

“HUMANITY (Love is in the air)”  
Written by Dick Wagner  
Performed by: Bobby Taylor and the ASU Humanity Choir

Dick Wagner (1942 to 2014) was a prolific songwriter and lead guitar player, legendary for his work with Alice Cooper, Lou Reed, Aerosmith, Kiss, and many more. Dick was generous in donating his talent and time to benefit the lives of others, and in the recent years before his passing, he wrote and produced songs and projects for St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, the homeless of Detroit, Guitars for Vets, and to raise awareness of violence against women and children.

In February 2014, Dick and Susan Michelson met with Dr. Neal Lester, founder of the Humanity 101 project at Arizona State University. Dr. Lester invited Dick to present a seminar, “An Evening with Dick Wagner.” A humanitarian by nature, Dick was so impressed by the Humanity 101 principles and objectives that he immediately wrote a song called, “Humanity (Love is in the Air).” He recorded a casual demo of the song and forwarded it to Dr. Lester. Dr. Lester loved the song and asked Dick to record the song, present and perform it as part of his planned ASU seminar.

Five months later, Dick passed away unexpectedly. Dr. Lester invited Susan Michelson to be on the Advisory Board of Humanity 101. Over the course of several lunches and meetings, Dr. Lester continually expressed his interest in recording the song for ASU and Humanity 101.

Two years later, Dr. Lester continued to pursue his desire to record the song. His passion for the project and the song led Susan to express that there was only one person with whom she would like to work to record the song. That person was Bobby Taylor, legendary Motown singer and producer, also renowned for having discovered Michael Jackson and the Jackson 5 and bringing them to Motown.

Bobby Taylor was the genius creator who produced the first seven Jackson 5 albums, including Michael’s iconic hits: ABC, I Want You Back, Ben, I’ll Be There, Who’s Loving You, Rockin’ Robin, and many more. Bobby had also been friends with Dick Wagner, and they had discussed collaborating together on projects.

There was one big challenge: Bobby Taylor lives in Hong Kong. And he is 82 years old.

That did not deter Dr. Lester, who asked Susan to create a budget to bring Bobby to Arizona, hire musicians, and record a commercial quality production of Dick’s song, Humanity.

Bobby Taylor, Susan Michelson, and Alex Cyrell met in the mid-1970s, when they worked together on albums and TV shows for the Jackson family. The trio became business partners and over the years, enjoyed an enduring musical and personal bond.

Forty years later, Susan called Bobby in Hong Kong and asked him if he would reunite with the team to produce Dick’s song for Humanity. Bobby agreed.

Susan assembled a group of the top Phoenix based session players and booked two of the best recording studios in Phoenix. With a conception of Rock and Roll meets R & B meets Gospel, she brought in a group of gospel singers, including several singers from the ASU Gospel Choir.

On October 17, 2016, a week of recording began.
A producer directs the sound, emotion, and blueprint of the song. Bobby Taylor produced the recording sessions. Partners Alex Cyrell, Susan Michelson, and Bobby Taylor together “mixed” the recording and meticulously guided it through its final, post-production incarnation.

The song, “Humanity (Love is in the Air),” performed by Bobby Taylor and the ASU Humanity Choir, is now a beautiful, inspiring record.

Bobby Taylor flawlessly sang the exquisite, powerhouse lead vocal in only two takes. Listening to his performance, one would never imagine that this is the voice of an 82 year old man.

Mastering, a blend of art and science, is the final process that makes a recording sound like a record. This recording was mastered by the most renowned mastering group in the world, Gateway Mastering. Gateway owner Bob Ludwig and his protégé, Adam Ayan, have mastered literally hundreds of platinum and gold records, including more than half of the Grammy award winning albums produced each year.

Originally written and now produced especially for ASU’s Humanity 101 program, “HUMANITY (Love is in the Air)” is collaboration between a legendary rocker and an R&B legend, with a powerful Gospel inflected message for humanity. As one musician described the recording session, it was a “Love fest.”

Multiple generations and ethnicities collaborated lovingly on the project. Musicians and recording engineers from ages 19 to 82 participated in the production of this record. The producers, musicians, Dr. Neal Lester, and ASU all came together to musically embrace and share the tenets of humanitarian principals: kindness, compassion, integrity, respect, empathy, forgiveness, and self-reflection.

It’s a message we are proud to share with the world.

As Dick Wagner has expressed to us in his song,

“Love is in the air. Breathe Deep.
Peace beyond compare...
Is still within our reach

Let’s try to come together
Sharing our HUMANITY
Reaching out together....
Sharing our HUMANITY.”
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