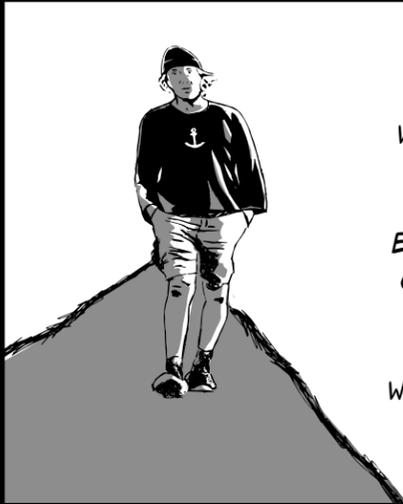


IN 2000, WOLSELEY RESIDENT AND ARTIST DAREK DAWDA PICKED UP HIS GUITAR AND CHALLENGED HIMSELF TO BECOME A SINGER-SONGWRITER. TO MARK HIS 52ND BIRTHDAY, HE LAUNCHED THE AEL MUSIC PROJECT. THROUGHOUT 2018, HE IS VIDEO RECORDING AND RELEASING A SONG A WEEK ON THE WEB.



"IT'S THE MOST EXCITING THING, TO WRITE A SONG THAT YOU LIKE. IT'S SUCH AN AMAZING ACTIVITY TO ENGAGE IN; IT FEELS SO GOOD TO SING, SO GOOD. I COULD WORK ON MUSIC TEN HOURS A DAY. IT WOULD BE THE HAPPIEST LIFE FOR ME."

AEL: A VOICE REVEALED



HE DEBUTED THE PROJECT WITH HIS SPOUSE JESSICA GONZALEZ PERFORMING HARMONIES. NOT LONG AFTER, THEY INVITED OTHER LOCAL MUSICIANS TO RECORD WITH THEM.



"I HAVE NEVER PUT THIS MUCH EFFORT INTO TRYING TO GET A SONG TO BE RECORD-ABLE; I WORK HARD ON THOSE SONGS. WE HAVE ONLY TWO AND A HALF HOURS TO RECORD TWO SONGS AND THE MUSICIANS HAVEN'T PLAYED THEM BEFORE, SO I HAVE AN INITIAL CONCEPT AND THEN I OPEN IT UP TO THEM."



I ASK DAWDA, IF TWENTY YEARS AGO, SOMEONE PREDICTED HE WAS GOING TO REALIZE THIS MUSIC PROJECT, HOW WOULD HE WOULD HAVE REACTED.



"I'D PROBABLY FIRST LAUGH, THEN I'D THINK, WELL ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE."

WHEN DAWDA WAS YOUNGER HE COULDN'T SING. IN HIS WORDS HE SAYS HIS VOICE WAS TERRIBLE. HOWEVER, HE ALWAYS LOVED SINGING, EVEN AFTER AN EMBARRASSING CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE WHERE HIS VOICE FAILED HIM WHILE PERFORMING IN CHURCH, IT LEFT HIM FEELING HUMILIATED. DESPITE THE ADVERSITY, HIS DESIRE TO SING DID NOT DIMINISH.



"THERE WAS A MANTRA IN MY HEAD: 'IF ONLY I COULD SING, THAT'S ALL I WOULD DO'. THEN I HAD THIS VERY DEFINING MOMENT WHEN I SAID TO MY SON, 'ADAM, I'M GOING TO LEARN TO SING!'"



THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT HE DID. SINCE THAT TIME, HE DEDICATED MUCH OF HIS FREE TIME TO PRACTICING GUITAR, TAKING VOICE LESSONS AND WRITING MUSIC; HE NOW HAS A CATALOGUE OF MORE THAN 70 SONGS. DAWDA SAYS PERSEVERANCE AND A POSITIVE ATTITUDE GOT HIM THIS FAR AND AT 52 YEARS OLD, HE BELIEVES IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO LIVE OUT YOUR PASSION.



"I STARTED THE JOURNEY WITH A QUESTION OF 'CAN I LEARN HOW TO SING?' AND NOW THAT QUESTION IS TURNING MORE INTO, 'YES I CAN, NOW I WANT TO SING WELL CONSISTENTLY!'"

I ASK WHAT IT MEANS FOR HIM TO HAVE THIS CREATIVE OUTLET IN LIFE.

"I JUST CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT BEING CREATIVE. I THINK IT'S A WAY OF HAVING YOUR VOICE IN THE WORLD; AND MUSIC, IT'S SO MUCH FUN. IT'S A PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, IT'S VOCALIZING AND EXPRESSING YOURSELF."



I PUT THE SONGS OUT AND I STAND BEHIND THEM, PEOPLE HEAR THEM AND IT'S PRETTY AMAZING."

AS FOR LIVE PERFORMANCE, DAWDA SAYS HE IS GOING TO TAKE IT ONE STEP AT A TIME AND CONCENTRATE ON FINISHING HIS RECORDINGS FIRST. HE WILL CONSIDER THE NEXT STAGE OF HIS PROJECT ONCE THEY ARE COMPLETED. TO FOLLOW THE AEL MUSIC PROJECT, VISIT AELMUSIC.COM.

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