

Ziggy Marley's 9-year-old 'Friend' introduces 'Sunshine' to Radio City Spectacular Opening



Matthew Welling is keeping' the beat!!!

By Vinette K. Pryce
(Special Assignment)

The 2015 edition of the Radio City Christmas Spectacular opened recently to the annual fanfare and pageantry families anticipate all year long and particular each time the Rockettes execute the high-kicking dance steps they are internationally acclaimed.

Inside the acoustically-perfect landmark showplace, a full orchestra provides festive preview to a holiday tradition that began in 1933 and will run until Jan. 3, 2016 with music, dance, drama, a 3-D film excursion, and probably the most delightful of all, a "Living Nativity" presentation which integrates a menagerie of animals – donkeys, sheep, camels – to tell the Biblical story of the birth of Jesus.

While snippets of dance tap numbers -- "Rag Dolls," "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers," "The 12 Days of Christmas," "New York At Christmas," and other delightful routines are publicized in previews, opening night offers a bonus with added exclamations to hail the debut presentation.

Nine years ago, The Garden of Dreams Foundation, a non-profit organization that

strives "to impact the lives of children facing obstacles" launched their collaborative with Madison Square Garden Entertainment. It was with that agreement that the one-night only presentation entreats special audiences to a spectacular added attraction.

This year it was a live performance by 10-year-old Matthew Welling. He won the night's showcase to a capacity crowd because he is exemplary. Some might consider the White Plains resident challenged by his battle with osteopetrosis – 'a rare inherited disorder that makes bones increase in both size (mass) and fragility' – but when the curtains parted at Radio City Music Hall, Welling showed no signs of a challenge.

Led onstage by a bedazzling member of the Rockettes, the blind, Westchester champion of the Garden of Dreams Foundation talent show opened the show with fireworks. Introduced and cheered on by Ziggy Marley, who introduced him as a "friend," Welling seemed dwarfed by the huge stage he commanded.

Prior to his appearance, a short film clip had summed up a few facts about the potentially fatal condition also called chalk bones, ivory bones,

or marble bones. In it his parents – Michael and Susie--explained the many stem cell operations their beloved son had endured in order to prevent the disease from deforming his bone structure while distorting his appearance.

The short of it is that Welling was born with the genetic disorder that causes the skull to grow abnormally.

However, if the film clip had not been shown the word osteopetrosis might have remained an anomaly to a majority of the audience. Standing in the same spot British singer Adele stood the night previous to sing her recently released "Hello," Welling sang his own composition.

Titled "Sunshine," the rendition featured the talented youth wailing a reggae-tinged "happy song" that earned him a standing ovation at Radio City Music Hall. "Are you ready?" Welling asked assuredly before launching into the lyrics. *Woke up this morning... I looked out my window... I looked at the sun just shining on me and said... Sunshine...* Heads bopped, fingers snapped and wide-eyed individuals gawked at the professional and inspirational message and accompaniment.

With music and his own penmanship, the drummer, keyboard player and vocalist won hearts. Many explained that he had seized minds too. As if his original song was not enough when it ended he segued to "One Love" the Bob Marley classic anthem to end his triumphant debut. Marley is attributed with poetry that states: "Some people feel the rain others just get wet."

Welling drenched with accolades must have felt the overwhelming response from



Garden of Dreams Foundation Ambassador Matthew Welling sings "Sunshine," as Saxophone Player James Maxson urges him on. (Photos courtesy MSG Entertainment)

an audience he could not even see. If he could have, he would have noticed that from the third mezzanine down to the orchestra section, the VIP opening night crowd stood in adulation of the boy who marked his 10th birthday the night before.

A student at the Music Conservatory of Westchester, a facility that lauds itself as a "music therapy institute" Welling "sees past his impediment and created a "happy song," his music collaborator Donald Stevens said. Together with Welling they recorded an album of his favorites.

Titled "You Be The Rockstar" the CD release last February features his own compositions -- "Darkness," and "Sunshine," and covers "The Lazy Song," by Bruno Mars, "Counting Stars" by One Republic, Ziggy's "Forward To Love," as well as the Reggae Legend's "No Woman No Cry," "Jammin'," "Three Little Birds," and "Get Up, Stand Up."

Matthew Welling is not only a hit at the Radio City Music Hall holiday Spectacular, he is also a favorite at YouTube.com



The Rockettes lit the Empire State Building red and green in celebration of Opening Night of the 2015 Radio City Christmas Spectacular running through January 3, 2016 (Photo: Starpix)



The symbolic passing of the Torch happens when each 2015 Torch Bearer get pinned by the Pioneer Torch Bearer who selected them. The event took place at the Dwyer Cultural Center in the Village of Harlem. Pioneer Torch Bearers are those who received an AUDELCO Award prior to 1995. They were pinned by Mary B. Davis, founder-friends of Vivian Robinson, chair Emeritus-AUDELCO. Davis pinned Singer/Actress Sandra Reaves-Phillips with Torch Bearer's Special Recognition Torch. (PICTURED) Mary B. Davis (center), surrounded by Pinner and Honorees (Photo: Hakim Mutlaq)