

**"United for the Ride Vol. 1":
The Mission and the Music
by:
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Braking the Cycle is a three-day, 275-mile fundraising bike ride from Boston to New York City. The annual event raises money for **The New York City Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Center's** HIV and AIDS services. In the past three years alone, Braking the Cycle has delivered over \$1.2 million to the HIV/AIDS services of The Center. This year, the highly anticipated event will take place from Friday September 11th through Sunday, September 13th.

One of the event's most dedicated cyclists is New Jersey singer/songwriter **Terry Christopher**, AKA Rider #154. A multi-talented performer with two albums under his belt, Christopher was declared "**Favorite Male Artist**" by the 2003 **Stonewall Society Pride in the Arts Awards**, with his album "**Take Another Look**" winning "**Favorite Album**" as well. In 2007, his GLBT pride anthem "**Brothers in Arms & Sister Soldiers**" was awarded the Stonewall Society Pride in the Arts "**Favorite Pride Song**". Terry's own participation in the annual ride as a cyclist inspired him to do more for the event. Raising awareness of Braking the Cycle, as well as raising money for the event, became one of Terry's missions. He was involved in organizing an ongoing, year-long itinerary of fundraising activities, from private rooftop house parties to benefits at Will Clark's popular weekly event Porno Bingo. Over dinner, a week before the CD was released, Terry and I discussed what motivated him to become even further involved: *"After completing last year's Ride, one of the hardest post-ride moments came when I had to return back to my 'regular' non-Ride life. It was intoxicating being around such good people all riding hundreds of miles for the same goal. There is something very bonding about training together and then actually doing the ride for those three days. It was so hard to stuff all those great feelings and emotions into a box and tuck them all away until the next Ride. I wanted to take that energy, that great sense of accomplishment, which for me was exponential being that this was my first Ride of which I didn't give up a single mile. I also rode my first 'century' during the Ride which is always a great accomplishment as well... A 'century' is covering 100 miles in a single day of riding.."* To keep the momentum going, Mr. Christopher turned to the art form he does best: music. Terry set out to turn his inspiration from Braking the Cycle into a benefit compilation CD, and less than a year later, that labor of love-- named "**United for the Ride, Vol. 1**"-- was born. **Len Rogers** of The Stonewall Society hosted an online CD release party on his site **Rainbow World Radio** on May 23rd, and there was a live concert at New York City's **Triad Theater** on Saturday, June 6th, which featured live performances by eight of the CD's featured artists.

"United for the Ride, Vol.1" features twelve songs by GLBT artists and our allies from all over the U.S., from West Virginia (**Judith Avers**) to San Francisco (**Joshua Klipp**)... as well as Canadian singer/songwriter Norine **Braun**. The chosen artists are all from widely varied musical backgrounds and genres, but what all the songs had in common was that all of their songs chosen for the CD embodied the core elements of the mission of the Ride. Terry Christopher stated to me that he didn't want to just fill the CD with "pretty love songs" (*What's wrong with that?!*). Rather, he wanted all the tracks to really exemplify the spirit of the annual philanthropic event it was benefiting; In the spirit

of charity, all the artists donated their songs and time for free. Terry stated, *"I spent a huge amount of time looking at tons of songs from LGBT and LGBT community supporting artists via websites, MySpace, Facebook, radio playlists, etc...and found a collection of songs that were really indicative of the messages I was searching for: hope, perseverance, love, courage, and sense of self. The 12 songs on the 'United For The Ride , Vol. I' CD, really sing of those themes, and collectively bring together a musical landscape of such powerful messages."* One hundred percent of the funds raised from "United for the Ride, Vol. 1" will benefit Braking the Cycle.

Adding a new title to his resume, Terry Christopher served as Producer of the CD, and New York City artists **Roger Kuhn** and **Morry Campbell**, who both contributed songs to the project, were Co-Producers. Two of the songs on the CD, Christopher's own "Braking the Cycle" and Kuhn's "Ride On", were inspired by Braking the Cycle and were patently written for the album. Mr. Christopher's own "Braking the Cycle" is a stunner. The song opens with a smooth, retro-electronic funk 'n' soul rhythm... but when Christopher first breaks into the chorus, singing *"Braking the cycle, braking the cycle starts with me; I'm not backin' down or givin' up till all of us are free..."*, the audience gets hit with a jolt of musical adrenaline as a harder, rock guitar sound emerges. Roger Kuhn combines lusty vocals with dynamic guitar work's "Ride On", the album's opener, *"Rider 154, bravery at his core, through thick and thin he rides again, giving back once more; he celebrates with music, his melodies help pave the way; he rides for you, he rides for me, he rides for those with HIV... He will ride on, oh he'll be strong ...He's gonna break the cycle for you and me, givin' all that he can for his community..."* In both of the CD's new songs, the delivery is sharp, and the lyrics get the message across as clear as a New York City summer sky. Both Christopher's and Kuhn deliver the same intense vibe that we imagine the riders get when they cross that finish line. In fact, every one of these young artists turns in an emblematic performance, with their individual talents making the most of their five or so minutes. California native **Randi Driscoll's** "Angel in Chelsea" is an anthem of keeping the faith that sounds both timeless and yet every bit written for 2009. It's hauntingly beautiful, with high-reaching vocals and piano notes which fall delicately on those vocals like the snowflakes she sings about in the song. The song is unambiguously about hope, with lines like: *"There's a battle ahead, but without the darkness, you could not see the light..."* Hope is also a theme in New Yorker **Jeffrey Wilgus'** strong yet sensitive, ultimately triumphant "The Answer in Me"; the listener clearly feels the vein of optimism running through the song. Atlanta, Georgia singer/songwriter **Mike Rickard's** "Everything You Need" is a perfect anthem for friendship and loyalty. And, this reviewer challenges anyone to listen to **Morry Campbell's** affecting "Long Long Way Home" and not be deeply moved...

Judith Avers' mini-masterpiece "Trade in Your Kingdom" takes the theme of friendship and to the next level. Since most members of our community are fiercely independent and proud to a fault, our pride may stand in the way of asking for help when we need it. Avers' song is a metaphorical plea for those in need to surrender some of that pride to accept a helping hand: "Trade in your kingdom, And all its grace; Lay down your halo, by my bedside, just in case." The grand song is just as regal as its title would imply. Equally as grand is **Norine Braun's** "Be Brave". The singer's haunting, almost ethereal vocals combine with a lush, multifaceted rhythm and lots of musical ornamentation. **Joshua Klipp** plays the bad boy of the bunch with "Rescue Me", a high-energy electro-dance gem with the addition of rap effectively used in his song. "United for the Ride, Vol. 1" ends with New York native **Dan Manjovi's** soaring "Things'll Get

Better". It's a perfect closer, with its somber yet optimistic tone which really symbolizes our community's decades-long battle against HIV/AIDS.

Every year for Braking the Cycle, hundreds of riders participate, coming from all over the country and donating their time, energy, and talent. Each of these riders has their own unique story and motivations; but collectively, they all unite for one noble goal, and together, they ultimately achieve one far-reaching result. The same way, "United for the Ride, Vol. 1" brings together twelve diverse artists from all over North America, all with their own individual talents and motivations, to achieve one noble goal. The synergy is amazing. Many different interpretations can be made from Brooklyn-based artist **Katie Sawicki's** provocative "Tuesday" or Philadelphia native **Robin Renee's** invigorating "For Today", but listening to this CD, it really seems like the artists patently wrote their songs for this project.

Sawicki's "Tuesday" starts out ostensibly as a somber, heartfelt, personal message to a lover which increases with percussion-heavy intensity as it progresses... and the astute listener will discover other themes within the song: commitment and sheer drive. Robin Renee's vibrant "For Today" is also delightfully cryptic, but the title alone should clue the listener as to why the song was chosen for this CD; the excitement is palpable as Renee sings, *"For today, come my way; can I say, come my way; For today, everyone is waiting...and it's all OK!"* "United for the Ride, Vol. 1" is guaranteed to bring positive results-- starting with the listener. And, like the annual Ride, the effects of this CD are guaranteed to last for a long time after September 2009...

Terry Christopher gave some final thoughts on "United for the Ride, Vol.1": *"I came from the train of thought that I chase down every realistic dream that I am passionate about, no matter how large or small, or how difficult the task at hand may be. I also believe in putting my money where my mouth is, which is why for this project-- because it was my vision, my long standing dream to do a compilation project for many years now-- that I would bust my butt to make sure I could finance this project 100% by myself. The earning potential and good work this project can acquire is exciting. The fact that the artists were so selfless in their wanting to be a part of it was paramount. Each of them have been brilliant in coming on board and providing me with the information to meet a laundry list of deadlines. We now have the CD which is going to work to fight HIV/AIDS and bring awareness and visibility to the efforts of the Braking The Cycle Riders and Crew. It's a win-win for everyone. But it came down to me doing more than coming up with an idea. Ideas are worthless and powerless unless they are cultivated, acted upon, and achieved. This life is for doing and chasing down our dreams, as we can't acquire anything from the grave. As my Aunt Marlene, who is the living, wilder-than-life version of Auntie Mame always said, you can sleep when you're dead. Just try being around someone like that and not getting caught up in living life to the absolute fullest and chasing down your dreams!"*

You can purchase "United for the Ride Vol.1" and learn more about the artists at:

www.UnitedfortheRide.org.

Learn more about Braking the Cycle at:

www.BrakingtheCycle.org.

Hear Len Rogers' interview with all twelve artists of "United for the Ride, Vol. 1" at:

www.RainbowWorldRadio.com.