Jasmine Guy’s ‘power’ radiates and inspires

Actress and director Jasmine Guy will tell you that she has come to understand her "power' and that each of us must do the same thing.

Guy – 52 and still a striking beauty – shared the spotlight Thursday morning with five extraordinary women at the 2014 Annual Tribute Luncheon sponsored by the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis (WFGM).

Guy's inspiring keynote, "Passion, Power, and Purpose," was an address worthy of a successful Hollywood actress and theater director, capping off a distinguished tribute to the WFGM's Legends Award honorees: Nancy Bogatin, Dr. Erma Clanton, Frances Dancy Hooks, Mary Shainberg, and Modeane Thompson.

Video presentations lauded the accomplishments of each legend and how their contributions have changed the city's landscape over the years. Set in the quiet elegance of the Cook Convention Center Grand Ballroom downtown, the event hosted more than 500 attendees.

"I feel honored to share the platform with these great women," Guy said. "Memphis is such a beautiful city, and I appreciate the efforts of the city mayor and the county mayor to make Memphis one of the best cities in the country."

Guy laced her dynamic speech with bits of comedy.

"I didn't have a boyfriend until I was 28." (Laughter from the audience). "Well, I wasn't quite 28, but almost." (More laughter)

"Passion, power, and purpose – I found my passion early. I was 12 when I saw the Alvin Ailey Dancers on stage. When I got home, I told my parents, 'That's what I'm going to do with my life.' I had always danced, but I didn't know you could actually do that as a job. I got the opportunity one summer to study with the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, and that's how my professional career started."

Guy declared that power and freedom comes in knowing what your passion is, all that it may encompass. Her parents were educators who encouraged her to perfect one talent and get really good at that one thing.

"I danced, I sang, I acted, and I loved doing all of it. For me, performing gave me a connection with God, in accordance with what I felt I was meant to do. Sometimes, I was a singer, sometimes a dancer, or an actor, and then, sometimes, I would be doing all three. When I resigned myself to doing all that I was gifted to do, there was a power in that."
"My father would always say, 'Don't be a jack of all trades and a master of none.' I must have heard that a million times. But in pursuing my dreams, I pursued all of my passion. I realized my own power in that pursuit. ... 

"You need to understand your power, and that you are free to choose your own path."

Guy began her acting career on the Broadway stage, where she toured the globe. Fans came to know her best as the pretentious but funny southern belle, Whitley Gilbert, on the "Cosby Show" spinoff, "A Different World." She landed six consecutive NAACP Image Awards for her sitcom role.

Presently, Guy has a recurring role on the television series, "Vampire Diaries," as Grams, descendent from a long and powerful line of witches. Guy directed the world premiere of the opera, "Dream," portraying the life and journey of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., at Atlanta's Alliance Theater.

She landed roles in several movies, including Spike Lee's "School Daze"; Eddie Murphy's "Harlem Nights"; Alex Hailey's "Queen," and Debbie Allen's "Stompin' at the Savoy."

Guy is also the spokesperson for the I Am Not Yours! Campaign, a support organization for advocates against child sex trafficking.

About the legends...

**Nancy Bogatin** – A philanthropist most noted for helping to create the Memphis Literacy Council and has spearheaded many efforts to boost public education.

**Dr. Erma Clanton** – Opened up the world of theater arts to African-American children as a teacher at Melrose High School for 25 years. She later produced critically acclaimed stage productions at Memphis State University (Now University of Memphis) as the college’s first African-American theater professor.

**Frances Dancy Hooks** – She was an educator for 24 years before she gave up her career to be with her husband, Dr. Benjamin L. Hooks, who was appointed in 1972 as the first African-American Federal Communications Commissioner. She remained at her husband's side during his tenure as national president of the NAACP.

**Mary Shainberg** – A philanthropist and tireless volunteer, particularly at LeBonheur Hospital and the Memphis Jewish Home and Rehab Center.

**Modeane Thompson** – Worked as a social worker for Family Services of Memphis. Thompson was quite active in both Birmingham and Memphis during the turbulent civil rights era of the 1960s. She is a community organizer who has advocated for families affected by the Kansas Street urban renewal and Boxtown redevelopment.