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## Healing Blues speaks truth about homelessness

By Ogi Overman Special to Go Triad Oct 27, 2016



Spoken-word artist Donald Miller (left) with producer Dave Fox (center) and engineer Benjy Johnson.  
Courtesy of Ted Efremoff

In September 2014, two Greensboro College professors released a concept album they had been working on for almost a year.

The album was met with such overwhelmingly positive response that, after a brief hiatus to decompress, they decided to embark on another similar — but not identical — project. And the response is expected to be every bit as encouraging and the finished product every bit as polished as the first one.

Art professor Ted Efremoff and music professor Dave Fox are the brains behind the project. Although Efremoff, who has since left Greensboro for a position at a Connecticut college, came up with the idea, it was Fox who carried out most of the implementation and day-to-day operations.

At its most basic level, both projects are fundraisers for the Interactive Resource Center, whose mission is to provide basic services to Greensboro's homeless population, with the long-term goal of re-integrating them back into society.

The initial project, titled "The Healing Blues," involved pairing some of the IRC's clients with a number of the region's top-shelf musicians and songwriters, having them tell their stories, and letting the tunesmiths put their words into song, which resulted in a 15-song CD.

A series of concerts were held in conjunction with the album's release, and together raised \$11,000 for the IRC, \$4,200 of which went directly to the clients who laid bare their life-stories.

The follow-up, titled "Healing Blues — Spoken Words," tweaks the concept a bit, as the name implies, relying more on the actual voices of the clients with music layered on top of it.

“Ted pitched the idea that the spoken word fits better with most African Americans’ background,” explained Fox, the area’s pre-eminent jazz pianist and composer. “He said it’s more of an urban reality. Although I’m not a spoken-word producer, I have a liberal outlook on what music is; I believe that anything that is organized sound is music, so maybe I could use spoken word as another element of the whole package.”

So Fox set about recording the IRC clients, winding up with about seven hours of tape from 14 clients. He then brought in 10 bands to Benjy Johnson’s Earthtones Studio, giving them nothing more than a key, a tempo and a groove and having them improv. Then came the laborious process of overlaying the words with the music.

“I picked out snippets of voices and fit them over the grooves and fleshed it out with some actual vocalists as well as a couple of professional spoken-word artists,” Fox said. “I felt like an artist who collects what he can and then makes something out of it.”

In the end, about 50 musicians were involved, all cream-of-the-crop local talent. And, as icing on the cake, he was able to persuade revered trombonist Fred Wesley (see sidebar) to come in and add his monstrous talents to three tracks. Wesley’s daughter, Joya, graduated from N.C. A&T State University and worked in Greensboro as a journalist for over a decade.

“I’d met Fred through Joya and had played with him a little years ago when he was teaching at UNCG,” Fox said. “One of the storytellers said he had always wanted to be a trombone player growing up, and I thought, why don’t I call Fred. I wrote one song specifically for him, and two others were perfect for a trombone part.”

Fox put the finishing touches on the album just last week, and the public will get its first taste of it Sunday at a CD release party on the Greensboro College campus.

“The first time we had bands rotating on and off, but this time it will just be the Healing Blues Band (Robin Doby, Chuck Cotton, Roger Kohrs, Sheila Klinefelter and himself) with a lot of guest artists coming in,” Fox said.

And might one of those artists be Fred Wesley?

“You bet,” Fox said, smiling. “He’s coming up from his home in South Carolina for the show. Said he wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

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Contact Ogi Overman at [overmanogi@gmail.com](mailto:overmanogi@gmail.com).

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### Want to go?

**What:** The Healing Blues Concert for the Homeless

**When:** 7:30 p.m. Oct. 30

**Where:** Huggins Auditorium, Greensboro College, 815 W. Market St., Greensboro

**Tickets:** \$10 for adults, \$5 for students by phone at (336) 272-7102 Ext. 5242, or online at [tickets@greensboro.edu](mailto:tickets@greensboro.edu)

**Etc:** Healing Blues CDs will be on sale. All proceeds go to the Interactive Resource Center.

### MORE INFORMATION



Fred Wesley more than a sideman