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Brownstein: Music video pays tribute to resilience of children, teachers

EMSB-sponsored project was largely a labour of love for Randi Katz and Tony Picciuto of The Directors Showband, and IND Films.

Bill Brownstein • Montreal Gazette
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Montreal songwriting team Randi Katz and Tony Picciuto head the Directors Showband. Business is starting to get better, after having dried up. "To be honest, I was completely depressed at the beginning. But we can take heart by looking at the resolve of the students and their teachers," Katz says. PHOTO BY DAVE SIDAWAY /Montreal Gazette

Montreal singers Randi Katz and Tony Picciuto head the Directors Showband, which for more than 20 years has subsisted on providing high-energy entertainment for private and corporate events, galas and fundraisers. Then came the pandemic, and their business, like so many others in the same field, largely dried up.

So they decided to go back to school. Sort of.



Rather than dive into a deep funk, Katz and Picciuto put their energies into creating a music video that pays tribute to others who spent much of the last year and a half shut down as well: schoolchildren and their teachers.

Not only does the resultant upbeat music video, Share the Love (We're Better Together), salute their resilience, but it also features more than 500 students from 25 English Montreal School Board (EMSB) youth sector schools and two adult centres. Plus, members of three families of students got to partake in a portion of the video shot at Beaver Lake with Katz and Picciuto.

The video will be officially released on YouTube and the EMSB's Facebook page Monday at 7 p.m., in advance of EMSB classes starting on Tuesday.

"For many years, we would write music, sometimes for ourselves but mostly for corporate clients," says Katz, noting that among those corporate entities were Bombardier and Broccolini Construction. "So we figured the time was ripe during the pandemic to branch out and write more.

"Back in February, in the midst of the lockdown and curfews, we were scratching our heads trying to figure out how we could pivot and do something to bring our community together, because we literally had no connection to our community then. We felt horrible for our clients and those in our industry."

So they created a musical video Valentine for their clients and released it online. It caught the attention of Mike Cohen, the EMSB's

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marketing and communications manager, who contacted Katz and Picciuto to ask if they would be interested in assembling a music video dedicated to students and teachers.

“Then it really hit home. As bad as we felt for those in our industry and our clients, we really couldn’t understand how children were coping with something so disastrous and isolating. It was like having to deal with being grounded for a period that no one knew when it would all end. We had already felt we needed to do something in that area. So when Mike called, it was a no-brainer. Of course, we would do something. It’s almost as if it was mandated for us to do.”

Almost immediately after that first contact, they wrote the song Share the Love (We’re Better Together). Then they worked with their partners at IND Films to create the all-inclusive music video set for release.

“It has a kind of fight-song theme to it,” Picciuto says. “It is so unlike anything we’ve ever done, but it certainly gets the message across how students and their teachers have coped.”

Share the Love (We're Better Together)



“It’s a song of hope, a song for the future,” Katz says. “As the song goes: ‘We’re in this now. We’re in this together.’ And we’re going to get through this together.”

This was largely a labour of love for the duo and IND Films. While production costs were covered by the EMSB, Katz and Picciuto were paid a fraction of their usual rate.

“We’re not a charity,” Picciuto says. “We would normally charge three times that amount for something like this. But at times like this, it’s far better to give than to receive.”

For the 13 members of the Directors Showband, it would make life a lot easier if they could get back on stage for large receptions and events.

“Now we’re able to do scaled-down, outdoor receptions with limited crowds and with scaled-back duos and trios,” Picciuto says.

“But it’s a start.”

But it's a start.

“We’re working now at about 30 per cent of what our business was,” Katz says. “But on the bright side, that still beats the 0 per cent we were working on during the height of the pandemic.

“To be honest, I was completely depressed at the beginning. But we can take heart by looking at the resolve of the students and their teachers. The EMSB calls what we did a ‘wellness video,’ but it was as much about our striving for wellness as it was for them. Now we can also see some light at the end of the tunnel.”

Even perhaps a tango or two.

AT A GLANCE:

The link to the music video *Share the Love (We’re Better Together)*: youtu.be/qAYeFhpMo_Y

It will be officially released on YouTube and the EMSB’s Facebook page Monday at 7 p.m.

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