election Day, at a time when Americans are reexamining the nation's racist and sexist past and during a fight over an empty seat on the Supreme Court.

"It's interesting just to have this show now kind of interacting with this moment. I'm curious what it will mean to people right now," she says. "I started this piece over a decade ago so it feels like a really exciting and conclusive final chapter."

Marielle Heller, who directed the film "A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood" and helms Schreck's show, says it's important that it comes out before the election.

"I do think it's raising questions that we all need to be thinking about as we

are voting for the state of our democracy right now," Heller says. "Questioning the history of our Constitution and what has gone into the different laws, particularly as they pertain to women and non-binary people, our bodies - it's very poignant."

Schreck's other plays include "Grand Concourse," "Creature" and "There Are No More Big Secrets." In addition to being a stage actor for almost 20 years, she also wrote for TV, including "I Love Dick," "Billions" and "Nurse Jackie."

She grew up in Wenatchee, Washington, without ready access to theaters and remembers watching PBS broadcasts of plays growing up, as well as listening to an LP recording of "The Glass Menagerie" starring Jessica Tandy.

"Even though I know that the theater is probably always best if you get to experience it live, I actually know the power of a recorded theater," she says.

Schreck has her hands full these days - in more ways than one. She is mom to twin 5-month old baby girls. They are fueling her passion to challenge the status quo, especially at the Supreme Court.

"We're just facing such a scary moment right now when it when it looks like hard-won rights - rights that people died to achieve - are very likely going to be rolled back by this court," she says.

"When I grasp for hope, I guess I find it in the knowledge that actually the majority of the people in this country support those rights - support gay marriage, support a woman's right to choose, think that police violence against Black Americans is a real problem."

Variety

ST LOUIS: Kim Massie, a St. Louis blues and soul singer who opened for stars ranging from Chuck Berry to Nelly, has died.

Relatives did not give a cause of death. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that she was believed to have been in her early 60s. Massie was living in Fairview Heights, Illinois, at the time of her death on Monday.

Massie was known for a big voice and was popular performer at blues clubs and other concert venues in St. Louis for decades. She served as the opening act for several performers, and was known for her covers of songs by artists as varied as Etta James, Gretchen Wilson, Stevie Wonder, Led Zeppelin, Adele and Aretha Franklin.

"I know her presence will be hugely missed on the St. Louis music scene," jazz singer Denise Thimes said. "There will never be another Kim Massie." (AP)

LONDON: Herbert Kretzmer, the journalist and lyricist best known for his English-language adaptation of the musical Les Misérables, has died. He was 95.

His family confirmed Wednesday that Kretzmer died after a long illness with Parkinson's disease at the London home he shared with his second wife, Sybil Sever.

Tributes poured in from giants of the London stage, including theatrical producer Cameron Mackintosh, singer Elaine Paige and lyricist Tim Rice.

Les Misérables producer Mackintosh said Kretzmer was instrumental in bringing Victor Hugo's classic tale of defiance and

redemption in early 19th century France to the stage in English in October 1985, five years after it had opened in Paris.

"His wonderful words for Les Misérables will live on in his memory forever more," he said in a statement.

For Paige, he was a "masterful wordsmith" while Rice described Kretzmer a "great lyricist and man of theatre" and a "giant of his trade."

Kretzmer, known as Herbie to his friends, was born in Kroonstad, a small town



Massie



Kretzmer

south of Johannesburg, South Africa, in October 1925. He was one of four sons of immigrants who ran a grocery shop and later a prosperous furniture store.

Though his childhood under the vast expanse of South African sky was "blissful," he wanted by the age of 11 to become a "newspaper man" - so he could get closer to his heroes on screen.

From Johannesburg, he moved to Paris in 1953, playing the piano by night in a bar in return for a meal. (AP)