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Sir Ivan 'The Peaceman' Takes Listeners To 'La La Land,' While Sharing His Message Of Strength, Hope And Acceptance

BY CHUCK TAYLOR



Unlike your average, everyday millennial superhero-a la Batman, Superman or Spider Man-caped crusader Sir Ivan's missive goes beyond thrills and spills at the local movie complex. And it's got a beat, to boot. As a dance artist and performer, philanthropist, activist and reality TV celeb, Sir Ivan has spread his message of positivity, acceptance, understanding and goodwill around the world for more than a decade via his self-styled imaging as "The Peaceman."

Since 2001, Sir Ivan has scored eight hits on the *Billboard* Dance Club Play Songs chart, reimagining upbeat earnest 1960s' "hippie" anthems into festive techno remixes-from his debut club re-rub of John Lennon's "Imagine" through 2011's top 10 "Hare Krishna." Other hit tracks include "San Francisco," "Blowing in the Wind," "Peace On Earth" and "For What It's Worth." An accompanying music clip for smash "Kumbaya" garnered 14.8+ million online hits and stands as the fifth most-viewed video at Yahoo! Video. That track was also nominated for an OutMusic Award for Outstanding Contemporary Spiritual Song.

Meanwhile, Ivan's 2010 debut full-length album "I Am Peaceman," offers dance remakes of classic anthems like "Eve of Destruction," "Happy Together," "Turn Turn Turn" and "In the Year 2525."

His latest single-the first with original lyrics-is "La La Land," which reached No. 10 in 2012 on U.K. Music Week's Upfront Club Chart, Top 20 on DJ Times National Crossover Pool Chart, and Top 30 on the *Billboard* Dance Club Chart. With a robust radio and promotional campaign, "La La" is now heading to mainstream pop radio.

Sir Ivan notes, "The message of 'La La Land' is consistent with the songs I covered from the '60s, in terms of exploring social progress. While we've made substantial strides in the U.S., civil, environmental, children, gay and women's rights are just as relevant today." The song offers a giddy, kaleidoscopic melodic froth, but is framed around an ambitious message that remains all-important: "I'm addressing violence in all shapes and forms, with the hope that awareness will turn to action."

As he has done time and again, Sir Ivan and his nonprofit Peaceman Foundation is putting money where his mirth is. He's pledged \$100,000 to The Trevor Project, the nation's leading crisis intervention and suicide prevention organization for LGBTQ youth. "There is never an excuse for harassment and bullying, and I will not stand for it," he attests. "As the son of a Holocaust survivor, I became aware from a young age of the need to stand up for the persecuted."

Abbe Land, The Trevor Project's Executive Director & CEO, adds, "Every gift helps ensure that young people in crisis can plan for a future that begins today. We are grateful to Sir Ivan and The Peaceman Foundation for their generous support of our life-saving, life-affirming services for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth."

This outreach is perhaps the culmination of Sir Ivan's decade-long calling as The Peaceman. He morphed into the iconic character after 20 years in the banking industry when, at age 45, as the eldest son of Sigi B. Wilzig-a legendary Auschwitz survivor, financier and philanthropist-he retreated from the family's multi-billion dollar banking business and resigned from Trustcompany Bank's Board of Directors.

And then the music business came calling. Columbia Records honcho Dave Jurman was impressed by Ivan's music acumen, and his energy and enthusiasm, and aligned the budding entertainer with Grammy-nominated producer Ernie Lake, half of popular remix team Soul Solution. That led to the recording and release of "Imagine," restyled as a high-energy techno dance track. Issued in 2001 by Tommy Boy, it catapulted Sir Ivan to *Billboard's* Club Play top 40 chart for the first time.

The press deemed the novel artist a "self-styled billionaire banker turned techno-hippy," with headlines like "From the Bank Board To the Charts of Billboard." Sir Ivan explains, "I wanted to go from one extreme to the other," trading in a suit and tie for a long-flowing caftan. Since John Lennon's 'Imagine' is a prayer, the idea was to dress as a lyrical prophet."

That worked out well until the events of 9/11/2001, when Sir Ivan says his Arab-influenced garb could have had dire consequences-ironic considering his accompanying message of peace and harmony. "Common sense told me that to keep from being hit over the head with a baseball bat, I'd better come up with another outfit." And thus: the modern-day Peaceman arrived, complete with a trademark Swarovski Crystal Peace sign, the essence of "a real live superhero character."

Add to that Sir Ivan's second branding earmark: the 15,000 square-foot Hamptons Wilzig Castle, renowned for its over-the-top parties and musical celebrations, big on kitsch and flower power. The bombastic home, which essentially could be a hip, happening nightclub, features an enormous outdoor movie screen, a kidney-shaped steam-emitting pool and more individually designed rooms than one can count.

"That's the best investment I ever made," Sir Ivan says. "The Castle became another way to express myself. After two decades in banking, it represents another artistic expression-and it's a constant work in progress, architecturally and design-wise. The house itself is an art project, in addition to being the sexiest home in the world." The theme of his summer 2012 party, natch, was "Welcome to La La Land."

And don't think the mainstream media hasn't recognized it. Sir Ivan and Wilzig Castle, dubbed the Playboy Mansion of the East Coast, have been featured on numerous TV shows, including VH1's "The Fabulous Life of the Hamptons," Bravo's "Chef Roble and Co." (where he hosted a medieval pig roast), Travel Channel's "Grand Castles of America" and WE's "Single in the City: The Hamptons." In addition, in 2007, superhero creator Stan Lee personally selected Sir Ivan to appear as "Jewish superhero Mr. Mitzvah" on SyFy Channel's "Who Wants to Be a Superhero?"

But make no mistake, there's plenty of heart behind the hero, as he maintains diligent focus on civil rights, women's rights, gay rights and environmental rights. Sir Ivan's case in point: "La La Land," whose music video personifies a magical place that rivals Oz, where none of these evils exist. where love and peace supplant terrorism, hate and violence (and another cause he embraces: Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome). He says, "Bullying unchecked leads down the road to genocide. Think about it: Name calling leads to physical acts of violence, and bodily harm can lead to death. Before you know it, society is involved in mass murder. The logical conclusion is the genocide of civilized peoples."

It's little surprise that he relates these traumatic issues to his family's heritage: "As an Auschwitz survivor, my father was bullied by Nazis, while 59 of my relatives were murdered in the Holocaust simply because they were Jews. And 40,000 homosexuals were murdered," he says. "The idea of a group being singled out because they live a different way from the ruling party was unacceptable then. Nothing has changed. It remains the same today."

On the heels of "La La Land" is Sir Ivan's next single "Kiss All the Bullies Goodbye," which confronts the issues head on. "I want to hit it on the head and be very specific. Anyone suffering from bullying-whether they're blind, in a wheelchair, the fat kid, the skinny kid, the short kid, the gay kid. It all starts on the playground just by being different."

And with that, Sir Ivan is driven to stay in the game for as long as it takes to foster change. "Through my music and whatever influence I may have, I want to demonstrate the importance of acceptance and understanding," he says. "If I have the power to help one person evolve in their attitudes of acceptance or to positively impact the life of a single bullied youth, I've been a success."