

Rap Musician with Cerebral Palsy, 30, featured on a CD of songs to be released for National Mentoring Month in January

January is National Mentoring Month, and rap musician Michael Berry, 30, is familiar with obstacles, and won't let the world define him by his cerebral palsy

BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, UNITED STATES, January 3, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- January is National Mentoring Month, and rap musician Michael Berry, 30, is familiar with overcoming obstacles, and won't let the world define him by his cerebral palsy. His dedication to finding mentors to help his career led him to a collaboration with Boston songwriter Dawn Carroll on two songs on a forthcoming CD titled "[Songs for Mary](https://songsformary.com)". Learn more at <https://songsformary.com>

The collection of songs is inspired by the life and work of [Mary Cardwell](#)

[Dawson](#) who founded the historic National Negro Opera Company in Pittsburgh in 1941. The CD, to be released during the week-long "Thank Your Mentor" celebration starting January 21st, is also destined to be the soundtrack for a stage musical, "If The Walls Could Talk". The entire project is being produced under the umbrella of the [Over My Shoulder Foundation](#) (OMSF) in Boston, a non-profit organization with the goal of raising awareness of the impact of mentoring founded by Dawn Carroll and Grammy-award winning singer Patti Austin.

"Without support and emotional sustenance, without a positive influence in our lives, we can become lost, disconnected and unstable as individuals and as a society," comments Carroll. "Proper mentoring is the miracle that fosters creativity, reconnects the disconnected, changes lives, and moves us all toward a society of greater inclusion, integrity and value." Adds Patti



Cover of the CD "Songs for Mary" which forms the soundtrack for the forthcoming stage musical.

Austin: "Through mentoring, our goal is to break down barriers that separate generations of people and cultures."

Mary Cardwell Dawson (1894-1962) was determined to bring opera to African American audiences, and was a beloved mentor to hundreds of musicians. The headquarters of the National Negro Opera Company was a grand Victorian home in Pittsburgh that many called "Mystery Manor". The mansion became a gathering place and refuge for Black celebrities who could perform in public but were not allowed out in public after sunset including boxer Joe Louis, baseball great Roberto Clemente, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Louis Armstrong, Lena Horne, and so many others. Each song on the 15 song soundtrack is about the legends who stayed at the mansion.



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Michael Berry

The grand manor has fallen into significant disrepair, and was named to the National Trust for Historic Preservations 11 Most Endangered sites in 2020. Happily, the newest owner has created a nonprofit organization to restore and maintain the Queen Anne-style mansion. Over My Shoulder Foundation also has plans to film a documentary of the preservation and restoration.

Michael Berry was immediately taken with Mary's story and the need to preserve this significant historic Black history site. Berry notes, "This home, the actual house that Miss Mary used in Pittsburgh, is a piece of our own history.

You have to think about all these different artists that stayed in this house, Cab Calloway and Duke Ellington and all the others. I felt a connection with Miss Mary because she was fearless, determined, and found a way to achieve her dreams against all odds.”

Berry originally met when Dawn Carroll when was a high school student in Houston. Carroll had come to his school as part of her work with the Over My Shoulder Foundation. "We met at the high school and I instantly knew he was special and wanted to help him find his dreams," recalls Carroll.

Now Berry is applying his verbal and writing gifts by adding raps to two of the songs written by

Carroll with longtime Boston rock veteran Jon Butcher, whose production, arranging, guitar and vocal skills are prominently featured on 'Songs for Mary'. In addition to rap, the songs embrace rock, pop, jazz and even classical music.

"Songs for Mary" kicks off with "If The Walls Could Talk," as a young rapper voiced by Berry contemplates the abandoned mansion and channels the spirit and energy — and pain — of Dawson and her prominent Black visitors. The final track on the CD is "Rise", is their fierce denunciation of racial discrimination from the perspective of one of Dawson's distinguished guests, heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis.



Songwriter Dawn Carroll (left) and Grammy-award winning singer Patti Austin, founders of the Over My Shoulder Foundation.

The entire CD is a tribute to Mary Cardwell Dawson, and a fitting celebration of National Mentoring Month.

To find out more about Mary Cardwell Dawson, the CD "Songs for Mary" and the efforts to preserve the Victorian manor home of the National Negro Opera Company, please visit www.SongsForMary.com

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Editor's Notes:

- Dawn Carroll and Patti Austin are available for telephone interviews.
- The "Songs for Mary" CD, to be released to the public on Thank Your Mentor Day January 21st, is available for review.
- Additional background is available for feature development on Mary Cardwell Dawson and the efforts to preserve the home of the National Negro Opera Company.

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