

## NYC Song of Hope: An Inside View By Harold Stephan

Written by NYC public school students under lockdown, in partnership with the Songwriters Hall of Fame and the NYCDOE, the “Song of Hope” was screened back to back with a live performance by Sara Bareilles in a Times Square Arts Education celebration on June 5th, 2021. Entitled “Let’s Get This Show On The Street”, the event was hosted by the performing arts nonprofit New 42. What a day to remember! This is how that day came to be.



“I want to give NYC public school students a high level musical experience to cap this challenging year”, explained Ms. Elizabeth Guglielmo, the Director of Music for the NYCDOE. “Would you be interested in working with students to compose an original song about the pandemic and producing the music?” “YES!”, I replied.

Through my work as Vice-Chair of the Songwriters Hall of Fame NY Education Committee, I reached out to Chairperson April Anderson to see if the Songwriters Hall of Fame would be interested in partnering with the NYCDOE on the project. We soon had the green light from Songwriters Hall of Fame CEO and President, Linda Moran, and the partnership was born.

*“Good morning, everyone! The NYCDOE Office of Arts & Special Projects, in partnership with the Songwriters Hall of Fame, is excited to announce the **NYC Song of Hope citywide songwriting project!***

So began the email blast to music teachers within a school system of 1.1 million students—the largest in the United States.

*In times of uncertainty, we turn to music to bring us hope and comfort. Many of us describe music as the “air we breathe” or “food for our soul.” Music is the faithful friend we can count on through all times. Some of us would even say that music has saved our lives!*

*Now is the time for us to come together in song.*

*We invite you and your students to join us in co-creating a NYC Song of Hope!*



We wanted the song to honor NYC’s cultural diversity while expressing hope, tenacity and resilience. Musically this meant exploring a number of ideas before settling on an arrangement featuring Big Band style horns infused with Latin Percussion and contemporary Hip-Hop. We structured the track into an easy to follow Verse/Chorus Pop format, so kids could “topline” over it, focusing on melody and lyrics. This provided structure and helped evoke the right energy and mood. ([Scan code/click to listen](#))



When it came time to launch the project into the NYCDOE, we broke the process up into two phases: Songwriting and Performance.

*PHASE 1: LET'S WRITE THE LYRICS AND MELODY TOGETHER!*

- *Listen to the instrumental track attached.*
- *Brainstorm\* lyrics and/or a melody that will encourage fellow New Yorkers to feel strong, hopeful, and proud of the city we call home!*

If students needed a point of entry for lyric writing, we suggested the poem, "Where I'm From..." by George Ella Lyon. We provided worksheets to get kids thinking about the people, places, foods, sounds, and characteristics that they identified with NYC.



*To access the poem, "Where I'm From..." by George Ella Lyon ([scan code/click to read](#)):*





For the performance phase, we synthesized the musical ideas of nearly 20 student songwriters and created a guide video with simple instructions for how to perform and record each section of the song, as detailed here:

*PHASE 2: LET'S PERFORM OUR SONG TOGETHER!*

- *With earbuds in, watch the guide video that includes student-created lyrics and melodies ([scan code/click link](#)).*
- *Video-record yourself singing or rapping along to the track. IMPORTANT: On your recording, we should only hear you singing or rapping; we should not hear the guide track.*

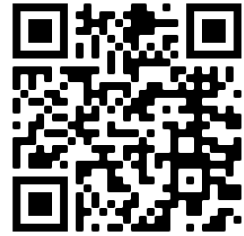


This is how the words, “Stay Strong, New York. We Love, NY. We are brave, we are tough, and we will rise above”, came to be heard echoing off the buildings in Times Square on a hot Saturday afternoon in early June, 2021. Both the mayor and NYC Schools Chancellor Meisha Porter were in attendance to celebrate arts education and the reopening of NYC's cultural community. The finished music video features songwriting from 20 student songwriters with performances from over 250 K-12 NYC public students representing all 5 boroughs. To listen, scan code below or [click here](#).





Don't forget to check out the author's delicious Chicken Halal recipe in the Musician's Cook Cookbook, with recipes written by quarantining NYC-area musicians. All proceeds from the cookbook go directly to the [Save NYC Musicians](#) campaign which helps NYC musicians who are suffering financial hardship at this time.



About: I have been a proud Local 802 member since the early 2000s, first as a commercial music composer and then as a Broadway keyboardist. I am a voting member of the Grammy Awards and Screen Actors Guild Awards and my music can be heard on YouTube from celebrities like MattyB, on TV Shows with my band [Amelia's Dream](#) and on TV commercials for Burger King, Chevrolet, Campbells, Hasbro, Fisher Price, Friskies and Sears. I have played keyboards on Broadway shows including The Lion King, Spider Man, and A Bronx Tale. My current focus is on pop songwriting and artist development. I am a Lincoln Center Scholar and Vice-Chair of the Songwriters Hall of Fame NY Education Committee and Co-Creator of [Master Sessions at Stuyvesant High School](#).