

CLEVE SCENE

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Nonprofit Record Label for Formerly and Currently Incarcerated Musicians Raising Funds to Get PPE into Ohio Prisons

By Maija Zummo



• Die Jim Crow Records

Die Jim Crow Records (DJC) is a nonprofit label, founded by Fury Young, with the goal of providing “formerly and currently incarcerated musicians a high-quality platform for their voices to be heard,” Young says via email.

The label’s first EP, released in 2016, was recorded locally at the Warren Correctional Institution in Lebanon, and included work from formerly incarcerated musicians in Brooklyn and Philly — two cities where DJC is now based.

“Headed to the Street,” a single off that six-track EP, even received a video premiere on **Rolling Stone’s website in 2018**. The song features lyrics from B.L. Shirelle — DJC’s current deputy director — who wrote it as she was getting ready to finish her prison term in Pennsylvania and return to civilian life. Young sent Shirelle’s lyrics to Anthony McKinney and Mark B. Springer, then both inmates at Warren Correctional, to set them to music, according to the Rolling Stone story.

McKinney is now at Ross Correctional and that relationship and Young’s relationship with the incarcerated has led to his current mission: **to raise funds to provide PPE to the prisons where DJC musicians are currently or have been incarcerated.**

Because of the close living quarters, inability to social distance and myriad other contributing factors, prisons have become a hotbed of coronavirus infection, especially in Ohio, where the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation & Correction is reporting 4,606 cases as of May 24.

According to his GoFundMe page, Young says, “We began this campaign on April 13 by reaching out to the 13 prisons we have collaborators at to see if they would accept PPE donations. We received three approvals, seven denials (three were good on supplies), and three did not reply.”

Currently, they have raised \$11,915 toward their goal of \$20,000 for PPE for inmates.

“When the whole COVID thing broke out, I think we felt pretty helpless, just like everyone else,” Young says. “B.L. Shirelle called me one day and said, ‘Fury, we really need to do something about this. We can’t be the org that sits back and does nothing while all this horror goes on,’ was the gist of what she said. And so I kept thinking about it and got really inspired. She donated about 50 masks to a local women’s shelter in Philly, and that then inspired me to think inside the prisons. So we just started the campaign and it has naturally grown from there. Our Board Director, Eric Borsuk, and Advisory Council member Cat Navarro have been very helpful in coordinating the PPE getting inside, so shout out to them, too.”

So far they have sent 100 KN95 masks and 20 bottles of 16-oz. hand sanitizer to a juvenile prison in Mississippi; 250 surgical masks and 250 KN95 masks to Taconic Correctional Facility women's prison in New York; 750 surgical masks and 500 KN95s to Pulaski State Prison women's facility in Georgia; 5,700 surgical masks to the Ohio Department of Corrections to disperse where there is the most need (Young says that that order is still on its way — “That order is still in transit and we're not sure what's going on. It came from China — the feds might be holding it up at customs or something because right now it's saying it's in Canada”); and 500 KN95s to the Ross Correctional Institution, also in Ohio.

That last prison is the home of the aforementioned McKinney, the musician who helped on the video that debuted on Rolling Stone.

“(The masks) arrived on Tuesday and I'm waiting to hear from Ant how they've been distributed,” Young says. “As of today Ross has not had any positive cases but I don't think they've been testing there until recently. We reached out to them simply because of Ant being there and they said we're very much in need.”

Young says McKinney, a drummer, singer and guitarist, has worked with DJC since 2014.

“He is mainly on these two songs on our EP which came out in 2016: 'Headed to the Streets' and 'Tired & Weary.' The latter is basically his story of how he got locked up,” Young says. “Ant has maintained his innocence for the past 15 years and has been fighting his case.”

While continuing to raise funds to get PPE to prisoners, DJC is also continuing its mission of giving those who are currently incarcerated or who have been “a firmer sense of identity and self-worth through creating music and writing,” says Young.

“People in prison are so misunderstood in society — the typical ‘judged as monsters’ kind of thing. Here's a quote of mine directly from our [website](#) that I think sums it up pretty well:

'Death to Jim Crow means a death to stereotypes, to misconceptions of the ‘Other.’

There is no Other. The term Jim Crow comes from a song which satirizes a slave. I see much parallel to the way our society views those incarcerated: that they are lesser than, merely criminals. DJC Records aims to change this narrative through music.”

For more about Die Jim Crow Records, visit diejimcrow.com. And for more about the PPE GoFundMe, visit gofundme.com/f/ppe-for-incarcerated-individuals.