

Singer, actor, Best Buddy thrills one thousand at the Venetian Ball: Kevin Spacey does Macau

17/03/2014 08:31:00 Anthony Lawrance



Long-time Best Buddies supporter Kevin Spacey addresses dinner guests

Perhaps the most surprising thing about Kevin Spacey is not that he's a gifted singer, but that he's such a nice, likeable guy.

Indeed, it's impossible not to be charmed by the Hollywood and Broadway star, who is better known for cold-blooded, villainous characters than he is for crooning, as he struts around the Venetian Macao's ballroom tonight. Even when he tells the audience that "settle down" means "shut the f%\$# up!", he does it in such a way as to make every one of us feel that right here, right now, we are the only important people in his world.

Which is why he is clearly the best choice anyone

could have come up with to headline a gala event in Macau launching the local chapter of Best Buddies International. A tough guy with a heart of gold and the voice of a Sinatra. Who could have asked for more? The organization he is here to support is a pretty amazing one, too. Dedicated to fostering support of, and interaction with, people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities, Best Buddies strives to spread love, care and mutual understanding among people from different walks of life.

With chapters in 51 countries, Best Buddies is well known internationally for helping to raise awareness of people who have experienced challenges in brain development either before, during, or soon after birth, yet who have a great capacity to bring joy to those around them, and who therefore can make a welcome addition to any environment, be it a home or an office.

These are people who typically suffer from Down's Syndrome, or who have experienced some kind of physical trauma that impaired their intellectual growth. Yet they are also people with an abundance of warmth and, yes, charm. Kevin Spacey's kind of people.

A few Buddies are in attendance tonight, and Spacey goes out of his way to make sure they are not forgotten by the swirling crowd of guests.

Decked out in Great Gatsby-themed tuxedos and glittering dresses, these well-heeled guests are here to cough up copious amounts of cash in support of the launch of Best Buddies Macau. They are doing a fine job of it, judging by the price tags on some of the items on auction. "Have a great time," Spacey exhorts the Champagne-guzzling crowd, "but please remember why we're here."

The Oscar winning actor (for 1999's "American Beauty") is pausing for breath in between numbers in a 30-minute routine at the end of the Venetian's annual Ball. A throng of people, many sporting grey streaks

in their hair, are crammed up like teenagers against the stage, iPhones held aloft, snapping “selfies” with Spacey in the background. He has just belted out Billy Joel’s “New York State of Mind” and is about to launch into a rendition of “Moon River”. It’s a magical treat, and Spacey is clearly lapping up the applause for a talent he rarely puts on display.

Earlier, Macau Inc had been given a chance to sit down with Spacey and ask what it meant to him, personally, to both be back in China (he is a frequent visitor and performer here) and to be helping launch the local chapter of his favorite charity in one of the country’s Special Administrative Regions. He could not have been smoother, while at the same time effusive in his response.

“I have been involved with Best Buddies for more than a decade,” Spacey says, nodding toward his good friend standing nearby, the organization’s founder and leader, Anthony Shriver. “Me and Anthony did our first event together back in 1997, and we just did another one earlier this year in Washington DC. I love this organization, so I’m very happy to be here in Macau tonight helping to spread its good work.”

He finds it particularly rewarding, he says, to be helping with the launch of best Buddies in a country that has always had a special place in his heart. Spacey was, in fact, the first major Hollywood actor to appear in a fully Chinese-funded movie, when he played alongside Hong Kong star Daniel Wu in 2010’s black-comedy film, *Inseparable*.

Adding that he also recently brought the Sam Mendes-directed play, *Richard III*, to Hong Kong and Beijing, Spacey says he expects to be coming here more often in the future. “I believe this is an exciting time to be in China as a performer,” Spacey says. “This is where the next ten years of opportunity is to be had. It’s the place to be.”

Professional interests aside, Spacey goes on to explain the meaningful nature of his association with Best Buddies. “Why am I involved? You just need to see the looks on these kids’ faces when they are being challenged to do something that they might not previously have known how to do. You see how they light up, when they go, ‘Wow, I did it! I can do that!’ and you realize it’s no different than when we were kids. We all wanted that recognition from people around us, who care for us and love us. So to help be a part of that in someone’s life ... well, that’s worth way more than the time required for me to show up.”

Shriver reinforces the point in another way. “Our Buddies want to be recognized for their contributions and achievements, just like anyone else would. That’s why we are doing our best to raise recognition of all the many wonderful talents our Buddies have, and how they can be such great friends and colleagues in the workplace. We want them to earn their way into white-collar job positions. And we want employers to realize how much better their companies can become through our Buddies’ contributions.”

Judging by the success of Best Buddies International since its 1989 founding, this is clearly a message that is being carried further and further across the globe. It helps, of course, that Shriver comes from the most elite of American elite families (the Kennedy clan, his mother is Eunice, JFK’s sister) and so he has been able to call up stars like Spacey and others with ease. Yet Shriver is as down-to-earth as one could imagine. Without his passion and dedication, in fact, it’s hard to imagine how connections alone could have generated such a movement.

Best Buddies today has more than 800,000 members enrolled in his formal programs, at more than 1,700 schools, companies and other associations around the world. Best Buddies volunteers, like Spacey, annually contribute support services that equate to more than USD168 million, according to the organization’s website.

As a result of their involvement with Best Buddies, Shriver points out, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are able to secure rewarding jobs, live on their own, become inspirational

leaders, and make lifelong friendships. However, Shriver still sees many horizons yet to conquer, including the biggest of them all, in China.

“Although Best Buddies has advanced tremendously in its short existence, many areas of the country and many regions of the world still lack programs to help people with IDD become part of mainstream society,” he says. “We are very excited, of course, to be here on the doorstep of China, launching this chapter in Macau.”

Both Shriver and Spacey are quick to give credit to their hosts, especially Sands China CEO Edward Tracy and his boss, Las Vegas Sands Chairman Sheldon Adelson.

“Without these men,” says Spacey, “we wouldn’t be here tonight, and Best Buddies would still be trying to figure out how to spread goodwill into the enormous China market. We are extremely grateful for their support – and for sharing our vision.”

Edward Tracy acknowledged “it’s our pleasure to be able to support the work of Best Buddies International this year, and to contribute to the success of Best Buddies Macao Association.”

Social responsibility “is one of the core values of Sands China, and we remain active in the local community, whether it’s through volunteer programmes or through donations and sponsorship,” Tracy said.

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Auction raises funds for best buddies

The Venetian Ball 2014: A Night of Glitz and Glamour, with Tiffany & Co. was held Saturday night with over 900 guests, including celebrities, business partners and community initiative supporters at The Venetian Macao. The Great Gatsby-themed evening marked the launch of the Best Buddies Macao Association.

Created by Sands China Ltd. to support noteworthy causes, the Venetian Ball was back again this year with the goal to raise funds for Best Buddies – which provides opportunities for friendship, employment and leadership training for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities – in Macau. Edward Tracy, President and Chief Executive Officer of Sands China Ltd., Anthony Kennedy Shriver, Founder and Chairman of Best Buddies International, Buddy Ambassador Charles Calhoun, plus notable socialites and philanthropists, attended Saturday’s red carpet event and charity dinner. The evening was highlighted by Academy Award-winning actor and long-time Best Buddies supporter Kevin Spacey performing his internationally acclaimed nightclub act, and also featured spectacular performances by live bands and Hong Kong singer-songwriter Anthony Lun, a silent and a live charity auction, and a fabulous gourmet meal.

One of the highlights of the evening was the live auction of seven collectors’ items. The highest bid went to the “Tiffany Legacy Collection” (a five-bar drop pendant in platinum with round brilliant diamonds), which was sold to a Chinese guest for HKD270,000. The most bid article was an Andy Warhol “Marylin” (a set of ten lithographs) sold for 180 thousand HK dollars. All seven items including a 7-night stay at Nisiko Loft Phillip Starck designed apartments in Japan, an Audemars Piguet watch and a Rolling Stones signed Fender electric guitar were sold at the ball.



Another 45 items – with an estimated market value of HKD1.5 to 2 million – were auctioned by ballot bidding (silent auction) at the occasion. The profits raised by both auctions will be donated to Best Buddies.

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