

Musical billboards for altruism

Local artists donate their talents to charitable events and organizations

MUSIC PREVIEW

REAL

Sunday, March 9
Black Swan Ale House

TOM PHILLIPS AND THE MEN OF CONSTANT SORROW

Saturday, March 15
Victoria Park Community Centre

MARY-LYNN McEWEN

Musicians commonly behave like living billboards for altruism. In 1971, George Harrison coaxed Eric Clapton and Bob Dylan to appear at his Concert for the People of Bangladesh. In 1984, Bob Geldof organized Live Aid. And Jackson Browne, Sting and U2 regularly raise funds and awareness for Amnesty International.

Calgary artists share this tradition, as evidenced by folks like Kris Demeanor, who spent a recent Friday night strumming chords in Alex Ferguson Elementary School's gymnasium, donating a live soundtrack to an auction that raised \$14,000 for a safer playground.

Local bands REAL and Tom Phillips and the Men of Constant



Donating his band's services for a worthy cause — Tom Phillips

Sorrow are two more acts who make music while making sure they leave the world a little better off than they found it.

REAL GENEROSITY

In a gesture of generosity, Kirby Sewell, the lead singer and driving force behind Real, hooked the band up with the Children's Cottage. The

former Mount Royal College student studied both music and accounting, giving him insight into two important sides of his career before he decided to focus strictly on Real's music. His group plays a polished blend of smooth pop in homage to '70s bands — a sound leading to Real's position in the listener-chosen Top 20 at garageband.com.

Between playing opening sets for Wide Mouth Mason and Streetheart and recording their self-titled debut, Real settled on the Children's Cottage as its chosen cause.

"Well, everyone loves children and wants them to be safe," says Sewell. "That's why we decided to donate (to) the Children's Cottage five dollars from every CD we sell at stores."

Citing a loving family that raised him to believe in goodwill towards others as a factor in his benevolence, Sewell is pleased to help others while pursuing a career in music. Real's disc was released at the end of January and is available at Megatunes and Sam's in Chinook Centre.

SORROWFUL FRIENDS

School Friends is an informal group that has built 12 schools in Guatemala and one in Nicaragua. Organizer Mike Miller snagged the help of Tom Phillips and company to perform a benefit gig March 15 at the Victoria Park Community Centre, helping to make School Friends' vision of an orphanage in Chimaltenango, Guatemala a reality.

School Friends is not a charity per se, but an informal direct aid organization, which means that 100 per cent of funds raised go to projects, not administrative fees. The Web

site, www.safetyboss.net, offers photos of groups of people from around the world coming together to build schools. Miller has been working with the group for about 10 years now.

"I've seen real changes in people's lives during that time," he says. "The idea is to bring people from the First World together with people from the Third World to share achievements."

He approached the Men of Constant Sorrow for help because "almost everyone in this city is a fan."

Just back from playing the Prostate Festival in Whitehorse, Phillips says that his band gets many requests for charity gigs.

"We like to do a certain amount of benefit work every year and this is a worthy cause," he says. "We had to, at some point, start really picking and choosing because there are a lot of good causes out there."

The band got even busier after its recent CD release, with gigs booked just about every weekend and Phillips writing new songs. Still, this worthy cause got the nod for the band's time, says Phillips, "because the people we are working with are great, they like our music and they are good promoters." Tickets for the benefit are available by calling 261-5075.