

TRUE COLORS FESTIVAL

EMBARGOED UNTIL 3 JUNE, 12PM SGT

OVER 40 ARTISTS FROM 14 COUNTRIES COLLABORATE ON MUSIC VIDEO BRINGING A MESSAGE OF HOPE, POSITIVITY AND INCLUSIVITY

3 June 2020, Tokyo - The Nippon Foundation (TNF) releases a music video in which 46 artists with disabilities from 14 countries perform an updated rendition of “Stand By Me”, the classic Ben E. King hit. The video may well be the first to feature such an international line-up of artists with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 4-minute video, filmed collaboratively but remotely in each artist’s home, is a message of hope, positivity and inclusivity from the artists to the global community of people with disabilities. It is an event of the True Colors Festival, created by TNF in its commitment to building a more inclusive and caring global society.

The geographically diverse line-up of performers spans many styles and genres, from a cappella to rap, jazz to classical, and ballet to breakdancing.

Among them are rapper Signmark (Finland), the first Deaf artist in the world to be signed to a major record label, Warner Music; Sparsh Shah (US), 17-year-old child prodigy, performer, speaker, and social media sensation; Caliph Buskers (Malaysia), an award-winning pop band of visually impaired vocalists and instrumentalists; members of Drake Music Scotland, the world’s first disabled youth orchestra that makes music with digital instruments; members of world renowned street dance crew, ILL-ABILITIES™ (represented by members from Canada and Holland); rapper, composer and music producer Wheelsmith (Singapore) who performed in Singapore’s 2019 National Day Parade; singer Aliènette Coldfire (Philippines), who placed third in the 2016 edition of *France’s Got Talent*; and Yusuke Anazawa (Japan), a blind virtuoso jazz violinist.

The video also features Amber Galloway Gallego (US), who provides the sign language interpretation of the song, and specializes in interpreting concerts and music festivals into sign language. (See Appendix for the full list of artist bios.)

Says Founder of ILL-ABILITIES™, Luca “Lazylegz” Patuelli: "We are currently all in a similar situation globally, we face lots of struggle and uncertainty about what the future will hold. By participating in a project like this, we hope to bring people together and inspire us all to stand by one another, no matter what obstacle comes our way."

Produced & Presented By



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“I absolutely *love* the fact that I get to work on this project with more than 40 other specially-abled musicians worldwide! This project is, for me, proof of the extraordinary power that technology has to bring us humans together, regardless of who and *where* we are in the world. I could not be more blessed to live at this point of history to be able to do such work!” says rapper Sparsh Shah.

Says Dr Sydney Tan, Creative Producer & Director of the music video: “It has been a wonderful privilege to work with these artists, who jumped in and gave their time and talent at short notice. Even coming from different geographical regions, cultures, languages and genres, the performances exhibit a unity of purpose and conviction in communicating the message of commitment to stand by one another.”

Stand with the world’s largest minority community

According to the UN, 15% of the world’s population – more than 1 billion people – have some form of disability, making them the world’s largest minority community. Even without the global pandemic, people with disabilities face discrimination in terms of having access to education, employment, information and communication.

At this time of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the difficulties they face have been intensified. For some, having compromised immune systems make them much more vulnerable to infection. For others, self-isolation is an impossibility. Stay-home orders means that home support, along with basic services, may become unavailable. Calming routines and daily interactions with the outside world are gone, leading to disorientation and stress. There are also instances where frontline medical personnel deprioritize treating people with certain disabilities.

At the 6 May 2020 launch of a policy brief calling for a disability-inclusive recovery and response to the COVID-19 crisis, UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged governments to place people with disabilities at the core of COVID-19 response and recovery efforts, and to work towards creating more inclusive and accessible societies¹.

He highlighted that under normal circumstances, people with disabilities are already less likely to be able to access education, healthcare and income opportunities, or to participate in their communities. They are also more likely to live in poverty, and suffer higher rates of violence, neglect and abuse.

“The pandemic is intensifying these inequalities – and producing new threats,” he said, adding that in this health crisis, people with disabilities are among the hardest hit. They face a lack of accessible public health information and significant barriers to implement basic hygiene measures, among other things.

¹ Coronavirus and human rights: New UN report calls for disability-inclusive recovery. UN News. 6 May 2020. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063242>

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TNF's "Stand By Me" music video aims to serve as a catalyst to raise awareness about this situation, while presenting a gathering of talented artists performing a well-loved song in a music video that will connect people everywhere.

Says Mr Ichiro Kabasawa, Executive Director of TNF, which has been supporting people with disabilities in Japan and around the world for more than 50 years: "We can already see a new way of living. Governments, employers and service providers have quickly adapted by implementing alternative work arrangements, harnessing technology and remaining efficient. As societies everywhere envision life post-COVID-19, the global community of people with disabilities must be factored in, right from the 'reset'. We *can* build a world in which everyone's needs are catered for, and no one is left behind."

To join in the conversation, follow its Facebook and Instagram accounts @truecolors2020, where you will also gain access to English and Japanese language content that spotlights the challenges experienced by people with disabilities globally. For more information, visit <https://truecolors2020.jp/en/>.

True Colors Festival towards 2021

The True Colors Festival creates opportunities to embrace diversity across abilities, genders, generations, languages and nationalities through performing arts.

Crisis pulls us apart, but will bring us together in time. This festival offers entertaining and thought-provoking moments where appreciation, acceptance and sense of belonging win over fear, denial, and insecurity.

The relaunch of the True Colors Festival marks our commitment in a search for the role performing arts can play in the coming days, with artists and audiences around the world.

Follow True Colors Festival on social media for updates:

Facebook [@truecolors2020](#)

Instagram [@truecolors2020](#)

Note to editor:

The Nippon Foundation (TNF) was established in 1962 as a non-profit philanthropic organization, active in Japan and around the world. Initially our efforts focused largely on the maritime and shipping fields, but since then, the range of our activities has expanded to education, social welfare, public health, and other fields—carried out in more than 100 countries to date. Together with our more than 20 partner organizations in Japan and worldwide, we are funding and assisting community-led efforts aimed at realizing a more peaceful and prosperous global society. To find out more about TNF, please visit <http://www.nippon-foundation.or.jp/en/>

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Further reading:

Coronavirus and human rights: New UN report calls for disability-inclusive recovery
<https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/05/1063242>

Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak
<https://www.who.int/publications-detail/disability-considerations-during-the-covid-19-outbreak>

Policy Brief: A Disability-Inclusive Response to COVID-19 (May 2020)
<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/policy-brief-disability-inclusive-response-covid-19-may-2020>

The Disability Community Fights Deadly Discrimination Amid The COVID-19 Pandemic
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/andrewpulrang/2020/04/14/the-disability-community-fights-deadly-discrimination-amid-the-covid-19-pandemic/#21a69853309c>

COVID-19's isolated world is the norm for people with disabilities
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/covid-19-isolation-disabilities/>

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