

Charlie Lustman Lives to Share His Story

BY ANDREW FISH PHOTOGRAPHY JIM STEINFELDT
PRODUCTION DESIGNER SCOTT HEDBLOM NUCLEAR CLOTHING RI
LIMITED EDITION HIPPIE GUITAR COURTESY OF MARTIN & CO.

Speedway

Charlie Lustman glows with an effusive energy, radiating a passion for life that can only come from someone who truly knows what he has. In "Made Me Nuclear," his one-man operetta now running at the Santa Monica Playhouse, he shares with us his musical thoughts on tackling challenges, overcoming fear, and learning how to laugh amid an absurd degree of hardship. Three years ago, Lustman, the former owner of the Silent Movie Theatre on Fairfax, glowed for a very different reason, as chemicals in his body were irradiated so the doctors could see how far his bone cancer had spread. With an exceedingly rare osteosarcoma, that affects one in 400 million, he says — Lustman had most of his upper jaw removed over the course of two surgeries. Lesser ordeals have broken the spirit of many, which is precisely why the singer-songwriter has taken to the stage with his lilting melodies and jaunty tunes, which carry the message of hope, joy, and transformation. With his chemotherapy behind him, a nearly undetectable prosthetic jaw in place, and a seemingly endless supply of moxie, Lustman shows us how to look at suffering as an opportunity for rebirth.

"Our campaign is to get this story out," he explains, "so that other people will be inspired to process their experience in a way that is powerful for them. Whatever, or wherever they're going in it, that the process will be more of a joyous, uplifting, awakening, and conscious experience for them — and makes them feel like they've never lived any better than they are right in this moment."

"Made Me Nuclear" takes us through Lustman's journey: From the shattering



"Part of coping is to make a difficult life humorous and lighter," Lustman relates. "I thought, 'I want to spin this in a way where we can kind of smile and laugh at it a

little bit.' A little bit — and not because it's frivolous and light. It's the way I went through it, so in the art, I wanted to create that. Creating the nuclear man is my way of saying, 'Can you believe this? Isn't this insane?' With that in mind, I dressed it with creative things, lyrically and visually, that would make you have a little bit of a laugh."

Currently planning a world tour, Lustman strongly believes that we have some say in the way we

moment he learns of his diagnosis, to a loopy side-effect he's dubbed

"Chemo Brain," to his emergence on the other side as "Somebody New." The fact that his father survived the concentration camps of World War II helps us understand how Lustman has been able to see his illness in perspective, and present his story with an alternately somber and contagiously upbeat sharing of his hard-won enlightenment. On the guitar and piano, with an impressively composed track to back him up, the songsmith adopts a superhero-like "nuclear man" persona, which serves as a light-hearted myth to help convey his message.

say in the way we change when faced with adversity. With a wife and three children, including a newborn son, he sees his life as the greatest place he could possibly be. And with "Made Me Nuclear," the performer has taken a severely sour batch of lemons, and made a mean glass of lemonade.

"It's all in how you look at it," he says. "That's what the project's all about." ▼

To learn more about "Made Me Nuclear," and to purchase tickets or the soundtrack CD, visit www.mademenuclear.com. For further information on osteosarcoma, or to find out how you can help, visit the Sarcoma Alliance at www.sarcomaalliance.com.