

'The White House won't say anything': Adam Rippon uses his voice to take a stance

EXCLUSIVE: Rippon discusses being a role model, his first time meeting Gus Kenworthy, and more



US figure skater Adam Rippon is an icon | Photo: Provided

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Anya Crittenton

Figure Skater **Adam Rippon** has not only dazzled people on the ice, but off it as well. Since springing to national fame during the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in 2018, Rippon has made his voice known as an LGBTI activist and icon.

This Saturday (27 April), the **San Francisco Gay Men's Chorus** will present Rippon with the **Trailblazer Award** at the **41st Season Crescendo Gala** at the Fairmont San Francisco.

GSN spoke to Rippon ahead of receiving his award for being a role model and experiencing the Olympics with fellow out athlete Gus Kenworthy.

What feels right

Rippon takes a moment to consider receiving the award.

'It feels,' he pauses. 'Right.'

He grew up performing in choir, but also as a 'really young kid who felt so embarrassed'. To now be receiving an award for helping other LGBTI people feel comfortable in their own skin, he says, feels full circle.

'The things I'm able to do, the people I get to speak with — it's the people who've come before me who did so much work for other LGBTQ people to have more rights, to live their truest lives, that I'm able to have successes because of them,' he goes on to explain.

'Now I feel a responsibility to be able to do the same thing for others. Not just people who look like me, but for everyone. I think it's important to speak for our trans brothers and sisters, who don't feel comfortable using the bathroom, or who can't serve in the military.

'I think it's important to speak up for all people, just like those who spoke up for people like me in the past.'

To Chechnya and Brunei: 'We hear you'

As his career progresses, Rippon says he finds it more fulfilling to support and motivate others. He does this on the ice by training younger skaters, as well as off the ice when he discusses LGBTI activism.

'It's so important to speak up, because I think we know by now this White House administration won't say anything,' Rippon states matter-of-factly.

He believes this applies to both domestic and international matters.

'They won't condemn white supremacy that's here at home, of course they're not going to focus on world LGBTQ issues,' he continues about the Trump-Pence administration.

‘It’s up to us to spread the word, to speak up and be vocal. We need to make it clear to the people of Chechnya and Brunei that, “We hear you, we’re doing what we can to spread the word, so action is taken.”’

Talking politics with Gus

America became aware of Rippon in a big way last winter in PyeongChang, when he swept into everyone’s hearts like an outspoken hurricane on ice.

He and freestyle skier Gus Kenworthy were the first two openly gay male winter Olympians from the US.

‘The first time Gus and I met was at the Opening Ceremony,’ Rippon recalls. ‘We were chatting, and I felt like I was talking to an old friend. Gus looked at me and just said, “You want to walk in together?” And I thought, “Yeah, I do.”’

‘We got to walk in together and I thought of how big of a moment this was – I remember being young and thinking that being gay is something I’ll never tell anybody. It’s gonna be my secret forever. To go from there to walking as an out gay person at the Olympic games with someone else who was also out and openly gay, it was surreal.’

They won people over not only with their athleticism, but their vocal politics. Some, however, didn’t love that and muttered the close-minded idea that athletes should ‘stick to’ sports.

Rippon has a simple message for those people: ‘To the people who say, “stick to your job,” well, what is your job? As an athlete or a public figure, or anyone who has a platform, if you want, you can take on the responsibility and be a voice for a lot of people. For me personally, I felt like I had to say something. I knew people were watching me, I knew people were listening, that’s why I felt like it was important.’

Be authentic

Looking forward, Rippon wants to see more authenticity — everywhere.

In figure skating, he reminds GSN, ‘you only have a few minutes to prove and show who you are’.

‘If you aren’t able to do that authentically, you’re not doing that to the best of your abilities. The best of your abilities is how well you know yourself,’ he says. ‘If you are being truly authentic, you will be

heard and seen. That's why it was so important for me to be out at the Olympics, especially later in my career. I felt like I only had something to gain.'

That's also why it's LGBTI youth across the world who inspire him.

'I remember when I was young, and I would have never had the courage to speak my truth. That's what inspires me – the young kids of today, because they're going to change the world and we can learn from them.'