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The Lilac Ball, and Celebrating a Singer Who Couldn't Sing

About 1,600 guests turn out for Prep for Prep fundraiser, plus a part for Meryl Streep's new movie

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The Waldorf Astoria is already home to the city's biggest ballroom, but it was bursting at the seams with people.

This was at Prep for Prep's Lilac Ball—named after the flower, not the color purple—which attracted something like 1,600 guests on Monday. A spokeswoman for Prep for Prep said that last year's party leveled out at around 1,300 attendees, not exactly a number to scoff at either.

Among this year's tally were Scott Bok of Greenhill & Co.; Glenn Dubin of Highbridge Capital; Andrew Farkas of Island Capital; Martin Lipton of Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz with his wife, Susan; Daniel and Margaret Loeb; and Daniel and Brooke Neidich.

Such a robust showing is obviously a great thing for the organization, which places promising New York City minority students at independent and boarding schools. It's maybe a slightly less great thing for those who are trying to navigate in and among closely set dinner tables with the hope of actually socializing.

The high level of attendance could be, well, related, to the fact that the evening honored Jeff Blau, the chief executive officer of Related Cos., the real-estate development firm.

“Wow, there’s a lot of people here,” said Mr. Blau, who was given a silver Tiffany box by the organization featuring the names of this year’s Prep for Prep graduating class of seniors inside.

Mr. Blau encouraged the many guests at the event to offer internships to students at Prep for Prep. “The Prep effect lasts a lifetime,” he said.

The evening featured several student speakers, and a call for donations from Diahann Billings-Burford, a Prep for Prep alum and the executive director of cultural investments at Time Warner.

“They always put me after the cute kid,” said Ms. Billings-Burford.

If there was a theme to our evening it was perseverance and tenacity. It started with a screening of “Finding Dory,” at a movie theater in Times Square. In this Pixar sequel to 2003’s “Finding Nemo,” Dory, a blue tang fish who suffers from crippling short-term memory loss, goes off in search of the mom and dad she barely remembers and lost as a child.

Building on the theme of never giving up was the Prep for Prep dinner, which raised \$4 million, and is at its core about drive and determination.

And then we ended at a dinner for Meryl Streep and her new movie, “ Florence Foster Jenkins,” which Paramount will release this August.

In it, Ms. Streep plays the eponymous socialite and amateur performer who actually couldn’t sing a note. But, to whatever end, she never relented on her dogged desire to perform, even at Carnegie Hall.

Jenkins, who would have likely found Dory the blue tang fish to be something of a kindred spirit, is regularly quoted as having said: “People may say I can’t sing, but no one can ever say I didn’t sing,”

Dinner, on an upper floor at Carnegie Hall, brought out Christine Baranski, Mercedes Bass, Barbara Walters, playwright John Guare, and a few people who can actually sing quite well, including Renée Fleming and Rufus and Martha Wainwright.

When it came to food, however, Jenkins “really only liked sandwiches and potato salad,” said Ms. Streep.

Thankfully or not, these selections were not what was being served for dinner.