

FEATURE

Buzzy Martin's book *Don't Shoot! I'm the guitar man* strikes movie deal

When Buzzy Martin took his first walk into the gates of San Quentin Prison, he had no idea that his life's journey would become a published book and a feature film.

Born and raised in Grand Rapids, Martin pursued his dream to make it in the music business and moved to California in 1979. Through those years, Buzzy wrote songs, recorded CDs, had a stint as a solo street performer at Fisherman's Wharf, played at local events and became friends with famous musicians such as Bob Seger and Ted Nugent, but his dream of becoming a well-known musician morphed into something totally different – something he never could have imagined. Martin's life path took a detour and he became a published writer and now has a list of Hollywood actors auditioning to play him as the main character in a major motion picture *Don't Shoot! I'm the Guitar Man*, based on his book of the same title. "I am blessed and fortunate...and humbled by all of it," says Martin.

It all began about 10 years ago, when Martin toted his guitar to various juvenile detention centers around California, where he could sit down with at-risk youth and share with them his favorite subject: music. While teaching guitar chords to the juveniles, Martin also struck up a personal chord with his students through song. His main goal was to get a strong message through to these children. Typically, these lost souls see from a young age that it is a rite of passage to be enough of a badass that it earns them their badge of honor to eventually end up spending the rest of their lives in a dead-end prison cell. "These kids just want to know that somebody loves them and cares about them," says Martin. "They feel defeated, thrown away, not loved, and franchised with no hope. They don't have to take this path in life."

It was at one of the juvenile centers that a friend suggested to Martin that he may want to check out teaching a guitar class to inmates at San Quentin Prison ("The Q"). Martin and his wife Laura

discussed the possibility of going to San Quentin Prison as an outsider. As Martin states: "Laura was a bit nervous about it, but she was very supportive. We are best friends and she supports me. I was honored by it. I thought of it as a gift, and after I started teaching at the prison I realized why I never became that other guy I was supposed to be. I was not supposed to be that rock 'n' roll star. That isn't real. This is."

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"I had to take five orientation classes at San Quentin before I could teach," says Martin. "The first class I taught had about twelve or thirteen students, but at times because of lockdowns, there would be only a few students. I found out that the guys were opening up to me through the music," says Martin. "They could finally let their guard down when they walked through my classroom doors and they would transform into little kids. I had prison guards tell me that they would see young men come into 'The Q' for the first time and after a few short months they would become old men. They warehouse everybody in prison," says Martin. "We just can't lock up everyone up. We need to rehabilitate these inmates. I don't teach at San Quentin anymore because the programs were cut and closed down. The prison even stopped handing out cigarettes and do not allow the inmates to workout. I decided to get a message out to everyone, and that is why I wrote the book."

Martin's book took six years to write using tapes he recorded after classes at The Q for reference. Martin and his wife Laura then self-published *Don't*

Shoot! I'm the Guitar Man when it was finished. Martin decided to kick-off publicizing his book in Grand Rapids, Mich., roughly three years ago. Over time, he had an offer from an editor to rework his book and Martin found himself becoming discouraged during the editing sessions. "I became really frustrated because it seemed nobody wanted to hear my message that we just cannot lock everyone up. The message I want to get across through my book is 'Education not incarceration,'" Martin says.

In the months to come connections were made wherein the book was sent to Ray Robinson at

Prodigy Entertainment, who became interested in making the book into a movie. Martin met Robinson in San Francisco in March and they shook hands on a movie deal. Robinson then brought the book to a conference at Penguin Publishing in Florida where he met with the Vice President and Editor in Chief, gave them the book and asked them to read it. A few days later, Martin had a contract with Penguin. The movie will be Rated R and Martin is not interested in seeing the film. "I am a non-violent kind of guy," he explains. "I watch Charlie Chaplin and Betty Boop! Plus, I experienced what is going on in our prison system and that is close enough for me. America is the number one country in the world that has the most prisons and juvenile homes. We keep showing money into the prison system instead of spending it on education. My goal is to sell one million copies of the book worldwide by December 1 and get this message out."

Things are moving very fast for Buzzy and Laura Martin these days. Penguin Berkley Books will have *Don't Shoot! I'm the Guitar Man* printed in hardcover and on the shelves on Sept. 7. The book can now be pre-ordered on amazon.com, borders.com and barnesandnoble.com.

Has any of this notoriety gone to Martin's head? Not at all. Martin's main focus continues to be fixated on the at-risk youth and on getting out his message, 'Education not incarceration.' "I hope I sell so many books that it allows me to visit all the juvenile halls all around the country and talk to kids at no charge and tell them that there are people out there who love them and care for them. That is what I want to do," says Martin.

For more information on the book and movie, visit buzzymartin.com, prodigymotionpictures.com or facebook.com.—Sherrie Coke

