



**D.J.C.
RECORDS**

**2 0 2 1
ANNUAL
REPORT**

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Die Jim Crow Records is the first record label in America for currently and formerly incarcerated musicians. We work to dismantle stereotypes around race and prison in this country by amplifying the voices of our artists. Through music and the arts, we strive to build a fairer justice system.



*Once incarcerated together, now sharing the stage at MoMA PS1:
Simply Naomi & BL Shirelle perform "Troubled Waters."
Photo by Ryan Muir, courtesy of MoMA PS1*

NOTE FROM OUR FOUNDER

From the outside looking in – considering we released only one album in 2021 – last year may seem like a sleeper. But behind the scenes, 2021 was a shapeshifting year. There were major cornerstones laid which furthered our team along in our second year officially operating as a non-profit label; tectonic plates which will guide our foundational makeup for years to come.

With 2020 having been such a global gamechanger, going into '21 was full of questions both internally as an organization and externally in the world at large. Would the pandemic wind down with the vaccine available? Would DJC artists tour this year? Were our artists in prison still at grave danger of contracting covid and facing inadequate medical treatment? I could easily fill this page with only questions. As things would have it, the year proved to be full of challenges, a few setbacks, many steps forward, and a lot of internal strengthening¹.

Going into 2021, our primary programmatic goals were finishing two LPs: I was knee deep in completing Territorial's *Tlaxihuiqui* – which I'd begun producing in 2018 to use as material for the Die Jim Crow LP – and BL Shirelle was in the thick of taking B. Alexis' debut album to the finish line as its Executive Producer.

Meanwhile, our newest board member Eddie Berg was leading BL, myself, and our board through a four-year strategic plan, and this involved some intense internal discussion around our mission, vision, strengths, weaknesses... you know, all that fun non-profit stuff.

The highlight of this process was taking a step back and thinking about our core; what we wake up everyday to achieve. Our prior mission statement of *providing formerly and currently incarcerated musicians a high quality platform for their voices to be heard* was a valiant goal artistically and technically, but what did it do for the public, for the culture? How did it speak to the human condition? We had to incorporate how not only did we give voice, but how these voices had a spirit behind them: a common thread that could change the world.

¹ It's with great relief that I also add: all of our artists in prison (and out, for that matter) who contracted covid were able to beat it and did not suffer long term health effects. Let's hope that number stays at zero.

I started to ask myself: "In one sentence, how can you sum up what 'Die Jim Crow' means, what you've been working towards since 2013?"



The early days: Fury Young & activist Five Mualimm-ak at a protest in 2013.

I thought about the complex true stories behind some of our lyrics, the diversity of our artists, the eclecticism of our benefit concerts, and the passion of our team. I thought about me being an outsider – this white, New York City Jew – a NOT formerly incarcerated person who'd formed deep bonds with folks in and out of prison across the country. I thought about my core business partner BL Shirelle, at the time our Deputy Director, who I'd met while she was still inside and despite us coming from such opposite worlds, we'd accomplished so much as creators and administrators with a future before us so rich.

I thought about how when I started Die Jim Crow as one album eight years ago, I only wanted to work with Black artists, and how that demographic had expanded to many walks of life over the years². I realized there was something essential in this expansion, that in a way, it embodied the three words "Die Jim Crow" even more than my original strict concept. By working with folks of all backgrounds who have experienced incarceration, we break down more walls, we challenge more preconceived notions, we unite more people, and we create surprising art that speaks to the human condition on multiple levels. We do this in a way that upholds our mission, our value of representation, and fights against the structural racism that spawned mass incarceration.

² Little known fact: it was actually BL who suggested to me, early on in us knowing each other, that I should expand DJC to not only Black artists.

It would take several drafts, but on November 15, our board of directors signed off on Die Jim Crow's new mission statement:

to dismantle stereotypes around race and prison in America by amplifying the voices of justice-impacted musicians and artists.

This one sentence embodied years of work for me, a newly-minted compass that had gotten us where we were and would continue us on the odyssey.

Our core values were analyzed and agreed to as well, reinforcing our organizational culture and spirit. With the principles of Free-Expression, Activism, Consistency, Excellence, and Representation as our northern stars³, I started to meditate heavily on what our future would look like, especially in the context of our four-year strategic plan and our refined mission.

I realized it was time for a big move. I had to step down as the sole executive director of Die Jim Crow. If we were to live up to our mission – to really stir people's imaginations, for the public to see radically different worlds collide into something beautiful – it was time for a change in our leadership model. I wanted to go 50/50 with BL Shirelle as my Co-Executive Director.

BL, who'd been growing with DJC as an administrator the past three years and learning alongside me how a board worked, how to manage staff, how to plan releases and produce music in prisons. BL, who I'd had many disagreements with but countless more agreements with since we started writing prison letters in April 2015. BL, who I'd met in person for the first time in January 2016, a month after she got out of prison, and we immediately recorded "First Impressions" and "Headed to the Streets" – her first paid gig as a professional musician. BL, who now was my Deputy Director and thus far had done a great job, with levels and levels to reach, like me.

I began to get things in motion. I secured the funding from a stalwart and long time supporter. I started sketching out a job description with lots of room for BL's input and design. I called her up and pitched the idea. She was on board. Yes!

It wouldn't be until March 2022 for the board to officially vote her in⁴ – but 2021 ended with this firm and exciting future in mind. A new leadership model. A refined mission. Core values. A vision for a fairer justice system through music and the arts. Moves like these are what felt like tectonic plates shifting for DJC and for me as our founder. All for one aim: to get to solid ground.

³ For more on our values, see page 9.

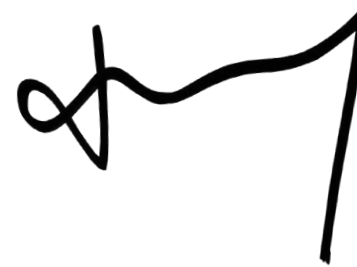
⁴ We will make the announcement public on Juneteenth 2022.

BL would finish B. Alexis' album in December, a profound and vulnerable collection of songs that I believe will touch the free world and those inside on a heavy level. *Tlaxihuiqui* was released on August 12 to critical acclaim and a heap of community support. On a personal level, I couldn't be more proud of how it came out.

Looking back months later as I write this, I think "what a year it was!" – A year where more deeply than ever I thought about how far we've come and how far we have to go.

I never saw DJC taking this path in 2013 when I was a 23-year old artist/activist with a crazy idea. I wanted to make one album and get out. In a way, *Tlaxihuiqui* feels like that album – my first LP as a music producer, breaking much of the ground I wanted to explore on the Die Jim Crow LP (songs like "Just Say No" and "Damn Fool" are directly from the original blueprint). Yet it's completely its own thing, its biology having formed its own planet. In our exciting future to come, I see Die Jim Crow the record label doing the same for many other artists in our ever-expanding universe.

As Kevin Woodley sings on "Just Say No"⁵ – *Beam me up, Scotty!*



Fury Young
Co-Executive Director & Founder
June 2022



⁵ Track 7 off Territorial *Tlaxihuiqui*.



2021 was a grounding year.

We came together with our board of directors and our staff and agreed on these five values. They are cornerstones which we will strive for always.

Free-expression. Recognizing the power of music, storytelling and the arts to transform narratives and inspire change, we provide our artists with a platform to share their authentic voices and take risks. We don't shy away from difficult stories and we embrace radical forms of expression and artistry.

Activism. We were built on a D.I.Y. spirit of social justice which is not limited to the music and art we release. We engage in activist efforts which benefit our community, whether it be showing up to a parole hearing or supplying facilities with musical instruments.

Consistency. We build strong and long-lasting relationships with lifers, long-termers, returning citizens and recidivists. There is an element of public service involved in making our albums, which allows us to form a stronger community of artists.

Excellence. We hold ourselves to the highest standards in every work of art we create. This extends beyond our albums to include album art, videos, literature, and performances.

Representation. We have justice-impacted people in positions of leadership in order to enact change. We do not limit who we work with based on the nature of their criminal convictions.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

2021 was a particularly meaningful year in terms of building community and giving a platform to some of the most underrepresented voices both in music and in the justice-impacted community.

In particular, 2021 was marked by several wins for our artists who are senior citizens and former lifers. We are proud to have made significant strides in amplifying the voices of people who can speak to experiences of aging in prison, life sentences, and the challenges to re-entry that senior citizens face — living up to one of our core values of representation.

- In early 2021, we helped one of our artists, Naomi Blount Wilson (Simply Naomi), secure funding from New Music USA for a groundbreaking project that brings together five vocalists who all served decades of their life sentences before being paroled or having their sentences commuted. They are all senior citizens, and collectively served over 140 years in prison. They are the Lifers Groove. You'll read about them more later.

- In late 2021, another artist of ours, Valerie Seeley, applied for and received funding from the NYC Women's Fund for Media, Music, and Theatre, for a collaborative project that will be executive produced by BL Shirelle. Seeley is also a senior citizen, as well as a and former lifer whose sentence was commuted by New York Governor Cuomo. This project emerged from her desire to speak to the experience of being in an abusive relationship, in particular being served a life sentence for a crime which she asserts was in defense of her own life.

2021 was also ripe with new collaborations on albums, concerts, and campaigns; building community both among incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, along with allies. These include Maserati-E, Andy Dixon, Shamir, KeiyaA, Union of Musicians and Allied Workers, D'Angelico Guitars, Musicambia, Trinity High School, and MoMA PS1, to name a few.

Read on to discover more about the amazing projects we released and built on in 2021...

*Top: Valerie Seeley shares nostalgic memories on "Driftin"
Below: the Lifers Groove having some fun at their album cover shoot.*



**“THE MOST IMPORTANT ALBUM OF THE YEAR.”*
TERRITORIAL’S TLAXIHUIQUI DROPS.**



Territorial’s *Tlaxihuiqui* (pronounced Tla-She-Wiki) was recorded with seven incarcerated musicians at Territorial Correctional Facility in Cañon City, Colorado. A prog-Americana album interweaving Indigenous Nahuatl chant, blues, and hip hop, *Tlaxihuiqui* is a powerful musical melding of diverse life experiences.

Including several lifers, Native American and Black artists, and a queer Jewish man, these artists share their path from remorse to redemption. Their album forces the listener to reckon with difficult questions about justice, punishment, and forgiveness, particularly because it features a musician who was convicted for five counts of murder and who reflects on his past crimes and feelings of guilt. Through this musical journey, we discover there is much more than what meets the eye behind a criminal conviction and a prison ID number.

* [Tlaxihuiqui: The Most Important Album of the Year](#) by Ryan Goldsmith. The Science Survey, February 1, 2022.



The word *tlaxihuiqui* translates to “the calling of the spirits” in the Uto-Aztecan language of Nahuatl. Traditional chants of this ancient language anchor the album and stand as a rousing cry for our shared humanity.

These history-making recordings took place over four intense days in April 2018, and DJC founder and album producer Fury Young remained in close contact with these musicians for the next three years to make this album a reality.

As DJC evolved into a record label in 2019, the album was delayed and soon after the pandemic hit. Over that period, outside musicians contributed vocals and instrumentation from Nashville to New Jersey to the Netherlands, and by mid-2021, the album was complete.

Combining strong and striking storytelling with brilliant musicianship and raw talent, this motley crew of artists came together to create this profound, unprecedented sonic experience.

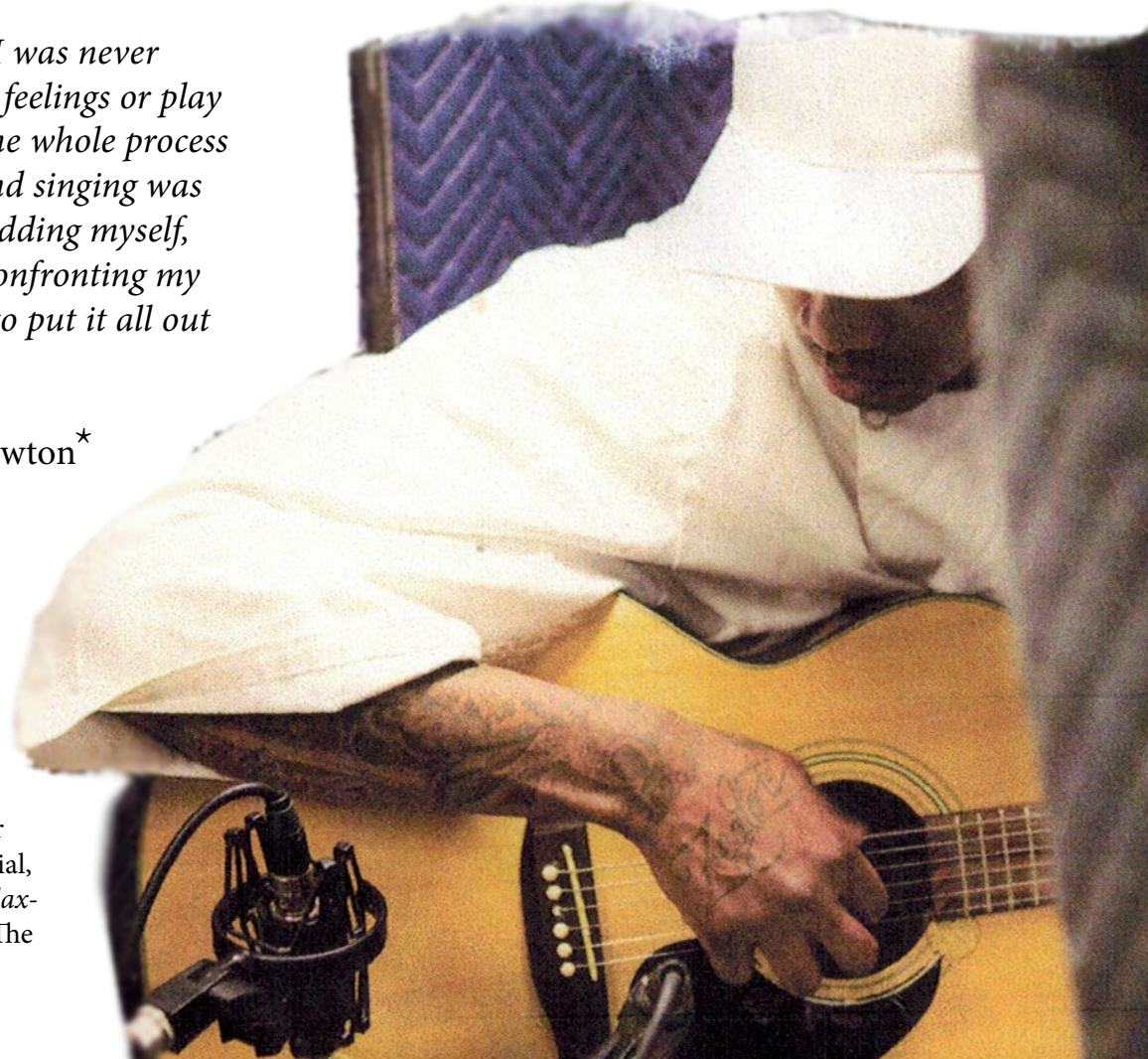
Top: Phillip “Archi” Archuleta and his handmade Native drum.
Opposite (L-R): Michael Tenneson, Kevin Woodley, and Dane “Zealot” Newton grace the album cover.

KEY OUTPUTS.

- Key Organizational Value: **Free-expression.** Songs like “Remorse” and “8788” do not shy away from difficult truths but hold them up for discussion, stirring debate about who should be in prison and perhaps challenging fundamental ideologies such as complete prison abolition.
- Album released digitally and on CD, featuring 13 tracks that take listeners on a visceral journey; through violence and heartache to catharsis and hope.
- Featuring seven currently incarcerated musicians from the original 2018 sessions at Territorial CF. The album also features six formerly incarcerated musicians – including Simply Naomi’s debut DJC features on “Mama’s Cryin’” and “Holy Rain.” The contributions of seven session players like John Heinrich and Eugene Moles tied the album together into a cohesive Americana sound and expanded our network of outside collaborators.
- In 2021, Lyric Videos were released for five songs on the album, with eight more in the works to complete a full visual album. These videos blend footage recorded during the Territorial sessions with calligraphy and visual artwork from incarcerated Colorado artists, an assortment of nature/stock/ambient footage, and personal photos and videos from the band. The Tlaxihuiqui Lyric Videos serve to further humanize the artists behind this cinematic album and enrich conversations around these groundbreaking – at times shattering – thirteen songs.

“I’ve always sang, but I was never really able to write my feelings or play any instruments. So, the whole process of me writing music and singing was me cleansing myself, ridding myself, confronting my past, confronting my failures; being willing to put it all out there.”

- Dane “Zealot” Newton*



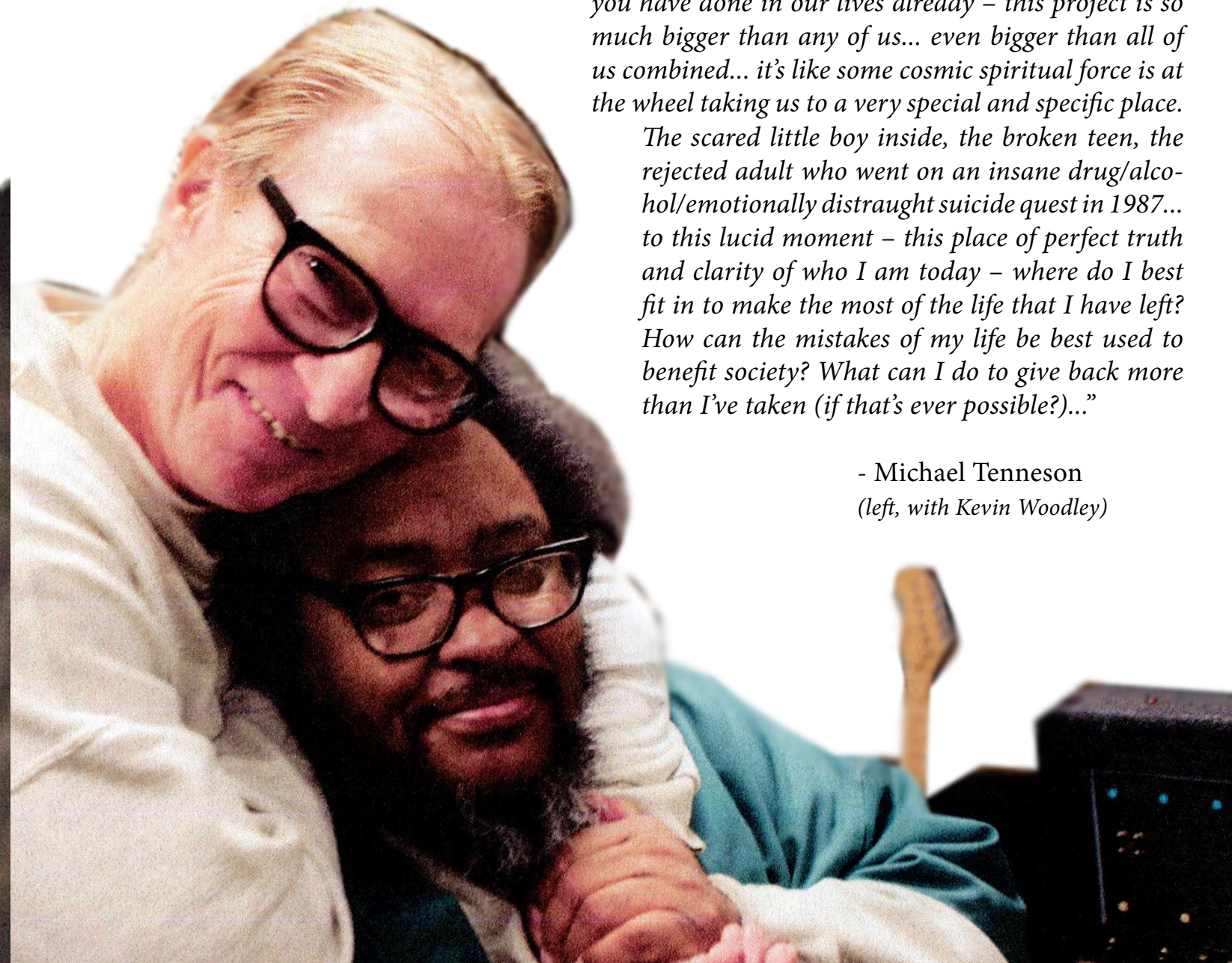
IMPACT.

- Over 10K album streams from around the world in 2021.
- Incarcerated Colorado artists have been able to sign our Exclusive License Recording Agreement, effectively owning their masters and receiving royalty payments directly.
- Critical acclaim in Washington Post, Colorado Public Radio, Oxygen, KCRW, Westword, The Science Survey, Deutschland Kultur, FLOOD, and more.
- By year-end 2021, DJC had sent \$5K worth of instruments to two Colorado prisons (where Territorial members are now located) via our Instruments Into Prisons campaign.
- Bandmember Michael Tenneson transferred to Sterling CF to begin a music theory program, thereby expanding opportunities for people in Colorado’s prison system to participate in musical activities.
- All members of Territorial are in contact with us and have expressed deep gratitude for the album’s existence. We hope to work on another album with these artists in the coming years.

“I cannot thank you enough in one lifetime for all that you have done in our lives already – this project is so much bigger than any of us... even bigger than all of us combined... it’s like some cosmic spiritual force is at the wheel taking us to a very special and specific place.

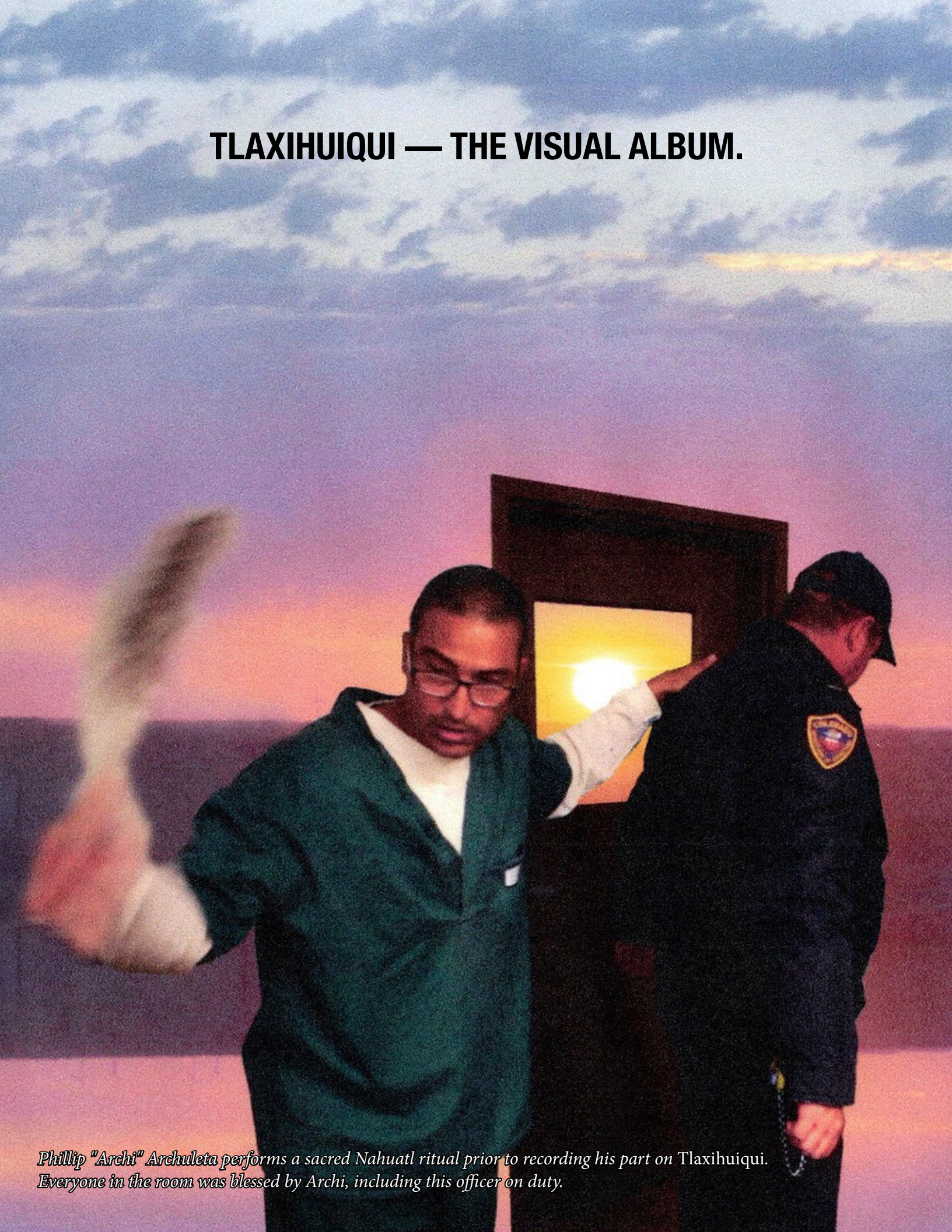
The scared little boy inside, the broken teen, the rejected adult who went on an insane drug/alcohol/emotionally distraught suicide quest in 1987... to this lucid moment – this place of perfect truth and clarity of who I am today – where do I best fit in to make the most of the life that I have left? How can the mistakes of my life be best used to benefit society? What can I do to give back more than I’ve taken (if that’s ever possible?)...”

- Michael Tenneson
(left, with Kevin Woodley)

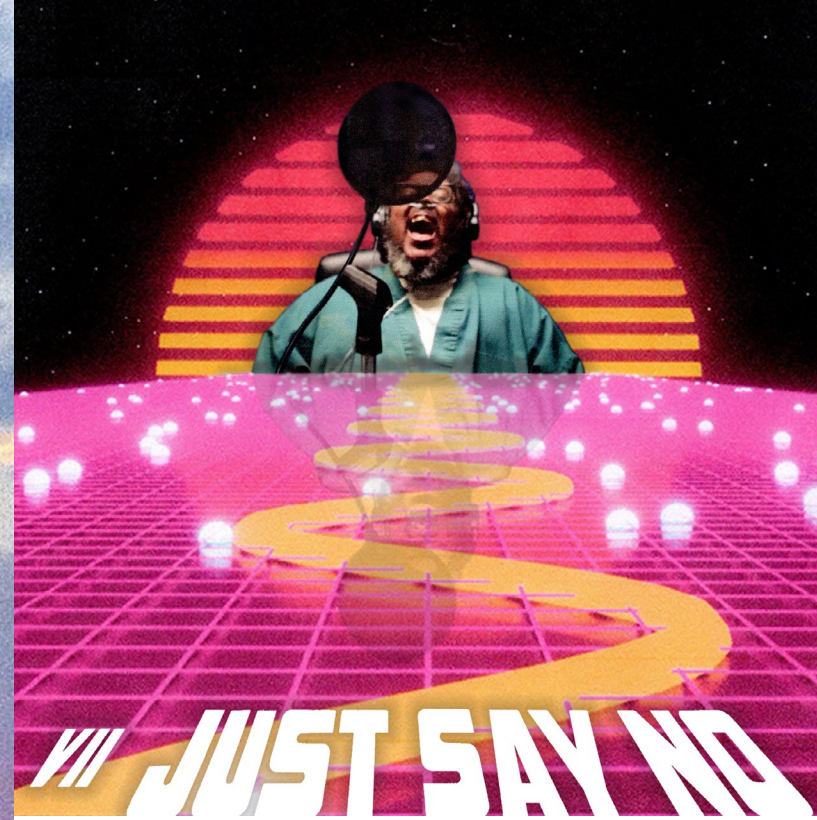


* Fun fact: Zealot, who had never recorded a song before Territorial, had the #1 streamed song on Tlaxihuiqui in 2021 with “America The Merciful.”

TLAXIHUIQUI — THE VISUAL ALBUM.

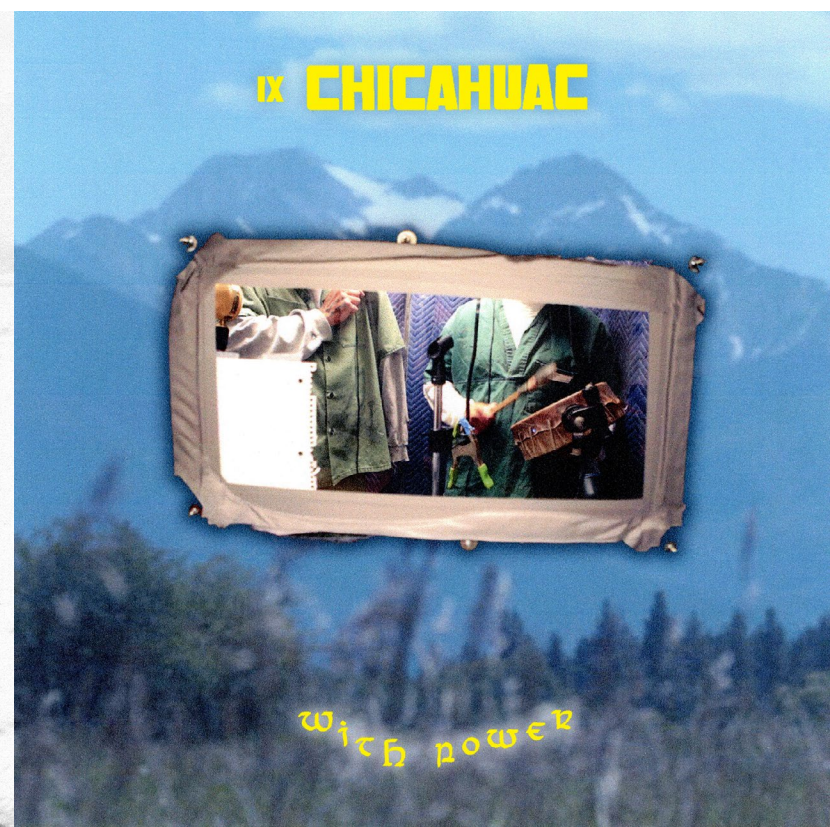
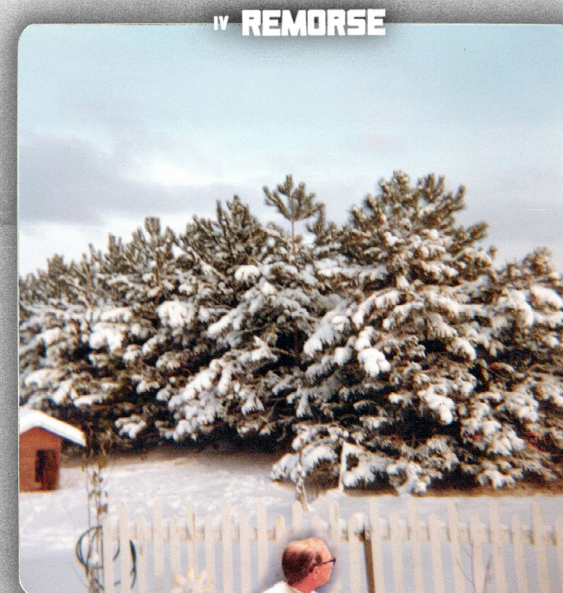


Phillip "Archi" Archuleta performs a sacred Nahuatl ritual prior to recording his part on *Tlaxihuiqui*. Everyone in the room was blessed by Archi, including this officer on duty.



“It’s been a labor of love assembling lyric videos for each song on *Tlaxihuiqui*, but at the end of the day it feels very rewarding. I believe in the album so much, and I think the music alone doesn’t fully do justice to the array of stories and spirits that are behind the body of work. In my spare time I’ve been chiseling away at each song, with the goal of giving the entire album a visual accompaniment. For an album as intense as this one, my hope is for the visual elements to give context to the darker shades and inspire productive conversations around our criminal legal system and the human condition.”

*Fury Young on editing lyric videos for every song on *Tlaxihuiqui*.
In 2021, we released videos for 5 of the 13 tracks!*



GET INTO THE GROOVEwith LIFERS GROOVE.

With B. Alexis, The Masses, and EL BENTLY 448 in post-production, we had to be selective about taking on new projects. When a New Music USA Creator Development grant landed across our desk, we decided to jump at the opportunity and apply for our first project with Naomi Blount Wilson, AKA Simply Naomi. Having served 37 years of a life without parole sentence, Ms. Naomi left behind thousands of lifers when she was released in 2019. Collaborating with four other former lifers to create Lifers Groove, we embarked on a new EP titled “The Era of The Groove,” which was recorded over the Summer in Hoboken, New Jersey with maestro producer/composer Brian Lawlor.

As band leader, Simply Naomi brought together four vocalists who, including her, have served over 140 years in prison: Maxwell Melvins, Michael Austin, Valerie Seeley and Carl Dukes. Melvins is a formerly incarcerated rapper, poet and advocate who formed the hip-hop ensemble Lifers Group while serving a life sentence at Rahway prison in New Jersey. His collective of incarcerated emcees released two albums and received a Grammy nomination for Best Long Form Music Video in 1992. Michael Austin is a formerly incarcerated R&B singer who served 27 years in the Maryland prison system before being exonerated for his charges -- he was completely innocent. Austin has released two albums independently and was featured in Phil Collins’ “Bring Down The Walls,” collaborating with acclaimed synth-pop artist Empress Of. Valerie Seeley served 18 years in New York state prisons before being granted clemency in 2016 by Governor Cuomo. While incarcerated, Seeley began writing short stories and poems which dealt with her experiences as a survivor of domestic violence. She is one of the earliest DJC collaborators going back to 2014. Carl Dukes, also incarcerated in New York state, served 31 years and found his passion for singing later in life. He is a jazz singer who draws from Nat King Cole and Arthur Prysock as influences. He was first featured on the Die Jim Crow EP with “Plastic Bag.”

Collectively, Lifers Groove forms a group of senior citizens who have all lived through decades of incarceration and yet have found a ballast in the form of music or writing during these hard times. By bringing their voices together, this quintet weaves powerful narratives around long term incarceration and reentry after spending decades behind bars.



(L-R) Michael Austin, Carl Dukes, Valerie Seeley, Maxwell Melvins, & Simply Naomi looking glamorous for their album cover shoot by Britni West.

KEY OUTPUTS.

- Key Organizational Value: **Consistency**. All five of these artists we have been working with for years, though we have seldom had the opportunity to record with them. Fury Young began corresponding with Simply Naomi in 2015 while she was still in prison but he was denied access to record her. Valerie Seeley and Young began collaborating in 2014, and though she has performed at several events and appeared in videos, this is her first musical offering with us. Michael Austin met Young in 2017 and they have been in touch since then, waiting for the stars to align with a collaboration. Maxwell Melvins has been our Senior Advisor since 2019 and we have worked together since 2017 when we produced a three-part interview series. Carl Dukes first appeared on the Die Jim Crow EP and we are thrilled to be collaborating with him again.

- A light shined on an urgent matter: “More than 200,000 people are serving life sentences – one out of every seven in prison. More people are sentenced to life in prison in America than there were people in prison serving any sentence in 1970.” (Source: The Sentencing Project)

- A musical treat. This six-song EP is progressive instrumentally – a blues meets soul album with Zappa-esque sprinkles courtesy of producer Brian Lawlor. The songs speak to their experiences with incarceration and re-entering society, but also reflect on themes of time, love and creating community.



(L-R): Simply Naomi, BL Shirelle, assistant Jack Impink, Carl Dukes, producer Brian Lawlor, Maxwell Melvins, Valerie Seeley, & engineer Kari Estes at Garden Sound Studio in Hoboken, NJ. Not pictured here is Michael Austin, who had to head back to Baltimore that day! Oh, and Fury, who's taking the picture.

FUTURE IMPACTS.

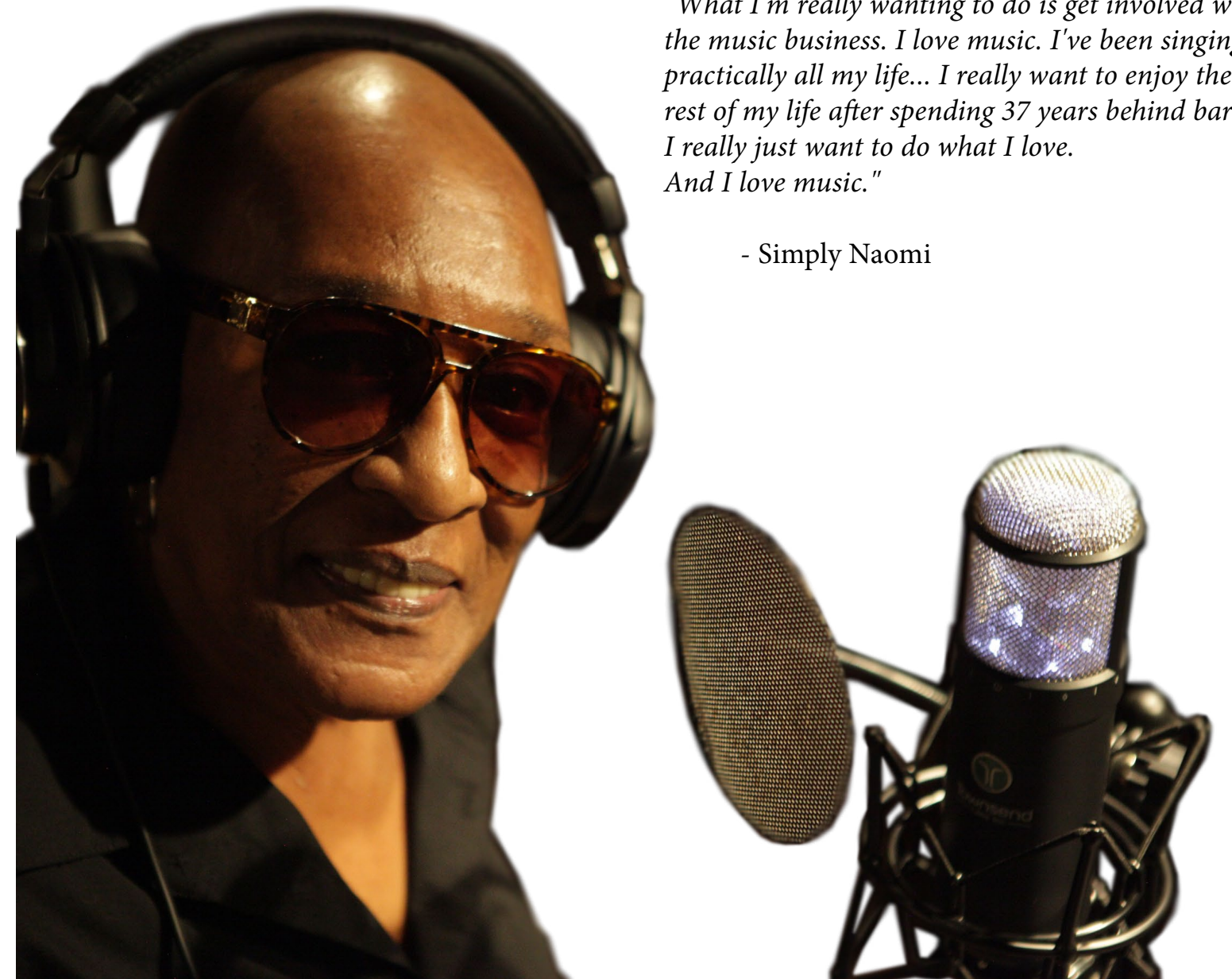
- We hope to perform the EP in prisons, especially for lifer's groups and aging populations.
- Give more visibility to the crisis of life sentences in America, and to the triumphs of these five individuals who have reentered society and are giving back in remarkable ways.
- Members of the group can speak to particular injustices and issues around the criminal legal system in addition to life sentences, such as domestic violence, wrongful convictions, exoneration, clemency, and commutation.

“While I was incarcerated, I worked trying to get better conditions for women inside. I've been home five plus years, and I'm still trying to give back to my community. Working with Die Jim Crow has been a great way to do that on an even bigger platform.”

- Valerie Seeley

“What I'm really wanting to do is get involved with the music business. I love music. I've been singing practically all my life... I really want to enjoy the rest of my life after spending 37 years behind bars. I really just want to do what I love. And I love music.”

- Simply Naomi





DJC x UMAW: INSTRUMENTS INTO PRISONS

On April 22, 2021, Die Jim Crow Records (DJC) and the Union of Musicians and Allied Workers (UMAW) launched the Instruments Into Prisons (IIP) drive to support incarcerated musicians. The campaign came about when Silent Jungle of The Masses sent Fury Young a list of equipment that their rap collective could use for production and recording. When UMAW expressed interest in making this a formal call to action within their network and beyond, Fury pitched them the idea of expanding it to a more broad-based campaign. This more far-reaching campaign appealed to the UMAW organizers, and after a few weeks of planning we set sail to launch. The idea seemed a natural extension of DJC’s PPE Into Prisons campaign during the initial peaks of the ongoing pandemic in 2020.

The goal of this new effort was simple: redistribute new and lightly used instruments and equipment from donors across the country for the use of musicians and creators inside of prisons. While initially we focused our donation streams into prisons with DJC-affiliated musicians, we quickly expanded the scope, reaching out to facilities across the country with music programming and musicians in need.

With the work of Ted Jamison, our Volunteer Coordinator, and a host of volunteer labor, IIP has developed into another arm of the record label working to fulfill its mission to amplify the voices of justice-impacted musicians. What better way to do so than by helping to supply the tools for said amplification, in this case quite literally! (Pardon the not-so electric pun...)

“Donating musical equipment is a tangible way to support people who are incarcerated in our country’s outrageously unjust prison system. The process of donating was organized and easy to engage with.”

- Julie Kathryn, who donated a MIDI and assorted cables to Allendale CI.

Michael Tenneson & Remy Martin recorded a song called "Something Pretty" with our donated instruments and recording gear.

*Top left: postcard of gratitude from E. Brokencoyote to Ted Jamison.
Top right: Ted and UMAW in planning meeting
Center right: studio at Allendale CI full of donated gear.*



“I was very glad to be a part of the experience and to help provide others inside with the same opportunities as I had when it comes to creative expression.”

- Tameca Cole

Cole, a longtime DJC collaborator, volunteered to drop off a new PA system at Birmingham Work Release, where she spent the last few years of her incarceration.



Since its inception, IIP has pursued slow but steady progress. We’ve implemented systems for organizing and processing donations, fielded logistics and communication with donors and prison staff, all while building a network of volunteers and partner organizations along the way.

We’ve been privileged to work with and receive support from the folks at D’Angelico guitars, The IF Project, Musicambia, and Trinity School in NYC, to name a few. Most importantly, we’ve been overwhelmed by the giving spirit of donors across the country (musician and non-musician alike) who have offered to redistribute their gear, often pay for packaging and shipping costs, or even occasionally purchase a brand new item specifically to donate inside.

As of the publication of this Annual Report (June 2022), the IIP campaign has been going strong over one year and will continue for the foreseeable future. We will reevaluate the campaign’s long term existence at the end of 2022.

Graphic by UMAW member Lilah Larson

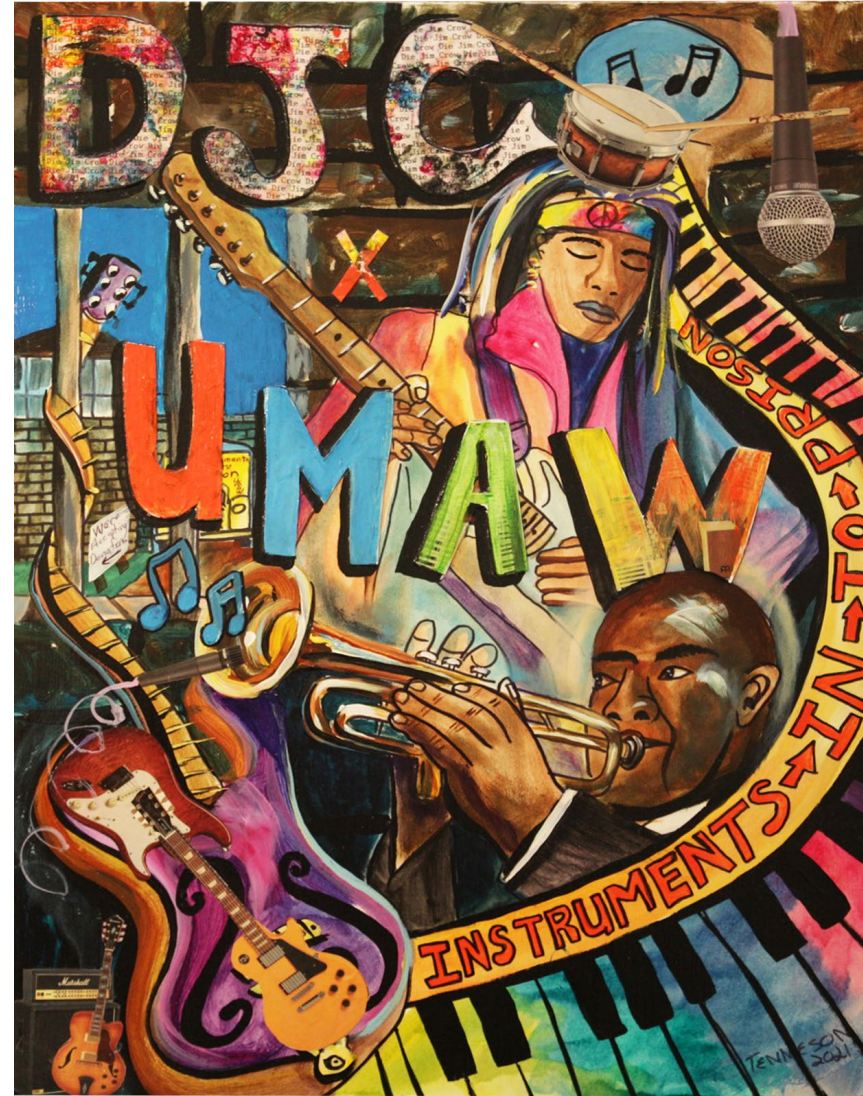
KEY OUTPUTS.

- Key Organizational Value: **Activism.** A grassroots campaign which benefits our justice-impacted community beyond the artists we work with.
- There were a total of 75 pieces of gear redistributed between April 2021 and November 2021 amounting to a market value of over \$10,000.
- Gear was donated across nine different facilities including, Allendale Correctional, Arkansas Valley Correctional, Oshkosh Correctional, Green Hill School (youth facility), San Quentin State Prison, Birmingham Women's Community-based Facility (work release location), Lansing Correctional, Sterling Correctional, and Sing Sing Correctional.
- By the end of 2021, there was just under \$5,000 dollars raised to cover shipping and additional gear costs.

IMPACTS.

- Our Instruments Into Prisons effort (IIP) is a huge help in furthering our cause, getting new and used instruments and gear inside of correctional facilities and providing artists inside with life-changing access to equipment.
- With the help of IIP, musicians inside of prison (DJC affiliated or not) have an increased opportunity to affirm their subjectivity by way of creative expression in an environment designed to stifle it.
- The IIP drive helps to kickstart individual musicians and prison music programming where resources and access are too often spread thin. For example, Territorial artist Michael Tenneson was transferred in 2021 to Sterling CF, where he is taking a leadership role as the facility builds its music programming. With the help of our donated equipment, his music theory class is underway with eight students so far.

Special thanks goes to Mark Epps, Marya Schock and her students, Cole Cataneo, Brandon Hayes, Jesse Kilguss and Nathan Schram of Musicambia, Fiona Perosi of D'Angelico Guitars, and UMAW Central Valley. We are proud to have partnered with the below organizations on this effort.



"It's a drive like this that's going to make all the difference in the world for a lot of lives of the men and women who are in prison in Colorado and anywhere else that these instruments are going to be donated to."

- Michael Tenneson

Mike's painted/collaged poster for the campaign.

"The donations have been a gateway to expression when simple conversation won't do... creativity when idleness is all around you... and value when you think you've been forgotten. I've seen dreams realized for some and rekindled for others. The drive and its impact will echo for a long time."

- Silent Jungle

Silent Jungle is the main beatmaker for The Masses. He is also a visual artist who experimented with this digital flyer.



INNOCENT BORN GUILTY: READY FOR RELEASE.

Leon Benson is one of the first Die Jim Crow artists. Fury Young began writing to him in May 2014 and he sent us many lyrics and some striking visual art. Though we never gained access to record him inside the Indiana prison system, LB was able to record on his own what we will soon release as an eight-song mixtape: *Innocent Born Guilty*.

In 1999, Benson was convicted of a murder which he has maintained absolute innocence of since his arrest. As his rap alter ego, EL BENTLY 448, he embodies the power and struggle of the wrongfully convicted prisoner who will stop at nothing to find truth and one day be emancipated — bringing a righteous, fiery energy that embodies the power, grace, and struggle of the innocent prisoner.

His uplifting yet gritty sound inspires all of us to seek justice and freedom in our own lives. Accompanied by soulful beats from Trvp Lvne (BL Shirelle, B. Alexis), this project is a heartfelt, honest look into the life of a wrongfully convicted Black man in America, exposing his truths through song in a desperate attempt at gaining what is rightfully his: FREEDOM.

In 2021 we completed the mixing and mastering of *Innocent Born Guilty*, but its release is on hold while his lawyers continue to work on his potential exoneration.



KEY OUTPUTS.

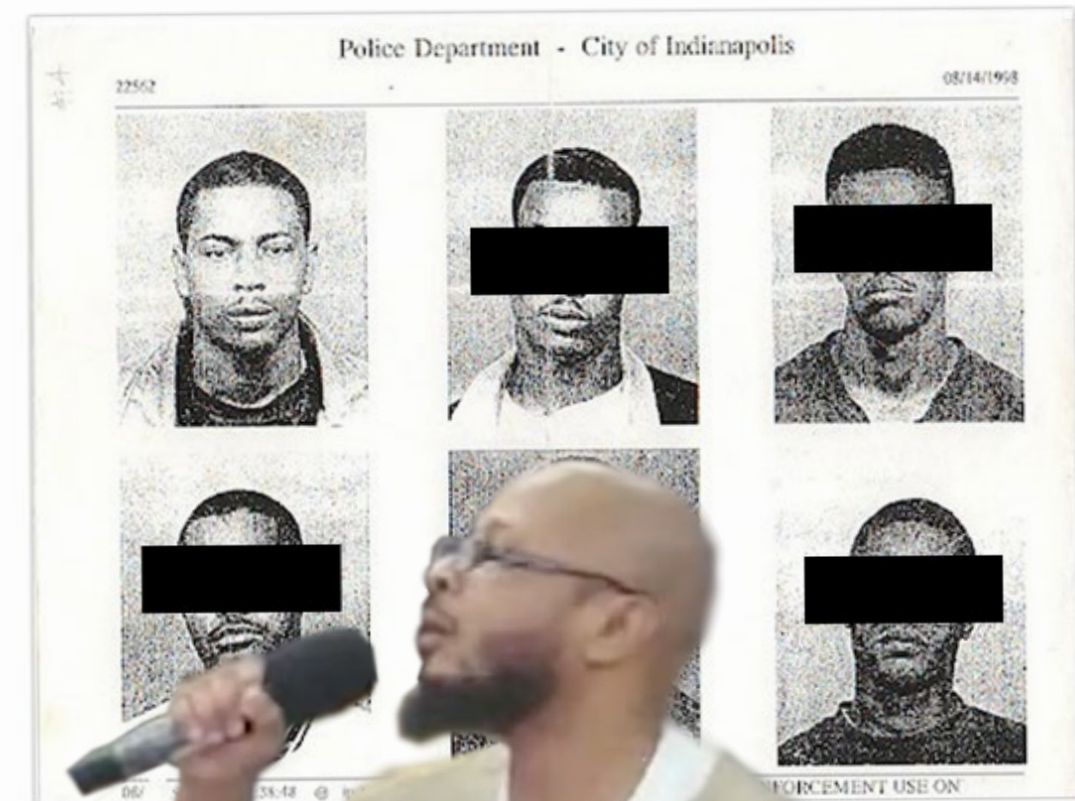
- Key Organizational Value: **Consistency.** We've been working with Leon Benson for eight years, and despite prison barriers, we've stayed in close touch and finally have something tactile to show for it: a hard hitting mixtape with a powerful story.
- Mixtape completed, 8 songs to be released digitally and on CD. Release date is pending on when Leon Benson is released from prison.

FUTURE IMPACTS.

- There are thousands of innocent people in US prisons. Exact data is unknown, but we do know that since 1989, 3,164 Americans have been exonerated after spending over 27,000 years in prison. Leon's story of not only being wrongfully convicted but accomplishing so much while incarcerated is remarkable, and as a trained public speaker and excellent rapper, he plans on touring the world and sharing his testimony.

Leon & Fury during their first visit. Pendleton CF, Indiana. They had been writing for four years at this point but had not met.

Innocent BORN GUILTY



"[DJC] inspires me on so many levels as an artist, business man, and spiritual human being. While my body has been confined the past 24 years, through... your unique efforts my voice (audio art) has been set free into the world. And at no better time, as my exoneration is looming to occur in a matter of months. You hear me?"

- EL BENTLY 448

BL COMPLETES B. ALEXIS

Recorded in February 2020 at Camille Graham prison in South Carolina, B. Alexis' debut LP was Executive Produced by BL Shirelle and completed in 2021. We will release "Black Barbie," the first Single from the album in 2022, and potentially the full album the same year. However, upon completing the project, the South Carolina Department of Corrections censored certain recordings, which has delayed the LP's full release.

We promise it will be worth the wait. B. Alexis tells the story of a young girl who looks to the light in her darkest days. The story of a woman who's willing to reveal her ugly scars in hopes to heal someone else. The story of uncovering love through layers of self-mutilated hate. The Conway, South Carolina native takes us on a common journey through a lense that is unique to her alone. Over soulful samples produced by Trvp Lvne, B.'s flow will send chills through your body.

As Shirelle explains, "The album is a transformative work about the journey to regain one's voice after innocence has been stripped away. It's a call for hope and for the uplifting of young Black girls and boys, from an artist who has been through it all and found a relationship with what she understands as a higher power." Grappling with abusive relationships and the devastating intergenerational impact of incarceration – then rinsing it all out of the mud – B. Alexis' first offering will also be the first solo album recorded by a woman in prison to be released to wide distribution.

BL Shirelle began mixing and mastering B. Alexis' album in February 2021, working alongside seasoned engineer/mixer/producer Bear-One (Young Jeezy, The Killers), and finished the project in December. Under the tutelage of Bear-One, Shirelle was able to curate one of the most vulnerable hip hop albums to date from a female emcee.

KEY OUTPUTS.

- Key Organizational Value: **Free-Expression.** B. Alexis discusses many heavy topics through the course of the album like mental health, prostitution, abandonment, and trauma; however she also explores the strength of faith and love, the concept of the Black family, and the upliftment of it.
- BL Shirelle's first offering as Executive Producer for another artist (she EPed her own debut Assata Troi). During this process, BL – who served a decade inside herself – developed her musical acumen; arranging each song with thoughtful detail and learning mixing skills.
- Additional justice-impacted artists featured on the project include Simply Naomi, gHSTS & gUITARS, Godjdess, Maserati-E, and Andy Dixon. Outside collaborators include Trvp Lvne, John Heinrich, Steven Meara, and Katie Hyun.
- DJC's first release from a South Carolina prison, where Blacks represent 60% of the prison population and only 26% of the state population.

FUTURE IMPACTS.

- B. Alexis' story resonates with many poverty-stricken Black girls in this country. It is a cautionary tale she hopes her demographic can learn from.
- BL Shirelle intends to tour this album via listening sessions in institutions for women and young girls on behalf of B. Alexis, in an effort to discuss the themes of the album and the process of healing.



"It's great to be on something that's just being established... it's like I'm one of the first artists. Something in me is telling me this DJC thing is going to blow... and I'm so glad I'm one of the first ones. I count it as a privilege."

- B. Alexis

"You make three times more points in a verse than Kendrick [Lamar]. I got you over Kendrick."

- BL to B. Alexis

D.I.S. — DA INFINITE SPECTRUM THE MASSES 50% COMPLETED.

We continue to perfect The Masses' debut album D.I.S. (Da Infinite Spectrum), which was recorded in February 2020 at Allendale Correctional Institution, a medium security prison in Fairfax, South Carolina. The project is taking longer than expected because, well, we're trying to make it great and it's a tall order...

The Masses are made up of six rappers, three singers, three instrumentalists, and two beat-makers. Their music is full of powerful bars that speak to collective power, such as "The Movement," a song with as much force behind it as Wu's "Triumph":

*"The Masses / Movement / Voice of the voiceless /
Soldiers of fortune / The poor and unfortunate."*

This is a grand-scale group project which may not see full release until 2024, depending on what roadblocks we run up against. We aim to release the first Single from The Masses in 2022.

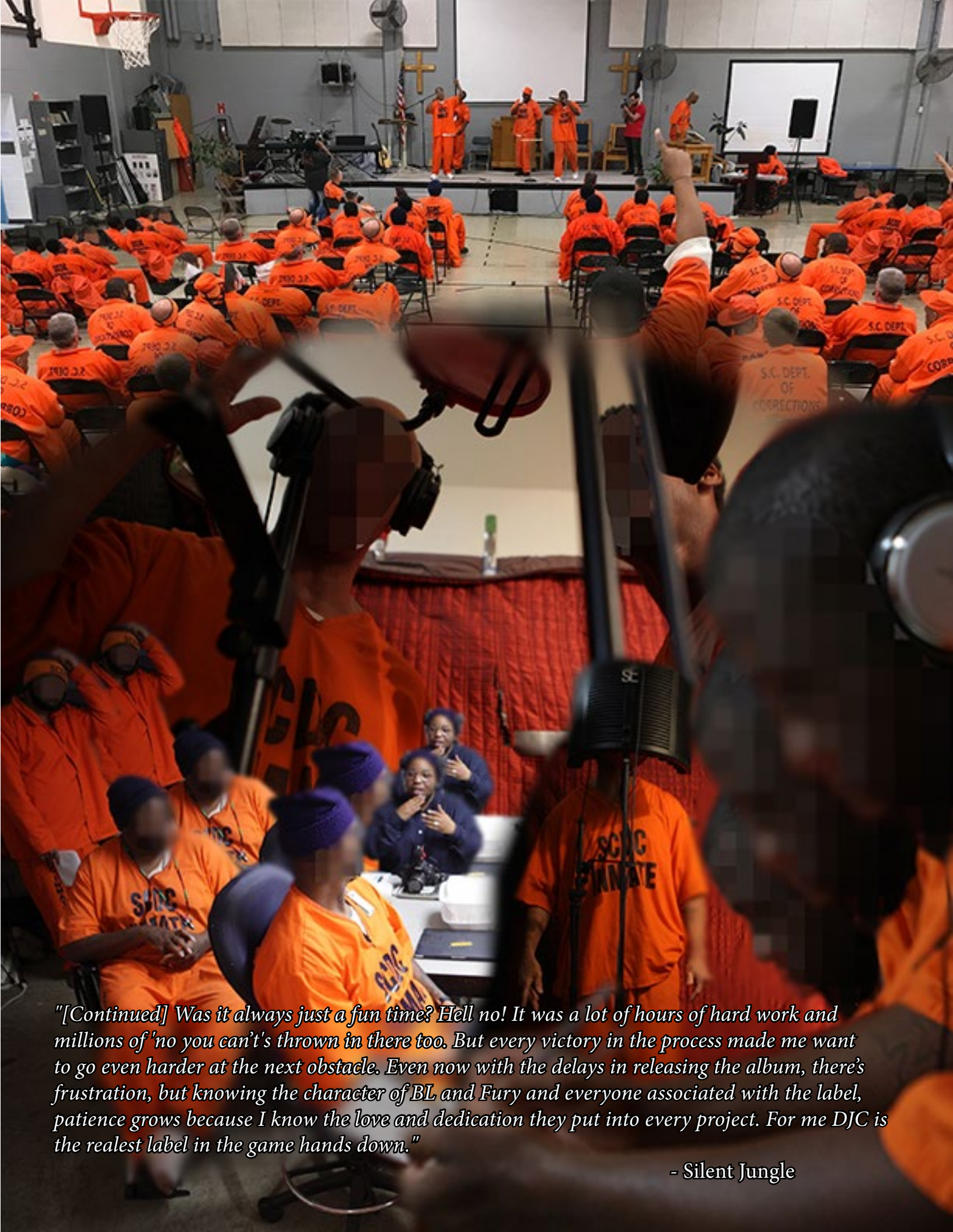
KEY OUTPUTS.

- Key Organizational Value: **Representation.** Our first project which features an incarcerated Co-Executive Producer; Silent Jungle, who has been able to provide key oversight from inside.
- Twelve songs about 70% completed. This does not include the mixing and mastering process, so in sum the album is about 50% complete.
- Over \$2.6K of instruments donated to Allendale CI, where members of The Masses and other residents are continuing to make music and express themselves creatively.
- Nine out of ten members of The Masses are Black, in a state where the ratio of ratio of African American to White incarceration is 4.3:1.

FUTURE IMPACTS.

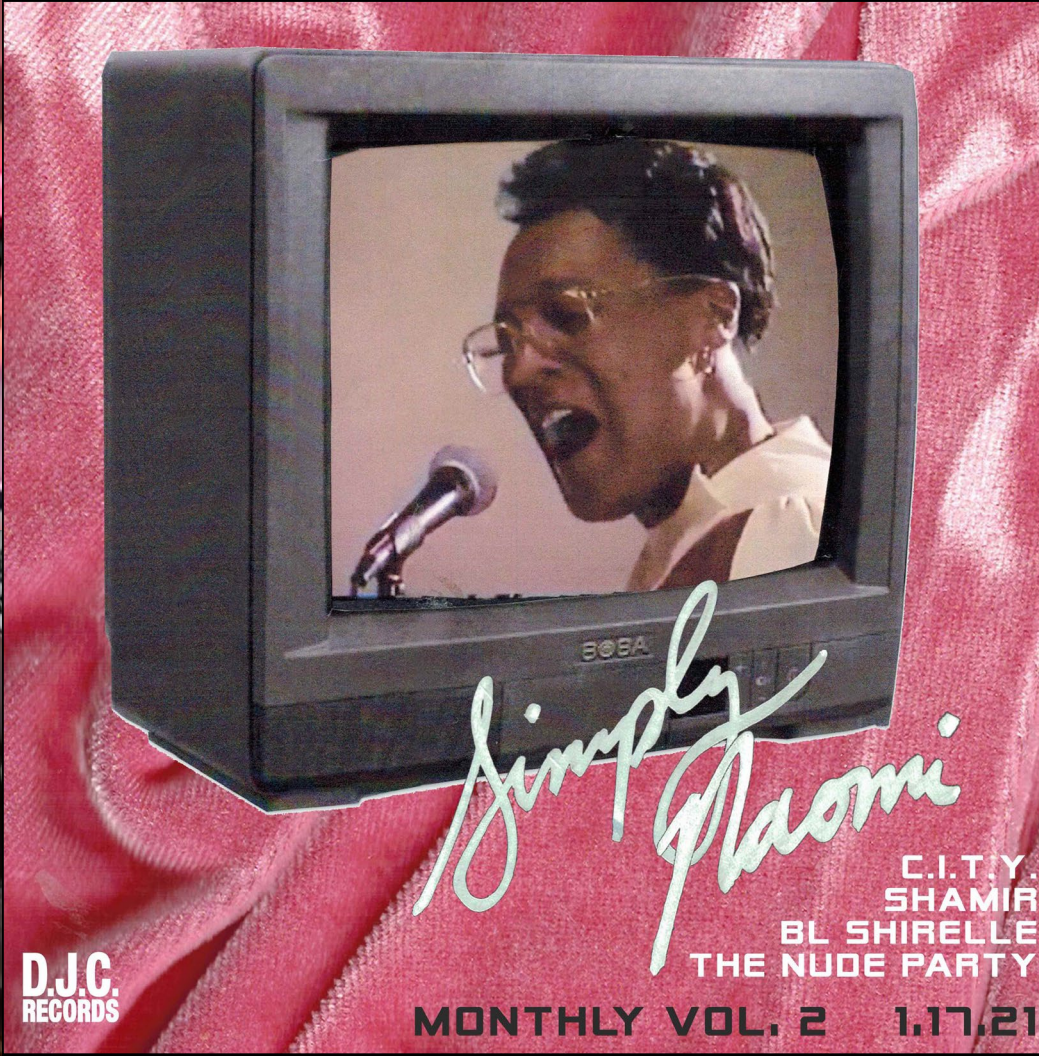
- The Masses will release the first group album recorded in a Southern prison, adding important perspectives to current narratives around incarceration and racial injustice.
- By the time the album is released, four of the members will be free, so there is a potential for touring. We are still too far away from release to surmise too much more about future impacts, but we expect The Masses to take the world by storm!

"When people ask me about what DJC is to me I tell them it's a form of resurrection. To have a label that comes into the darkest places and connects with the most forgotten people is powerful. Working on The Masses album gave me an additional purpose and drive every day outside of the grind of the prison routine. I could always escape into the creative process of songwriting or beatmaking. And along the way I learned so much on so many levels..."
[Continued on next page]



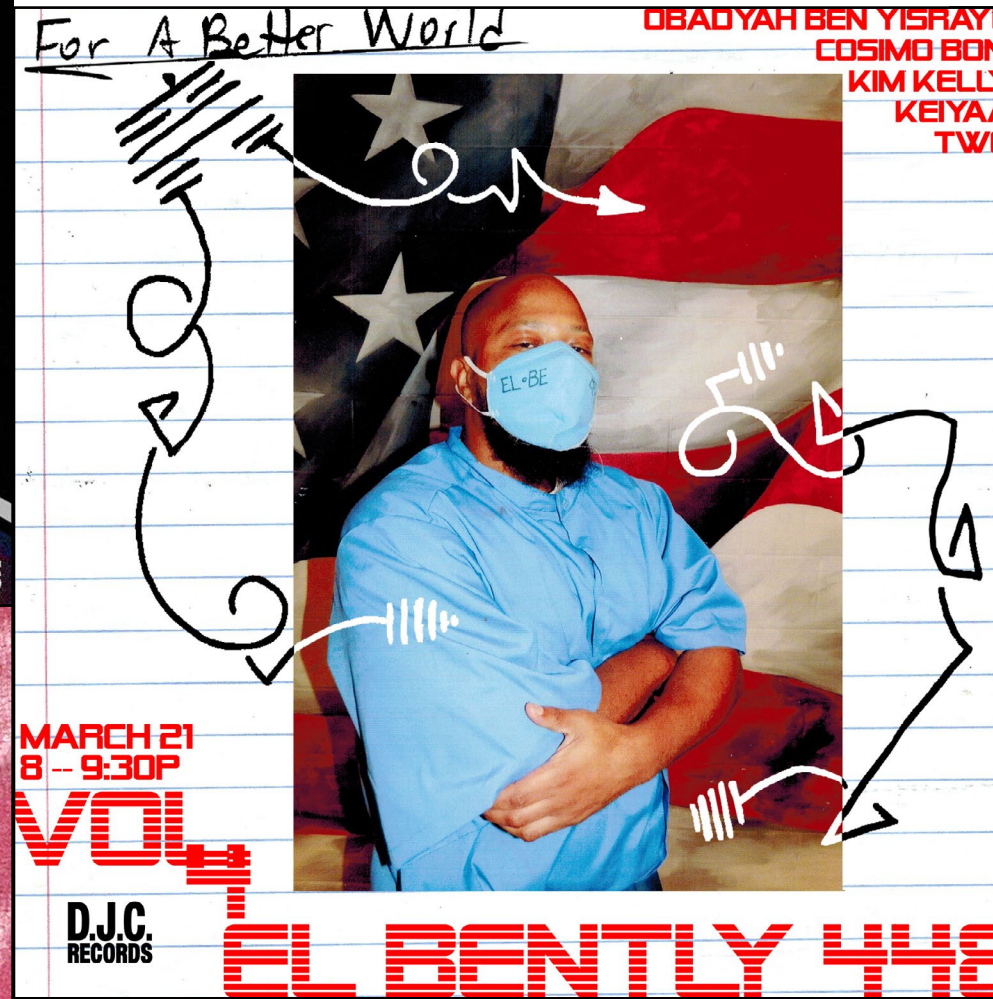
"[Continued] Was it always just a fun time? Hell no! It was a lot of hours of hard work and millions of 'no you can't's' thrown in there too. But every victory in the process made me want to go even harder at the next obstacle. Even now with the delays in releasing the album, there's frustration, but knowing the character of BL and Fury and everyone associated with the label, patience grows because I know the love and dedication they put into every project. For me DJC is the realest label in the game hands down."

- Silent Jungle



VIRTUAL VOLUMES

Between January and April we held three Virtual Volume concerts which showcased formerly or currently incarcerated musicians alongside talented popular artists like Shamir, KeiyyaA, and The Nude Party. This was a great way to build community with artists who we may not otherwise work with, grow our fanbase, and raise funds to complete projects.



Notably, this was the first collaboration with DJC and Maserati-E, who later dropped a feature on B. Alexis' project. An immensely talented songwriter/rapper/singer/guitarist from Oakland, Maserati-E has a bright future ahead of him! Check out his music.

In total, 145 people tuned in to these events and we raised over \$2K for DJC and justice-impacted artists, and provided stipends for the other featured performers (many whom graciously declined). You can find all Virtual Volumes on our [Youtube](#) channel.

*Some of the performers during these eclectic evenings:
This page: EL BENTLY 448, Cosimo Boni
Opposite (top down): Maserati-E & Antwan "Banks: Williams,
KeiyyaA, Obadyah Ben-Yisrayl, BL Shirelle*

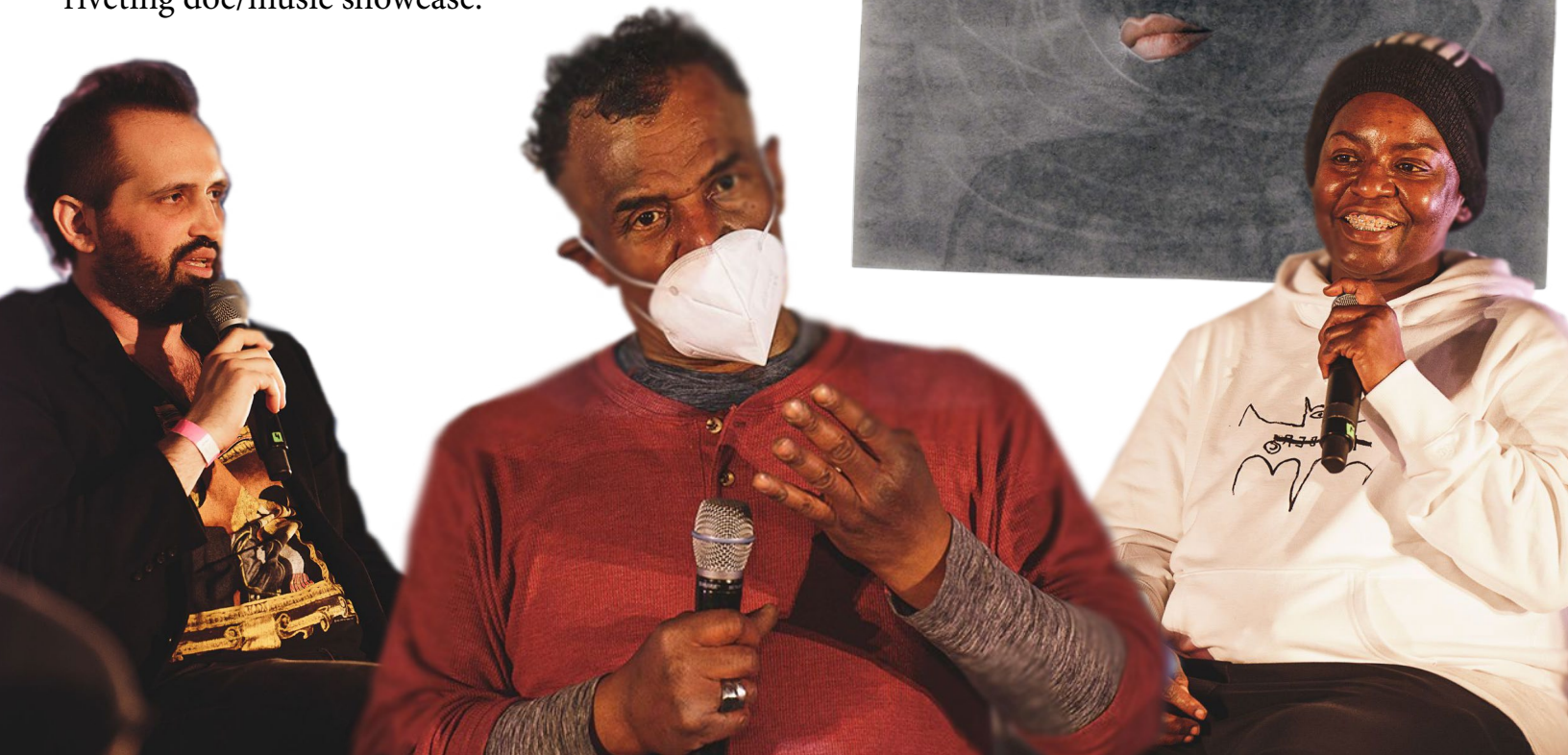
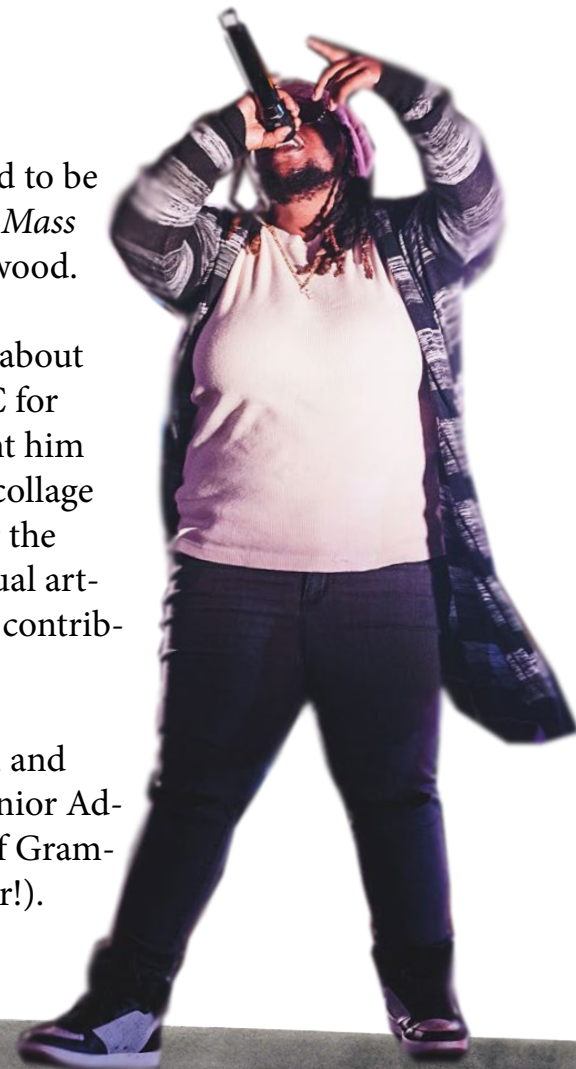
DJC AT MoMA PS1

After a year of quarantining and no live events, we were honored to be part of the closing event for the *Marking Time: Art in the Age of Mass Incarceration* exhibit at MoMA PS1 curated by Dr. Nicole Fleetwood.

Fleetwood, who met Fury in 2017 when she moderated a panel about Maxwell Melvins and Lifers Group, has been a supporter of DJC for years. When Fury showed her the artwork Tameca Cole had sent him from prison, she was blown away by "Locked In Dark Calm," a collage on charcoal. This piece would go on to be the flagship image for the *Marking Time* exhibit, and help propel a career for Cole as a visual artist. She has since won several grants and residencies and been a contributing artist for The New York Times.

The March event featured a [panel](#) with Cole, BL, Simply Naomi, and Fury, with a surprise appearance from Maxwell Melvins, our Senior Advisor, member of Lifers Groove, and former member/founder of Grammy-nominated Lifers *Group* (not to be confused with the former!).

The evening followed with performances from BL and Simply Naomi, who performed respectively and then joined forces for a yet-to-be-released song from BL called "Troubled Waters." Perhaps most remarkably, the seven incarcerated members of Territorial were able to reach a wide new audience with the screening of [Tlaxihuiqui: A Virtual Performance](#), a riveting doc/music showcase.



MoMA PS1



FEAT.
territorial
bl shirelle
simply, naomi
tameca cole
fury young

livestream / 6p EST

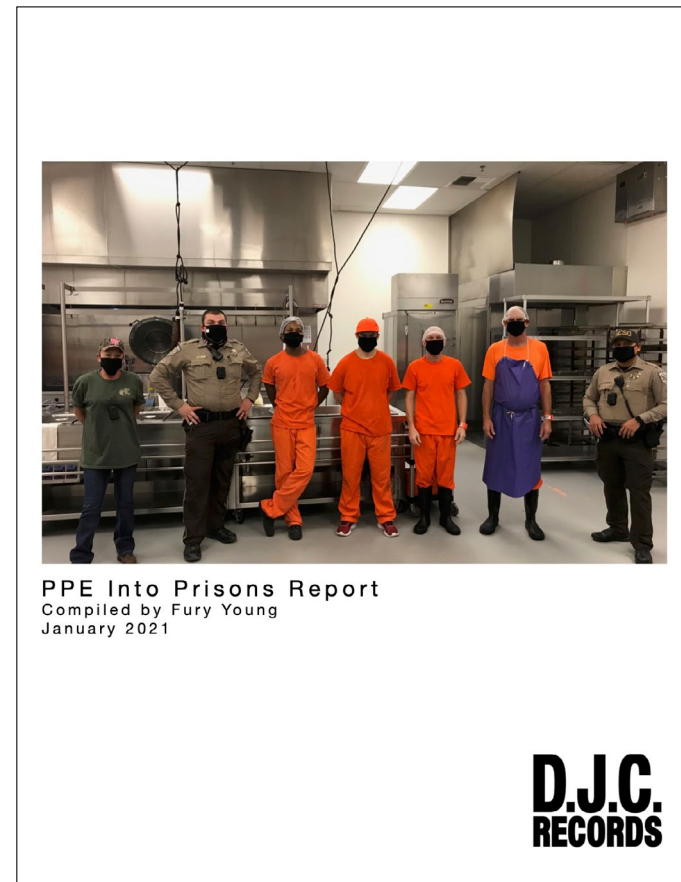


Opposite: "Locked in Dark Calm" by Tameca Cole
L-R: Fury Young, Maxwell Melvins, BL Shirelle,
Tameca Cole, & Simply Naomi... What a night!

PUBLISHED REPORTS



2020 was our official launch year as a record label and we published our first [Annual Report](#).



From April to October 2020, our PPE Into Prisons campaign raised \$25,000 and sent over 30K masks to 26 prisons and jails in 16 states. [Read the full report](#).

Click links or view reports at:
diejimcrow.com/reports-financials

PRESS

“The howling need for redemption at its core makes it less a mere musical experience and more a profound leap of faith.”

- Michael Patrick Smith, *The Washington Post*



Click logos or view articles at:
diejimcrow.com/press

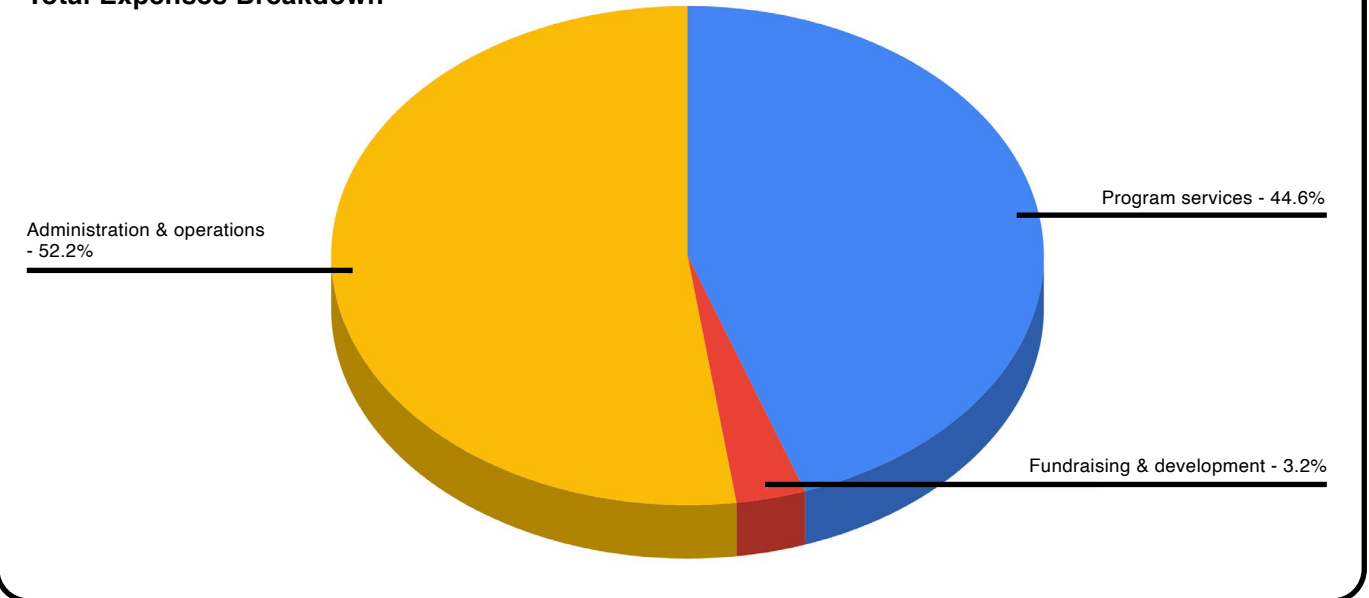
FINANCIALS

Statement of Activities		
<i>For the year ending December 31,</i>	2021	2020
Revenue		
Contributions, grants, and other income	\$87,755	\$88,607
Government grants	\$12,000	0
Gifts in-kind and contributed services	\$16,295	0
Total Revenue	\$116,050	\$88,607
Expenses		
Program Services*	\$38,594	\$63,026
Fundraising & Development	\$2,725	\$2,857
Administration & Operations	\$45,120	\$33,453
Total Expenses	\$86,439	\$99,336
Excess/(deficit) of revenue over expense	\$29,611	(\$10,729)
Net assets or fund balances at beginning of year	\$26,041	\$36,769
Net Assets at End of year	\$55,652	\$26,041

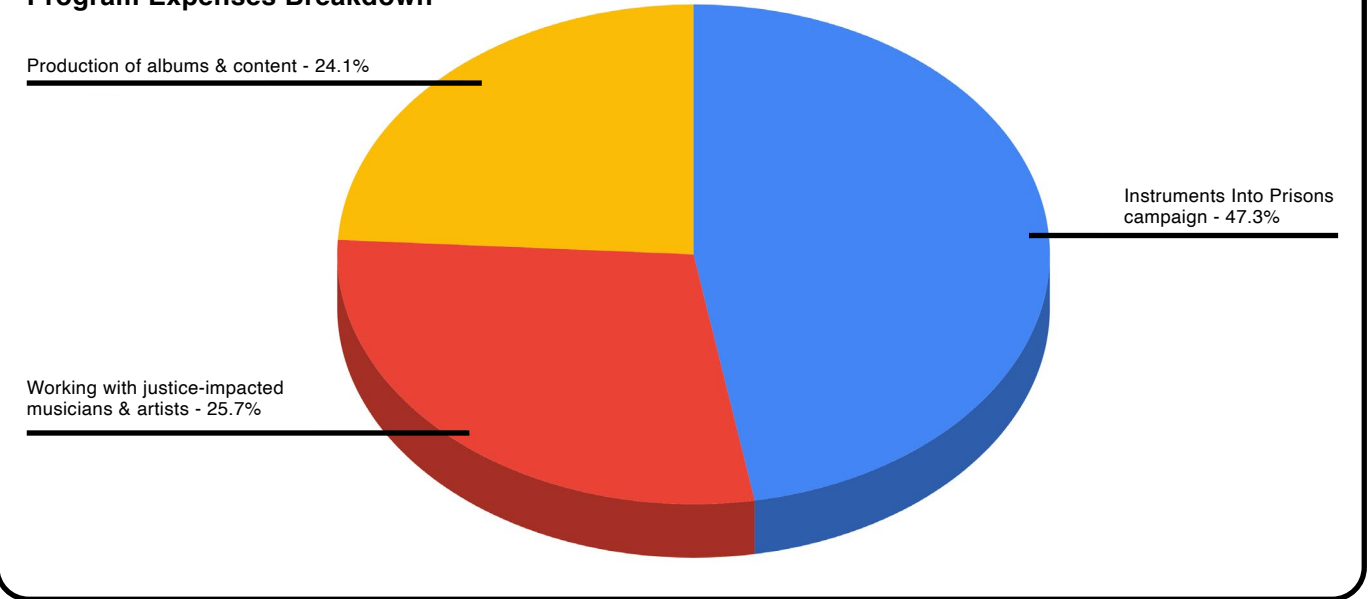
*2021 includes \$18.2K of Instruments Into Prisons expenses. 2020 includes \$25.5K for PPE Into Prisons expenses.

Balance Sheet		
<i>For the year ending December 31,</i>	2021	2020
Assets		
Cash and cash equivalents	\$57,756	\$43,103
Grants and contributions receivable	5000	0
Fixed assets	0	0
Total Assets	\$62,756	\$43,103
Liabilities and Net Assets		
Accounts payable and accrued expenses and line of credit	\$7,104	\$17,063
Deferred revenue	0	0
Total Liabilities	\$7,104	\$17,063
Net assets		
Unrestricted	\$43,792	\$11,040
Temporarily restricted	\$11,860	\$15,000
Total Net Assets	\$62,657	\$43,103
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$55,652	\$26,040

Total Expenses Breakdown



Program Expenses Breakdown



- A revenue growth of 31% from 2020.
- \$56.4K from 295 donors, including \$4.4K from Instruments Into Prisons (IIP) campaign.
- \$21.5K in grant support thanks to New Music USA, Resist, Robert & Maurine Rothschild Fund, and the Yip Harburg Foundation.
- Over \$16K of in-kind support with the incredible turnout from the IIP campaign.

SUPPORTERS

None of this work would be possible without the incredible support of the foundations and individuals who keep us going. We extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of you.

New Music USA
Robert & Maurine Rothschild Fund
The Yip Harburg Foundation
Resist.

A special thank you to our dear supporter Mary Hamrick.

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			Jeanie Austin

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