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## CANADIAN STARS JOIN IN CORONAVIRUS BROADCAST FUNDRAISER

Celine Dion, Justin Bieber and Margaret Atwood were among the Canadian celebrities who joined for a broadcast event Sunday to honor healthcare workers battling the coronavirus pandemic and raise money for food banks. The "Stronger Together/Tous Ensemble" event, which was broadcast on radio, television and streamed online, brought together Canadian personalities who sang or delivered messages of solidarity from their living rooms or — in the case of Dion — their kitchens. The Canadian singer paid tribute to those who work in health care or provide essential services despite the risks of contracting COVID-19. Her message to fellow citizens: "stay

healthy and as positive as possible." "We will get through to the other side," said award-winning novelist Atwood. "There is another side, and when we do get there we will be thinking of other and better ways to do things. I'll see you on the other side." Testimonies and messages of solidarity alternated with songs during the 90-minute show that had no commercial interruptions. Other celebrities that made an appearance included singers Michael Buble, Bryan Adams, Alessia Cara, Shania Twain, Buffy Sainte-Marie, and Drake. Canadian-born Hollywood stars also appeared, including Kiefer Sutherland, Mike Myers and Ryan Reynolds, as well as sports and political personalities — like former

astronaut and Governor General of Canada Julie Payette.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also took part, urging Canadians to remain cautious and at home. The event, billed as the broadest multi-platform broadcast event ever in Canada, was aimed at raising funds for the country's food banks. "Canada, you're amazing. The @foodbanksCanada website has crashed under the weight of your generosity. Remember you can still donate after the show — please keep trying!" FoodBanks Canada tweeted.—AFP



In this file photo Canadian singer Celine Dion performs on the opening night of her new world tour "Courage" at the Videotron Centre in Quebec City, Quebec.—AFP photos



In this file photo Canadian singer Justin Bieber arrives for YouTube Originals' "Justin Bieber: Seasons" premiere at the Regency Bruin Theatre in Los Angeles.

## Washington food trucks head to the suburbs to find customers

The coronavirus epidemic has emptied downtown Washington of its popular food trucks ever since their main customers — lunchtime office workers — fled in March the safety of their homes. To survive, the truck operators followed them into the suburbs, taking orders online and advertising through social media. With drastic staff cuts and major belt tightening, the toughest operators have managed to survive — up to now. One of these operators is Jason Tipton, co-owner of the "Dirty South Deli." Tipton recently parked his blue food truck in a residential neighborhood in north eastern Washington and handed out pre-ordered sandwiches wearing a face mask. He also catered to some new customers. "It's a good surprise, it's nice," Tipton, 42, told AFP. "Today was very busy," he smiled.

For this micro-enterprise with four employees — two of whom are in lockdown — adapting to the new circum-

stances is key to survival. "We have an online tool now to take orders, we advertise our tours on Twitter and in the Facebook neighborhood groups, and we use word to mouth," Tipton said. Tipton has also found customers in places on the outskirts of Washington near the University of Maryland, where teachers and students live.

## "On our own"

"We enjoy home cooking but we miss the variety of DC's restaurants," said private music teacher Elise Blake, 37, as she took her "DSD" sandwich. "This is different, a little bit of a splurge," she said. "It's savvy for a truck to come to the neighborhoods if you can't go downtown," added Blake's boyfriend David Murray, 37, also a musician. Tipton seemed satisfied with the day's work. "We made enough money to break even," he said. The future, however, seems bleak. "We're on our own, we just

have to make money." The "DSD" partners would rather tough it out for a while because the alternative is to close. Tipton said he has not applied for federal aid, and does not know if the loan application he filed with the city will be accepted.

## Jamaican blues

On Washington's trendy H Street Kadeem Todd and Denville Myrie have parked their food truck — the "Jerk@Nite" — in front of the restaurant that they were setting up just as the coronavirus pandemic struck. The partners, both 28 years old, entered the food business in 2012 by selling organic dishes from Jamaica, their country of origin, at the Howard University campus.

As business grew they bought a second truck, and eight months ago decided to open a brick-and-mortar restaurant. "COVID-19 changed everything," said Todd. Starting on March 18 "we had two

weeks of complete standstill. Really tough times." Thanks to their Instagram account and positive word of mouth customers have begun to trickle back. The truck outside their restaurant accepts take-out orders while their second truck heads out twice a week, prowling for customers around Howard University and an apartment complex in nearby Maryland.

"Delivery apps have kept us afloat, but we can't sustain this much longer," he sighed, adding that he pared his staff of 13 down to seven. The partners are looking into seeking federal and local aid, but have little hope. "We're trying to get out by ourselves, we can't wait for somebody to save us," he said.

## "Focus on the present"

Zack Graybill, chairman of the regional food truck association which represents some 100 operators, hopes the crisis will be over by June — but doesn't want to

too optimistic. According to a poll of association members, 15 percent are not operating, 35 percent are trying food delivery by themselves or through apps, and "a huge bulk are roaming to residential buildings," he said. Graybill is also the co-manager of "DC Slices," an Arlington, Virginia-based food truck selling pizza.

"First two weeks, we were just traveling, going to random locations not sure if you would sell \$10 or \$500 worth of food," he said. Survival comes at a price: two of his four trucks are no longer running, and his staff was slashed from 15 to three. "The important thing is to focus on the present," he said.—AFP



Dirty South Deli food truck staff Brian Potter is seen at work.



Jerk@Nite food truck owners Kareem Todd (left) and Denville Myrie pose by their food truck parked in front of their newly acquired brick and mortar restaurant in Washington DC.



Dirty South Deli food truck owner Jason Tipton chats with a regular customer.—AFP photos

## Bass therapy gets Romans dancing and laughing in face of lockdown

Laughing in the face of the coronavirus lockdown gripping Italy a troupe of performers complete with DJ and thumping-bass sound system is bringing dance fever and comedy to Rome's densely-packed working class neighborhoods. Residents of all ages in the Italian capital's San Basilio district threw open their windows to take in the "Under the same sky" show being performed in their very own pine-filled courtyard. "It's a very popular show. We have a DJ, I play songs to get them dancing, even at their windows," the group's star, electric violinist Andrea Casta, told AFP.

"We alternate with the cabaret and a comedian. We also invited a singer from the neighborhood. It's an open space and we'll continue to go to the suburbs of Rome and to other cities." The performers also dropped by The Corviale, a vast housing development on the outskirts of the city, to the delight of residents happy to escape for an hour while respecting social distancing rules. "Having ordinary people on the balcony is better than seeing the rich on the balconies at theatres, who have the possibility of living this situation more easily," explained well-known comedian Antonio Giuliani. "Besides, we don't go to their areas, we only go to working-class neighborhoods."

## Bringing the show home

In the courtyard, a few people dance and clap their hands, their smiles hidden behind face masks. But the real show is up above, at each window, where residents sing, laugh at off-colour jokes, and wave their lit-up mobile phones as if at a rock concert, calling out for more. "The children can't leave the house. Sometimes we make them go down a bit with masks. But this is a beautiful moment, a moment for all, everyone has fun," said Adriano Sindaco, enjoying the show with his daughter Giada. "These circumstances unite us, they don't divide. Often there is isolation but here, we can meet," added Anarita Napoli, her mouth covered with a mask.

"In normal times, everyone wants to go out to go to the theatre, to the pub, to listen to an artist. At the moment, they can't go out, so we bring the show to their homes," said guitarist Casta. Fellow entertainer Antonio Sindaco hopes he will not have to run "Under the same sky" in too many neighborhoods. "It will mean that we are cured, that there is no longer this virus and that we can return to normal life," he said. "Otherwise we will continue, but with people this time one or two meters apart and outside. Always for free and for the poorer districts of Rome."—AFP



Electric violinist Andrea Casta (center) performs in the courtyard of a popular apartment building for the show Sotto lo Stesso Cielo tour (Under the same sky tour) in San Basilio suburbs of Rome.—AFP photos



People with protective masks look from their windows at artists performing in the courtyard of a popular apartment building for the show Sotto lo Stesso Cielo tour (Under the Same Sky tour).

## Dolphins reclaim Bosphorus as virus silences Istanbul



Dolphins swim in the straits of the Bosphorus where sea traffic has nearly come to a halt on April 25, 2020, as Turkish government announced a four-day curfew to prevent the spread of the epidemic COVID-19 caused by the novel coronavirus.—AFP

Good news for some of the city's most-loved inhabitants — the dolphins that swim in the fish-rich waters of the Bosphorus Strait between Europe and Asia. The Turkish city of 16 million has been under lockdown since Thursday as part of government measures to stem the spread of the coronavirus, following two successive weekends where it was also shut down. The latest confinement period is due to expire on Sunday midnight. The pandemic has claimed more than 2,700 lives in Turkey. Spotting dolphins in the Bosphorus — a usually very busy narrow waterway connecting the Mediterranean to the Black Sea right through the heart of Istanbul — is often a source of joy for the city's residents.

But the lockdown has meant fewer ships and more fish in the water, encouraging the mammals to come closer to shore and prompting more frequent sightings. "A decrease in boat and human traffic across the Bosphorus has a big impact," said Erol Orkcü, head of the amateur and sports fishing association in Istanbul. "Terrestrial and aquatic living things can remain free without human beings. That enables dolphins to come closer to the shoreline," he told AFP. Before the pandemic, fishing was a daily ritual in Istanbul with hundreds lighting fires or bringing samovars for making tea as they prepared for long angling stints along the shore. The sight of thousands of amateur fishers on the

Galata Bridge and on the banks of the Bosphorus is one of the city's iconic images. But they are now almost deserted.

## "Terror" of fishing halted

Yoruk Isik, a dedicated ship spotter who snaps vessels passing through the Bosphorus, said he had photographed dolphins before the pandemic but now they were swimming much closer to the shore. Dolphins "are coming closer to the edge of the water as the terror of uncontrolled anglers on the shoreline has temporarily stopped," he told AFP. "I call it terror because 90 percent of them are not aware of what they are doing and cause incredible environmental pollution," he said.

At Sarayburnu, which separates the Golden Horn from the Sea of Marmara, a pod of dolphins were spotted swimming with an army of seagulls — to the joy of photographers. The visibility of the dolphins is seen as an indicator of a healthy maritime ecosystem as the mammals are fighting for survival. Turkish literary giant Yasar Kemal wrote about the devastation wrought on the country's coastal ecosystems by the overhunting of dolphins for oil in his 1978 novel "The Sea-Crossed Fisherman". Since 1983, maritime mammal hunting has been prohibited in Turkey, and dolphins are protected by law. —AFP