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THE FORCE IS STRONG WITH NEW YORK: AN INTERVIEW WITH THE EMPIRE SABER GUILD



(<http://empiresaberguild.com>)

(Photo: Empire Saber Guild)

New York is the home of Broadway musicals, the iconic yellow cab, the skyscraper, and the **Empire Saber Guild**(<http://empiresaberguild.com/>). Recognized as the New York Temple of the Saber Guild, an international *Star Wars* lightsaber performance and costuming organization, the Empire Saber Guild serve the Force as well as the community that makes up this great state. Dressed in detailed costumes and wielding lightsabers, each member is a volunteer devoted to sharing their love of *Star Wars*.

“*Star Wars* is something that’s been around for ages . . . everyone has their own part in it,” said Rubin Polizzi, recently elected Local Director of the Empire Saber Guild. “You can touch it. It’s not an untouchable franchise, and because

you can, people hold onto it and they feel like they're part of it. I feel like I'm part of the *Star Wars* universe by being in an [Lucasfilm-recognized] fan group."

Created by Matthew J. Procaccini and Adrienne Lombardo in 2012, the group started off with three members and has grown in size since then, performing at various fan conventions as well as charity and sporting events, such as San Diego Comic-Con, Wizard World Philly, and the Brooklyn Cyclones' first-ever *Star Wars* night.

"We try to put on the best performance we can," said Rubin, referring to the lightsaber performances that the group choreograph and rehearse for on a weekly basis.

Rubin kindly sat down with **Making *Star Wars*** contributor Johnamarie Macias to discuss what the Empire Saber Guild is all about, how they contribute to the local community, and how you as a *Star Wars* fan can join the group.

JM: Let's start with the source of it all. How did you become a *Star Wars* fan?

RP: I basically grew up on *Star Wars*, and I remember watching it on Channel 11 when I was really young.

JM: Me too! On WB.

RP: Right?! I never even realized what it was until the re-release in '97, and I was like, "Oh, that's the movie I only watched a little bit of it every couple of weeks when it was on . . . Ever since then I've been a huge *Star Wars* fan.



(<http://empiresaberguild.com>)

(Photo: Empire Saber Guild)

JM: That's great! Explain briefly when and how the Empire Saber Guild got started.

RP: Sure! Matthew Procaccini and Adrienne Lombardo, they were looking for a lightsaber choreography group . . . and they stumbled across Saber Guild(<http://saberguild.com/>) through a friend in the Pennsylvania

Temple(<https://www.facebook.com/SaberGuildKeystone>). They basically thought, “Oh wow, this is something that we can do and be on the level of the 501st or Rebel Legions and really be able to do some charity work.” They contacted SaberGuild.com and Temple Prime, which is the main Temple out in California, and they got the OK to start their own Temple here in New York.

JM: That’s so cool. And what’s your role, specifically?

RP: I was just elected the local director. I’m taking Mr. Procaccini’s place. He and Adrienne are moving out to Seattle and they’re going to start a Temple out in Seattle with the Rebel Legion and 501st out there. I’m basically taking over their role and heading up the group.

JM: Gotcha! It’s so great that they’re spreading it around. Since you run the local chapter now, do you find it very difficult to persuade the locals to join?

RP: We have to have very authentic and specific types of costumes, so we can’t say, “Oh I want to be a Power Ranger Jedi.” Hey, I wanted to do a Green Ranger Jedi and thought about the whole concept, but then you can’t do the Saber Guild . . . If you actually want to perform with us in one of our shows, you have to be an official member and have a full-fledged costume—and that’s usually the biggest part . . . We’re representing Lucasfilm and Disney and we got their blessing and part of that is to step our game up. As far as getting people lightsabers, everybody wants a lightsaber!

JM: Everyone always wants a lightsaber! It’s impressive what you guys do. Speaking of lightsabers, the Empire Saber Guild hosts lightsaber open rehearsals. Describe what an ordinary session is like for someone looking to attend.

RP: Sure! We hold open rehearsals every Friday. Basically, what a beginning training session would look like is from 7:00pm to 7:10pm people come in and put down their stuff. Then, we go into warm ups, which range anywhere from CrossFit style, cardio drills, to Blue Dragon drills (a more Kung Fu based sort of warm up). And then, we will go into the main portion of the class and that will range. Recently, we had an acting class for an hour that was called “Why am I standing here?” It focused on background acting. Some classes . . . we [rehearsed] Form V: Djem So. We had an actual master swords artist come in and create a Form for us, so maybe we’ll do a drill or maybe we’ll do a class on



<http://empiresaberguild.com>

(Photo: Empire Saber Guild)

actual choreography of some sort.

JM: That's so cool!

RP: So yeah, you come in, you warm up, we get into the main class, which is either a drill, a choreography class, or an

acting class. And then, we go into—I would say about the last 40 minutes would be 'show off' and open choreography, where people can actually get to practice the fights that they're working on or maybe just work on what they've learned in class. The only time that sort of changes is when we have a show coming up. Two weeks before the show, it might just be straight up show rehearsals. For new people who may be there during [the rehearsals], we will have somebody to take them off to the side and work with them one-on-one.

JM: Speaking of rehearsal for shows, does the Empire Saber Guild have anything planned for the upcoming holidays?

RP: We are currently talking to a couple of children's hospitals for after the holidays, around January. Normally, from September to December, it's pretty quiet. There are aren't that many conventions or shows.

JM: And since you all do this sort of work, what are some charities or organizations you support, so we may also offer our support and donations?

RP: Our main charity that we've been working for is small New York based program called **DCTV**(<http://www.dctvny.org/>).

JM: DCTV! Yes, I am familiar with them. I took a few classes there!

RP: You did? We're supporting their youth program!

JM: That's so great!

RP: We raised about almost \$2000 for them this year. We've been working on some stuff with them. We're trying to work with **Toys for Tots**(<http://brooklyn-nj.toysfortots.org/local-coordinator-sites/lco-sites/default.aspx>). They've been super great and they love the idea of us . . . We went to the **Autism Speaks**(<http://www.autismspeaks.org/>) Walk. Along with the Dark Alliance and Mandalorian Mercs, we raised \$1500 for them. We're branching out and trying to figure out which one we want to stick with, but those are the main three we've been working with.

JM: That's wonderful, reaching out to the community that way. Simply because a lot of people on a normal basis don't really do that, so it's great to see that kind of stuff coming out of *Star Wars* and contributing to that line of work.

RP: Yeah! One of the things I love about Saber Guild is the fact that it is a not-for-profit . . . We are costumed performance charity groups and it really is great to do something that's different from everything else, that's something you love and share it with other people.



(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CttWqfYJsU>)

The Empire Saber Guild at St. Mary's Children's Hospital. Watch the full video of the performance and charity work [here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CttWqfYJsU)(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CttWqfYJsU>). (Photo: Empire Saber Guild)

JM: Exactly! And what kind of words of advice do you have for a beginner looking to create a *Star Wars* costume?

RP: If you're building a costume specifically to come into Saber Guild or any of the other costuming groups, make sure you pay attention to their guidelines because every group has different guidelines and what is acceptable and what's not. If you pay attention to the guidelines, you'll wind up saving yourself a lot of

money from having to remake or repurchase something that you thought was acceptable. Read the guidelines and ask questions would be my number one piece of advice before starting a costume.

For a group like Saber Guild, we always want to keep in mind, “If there were 100 Jedi walking down the street, would you fit in? Or would you be a sore thumb?” Really think about how this costume works in the *Star Wars* universe and take it from there.

And the third piece of advice, take your time. Your costume won’t come together the very first time you build it. You will build it, and then rebuild it, and then rebuild it, and possibly never stop rebuilding it. You’ll keep improving upon it . . . Don’t rush it. Take your time and let it grow.

JM: And do you have a most memorable performance or event?

RP: As awesome as Eternal Con(<http://www.eternalcon.com/>) was for us in the sheer aspect that we had 23 members and we literally took over an entire audience . . . I would have to say the Brooklyn Cyclones(<http://empiresaberguild.com/brooklyn-cyclones-star-wars-night/>) game this year. It was a really great event because it was seen by 5,000 people and all night we would come on and do skits in between innings. And finally, it ended with this big battle on the field . . . everybody was there, and I remember [the audience] was in it. They stayed. They watched the whole thing. They were cheering for the good guys and booing the bad guys, and they did Force chokes and Force pushes. You were literally into it. And then, the stadium lights cut out at the end of our performance and the fireworks went off. All you saw over the field were red, blue, green lightsabers—maybe a purple—and fireworks just going off in the background . . . We pushed really hard and we worked really hard, and at the end, there was this great moment when everybody was like, “This is why we do this.”

JM: That sounds so awesome! If someone’s really looking to join, how can they and what are the requirements?

RP: There’s two ways to join! If you’re in the New York area and you’d like to join Empire Saber Guild, the first thing to do would be to e-mail [US\(mailto:empiresaberguild@gmail.com\)](mailto:empiresaberguild@gmail.com) or go to our website at EmpireSaberGuild.com(<http://empiresaberguild.com>) and contact one of us. Or show up to a class! Our classes are posted on our Facebook page and website.

You can literally just show up to a class and have a good time! Once you've decided that you want to become a full-fledged member and get a costume together, then we'll send you to SaberGuild.com to fill out the form.

It's a fun time! We've bonded over the course of the two years that we've been around in New York. If it wasn't for the guys out in California, I don't what we would be doing. And we carry that Lucasfilm title with a lot of respect because these are the people who allow us to play in their sandbox, if you will. We respect them and we respect the guys out in California who were able to get us that honor, and it's really about being the best ambassadors for *Star Wars* that we can be.

JM: That's fantastic! I love talking to fellow *Star Wars* fans. It's my favorite thing to do!

Stay tuned to **part two** of this interview at [The Wookiee Gunner](http://TheWookieeGunner.com)(<http://thewookieegunner.com>) next week. Rubin will share his thoughts about *Star Wars: Episode VII* and *Star Wars Rebels*.

Find the Empire Saber Guild at their [main site](http://empiresaberguild.com)(<http://empiresaberguild.com>) and show your support by following them on:

- [Twitter](http://twitter.com/nysaberguild)(<http://twitter.com/nysaberguild>)
- [Instagram](http://instagram.com/nysaberguild)(<http://instagram.com/nysaberguild>)
- [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/EmpireSaberGuild)(<https://www.facebook.com/EmpireSaberGuild>)