

Musicians reach out to wounded warriors

By Chris Traber

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Musical tributes honouring international soldiers abound, and justifiably so.

Rare, however, is melodic homage to the men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces.

Our amalgamated military service branches have protected our nation's rights and freedoms since before Confederation to present day in Afghanistan, Newmarket resident Bernie Prost said.

"Every day, Canadian troops put themselves in harm's way, protecting those who can't protect themselves and ensuring freedom for citizens abroad and, of course, here at home," he said.

A friend pointed him to YouTube, which features military tribute songs. "We both believed we could take it further."

Mr. Prost, a professional photographer with a Markham studio and fellow amateur musician Jim Davidson, who served with Canadian forces in the 1960s, deliberated on how they could produce music with a message and tangible meaning.

The two musical hobbyists began drafting lyrics and fine-tuning accompanying scores.

"We've always been inspired by the selflessness and commitment of our brave troops," Mr. Prost said, adding the growing wounded and casualty lists overseas punctuates that our soldiers are in peril daily.

"We wanted to show our support."

The project gained momentum. With five songs ready for production, the men enlisted family and friends and volunteer help. They established forthewarrior.com, an Internet site crafted pro bono by an associate.

Turning to former FM drummer Marty Deller, now owner of Boomka Recording Studio, the duo recruited Newmarket sound engineer Peter Willis, who has worked with Glass Tiger and Alannah Myles.

Mr. Prost's daughter, Kara, 25, warmed up her vocals and son Taylor, 20, brought his keyboard and bass skills. Professional guitarist Bill Campbell and the Durham Regional Police Pipes and Drums Corps stepped up as well.

The result is a series of poignant songs, stirring and inspirational, reflecting on the departed, the wounded, the damaged and the survivors.

Midnight Soldier, a requiem on post traumatic stress disorder, with Mr. Prost on vocals, is stunningly moving. His voice has a plaintive Willie Nelson quality and the sound production is crisp and full. Other tunes address a POW's lament, a soldier's prayer and the cost of victory.

To defray their out-of-pocket expenses, already in the thousands, the men solicited sponsors. Many York Region businesses lined up. In addition, the songs can be sampled free or downloaded for \$1.98 each.

Proceeds support woundedwarriors.ca, a non-profit charity assisting wounded Canadian service members and their families.

"This is the quintessential Canadian patriotism, quiet and effective," Wounded Warriors founder, Capt. Wayne Johnston, said of the duo's largess. "It's very grass roots, important and generous. Everyone thinks Bay



Musicians reach out to wounded warriors. Bill Campbell (From left) Jim Davidson and Bernie Prost recorded a song available online at forthewarrior.com to help injured soldiers and their families.

Street just writes cheques. I've got a news flash: It doesn't work that way. The help from For the Warrior is huge."

The men's music "stands out in an orchestra of many," Capt. Johnston, a former repatriation officer and current Canadian Forces casualty management officer, said. "It grabs you. It stands the test of time."

A work in progress, the songs and website require additional sponsors, Mr. Prost said. The funds are earmarked for more extra studio time, editing, mixing and mastering the production. His goal is to complete the initial play list and eventually produce a CD. Ultimately, he wants to produce a rousing Canadian military music tribute video featuring a range of homegrown talent.

"That's way down the road," he said. "Canada doesn't have that yet and we feel one or two of the songs qualify. It'll all depend on response from the website downloads."

A self taught pianist, guitarist and vocalist and former rock drummer in the 60s, Mr. Prost echoes the sentiment of Capt. Johnston, who has witnessed the ravages of war.

"Our soldiers come home with either their flesh or soul torn from them," Capt. Johnston said. "They appreciate our support when they need it most - in peace time."

To learn more on how to support the project, visit forthewarrior.com and woundedwarriors.ca.

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