

# *Columbus Alive*

## *DJC Records raises money for incarcerated endangered by the coronavirus*

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When Fury Young started what would become DJC Records (formerly Die Jim Crow) back around 2013, he knew only that he wanted to give some voice to the incarcerated and the formerly incarcerated by recording a full-length album featuring their musical contributions. “I was 23 at the time, and I knew I really [cared] about social justice issues, but I didn’t know how to harness that energy,” said Young, who grew up on New York’s Lower East Side and gravitated toward the issue due in part to his father’s career as a social worker.

Around the same time, Young discovered Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, which he said introduced a needed focus. In short order, Young hatched the idea of collaborating on an album with the incarcerated, and he started writing to inmates and prison arts organizations with little understanding of how to navigate the layers of bureaucracy. “And most of them didn’t reply,” he said.

One person that did, however, was Catherine Roma, who helped establish the UMOJA Men's Chorus at Warren Correctional Institution. Roma assisted Young and his DJC team in getting access to the prison, where the crew recorded the six-song Die Jim Crow EP, released in 2016.

The Ohio-based recording sessions help explain the Brooklyn/Philadelphia-based label's deep local ties. DJC has also fostered contributions from the likes of formerly incarcerated Columbus soul man Norman Whiteside and a trio of Ohio musicians still serving out sentences, including percussionist Anthony McKinney, currently incarcerated at Ross Correctional in Chillicothe. While music remains central to DJC's existence, Young said the nonprofit has seen its mission grow and morph through the years, evolving into a strong advocate for prison reform. Most recently, the label started raising funds to help distribute personal protective equipment (PPE) to incarcerated folks, a population that has been ravaged by the continued spread of COVID-19. In recent weeks, the organization has donated masks and hand sanitizer to a handful of prisons nationwide, including the headquarters of the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction (ORDC) and to Ross Correctional.

"It's a plague and it's highly contagious, and these are people who can't social distance or effectively quarantine," said Young, who first adopted a "let's take care of our own" approach, making donations to the prisons in which musicians the label has previously worked with are housed. "Then as things popped up and [the virus] started progressing in other states, we took more of an approach where the most desperate situations get priority."

Amid this growing mission, the full-length album has continued to take a back seat, to the point that Young admits there's a chance that it might never see a release.

"It's going to be done when it's finished, and it might never be done, like some kind of Don Quixote shit," said Young. "When I started the LP, I was just some kid. I was 23 years old and I had this big idea ... to make a collaborative album. But what ended up happening, which is really cool, is that this whole other thing happened. And it's what needed to happen, and what was meant to happen."