



SONGS IN THE KEY OF LIFE

ALEXANDER STAR CHARTS AN ARTISTIC PATH WITH HIGHER PURPOSE,
CREATING IMPACT MUSIC THAT STIRS THE MIND AND SOUL

BY DANIELLE CHARBONNEAU

O

n a spring evening in March 2022, Alexander Star stood behind a silver recording mic wearing a simple gold chain, a crisp black T-shirt and a black ball cap embroidered with his own logo—a gold star with the silhouette of a fedora-wearing

musician throwing a peace sign.

The South Florida-based musician grooved with a swagger and ease that easily enralls an audience. Behind him was his five-piece reggae-rock band, the Golden People, and to his right were seven teenagers from Handy, Inc., the nonprofit organization in Fort Lauderdale that advocates for abused, neglected and disadvantaged youth. For months, Star had been mentoring the teenagers to write and produce their own original songs for an album called *Library of Us*.

Star and his mentees were about to perform the songs live for an internet audience.

“Yo, B.X., go ahead and give me some sprinkle sprackles, yeah? Something nice,” Star requested of his keyboardist, Michael James (aka, B.X.).

James responded with a whimsical cascade of chimes, played over a jazzy beat the band maintained for Star to emcee the concert. Star introduced his band and the teenagers; the concert began. One by one, each teenager rotated to the mic to perform their own original lyrics, with backup vocals by Star. Kenwon rapped about a guardian who stepped in to mother him and his four siblings. Kemitrius spit lyrics about George Floyd and his fear of dying early. Angeles quickfire-rapped in her native Spanish. Sky, Jabari, Tati and Arielle took their turns. All were courageous, raw and vulnerable, surely eliciting a gut-punch of emotion from anyone who watched online.

When asked how he helped the kids to open up so fiercely, Star says he led by example.

“You have to show them what’s possible,” he says. “I put on a beat, and then I’ll write and perform a verse I just wrote. It will have no cursing and no demeaning lyrics, but it’ll be full of punchlines and clever bars. I meet them at their level. I tell them, ‘Yo, I’m a dope artist, and you can be, too.’ I perform my level of dope, and they have something to try and match.”

Star’s collaboration with Handy is just one example of the type of work for which the full-time musician has become known. He’s dubbed the “Impact Artist”; his pursuits typically support a cause or contain socially conscious lyrics.

His inspired work has taken him around the globe. For instance, in 2018, Star found himself in a hotel room in east Africa with Rwandan superstar Andy Bumuntu collaborating on a song to be performed at the Ubumuntu Arts Festival. Organizers had seen one of Star’s music videos and recruited him to write an anthem to provide hope and healing to the post-genocide nation. Star asked to connect with a Rwandan artist so the song would be a true cultural collaboration. To prepare, he also spoke with locals who had witnessed acts of genocide during the 1994 Rwandan civil war.

“There was one guy; he said he [can be] walking to work, or walking to the store, and the man who murdered his parents [may walk by and] wave good morning to him,” Star says. “Imagine the level of trauma walking around, and how much humility and forgiveness you’d have to have. I basically put myself in the shoes of somebody trying to get over that trauma. That’s how I wrote the song.”

“Show Me the Way” tells the story of a person who is downtrodden and struggling to persevere when he meets a man on the road who inspires him to cling to hope.

“There’s a cloud on my heart today,” the lyrics go. “He said, ‘Peace on the way.’”

After the song was finished, Star visited an orphanage where he was greeted by a mob of uniform-wearing youngsters. The children surprised him with a dance they choreographed for the song. Star was so moved by their spirit that he invited them to perform with him on stage at the festival.

Star has been the headliner at five United Nations events in several countries. And in France, he earned Parisian stardom when he became a reappearing music mentor on the French reality television show, *Les Anges*, which filmed in Miami.

MUSIC MEETS MESSAGE

Locally, Star’s positive music also has been an asset. He is the musician behind a recently released song for the Children’s Services Council of Broward County, “Listen with Love,” which likely was influenced by Star’s own children—son Zion (age 11) and daughter Nova (age 2)—with Samantha Chin-Yee, his wife of nearly 14 years. The song encourages adults to read between the lines of what their children say and “listen with love” so they can truly *hear* their kids.

He produced “Just One Firefly,” the inspiring theme song for 211 Broward, the county’s crisis hotline. His powerful call-to-action anthem “This Is My Era” was rebranded into a Super Bowl LIV campaign for Miami that featured NFL stars Larry Fitzgerald, Jarvis Landry and Mark Sanchez, rapping alongside Star to promote coral reef conservation.

For a public service campaign, he challenged Miami residents to be environmentally friendly with a catchy, Caribbean-styled tune, “Keep Miami Beautiful,” which was later nominated for an Emmy award.

While Star wears the title “Impact Artist” proudly, he resists being pigeonholed. Why should positive music and straight awesome music be seen as mutually exclusive? Foremost, Star wants to be recognized as a gifted musician and producer. He has reverence for the craft, perhaps passed down to him from his father, a “tuxedo-with-tails-wearing” classical concert pianist.

This reverence was recently illustrated by an Instagram video. In it, Star demonstrates how to mix multiple layers of track with instruments, a cappella and sounds. As he hovers over his laptop, he appears like an orchestra conductor, closing his eyes and swaying his hand over the keys, expertly timing each beat to harmonize into a masterpiece.

For Star, it’s music first; message close second. Too often, Star says, impactful music is put in a niche, walled off from the popular mainstream. Star hopes to smash that wall. His larger vision is to make conscious music more of a norm in the music industry.

“My goal is to win with impact music at a level that



HEALING POWER: "Music is the kind of medicine people enjoy taking," Star says. "So, I write prescriptions to treat the symptoms I see."

inspires rising artists to also make [similar music],” he says.

This wasn’t always Star’s goal. He came to the realization after following a very different path.

MAKING THE SCENE

As a teenager, Star was inadvertently thrust into South Florida’s world of celebrity, luxury, nightclubs and wealth. He tells the story of when he was just 16, on the basketball court across from his house in Coral Springs, freestyle rapping with his friends. His skills attracted a horde, and a man who would become his manager took notice.

“He was driving by, and he just stopped,” Star remembers. “He saw the crowd of people in the basketball park bobbing like [in] *8 Mile* [the 2002 movie with Eminem]. He got my info that day; two months later he invited me to come to the recording studio. It was the first recording studio I had ever been in.”

Star met a few other young musicians. Together they formed a group called the Free Agents. They recorded a CD, made copies, printed their own album art at Kinkos and started hustling their jams on South Beach.

They also sang live a cappella.

“We would walk up to people and ask, ‘Can we sing something for you?’” Star remembers.

Their pavement-pounding paid off when one night they sang for a table of people; one turned out to be Jerome James, an NBA player at the time with the New York Knicks. James asked the Free Agents to come perform at his family reunion.

“His family loved us,” Star says.

James wanted to help make the Free Agents famous.

He offered to house the boys in his luxurious three-bedroom guest house on a five-acre property, where the Free Agents lived for two years.

“I’m 18 years old, living with a multimillionaire, driving his cars. I’m going to the clubs with NBA players and his entourage,” Star remembers. “We’d roll up in a three-car caravan—his silver Rolls-Royce in the front, silver Mercedes in the middle with all his girls, and then the silver Hummer.”

The scene was particularly wild for Star, who, as a child, had mostly grown up in small-town Tennessee by a soybean farm. His family was middle class; his father a “piano prodigy,” his mother a New York Jewish hippie, his sister a musician in the orchestra who could play seven instruments.

While under James’ wing, Star knew he was living just about any other teenage boy’s dream. However, he says the scene ultimately turned him off—and propelled him toward the path he’s on now.

“I had a radar for people’s happiness,” Star says. “I remember being in those clubs and thinking to myself, ‘The people spending the most money look the least happy.’ They were all putting on this facade.”



FORGING HIS OWN PATH

At 20, Star realized he wanted to change courses. He broke away from the Free Agents and went to school at Broward Community College, where he studied radio and television broadcasting. He retreated into a phase of solo creativity and started writing music for himself.

“That’s when my mind-state switched,” he says. “I no longer had people telling me what to write. I no



ON STAGE: Star will perform at the Community Care Plan Nonprofit Awards, hosted by 211 Broward, on March 3 at Seminole Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.

longer had people pointing at the radio when a song was playing and saying, ‘You need to do something like that.’ I was by myself, asking what does Alexander Star, the human, talk about? What do I write when I’m locked in a castle tower with pen and paper? And that’s where all of my consciousness just started hemorrhaging.”

At first, he kept those songs a secret.

“I didn’t think that anybody wanted to hear music that has a positive message,” Star remembers.

He reluctantly shared some of the work with an older friend and mentor, Lex Kelly.

“He’s like, damn, Star. People need to hear this,” he recalls. “But I was really adamant. I’m like, ‘Yo, nobody wants to hear this.’ ”

Kelly’s encouragement, it seems, subconsciously soaked in. A short while later, Star found himself on stage at a talent show on the community college’s breezeway. He had been running late for a math test and was hustling past the stage when the emcee called him over and asked him to perform. Star was reluctant, but when the emcee offered to let him cut the line if he got on stage that moment, Star agreed.

“I was like, ‘Well, all right, but I ain’t got no track,’” Star says. “So, I decided to just rap something a capella. And it was a song that I had written called ‘Warrior for Life.’ In it, I talked about my struggles and viewpoints on the world.”

To his surprise, the students reacted.

“They were going crazy,” Star remembers. “I ended up winning the talent show.”

Kelly’s words suddenly resonated: “People need to

hear this.” The phrase became his affirmation.

From that day forward, Star set out to make what he now calls “medicine music”—music that heals, moves and reflects truths. It’s not always serious. Sometimes it’s silly, but it’s always designed to make people *feel*.

“That’s the whole point of music,” Star says. “Music is a driving force in how we feel because music is frequency. When you align with frequencies that make sense to you, you operate at a higher function. Scientifically, I understand that music can be medicine, or it can be poison. I know a lot of people who are making poison, and I’m cool with being one of the few who makes medicine.”

While Star hasn’t struck superstardom just yet, audiences and artists have responded. He’s been invited to open for big names like Earth, Wind & Fire, and he’s written music for artists including Flo Rida and Black Violin.

His band recently performed on Las Olas Boulevard at the Visit Lauderdale Food & Wine Festival. And he’s working toward booking a national concert tour. Star hopes to play shows where people are especially receptive to a conscious message.

“Maybe a Tony Robbins event or something like that,” Star says.

A second album produced with kids from Handy likely will be released later this year. Star says he’s ready for the next level.

“People know me now as an impact artist,” Star says. “People are about to know me as a dope-ass artist who happens to also be very impactful.”