



Students at The Governor’s School for the Arts in Norfolk work on the production set of a music video for GSA alum Jake Clemons’ song “Born Like Me.” COURTESY

BY COLIN WARREN-HICKS STAFF WRITER

On a cold February afternoon, 20 dancers from The Governor’s School for the Arts in Norfolk twisted and lunged, performing for a music video on the plaza of the Icon Norfolk Apartments building. GSA film students were behind the cameras, filming.

They conceptualized, performed and filmed the video of Jake Clemons' song "Born Like Me," which was released Wednesday to commemorate Juneteenth.

Clemons, a 1998 GSA alum, has been a tenor and baritone sax player with Bruce Springsteen's E Street Band for 12 years.

He is the nephew of Clarence Clemons, a Norfolk native and longtime saxophonist for Springsteen's band until his death in 2011.

The song has been available to stream since 2022. Clemons wrote it in the wake of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor's 2020 deaths at the hands of police; the lyrics reflect on racial violence, the need to stop racial injustices and people coming together in peace.

The song includes Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter Allison Russell and Tom Morello, the former guitarist for Rage Against the Machine.

The music video, however, is the work of GSA students.

"I wanted to think about a way to have a visual aspect of this release, and in some fantasy, I wanted to be able to promote this school that I'm very proud of and grateful for," Clemons said in an interview.

GSA students from every department played a part. Music students composed the intro and outro.

Theater and film students organized the shoot and controlled the cameras; students represented the song's repeated lyrics of "I can't breathe," such as by being wrapped in cloth and depicting drowning.

Viewers might recognize a few locales, including the top of the Dominion Tower parking garage, the Interstate 264 overpass near Harbor Park and the dark flow of the Elizabeth River that acts as a backdrop in multiple scenes.

Ava Harlan, then a high school senior, was a first-assistant director and created call sheets and scheduled shoots.

"We've had so many opportunities at GSA so far, but this is definitely the biggest one," she said, standing on set in downtown Norfolk. "It really is just the dream."

Colin Warren-Hicks, 919-818-8138, colin.warrenhicks@virginiamedia.com