

WILSON CRUZ:

Thank you, Jonathan. I wanted you to stand with me here, tonight, because you've inspired me through your excellence and your journey. I'm so grateful, my friend! I hear you should thank your husband first, so you're sure not to forget him, but I only have one of those on TV, so thank you to my Space Boo, Anthony Rapp, and my entire Star Trek Discovery family for imagining a more hopeful future with me... and Judith, my sweet, congratulations. No one is more deserving. You've been our LIGHT through many a storm, through many years.

Tonight, I want to take this opportunity to say thank you for the gift of this career and this life, really, because I know none of it would've been possible without a community like this to encourage me and without the incredible activist this award is named after, Vito Russo, and his dream of visibility for all of us. I want to thank GLAAD, its board and especially, my friends there, our fearless leader, Sarah Kate Ellis, who has turned this place into the powerhouse of advocacy that it is, and Rich Ferraro, Monica Trasandes, Anthony Allen Ramos, Meghan Townsend, Lewis Osio de dios, Nick Adams - your integrity and dedication impacts not just how we are seen, but how we see ourselves. I wanted to work here because I needed to see more BIPOC and Trans representation in media and you gave me the platform and opportunity to advocate for it, when there was so very little. It was a privilege. Thank you for that, for tonight and for all you've done for us.

I have to thank my parents for teaching me the meaning of true love. My brothers Gilbert and Joshua for putting up with me and making me Tio Wilson, best gig ever, by the way...actually, my brother Josh is here with his husband - Walther, thank you for loving my brother so much ... And if you know me, you know my brother Josh, and so you know why he is also actually, my best friend and is truly my favorite person in the world.... I love you guys.

I want you to know that I know NO actor, not even one as devilishly handsome as I am... can attain any level of success or fulfillment unless they, first, are afforded an opportunity to share their gift and for me to have been afforded 3 decades of opportunities to do what I love, indeed, what I feel I was put here to do, to be allowed to strive to live up to my potential, all while being openly and unapologetically who I am, existing in this Queer and Afro-Puerto Rican vessel.... I know that is something that only happens because many of you were willing to give me a chance to show you what I could do. I'm looking at you, Tammy Rosen, my manager of over 20 years, who's here tonight along with my friend Michael Grief, who changed my life and my trajectory by casting me in RENT. I'm thinking of Winnie Holzman, the creator of My So-Called Life, my fairy godmother, for whom I will live in eternal gratitude... you said yes at a time when so many, given the times we lived in, did not... Thank you.

To my community of Queer artists - the dancers, singers, authors, poets and actors of color, out there in the hustle, or studying their craft, going after their own dreams. I want to remind you that you contain multitudes. The magic in you is ancient. It works through you. Let it. Feel it, like you feel it when that Bad Bunny song hits. Never lose your sense of curiosity. Never question your beauty or the fact that that which makes you different is also that which makes you special. When you doubt it the most, remember I said it.

This year marks my 30th anniversary as a professional actor and in those 30 years we have accomplished so much. We really have changed the conversation. I know these last few years have been really difficult for us and I know we're all tired, but I fear what happens if we disengage now when OUR kids need us the most. We cannot sit back and celebrate our victory on gay marriage and forget that our youth, our

Trans siblings, our immigrant families, abortion access, and our voting rights are under direct attack and if you think they're going to stop at abortion and not come for those marriage rights, next.... You haven't been paying enough attention.

We can not allow them to turn the clock back to a time when they thought they could shame us into silence or inaction, using the same tired tropes, like groomer... or worse, while they burn our books. Not today... because we've moved on. We know better. Listen to me... I'm on Star Trek! I have been to the future. In the future, we don't just accept the diversity of humanity, we celebrate it. We can't allow them to roll back our rights because they refuse to evolve! People love who they love and people know WHO they are. It's as simple as that.

So, tonight, let's commit ourselves to continuing Mr. Russo's work of insisting to be seen and RESPECTED. Vito understood that our power lies in our visibility and we know that it works. We embrace the power of our stories because we know how they've informed our humanity and have left an indelible mark on the lives of LGBTQ people and the people who love them, which is to say, mostly EVERYBODY! Because we ARE part of the world. We have ALWAYS been here. We will ALWAYS be here.

Remember this: We are a community of lovers who have dared to imagine, and make real, a more expansive and inclusive definition of love and identity for the human race. We mustn't ever lose sight of that or the power inherent in it and the great service we continue to provide to humanity in the epic struggle of bending that moral arc toward more justice, more love and more acceptance. That is who we are and that is our charge.

Thank you for choosing to see me and for affording me the lifelong gift of blazing my own trail as I pursue the privilege of telling our stories, sharing our humanity and making us, ever more, visible.

Thank you for letting me continue to be a part of the continuing effort of showing just how beautiful our rainbow really is.

I will leave you with this quote. "It's so important to do something while you're here, because this is the only shot you get. If I live another ten minutes or another ten years, that's the way I'm going to spend my time. Agitating for change, because change needs to happen. None of this is going to happen in my lifetime. I'm fighting for the generations that come after me." -Vito Russo... Thank you, Mr. Russo... I say, AMEN. Thank you.