

HIPPO NITE

BARS, CLUBS, BANDS AND OTHER AFTER-DARK AMUSEMENTS

Life in the Years reels 'em in

Musicians from everywhere reflect on aging in benefit CD

By Michael Witthaus
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The aging process can elicit many emotions — reflection, stoicism, defiance, loneliness, resignation and sometimes sorrow. It also brings awareness. Hair missing from the usual spots and hot flashes — what modern women call power surges.

All of these feelings and more are expressed in music on *Life in the Years*, a pair of CDs compiled by Londonderry songwriter Dave Bastien, a joint effort of his nonprofit group Musicians for a Cause and the Moore Center in Manchester. A worldwide competition produced more than 1,200 entries and 35 winning songs.

"The contest was about finding songs that help bring compassion and awareness to issues around aging and the elderly," Bastien said. "Anything that presented an important perspective about aging was what we were looking for." The results run the gamut from thoughtful to funny to heartbreaking, and that's really the point, Bastien said. "It's important that to feel something. Sadness is OK. It's an emotion, and if it makes you feel compassion it's good."

Two songs about losing parents to cancer fit this mold — Jen Foster's "Talk Me Home" and Out of Ether's "Daddy Don't Let Go." But for each tear, there's a knowing smile, like "Is It Hot In Here," a menopausal shuffle from Ellen Bukstel, or Mr. Deep Positivity's hip-hop romp, "Nothin' But a Number."

Some of *Life in the Years*' most striking insight comes from unlikely sources. Twenty-four-year old Anthony Salari wrote "Get Pretty" for his mother, after she saw the lines on her face in a mirror and began to cry.

"She said, 'I don't know who this person is — it isn't me,'" Bastien recalled. "So he wrote her a love song."

One of the best selections was almost too late for the collection. Bastien repeatedly asked Liz Longley for a contribution, to no avail. One night, he and Moore Center CEO Paul Boynton went to an open-mike night at Tupelo Music Hall where Longley was the feature performer. Boynton was so impressed he commissioned her to create a theme song for his social services organization.

Later, Bastien asked Longley if she'd ever written a song for the *Life in the Years* project.

"At this point, the contest was done, and I was

about to create the masters. She said, 'Well, I wrote a song about my grandmother last week.' And I said, really? Can you send it to me?" She said yes, and later mailed him a rough recording done with a portable tape machine set atop her piano. "I was blown away," Bastien said. Within a week, a CD version was done and in his hands. "Unraveling" is an evocative meditation of a once-vibrant woman, now challenged by Alzheimer's: "I'm the only daughter of her oldest son/ I knew her well before her spirit was gone/ Her life is a thread woven into every part of me/ And she is unraveling."

Writes Longley in the accompanying notes for the song, "after eighty-four years of leading a beautiful life, it's hard to accept that the one thing she can't collect is her memories."

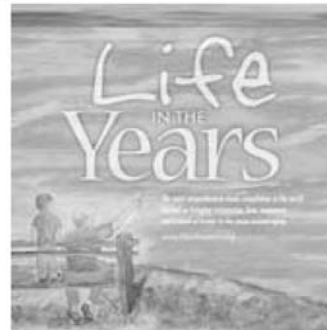
"Unraveling" is the lead track on disc two of the project, *More Life in the Years*. The original plan called for one CD, but at the end of the selection process, the contest's judges insisted that 20 songs make the cut. Bastien knew that was technically difficult, if not impossible. Bastien said, "It doesn't have to be one CD, we can make it two. Immediately people said, 'Do it, let's get going.' Because there were so many songs people were passionate about."

Other highlights include Nashville writer Kathy Hussey's song about how aging doesn't change what's inside a person. "The Same Mary" won the top prize for Hussey in the 2007 Great American Song contest. Tracy Newman's "I Just See You" echoes these sentiments, with a husband telling his wife, "Let me be your looking glass ... I don't see young, I don't see old — I just see you."

Former Allman Brother Johnny Neel contributed "Memories," and Colin McGrath's "Squirrels" tells the story of a retired man "with a bag of nuts" who explains his habit of treating furry-tailed rodents as pets with a line that neatly sums up the project's essence: "Everybody has got to have a way of keeping the time from slipping away."

Life in the Years began with contributions from a few big names. Livingston Taylor donated "Best of Friends," his 2002 duet with former sister-in-law Carly Simon, and Natalie Merchant provided "Beloved Wife," originally released in 1995.

"That was a key in getting independent artists to participate," said Bastien, who used a variety of Internet resources, including song



Life in the Years and *More Life in the Years* are sold for \$15 each at the Web site. The albums are also available for download for \$12 each.

placement specialist broadjam.com, to attract performers. The project's goals are national in scope, with hopes to recruit "Champions" willing to sell 20 CDs or digital downloads of *Life in the Years*. "If we can get 500 people in each of the 50 states to do that, we'll have a gold record," said the ever-enthusiastic Bastien.

One critical component, he said, is getting young people involved. Today's youth will be making tomorrow's decisions about how the elderly are cared for. Kids in grammar school today are going to the politicians, business owners, developers, and you want them to be aware of what elderly housing needs are, what government policies are going to be," Bastien said. "If a teacher gives them an assignment, they won't necessarily read the papers. But they'll listen to music. The messages in these songs will help create awareness and compassion that's going to carry with them as they age."

See the CD

For more on *Life in the Years*, go to www.lifeintheyears.org