Song for Lupus
Julian Lennon shines a new light on an old tune

Julian Lennon, 47, singer/songwriter and elder son of Beatle John Lennon, has been out of the limelight for more than a decade after releasing Véите, his smash album recorded when he was just 20, and four subsequent albums. He’s been focusing on art, photography, and cooking in his adopted home country of Italy. Until now. This month he’s back and making music again, inspired by the memory of an old friend and a famous song.

In 2009, Lennon met American singer/songwriter James Scott Cook through a mutual friend and offered to contribute background vocals on a song Cook was writing. But when he heard the tune, a tribute to Cook’s grandmother, Lucy, who has lupus, he felt compelled to do more. Of course, Lennon had a Lucy in his life as well, his childhood pal Lucy Vodden, portrayed in a drawing preschooler Julian brought home and showed to his dad.

“I remember him saying, ‘What’s that?’ and I said, ‘That’s Lucy in the sky with diamonds.’” The rest, as they say, is history. (John Lennon and Paul McCartney went on to create the song, and the Beatles recorded it for their Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band album.)

The very week Julian Lennon went into the studio to begin work with Cook, he learned that Vodden had died from lupus, after struggling for years with the disease. Clearly, the Lucy and lupus connections were too coincidental for Lennon to ignore. “I said, ‘Why don’t we change a few of the words, make it a duet, and make it a charity single in honor of Lucy, and Lucy in aid of lupus?’” Cook loved the idea and last December, the upbeat pop single “Lucy” was released as an extended play CD.

Lennon and Cook earmarked a portion of sales for lupus research, shared by the Lupus Foundation of America (LFA, lupus.org) and the St. Thomas’ Lupus Trust in Great Britain, where Vodden was treated. This month the pair will sing “Lucy” at LFA’s Butterfly Gala National Awards Dinner in Washington, D.C.

Lupus affects the immune system, which attacks healthy tissues and organs, causing inflammation and damage to the skin, joints, kidneys, blood cells, heart, and lungs. Almost no area of the body is exempt, and there is no cure. LFA estimates at least 1.5 million Americans have the disease.—Leslie Pepper