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Interview with Colin Dussault - A Song For Our Children Stand Up, Speak Up (A song against "Weapons of Class Destruction")

By Helen Marketti

Cleveland area musician Colin Dussault has written a song for the children in our lives who may wonder if it will be a safe day at school. Gone are the days where we went to school and never gave a thought that an active shooter could storm the building. Unfortunately, in today's world, it is something that must be considered regardless of city, school, or grade level. What began as a poem Colin has turned into a song expressing the emotions parents and their children face as the school day begins and ends. A collective effort came together when Colin asked other Cleveland musicians and students to lend a hand for this worthwhile project. In this Q and A, Colin shares his thoughts as to how this song transpired.

NCV: Please share how this project got started:

CD: The song came about in the aftermath of the Parkland, Florida school shootings. I woke up in the middle of the night after viewing the news reports of yet another school shooting. I was broken hearted and very sad over the way our children's youth and innocence had been destroyed by gun violence AGAIN!

I have an 11-year-old daughter (10 at the time of the Parkland shooting) and it really hit home. I really was upset and saddened by the fact that she and other children her age have to live through this.

Additionally, when the Parkland students marched and were met with resistance and negative reactions, it blew my mind. How could these victims be victimized all over again by "adults" with an agenda that contradicts the simple premise of keeping kids safe. As a result, I kept waking up night after night thinking of verses. Finally, I had to get out of bed and write. I wrote the song at 3:30 in the morning.

I wrote it as a poem for my daughter, Sophia. It became clear that it would be a poem for all the children who have had their lives and sense of peace shattered.

Once written, I emailed it to my



friend Alex Bevan and asked if he might be interested in tweaking it and add his brilliance. He instantly replied in the affirmative and within a few days had emailed a demo!

NCV: Had this been a song that may have been percolating prior with other tragic events in our country?

CD: I think the idea had been germinating within me for some time. One cannot help but be affected by the way the nation has turned from a peaceful and unified nation to a country of bickering and warring political factions. Left vs. Right, Conservative vs. Liberal, Republican vs. Democrat, gun owner vs. parent, etc. It really has affected me. I am very disheartened with what we have become as a nation. The stripping away of voter's rights, the partisan politics, the current "President," the negativity, the school shootings - all have led to this song.

NCV: No student should ever have to attend school wondering what will happen that day or any day. What do you think can be done or should be done? I know there is never an exact answer and no one magic formula.

CD: There is no easy answer, but surely common sense gun legislation has to commence. Clearly, there needs to be a national gun registry, stricter uniform laws. Stiffer penalties and quite honestly, we need to put OUR rights as citizens above the rights of a person who wants to own a weapon. Furthermore, there is no reason why an individual should own, have access to, or possess high-powered automatic

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or semi automatic guns and military grade weapons with high volume clips and magazines with capabilities to mow down hundreds of victims at a time. The time for debate has long passed. I have a child who attends a public school. She and I are afraid every day for her safety. That is disgusting and unforgivable. I see politicians and groups with money and special interests continuing to allow this to happen to our kids.

NCV: Your song sends a message. It leaves the listener with thought provoking words. I like how you brought in youth of all ages to participate as well. Did any of them share their thoughts with you about being afraid to attend school?

CD: Several kids thanked us. Several mentioned how they do "the drills" at school. They expressed their fears. It was very inspirational the way the "kids choir" came to be. It started with my daughter and her best friend Audrey and her brother Max. From there it became clear that we needed more voices. We needed THEIR voices. This was for THEM - the kids.

I put the word out through social media that we needed kids to sing, ages 5 to 18, and before we knew it, we had over 35 kids whose parents agreed to bring them to the studio. It really did run itself. I was simply holding the wheel gently as the song steered itself to where it wanted to go. The key is not to mess that up, just let the creative process take over and gently keep it between the lines. We started with the young voices, just three or four of them, then augmented the chorus with each pass. The idea being, it started out as a few voices and like the movements, demonstrations, and outrage over the shootings, the voices grew stronger, larger, and bigger!

NCV: You have a cast of talented Cleveland area musicians who have contributed to this piece. What were some of their thoughts towards your project?

CD: Everybody was in the mindset that enough is enough. We are all saddened by the rash of violence and the way our society has been ripped apart by politics, greed, etc... I know they were all eager to lend their voices for positive change.

Alex Bevan: When Colin first contacted me, the song was still a poem. I thought it was powerful and emotional. I thought it was heartfelt in the wake of the Parkland, Florida shootings. What made the poem even more powerful is that Colin was speaking as a father. I have known Colin for quite some time. He asked me to put the poem to music. So I sat down, worked on it, changed a couple of things, but it was Colin who did all the heavy lifting for this project. I turned it into a campfire song, I envisioned it as not a protest song but something that was all-inclusive, where everyone agreed.

Finally, I like that it is a "Cleveland song." The artists who contributed are my friends and colleagues and we have been out here plying our craft and playing our music for decades. We all respect and love one another.

The idea was to have the song unfold, not push back. I made a demo, sent it back, and he asked what my thoughts were if we recorded it. I was in. He contacted several other Cleveland musicians who are also creative forces. I lent a hand where I could but Colin took the ball and ran with it.

NCV: Please share where proceeds will be distributed.

CD: From the beginning, I told Alex Bevan and the others involved that in no way did I want to "profit" from the song and the violence. I immediately sent out emails and messages to several groups.

The first group I thought of was March For Our Lives. However, I received no replies from them. I actually ran into this with several groups.

I was somewhat surprised at their

Continued on page 10

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Continued from page 9

lack of response, but undaunted, I continued to research and reach out. Finally, I was able to elicit a reply from Molly Crowe, a Volunteer Local Chapter Leader for Moms Demand Action For Gun Sense in America. After a few email exchanges and a 45-minute phone call, we agreed that I would send profits and proceeds from this song to that group.

NCV: Do you play this song at all of your shows? How has it been received?

CD: Yes, we are performing the song at our shows. Obviously, we have to be careful as to when we do it, but at some point in every performance the band and I reach a comfort level where the audience and I (we) are connected and know each other a little bit. At that point, I explain the genesis of the song and we perform it. It has been met with great applause, some tears, a few standing ovations and has resulted in sales of the CD single. Of course, we then do a "happy" fun song immediately after to get the party back. But I like that we can incorporate a "protest song" into the show. A song with a message. From time to time, I can feel it hitting a vein and really connecting with a room.

NCV: Is there anything else you wanted to mention or discuss?

CD: The artists who donated their time all deserve mention. Of course, Alex Bevan, who took my poem and gave it melody and structure; Walkin' Cane who lent his great guitar playing along with Alex, Chris Keffer who recorded and engineered it, and Michael Stanley, who lent his voice to the song. I am such a huge fan of both Alex and Michael and it is a thrill and an honor to think they lent their voices, time and talent to something that I co-wrote and produced. Furthermore, the other musicians who answered my call when asked deserve credit as well. I did not start out thinking I would have all of these voices on the song. It just drove itself in that direction.

The one thing it shows is that we are all of the same mindset in that we are tired of witnessing what we are witnessing. We used our voices and our talent to do and say something about it. I really feel isolated and depressed over the way we, as a nation, a society and even communities have been sepa-

rated, divided, split, and torn in two because of divisive political issues, partisan politics and ideals. The fact we all joined as one voice really restored my faith in humanity, the creative process, and the arts. I feel as if for a brief moment, we were all one in the same and we did something, said something, and created something that is positive loving, and needed. It really is my way of telling my daughter and all children that I am proud of them and I am embarrassed about how we have failed them. We have failed to protect them. We have failed as grownups. We have fallen way short of where we need to be in terms of laws and common sense. That is some of what this song is about.

Finally, I like that it is a "Cleveland song." The artists who contributed are my friends and colleagues and we have been out here plying our craft and playing our music for decades. We all respect and love one another. The fact we added John Adams (the drummer from centerfield at the Indians games) to the ensemble was so cool. He is a dear friend. And with him and all of the others, it is a Cleveland project. I would have liked to have had Dorothy Fuldheim, but she is gone, Superhost never called back, and Barnaby was too expensive! But sans those three, it is a Cleveland effort and is something I am very, very proud creating with the help of my friends.

Note: In addition to the above mentioned artist Colin was joined by many other Cleveland musicians for solo lines and harmonies. The following artist contributed their time: Rachel Brown, Becky Boyd, Chris Allen, Thor Platter, Anne E. DeChant, Jim Tighe, Eroc Sosinski, Rich Spina, Kristine Jackson, and more than 35 northeast Ohio school-children who brought this composition to life. The song was recorded, mixed, and mastered over the course of five sessions (April 5, 10, 11, 14, 25, and 29), at Magnetic North Recording Studios in Beachwood, by Chris Keffer.

"A Song for Our Children" song and video can be viewed and purchased at www.songforourchildren.com All proceeds donated to organizations that support March For Our Lives causes.