



MUSE WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

'STILL WE RISE'

Annual Muse Conference, March 2-5 in downtown Bend, set to celebrate and inspire women's equality.

by Ronni Wilde, for The Bulletin Special Projects

The 2017 Muse Conference, an annual gathering and forum designed to inspire social change and awareness of women's rights, will take place in downtown Bend March 2-5.

This year's conference, themed "Still We Rise," is the fifth annual and features four days of activities including films, a salon series, an art show, a community yoga class, meetups, an "Art as Activism" workshop, a teen segment and an impressive list of guest speakers and presenters.

World Muse offers year-round programming, and the conference — which is expected to draw as many as 1,000 attendees — is a way to bring more of the community into the conversation

about equality, said Amanda Stuermer, founder of the World Muse organization and the Muse conference.

"This is a way to invite more solidarity; it's not just for women," she said. To drive that point home, Stuermer said this year's conference is featuring more male voices, and she and her team hope that more men will attend.

"We want to reflect the need for all of us to come around together on issues of equality and social justice," she said. "We see mainly women, and we'd like that to change."

Since its inception five years ago, Stuermer said the conference has grown each year.

"We've grown from two days

The Muse Conference celebrates International Women's Day, which is March 8, and serves to kick off National Women's History Month. This series of observances is presented throughout the U.S. by the National Women's History Project every March and honors women who have fought for equality over the decades. Following the Muse Conference, events will continue to take place in Bend at the Liberty Theater

throughout March as part of National Women's History Month.

Festivities taking place in March also include the "Count Her In" Celebration happening in Portland on Thursday, March 2. Hosted by Women's Foundation of Oregon, this event celebrates the publishing of "Count Her In," an extensive report that examines the challenges and triumphs of women in Oregon. Women's

Foundation of Oregon worked closely with World Muse to create this report, which is the first of its kind in two decades.

The "Count Her In" celebration will be held at 5:30 p.m. at Castaway Portland, 1900 NW 18th Ave. Single tickets are \$150, or \$1,500 for a table of 10. Registration closes Feb. 28. For details about this event, please visit www.womensfoundationoforegon.org.

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— Amanda Stuermer, World Muse founder

to four days, and added on more events and access points for the community," she said. "We are featuring more local leaders, and have opened up smaller events so people can get a local feel."

This year's lineup of presenters numbers about 30. Among those are Carmen Perez, the national co-chair of the Women's March on Washington; former NFL player Wade Davis, who speaks, writes and educates about gender, race and orientation equality; Julie Lewis, an activist and 30-year HIV survivor who is mother to Grammy-award-winning producer Ryan Lewis; Shireen Ahmed, a sports activist, freelance writer and public speaker who focuses on Muslim women and the intersections of racism and misogyny in sports; and author Holiday Reinhorn and her husband, actor Rainn Wilson, who portrayed "Dwight" in the long-running television series "The Office." Reinhorn and Wilson are both activists whose work involves using the arts and literacy to empower at-risk adolescent girls in rural Haiti. Other presenters include hip hop artists, CEOs, activists, healers, athletes, students and a slate of others.

"We try to bring in a good mix of people to show the many different ways to create change in the world," said Stuermer. "It doesn't have to look one way. We have a blend of front-line activists and many others, from artists to athletes to nuns." The nuns, she said, were excommunicated from the Catholic church because they promote social justice.

Sara Smith, an active member of World Muse and vice president of accounting for a local transportation

company, said she and her daughters are involved with Muse and attend the conference because they are aware of the challenges women face and hope to play a part in creating positive change.

"As a woman and a mother of two girls, I am keenly aware of the challenges that I face, as well as the ones that they face in their lives," said Smith. "I want my girls to live in a world where they are treated with respect and where they can flourish and live the life they want." She added, "Too often, the value of a woman is based first on her physical appearance, and everything else is secondary. Muse has helped both of my girls find their voices. It's a community where women and men support other women, not just here in Bend, or in Oregon, but around the world. Women's rights are human rights."

"In my dreams, I wanted the conference to be this big successful event, but it took our whole community to rally around it and make that dream a reality," said Stuermer. "I am so incredibly inspired by the way the community has come together to support this," she said, adding that the conference also receives support on a global scale. "We already have speakers for 2018. That's a testament to the fact that we need more of this."

As the event continues to grow, Stuermer said she and her team are ready to evolve and grow based on what the community wants to see.

"We are open to whatever changes come, but we have to be mindful of what we can sustain. We are tiny but mighty."

For more information about the Muse Conference or to register, please visit <http://theworldmuse.com>.



This year's conference begins on Thursday, March 2 with check-in from 4 to 6 p.m. and a film series from 5 to 8:30 p.m., both at the Muse Hub, located at the Liberty Theater, 849 NW Wall St. On Friday, March 3, the Salon Series (interactive panel discussions) will take place from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Muse Hub. This is followed by the Muse Art Show from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., featuring local and visiting artists. On Saturday, March 4, the Muse Conference Main Program will take place at the Tower Theater, 835 NW Wall St. This is a full day of keynote speakers, panels and performances taking place from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., followed by a reception at the Muse Hub from 5 to 7 p.m. The day concludes with a private dinner from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. for presenters and all-access pass holders. The event concludes on Sunday, March 5 at the Muse Hub with an Art Empowerment interactive workshop from 9 to 11 a.m., and a yoga class from 3 to 4:30 p.m.

Tickets are available on a per event basis, or for the conference as a whole. Tickets are \$10 each for the film series, \$10 per salon panel, \$45 for the Art Empowerment workshop, \$15 for the yoga class, \$150 for a day pass to the Saturday Main Program and \$375 for an all-access pass to the entire event. Youth passes to the Saturday Main Program are offered at \$95. Scholarships are available for local nonprofit organizations and schools.

Ticket sales officially close on March 3, however Stuermer said the event typically sells out the week prior to the start of the conference.

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