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Adam Lambert and Brian May of Queen perform onstage at the 2019 Global Citizen Festival: Power The Movement in Central Park in New York. — AFP photos



South Korean boy band NCT 127



US singer Pharrell

Queen and Adam Lambert rock festival urging foreign aid



US actor Rami Malek



US actor Leonardo DiCaprio



US actress Rachel Brosnahan

The legendary band Queen and glam frontman Adam Lambert led a packed Central Park on Saturday in mobilizing world governments to pledge international aid to eradicate extreme poverty and tackle climate change. An estimated 60,000 people crowded in the iconic Manhattan green space for the Global Citizen Festival, an unofficial exclamation point to the United Nations General Assembly which distributes free tickets to people who have worked towards the greater social good.

Entertainment mogul Pharrell Williams, soulful pianist Alicia Keys, R&B prodigy H.E.R., pop band OneRepublic, K-pop boy band NCT 127 and singer-songwriter Carole King also played the festival. Now in its eighth year at Central Park, the day of concerts saw fans young and old sway to classic Queen hits like "We Are The Champions," "Bohemian Rhapsody," and "We Will Rock You."

Frontman Adam Lambert, who has toured with the band for some eight years, led the charge as veteran Roger Taylor helmed the drums as guitarist Brian May delivered his signature anthemic guitar solos. The flamboyant Lambert went through a series of dramatic costume changes, finishing the show wearing a crown and a bright red military-esque uniform, as May dropped his long trench coat to reveal a t-shirt featuring the image of Queen's original lead singer Freddie Mercury, who died in 1991.

Like many of the other performers, Lambert used the moment to urge environmental protections. "We're asking fans to take action to ask certain governments around the world... to take part in helping take care of our oceans," Lambert said. "Fish and wildlife in the ocean are literally gagging on pieces of plastic and it's killing them."

A day prior the former "American Idol" contestant had told AFP he was thrilled to participate. "I love that they're encouraging people to push the more wealthy world governments into backing these initiatives with real funding so that the real change can happen," he said. "They're getting people involved on a task level, so it's actually educating all of our audience members."



US actor and singer Ben Platt

"It's a really brilliant set-up."

Believe in change

Prior to the Queen performance, Hollywood A-lister Leonardo DiCaprio made a surprise appearance to praise youth activists, including the Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, who have taken to the streets and addressed world leaders in leading a global climate movement. "Millions of individuals did more than simply walk out of their schools and places of employment. They took a stand," DiCaprio said. "They set an example of true leadership that our planet so desperately needs." "These young people have said clearly, definitively and without fear, that the time for inaction is over."

The Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Gaston Browne, unveiled a new path for the island nation to tackle plastic waste and design alternative materials, as Norway's Prime Minister Erna Solberg increased contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria to \$228 million by 2023. Germany meanwhile pledged \$11.1 million to the "Education Cannot Wait" fund, aimed at assisting children living in conflict and crisis zones, as Switzerland vowed \$6 million to it. Earlier this



US-Israeli actress Natalie Portman



US actress Laverne Cox



US actress Anna Kendrick

Cambodia's first gay dance troupe upends centuries of tradition

Gold jewelry glistening, six male dancers from Cambodia's first gay "Apsara" troupe swirl in unison on a dimly lit stage, their production a radical shake-up of a ballet form performed by women for more than a thousand years. "Some people say LGBTQ people are born abnormal," 23-year-old dancer Chan Sory tells AFP during a rehearsal in Phnom Penh. "So our goal is to use art to change their mindset."

He is part of Prumsodum Ok & Natyarasa, an all-male Apsara company trying to alter perceptions of the gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community in Cambodia—which is still plagued by prejudice. Bare-chested men wearing crowns and traditional sarongs glide through the slow, graceful movements of the Khmer dance, arching their hands back in poses normally performed by young women in golden dresses.

The soulful pop of Britain's Sam Smith, who recently came out as non-binary, is interwoven with traditional Khmer melodies. Apsara is a celebrated part of Khmer culture—dancers are engraved on the walls of the

Angkorian empire's surviving temples in Siem Reap—and founder Prumsodum Ok says some people are angry he is breaking with convention. "But once they see the quality of the dancing... they can see our love and devotion for the tradition," explains Prumsodum, a Cambodian-American choreographer.

Buddhist-majority Cambodia does not criminalize same-sex relations, but rights groups say the community still faces prejudices linking them to drug use and sex work and they are often caricatured on popular television shows. "My goal is to create a more dignified and realistic image of what it means to be LGBTQ and do it in a way where we don't become pigeonholed," said Prumsodum, who is also gay.

The child of refugees who fled the murderous Khmer Rouge regime, Prumsodum—now 32—grew up in California. He moved to Phnom Penh in 2015 to work on a dance project exploring the role of sexuality in Apsara, but stayed on once he saw young gay Cambodians' need for "a role model". The company is already making strides, and was even invited to perform at Cambodia's Ministry of Culture, which company members hope is a sign of changing times.

"Just the fact that they allow us to do what we do is a gift already," said Prumsodum. Troupe member Dy Puthik tells AFP he joined first because of his love of dance, which he did not have to opportunity to indulge while growing up. "Generally LGBTQ people have not been given value," he said. "I now realize that I am doing an important thing."—AFP



This photo shows choreographer Prumsodum Ok, right, with a member from the Prumsodum Ok & Natyarasa dance company during an Apsara dance performance in Phnom Penh. — AFP

Mexican crooner Jose Jose, hero of jilted lovers, dead at 71

Jose Jose, a velvety-voiced Mexican crooner who was wildly popular in Latin America over a 50-year career that spawned love song after love song, has died, the Mexican government and his son said Saturday. He was 71. Jose Romulo Sosa Ortiz, known as the "principe de la cancion," or prince of song, had suffered from pancreatic cancer.

"We regret to report the death of singer Jose Romulo Sosa, better known as Jose Jose... since the beginning of his career, the singer of 'El Triste' was one of the most beloved voices in Mexico," the country's Culture Ministry said on Twitter. Son Jose Joel posted images of black ribbons on his Facebook page, saying "we are trying to process the situation by having in our heart the divine promise that we will see and hold him again, never to be separated."

Mexican broadcaster Televisa, which Jose Jose worked with for much of his career, reported that the singer died Saturday at a hospital in Homestead, Florida, near Miami. His body was taken to a Miami funeral home later in the day where his wife, Sara Salazar, gave a brief statement to the press. "The love of my life has gone away," she said. In his heyday in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Jose Jose churned out hit records at a dizzying pace.

He sold more than 120 million records during his professional life, many of them featuring songs meant to comfort jilted lovers. His first international hit—"La Nave del Olvido," or "The Ship of Oblivion"—came out in 1970 and is still heard on Latin American radio stations from time to time. "He was an extraordinary singer," Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said.

"He made many people in my generation cry or feel happy with his songs," the 65-year-old leader said. "The best tribute that we can pay him is to remember and never stop listening to his songs. Some of his hits are just amazing." His lyrics could be heard playing in Mexico's streets and coming from houses, shops and cars throughout the after-

noon, as TV stations canceled previously planned programming to air remembrances. Jose Jose had an interest in mysticism, and in March 2018, when he revealed to his fans that he had been diagnosed with cancer, he blamed it on what he called negative energy surrounding him.

Romances and alcoholism

After the news of his death, fans flocked to Claveria, the middle-class neighborhood of the Mexican capital where Jose Jose grew up, to sing his best-known songs, including "El Triste." Some 300 fans, including older people who said they had met him, gathered in a park where his statue is located.

Jose Jose was very open with the press and his fans about his personal life, including his romances and battle with alcoholism. "He was my idol. It's very sad... life was very unfair to him," Mexican singer Vicente Fernandez, who performed a ranchera song with Jose Jose, told Televisa.

In 2008, Jose Jose published his autobiography, "This is My Life," and promoted it as an inspiration for people battling addiction. He quit drinking in 1993, but the hard life he had led, the strain on his voice after decades of performing, and other health issues silenced his beloved tenor tones. He stopped singing in the early 2000s. Sosa Ortiz was born in Mexico City to a family of musicians. As a small child, he got his first taste of that world by singing in school choirs.

As a teen, he performed in taverns and sang serenades until he recorded his first album in 1969. It was a smash hit. That was when he took Jose Jose as his showbiz name, the second Jose meant to honor his father, who had died a year earlier. The crooner married three times and fathered three children. He married his Cuban widow, Salazar, in 1995. They moved from Mexico to Miami that same year.

In an interview in January 2018 on Telemundo to promote a TV series based on his life, Jose Jose was a mere shadow of what he had been. He spoke in a weak, fragile voice, his face partially paralyzed. Asked about love, the man who spent decades singing about it, said that throughout his life, he had never been able to stand up for himself with his lovers. "They did absolutely whatever they wanted with me," he said.—AFP