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Breast Cancer Charity Hits the High Notes

By Cathy Tyson



Photo provided

Sandy Preto was inspired to start a Moraga-based charitable organization after a joyous surprise party organized by partner Mark Carlton after her tough two-year battle fighting breast cancer.

She was diagnosed in April of 2011 with Invasive Lobular Carcinoma and had multiple surgeries, plus chemotherapy and radiation along with some nasty complications.

The evening originally started as a dinner to express the couple's heartfelt thanks with her medical team. Preto noticed a band setting up in a corner of the restaurant, but she had no idea that Mark also arranged an expanded party inviting friends, family and the band Luce to celebrate completing her treatment.

That magical night, life affirming and full of hope, led to their founding what is now called Notes4Hope, an educational non-profit to bring people and music together to raise funds and build awareness for a more integrative approach to treating and preventing breast cancer.

It was a challenging, lengthy process setting up the non-profit to promote and produce live shows where 100 percent of the proceeds are donated toward breast cancer research and prevention. Neither Preto nor Carlton had any experience putting on live performances, but together they figured it out and started the very first fundraiser concert in February, 2013 at the Town Hall Theater in Lafayette.

Luckily Tom Luce "was a great supporter from the beginning," explains Preto. That first show featured Luce and Tender Mercies, a band with several members from the Counting Crows. It was a sell-out.

Fast forward more than three and a half years, and Notes4Hope has put on a total of 11 events, from the Round Up in Lafayette to Drakes in Oakland to the Red Devil Lounge in San Francisco to four shows, including their most recent, at the California Shakespeare Theater in Orinda just a couple of weeks ago with headliner Matt Nathanson.

The most recent concert on Oct.

15 sold out even quicker than they anticipated; chalk it up to the fantastic headliner and social media marketing, but unfortunately the weather didn't cooperate, with a record amount of rain that hit right at showtime.

Despite the challenges, the event was a "smashing success," Preto said, due to an army of volunteers, the continuing support of donors and sponsors, and lots of tents to cover all of the equipment on stage, along with the VIP dinner. Most patrons came prepared in full rain gear and umbrellas; trash bags and blankets were provided to those in need.

The highlight came when Carlton proposed to Preto onstage while being serenaded by Tom Luce, of the band Luce, singing "All I've been Waiting For." Incidentally, she said "Yes!"

In addition to the live shows, the couple have also produced two collections of original music called CD4Hope2015 and CD4Hope2016, with all the proceeds benefitting the fight against breast

cancer. Both discs are a collection of unique original songs with a message of optimism and inspiration by a variety of Bay Area artists, including Jackson Rohm, Painbirds and Rob Hotchkiss. The artists own their songs, but they generously allow Notes4Hope to use them, Carlton said. CDs are available for purchase at Allison McCrady Fine Arts in Orinda Theater square as well as at Farmyard Darlings located in the old Hen House building in downtown Lafayette. The CDs are also available online and for download from the website www.notes4hope.org. "Each song reminds us to be grateful, and aware of the power of our human spirit," sums up Preto and Carlton's message on the interior of CD4Hope2016.

It's clearly a juggling act that Preto, now cancer-free, and Carlton enjoy. When not planning these full scale concerts, both have day jobs, are raising kids and recently moved. They plan to have two or three shows next year, and presumably will have time to organize a wedding.



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