



Hope Floats

By Jilian Sanz

Even as a Grammy-nominated songwriter, mother, entrepreneur and devoted philanthropist, Denise Rich's largest contribution to the world may very well be the gift of hope.

Denise Rich's blood runs blue; in the music industry rank, she reigns supreme among song-writing royalties. Her body of work has been recorded by the very best, including Celine Dion, Marc Anthony, Aretha Franklin, Mary J. Blige, Patti LaBelle, and Natalie Cole. She is on the board of The Clive Davis Department of Recorded Music, and through her New York City-based publishing company, Denise Rich Songs, she continues to produce music that transcends across boundaries—in four languages and in several genres.

Rich is also heralded as a pillar of support for the many paths she's crossed. In fact, she's laced the company with a management division that currently acts as a platform for young, talented writers across the country. "I write with them, and they also write a lot among each other," she explains, in a slightly different intonation—one that illustrates her excitement for the future of their success.

And while Rich supports essential charity efforts of all kinds and sits on such boards as LIFEbeat (the music industry fights HIV/AIDS), the Interfaith Center of New York, among many others, her personal roots are dug deep in the charity she started in her daughter's honor.

"Unfortunately, my middle daughter Gabrielle passed away at the age of 27 after a long struggle with leukemia," Rich reveals. Her daughter had Hodgkin's lymphoma and was cured for three years before she was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia, a cancer that forms in the bone marrow.

The bout with AML lasted only a few brief months, but Rich vividly recalls the doctors, the hospitals (including Sloan-Kettering and Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center), and the trial-and-error treatments. But more importantly, she remembers all of Gabrielle's idiosyncrasies in the hospital—endless hours on the computer researching statistics of causes of leukemia in young people, rocking out with headphones on, and skipping along to the music while she was still mobile. Even afterwards, Gabrielle visited the Hutch children's ward in her wheelchair to spread hope to the young patients.

Indeed, Gabrielle's spirit during those bleak days was an unbroken one. "She was an Oxford graduate, very smart, and at the same time, a real sportswoman—a skier and rock climber. She said when she got out [of the hospital] she was going to climb the building, stand at the top, and shout. She was that kind of spirit."

And it's that strength—that unwavering hope—Rich has promised to keep alive.





The G&P Foundation for Cancer Research was founded in 1998 and renamed the Gabrielle's Angel Foundation for Cancer Research in 2008. Its mission is to fund research that focuses on prevention, treatment, and quality of life issues of leukemia, lymphoma, and related cancers.

"When my daughter was alive, she was a finalist to be the face of Lancôme," she says. "They sent me her audition tape, which she had said, 'I don't believe we die. I believe that life just goes on.' That gave me so much strength. I wanted to honor that message and memory, because if you believe that, then you believe in hope and that it's not all for nothing."

Cancer research, however, doesn't come cheap, so Rich tapped her best resources—friends, colleagues, and her own innate penchant for throwing debonair revelries—and the Angel Ball was born. At one time a bi-annual event, the yearly ball is recognized as one of New York City's top charity events. "All of my music friends come and perform so that we won't incur costs to the charity. That's how we've managed to give 82 percent of proceeds directly to fund research," or \$13 million worth of research.



Of course, hundreds of cancer research foundations exist, and all have a similar sincere and passionate sense of urgency to fight cancer, but

Rich's organization funds the future. "We fund junior researchers, more than 41 of them now, and give them \$225,000 a year for three years to complete their projects." Her desire is that these young people, who she refers to as our future leaders, will continue their work with funding through the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

While the gala, which acts as the main fundraising event for the foundation, honors Gabrielle's memory and Rich's own hope for life without cancer, it also highlights a special group of hand-selected honorees who are tackling the same monster, but in different ways. This year, The Edge from megaband U2 and his wife, choreographer and dancer Morleigh Steinberg, stand under that spotlight for their own cancer efforts through The Angiogenesis Foundation, which funds angiogenesis-based medicines that could potentially treat or cure diseases triggered by a lack or excess amount of capillary blood vessels. The couple's own daughter battled cancer. "The truth is that there is nearly no one in the room that evening that hasn't been touched by cancer," Rich says.

The other deserving honorees are Sean Parker, who has been at the helm of such forward-thinking entities as Napster and Facebook and

acts as managing partner of the Founders Fund, and Bernd Beetz, the CEO of global beauty leader COTY Inc. Both men have joined forces with the world's largest bone marrow bank, DKMS, which Rich supports on a personal level.

She recalls Gabrielle's own marrow transplant, for which she was the closest donor. But even as a five out of six match, Rich's bone marrow didn't take. "They didn't exist as much in those days, but by going to a bank you can get a much better match and the person has a much better survival rate." And with surviving on everybody's mind, the approximate 900 guests of the 2010 Angel Ball on Oct. 21 at Cipriani Wallstreet will be addressed by a survivor—*Survivor* Africa winner Ethan Zohn will speak about his experience with cancer.

Entertainment Tonight's Samantha Harris will host the gala, and in tribute to Gabrielle's belief that music and laughter somehow aid in the healing process, the evening will feature special live performances by 23-year-old rising star Shontelle as well as chart toppers like the legendary Patti LaBelle, Ne-Yo, Josh Groban, and Sam Moore. And New York hallmark DJ Cassidy will intermittently punctuate between performances his beats. "It's not supposed to be sad," Rich says. "It's a celebration of life and hope."

The Angel Ball will also auction off donations from first-rate sponsors like jewelry designer Lorraine Schwartz, who has also funded a research program in memory of her mother; Continental Airlines; Donnie Toresco of Toresco Enterprises Inc.; and artist Romero Britto, who will provide limited edition sculptures to adorn every table and to have auctioned as well. These heart-

shaped sculptures have Rich dubbing the event, "art with a heart."

Rich, who grew up in small-town Worcester, Mass., likens the support for the foundation to the support seen in a small community. "Cancer breaks down walls," she says. "There are people from all over the world, from different religions and origins. It's so wonderful to see them interact and get together."

Despite her daughter's outcome, Rich carries much hope for the fight against the disease. "I will keep going until one day there is a cure for cancer. Then I will throw a huge party and invite everyone who's ever helped us and just party all night." She does realize, of course, that she already provides a party of such amazing proportions for the supporters of her cause, but imagine, Rich says loudly, just how much better that final fete will be. ■

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