

Rock Star Bon Jovi Washes Dishes to Keep His Community Fed

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In the News

Had this been a normal summer, rock superstar Jon Bon Jovi, 58, would be on tour with his rock band Bon Jovi, but the global pandemic put the kibosh on that. So instead, Bon Jovi -- the man, not the band -- filled in as a dishwasher at the JBJ Soul Kitchen, a nonprofit community restaurant in New Jersey operated by the Jon Bon Jovi Soul Foundation. And one outcome of that is a new song he wrote with help from his fans to tell their stories of life during the shutdown.

The song is called "If You Can't Do What You Do, You Do What You Can."

The JBJ Soul Kitchen, now in operation in three New Jersey locations, is an effort to address food insecurity -- hunger -- among people in need. The menu, which features fresh farm-to-table meals, has no posted prices. Patrons who can afford to do so make a donation to cover their own meal and the meal of someone else. Individuals or families who cannot afford to donate are fed anyway, and those who are able can pay it forward by volunteering for tasks in the kitchen, such as washing dishes.

The JBJ Soul Kitchen website expresses the philosophy this way: "Community Dining with Dignity. All are welcome at our table where locally sourced ingredients, dignity and respect are always on the menu."

The required increased social distancing ordered during the pandemic upended the Soul Kitchen's normal practices, especially when meals could only be served by take-out and the public could not be allowed in the kitchen, so Bon Jovi filled in at one of the restaurant's locations as a dishwasher.

At one point, Bon Jovi's wife, Dorothea, took a picture of him washing dishes and posted it on social media, with the caption, "If you can't do what you do ... do what you can."

Bon Jovi says he thought no more about it, but eventually it came to him that the caption could be a song title. And it also occurred to him that the song was an opportunity for others to express their thoughts about dealing with the pandemic.

So Bon Jovi wrote the first verse:

Tonight they're shutting down the borders and they've boarded up the schools
Small towns are rolling up their sidewalks, one last paycheck coming through
I know you're feeling kind of nervous, we're all a little bit confused
Nothing's the same, this ain't a game, we've got to make it through.
And he wrote the chorus:

When you can't do what you do, you do what you can
This ain't my prayer, it's just a thought I'm wanting to send
Round here we bend but don't break, down here we all understand
When you can't do what you do, you do what you can.

Then, using social media, he invited his fans to contribute verses or stories to be made into verses, and stories poured in -- some 6,000 submissions in the first two days.

Here are three of them:

From Adriana:

As we look through the windows and wonder what to do
This job is not going to be available for a year or two
It's time to get creative, it's time to fight again
It's time to give some love to all our families and friends.
From Jeffrey:

Well this life's become a movie that no one wants to see
Everybody's workin' hard to keep their heads above the sea.
Life is a nightmare, life is a dream
I'll hold on for you if you hold on for me.
From Brice (a truck driver);

Tonight I lay my head down and try to get some sleep
I pray I stay essential, that my family's health will keep
I walk into that warehouse and bring on the load
For our country must keep rollin' on our highways and roads.
(You can post your own lyrics using the hashtag #DoWhatYouCan.)

Now that New Jersey, which was one of the states hardest hit by the first wave of the coronavirus, is beginning to reopen and allows outdoor seating at restaurants, JBJ Soul Kitchen has transitioned back to its pay-it-forward model.

The Soul Kitchen website advises, "Please note that our in-need customers will always be seated first as they have no other options for dining."

"Our desire is to make sure that anyone who needs a meal knows that they can come and see us," Bon Jovi said, "and we'll provide them with that nutritious meal."

More on this story can be found at these links:

[From Rock Superstar to All-Star Dishwasher, Jon Bon Jovi Is Keeping His Community Fed. CNN](#)

[Do What You Can -- Our Story. YouTube](#)

[Bon Jovi Finishes His Coronavirus Song 'Do What You Can' With Help From Fans. NJ.com](#)
[JBJ Soul Kitchen, community restaurant](#)