

ART

PLACE

ARTIST

MARLEY GIUNTA



Marley is a passionate musician and performing artist, as well as an award-winning songwriter. She continues to compose for guitar and voice, as well as explore other art forms that inspire her and enrich her musical world.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The project will invite seniors from Unitarian House of Ottawa to be recognized and celebrated for their musical talents by doing sessions and following them over a course of a few months. The goal of the project is to inspire and encourage participants to share their musical talents through recording and building a live performance.

PARTNER SITE

The mission of **Unitarian House of Ottawa** is to continue to provide a not-for-profit residence for seniors where, in a secure and caring environment, residents will have maximum independence, opportunities for personal fulfillment, companionship and participation in a dynamic, collaborative community of residents, staff and management.

ABOUT ART PLACE

Art Place, a 3-year professional artist-in-residence program, addresses social issues by placing artists and arts groups in community settings to co-create art projects and provide free of charge arts programming. The 2015-2016 projects enable participants from non-profit groups, in Ottawa, to take creative journeys through theatre, dance, music, storytelling and visual art. Art Place amplifies voices in various underserved communities touched by the project, to tell their stories and share their unique perspectives.

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Blog Post 1 - Dec 2, 2015

As I sat down at the first Lounge Room Session, I was surprised that I felt so nervous. I began to introduce myself and my project and halfway into it, I realized that I had completely lost the group. They either couldn't hear me or didn't understand what I was explaining to them.

When I asked if they had any thoughts on what I was saying, ideas to contribute, or interest in co-creating an art project with me, all I got back was a long pause and then.... "Are you here to play songs for us honey?"

That was the moment I realized I was in brand new territory as a music facilitator and that working with older adults was a unique and different experience than any other I had. My years of hosting open mic nights and music jams had not prepared me for this in the least. It felt

a bit like a free fall. Was this project even going to work?

I decided to take things slow, let go of all expectations and start singing, encouraging anyone and everyone to sing with me. My doubt didn't last long. A couple songs into it we found one we all knew and intuitively sang it together perfectly on the first try. It was beautiful. When the song ended we all felt the echo of it in the room. Everyone was smiling and looking around at each other... it amazed me. A man showed up with a lap harp, another with a violin. The songs just kept coming out of us, the language of music connecting us all together. I realized in letting go of my expectations I made room for exactly what I was hoping for.

"When nothing is sure, anything is possible." - Margaret Atwood



A TRIBUTE TO MY MUSICAL ROOTS

Blog post 2 - December 23, 2015

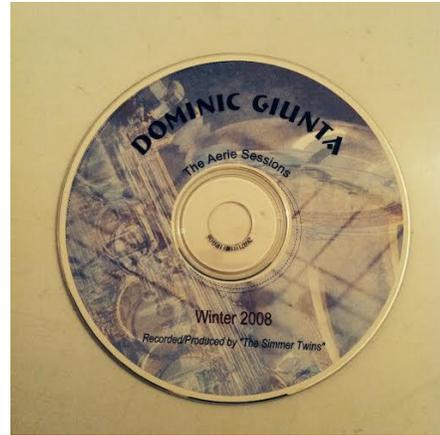
My grandfather Dominic Giunta was a talented opera singer, a tenor. He sang most of his life in choirs, churches and shows in his spare time, but never "pursued" a career in the arts, choosing instead blue collar, basic pay jobs. I know life was tough and he did what he felt he had to do to put food on the table for my father

and his five siblings, but I always wonder what would have happened if he had the support and freedom to explore a career in opera. My sister and I were fortunate to grow up in a musical family and supported in all our musical passions, so I want to do what I can in my lifetime to support the musical passions of others.



I am lucky to have been able to sing with my grandfather growing up, he had a powerful and emotional voice which aged beautifully. As a tribute to this, my father had the idea to record a CD of my grandfather singing at the age of 70

years old. I loved this project and I cherish this CD to this day. I believe it is never too late to be honoured for your talents and creative projects. I love that I have this CD of my grandfather singing, and it was a huge inspiration for my Art Place project. I know if my Grandpa were still alive today, he would be here singing along with us.



THAT DAY, EVERYONE WAS SINGING...

Blog post 3 - January 6, 2016

They just kept rolling in, I have never seen so many walkers. I guess by the fourth week the word had got out about Tuesday night music jams. I was scrambling to find more chairs and places for people to sit. It was Christmas time and everyone was excited to sing carols for the second week in a row.

The week before was energetic and joyous, we went around the circle choosing our favourite carols to sing and helping each other remember the words while ringing our jingle bells and tapping our drums. At first, it seemed a bit silly to me that they wanted to sing all those carols. They wanted to sing every carol I had ever heard of... seemingly every Christmas carol in

existence!

At one point though, looking around the room, it dawned on me that these wonderful elders had a deep and sincere yearning for these holiday songs, and I thought about how powerful these songs must be for them; bringing back emotions or memories from their lives.

One of the participants, Eileen (who has reached the impressive age of 99) told us about how every Sunday afternoon growing up, her family and friends would gather around the piano and sing songs together. She said the singalongs at Christmas time were her favourite; she waited all year for them.



This week was the week before Christmas, but it was special for another reason as well... I had the inspiration to invite my sister Wallis and her husband John to the session as they were home for the holidays from Europe and just happened to be amazingly talented professional opera singers. Everyone thought this was a grand idea! Some of the participants are often a bit shy or sometimes tell me "oh, I can't sing really, I love music but I'm no good at singing" but that day, everyone was singing.

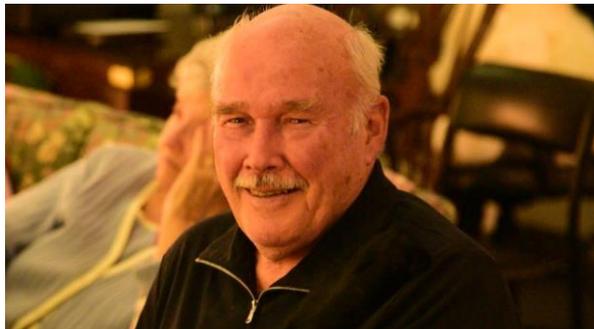


We were a big group and we raised our voices loud. It was wonderful to all be in the same room, holding space and singing together, singing with my family and my friends around the piano... The carols no longer seemed silly, they felt like the most sacred songs I had ever heard. I'm sure most of the participants had strong memories attached to those tunes, as most closed their eyes while singing. I felt deeply moved witnessing this. I felt grateful for everything that had come together so that I could be there. What a gift!



THANK YOU ANDY

Blog post 4 - January 20, 2016



I want to take the opportunity to share my gratitude for one of residents at Unitarian House who has contributed so greatly to the success of my project. Andy Pritchard showed up at the first lounge room session with an old fiddle and a twinkle in his eye. I encouraged him to play whatever he felt like, and even though he was clearly rusty and hadn't played in awhile he had the courage to show up and try. There was a bit of an awkward moment on that first day when Andy was struggling through a song slowly, and people were looking anxiously at me like they were wondering, is this what's supposed to happen? I just kept smiling and listening and giving my attention to Andy to show them that what was happening was great

and was what I expected. Then, all of a sudden, one of the other ladies yelled out, "That's it honey! It sounds great, keep going!" to Andy. His face lit up in a smile and I felt a shift in everyone's energy, like we all relaxed simultaneously. It was a beautiful and transformative moment, and a memory I will never forget.

Andy got better and better each week. It was amazing. His wife thanked me after a few sessions, telling me that he had a new spring in his step and that he hadn't played in many, many years but now he's practicing at home and there is a noticeable change in him. "Tuesday is his day," she said, "he looks forward to it all week!"



Not only was he a regular and enthusiastic participant in the sessions but I truly could not have done what I did without him, musically speaking. He knew all the old tunes (that I did not!) and helped me figure them out on the spot on my guitar as people requested them.

He carried the singsong with his fiddle playing and his enthusiasm. He came to every session and contributed SO much. A stand up man and a great fiddle player with a bright smile and a heart of gold. Thank you Andy!

UNEXPECTED GIFTS...

Blog post 5 - March 11, 2016

When I sat down to write my application to be an artist-in-residence for this year's Art Place program, I was singularly focused on how I could use my strengths and skills set to meaningfully contribute to the lives of elders in our community. I value their life experience and wisdom and feel a deep sadness in learning about older folks in seniors homes suffering from loneliness, isolation and boredom. It doesn't feel right to me, and I have always admired other cultural practices, especially those of Indigenous peoples that respect and revere the power and wisdom of their Elders.

I was thrilled that my project was chosen and that the wonderful Unitarian House of Ottawa welcomed my request to do my residency there. In the application process, we were asked to define what we saw as the successful outcome of our project. I had outlined success as having a positive impact on the lives of the participants, empowering them through our sessions and contributing meaningfully to their lives.

So I began my project with high hopes and within a couple of weeks I got lots of confirmation that I was, in fact, having a positive impact on their lives. They loved the sessions, all was well. Hurray!

Then the funniest thing happened....

Spending week after week with these wonderful folks, and sharing such a positive space in our sessions, I started to realize that I was feeling really empowered myself! It was so unexpected when I realized this, I laughed out loud. Then, almost simultaneously, I was struck by a deep gratitude for all of the gifts I was receiving from these wonderful people. They were teaching me about patience and acceptance. They were

reminding me about slowing down, being playful, letting loose. They were teaching me old Irish songs that I could sing to my grandmother to bring her joy. They were reminding me to be courageous and trying new things. They were simply yet deeply appreciating and acknowledging me and it was such a meaningful contribution to MY well-being.

How cool is that?

I set out to give a gift and ended up receiving one as well. I have also received a lot of inspired ideas from this project including beginning a cross-generational podcast series and a business creating custom nourishing meals delivered to seniors with mobility issues. This project has definitely inspired me on my path to go towards more work with seniors and to study more about healing arts and music therapy. I find a calmness in spending time with older people, a



wonderful and refreshing change to our modern, fast-paced and high pressure culture. I am so grateful that Art Place focuses on collaboration with community, because it was through our collaboration that all of these gifts

came to be. We all have something wonderful

to contribute.

“The beauty of collaboration between older and younger generations is that we combine strength with wisdom—a surefire way to accomplish more” – *Brett Harris*

PROJECT CHECK IN WITH MARLEY GIUNTA

March 23, 2016

What did it mean for your participants to create with music together and record sessions? Why was this important to them?

Playing music together makes us happy. It connects us. Everyone has a need to feel connected to others in meaningful ways. I think that the Lounge Room Sessions were important in creating a time and space for this to happen easily. It was an activity which was very inclusive and easy to participate in. You could just sit there, close your eyes and still be appropriately participating. It didn't really matter if you knew the music or not, or you played an instrument or not. Most of the participants were just excited to be there and hold space for people like Andy to play his violin, and to acknowledge him. All of us together made it a safe space. It's important to create safe spaces for us to connect in meaningful ways. Loneliness is no stranger to a lot of these folks who may have lost their loved ones and moved out of their homes. The lounge room sessions helped them connect with past memories and create new ones. The recordings are important for the process of creating new memories. They were a part of something and they have the recordings to share with others and help them remember.

How did you notice the participants change by attending weekly Lounge Sessions?

I have seen changes in the participants in a variety of ways. Sometimes a participant might show up to the sessions feeling agitated or confused. They will say that they probably won't stay or they want to sit near the door so they can leave easily. I see major changes in these participants almost immediately as we begin to sing together. They tap their toes, they close their eyes, they start to relax. Soon they are smiling and choosing songs they like to sing, staying until the end and are fully engaged in the experience. It's beautiful to see. They connect with the music and the group.

The other types of change I've seen in the participants are slower and harder to measure. However, they are tied together by a common theme: opening up, moving past insecurities, feeling comfortable, feeling empowered. Andy told me he hadn't picked up his fiddle many years. He started bringing it to the jam sessions every week and he just kept getting better and better. The first day his playing skills were rusty and he was quite shy and by the end he was confidently leading song reels and learning new songs he had never played before. Not only did his playing greatly improve but so did his energy and his confidence. It was truly amazing to watch.

What are some of the impacts that came out of the project that surprised you most? Did anything unexpected come out of them attending Lounge Room Sessions?

As the Lounge Room Sessions come to a close, it feels like I'm only now really starting to process the impacts of the project on a deeper level. I was truly surprised at how much warmth and appreciation I received from the participants, the staff and their families. One son thanked me and told me his father has "really come alive again" and that I was doing really important work. This kind of feedback is really inspiring for me and has me thinking about studying music therapy in a more formal way. I was also not prepared that my role as facilitator would require me to learn so many old songs on the spot! This was a wonderful surprise and my musical abilities and repertoire have improved because of it.

Another wonderful outcome is that the staff of the Unitarian House and I came up with the idea that the CD's of the recordings from the Lounge Room Sessions could be sold as a fundraising effort for a new roof to be put on their building by the fall of 2016 for their *Replace the Roof* campaign. Other residents from Unitarian

House will collaborate on the artwork for the cover and booklet to help out with this effort.

It's sometimes hard to measure just how many impacts a project like this can have. I know in my life, this project has been a complete inspiration and I am very grateful. There are always ripple effects and I'm sure there will be

for the residents of Unitarian House as well. Andy told me he was asked to come in and play his fiddle for his grandson's kindergarten class. This is amazing. The video footage taken during the sessions is intended to tell our story and highlight the success it has been in hopes that others will follow in our footsteps.

IT GIVES ME THE FEELING OF LOVE

Blog post 6 - March 21, 2016

"Music speaks what cannot be expressed,
soothes the mind and gives it rest,
heals the heart and makes it whole,
flows from heaven to the soul."

- *Author unknown*

I have reflected often on the influence of music in my life, and how it has shaped and defined my journey. Through this project I deepened my understanding of the incredible therapeutic benefits of music and the compelling outcomes for seniors, especially for individuals with Alzheimer disease and related dementias.

I was quite inspired getting to experience these outcomes first hand through my Art Place project. When I did more research to find out why music can have such a profound therapeutic benefit for seniors with dementia and Alzheimer's I found out a lot about these conditions and why music is used so successfully as a treatment.

"When used appropriately, music can shift mood, manage stress-induced agitation, stimulate positive interactions, facilitate cognitive function, and coordinate motor movements. This happens because rhythmic and other well-rehearsed responses require little to no cognitive or mental processing. They are influenced by the motor center of the brain that responds directly to auditory rhythmic cues. A person's ability to engage in music, particularly rhythm playing and singing, remains intact late into the disease process because, again, these activities do not mandate cognitive functioning for success." 1

Learning about this has been amazing! Music therapy is such a beautiful way to improve peoples' lives and contribute to their well-being. I am truly inspired by my experiences at the Unitarian House, and I plan to do further research and study the techniques of music therapy for my future endeavors. Wonderful.

NEVER TOO LATE TO LEARN NEW SONGS OR SKILLS: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS WITH MARLEY GIUNTA

April 12, 2016

How would you describe your overall experience with Art Place?

My overall experience with Art Place was very positive. It was a unique experience for me, and pushed me to grow my skills both musically and as a facilitator. Working with seniors in this capacity was also a new experience and one which I will seek out again. It was truly a joy to be able to contribute to the well-being of such



an important but often overlooked demographic of the population.

What are some of the most significant things you've learned through out your project?

I learned the power of interactive music making with seniors, specifically singing and playing old songs from "their day". Through a therapeutic lens, music-making with seniors in this way can be a way to connect meaningfully with others, open the heart centre, calm and relax, animate, boost self-confidence, trigger memory and honour their experiences. I learned a great deal about the health and mobility challenges facing our elders. I learned that warmth, flexibility and openness are really important in leading activities with seniors. I learned that work like this is so needed, and I learned that I really love doing type of work. I also learned how to sing and play a whole lot of old tunes on my guitar.

How was your project a success?

There are so many ways in which my project was a success. In sharing music, love and meaningful experience with the participants, we developed a connection where gratitude and joy flowed freely during and after the sessions. This created the safe and encouraging space I was truly hoping for going into the project. This also allowed participants such as shy Andy, playing his fiddle for the first time in many years, to have the courage to push himself out of his comfort zone and then experience the reward of doing that. I was definitely out of my comfort zone as well sometimes, as facilitating an

activity with a large group of seniors presents many unique challenges. I experienced the reward of my courage as well and had tremendous positive feedback from the participants, their families, and the staff at Unitarian House.

The project was also a success in that we were comfortable enough as a group to actually record some candid tracks from the sessions and took some video footage in the hopes that telling our story will inspire others to create programs such as these.

What do you intend for audiences to see, experience, and think about when learning about your project?

I hope that people learning about my project will consider what life might be like for our elders in places like Unitarian House, who may have lost family and friends, and be limited by cognitive or physical disabilities or both. I hope people will see how big an impact something like the Lounge Room Sessions can have on their quality of life and well-being, and how beautifully simple it is to bring in music and art to their lives. Music is a language and can connect us regardless of age, gender or ability. I hope people can reflect on the powerful therapeutic value of music for our aging populations and be inspired to bring their creative gifts into the lives of seniors in their community. We all find joy in contributing to the well-being of others, and I hope to show



people learning about this project how something like the Lounge Room Sessions can be such a beautiful and meaningful way to do so.

In what ways did or will the community benefit from your project?

I hope that the Lounge Room Session project inspired the residents and staff at Unitarian House to continue playing music and singing together, as they all enjoyed it so much. On family and friends night, Andy's grandson came in with his guitar and played music with his grandfather. He told me he had never done that before, and that he would like to do it more often. These are small gifts of the project but nevertheless, meaningful to those involved. The recordings that we did will be burned into CD's and given to all the participants along with photos from the sessions. I truly hope this will be a way for the participants to carry the memories and meaning of our sessions with them and to share it with friends and family.

The other day at my neighbourhood coffee shop, one of the baristas came up to me and asked about the project and said he was really inspired and would love to do something like that himself. We spoke at length about how he

could go about doing this. This is an example of the ripple effects a project such as this can have, and I can only hope it inspires more and more people to create music and spend time with our beloved seniors.

In your opinion, what did the participants learn from the project?

- That they matter, they have not been forgotten and that people from the outside community value spending time with them.
- That you don't have to be a "good singer" to participate in music making and be celebrated
- That it's never too late to learn new songs or skills
- That it's fun to play music together and encourage each others' talents, stories and songs

Do you have anything else you would like to share about your project or the program?

I want to share how valuable the experience was to me personally. I have been really inspired by this project and hope to learn more about music therapy and to create more experiences like this in my future.

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