

Three concerts to launch Healing Blues Project CD

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Before coming to Greensboro College from UConn three years ago, art professor Ted Efremoff headed up an art project that involved planting wheat seeds. What, you may legitimately ask, does gardening and art have in common? The short answer is that it is a relatively new discipline called “social practice.”

“We planted, threshed and harvested the wheat using bicycles,” he explained, “and then made bread and pizza and gave it to the folks in one of the poorest neighborhoods in Hartford. It’s basically social engagement in a creative way.”

Lately, Efremoff is still planting seeds, but these are of the metaphorical variety. Yet they too are reaping benefits for those who need it most, and doing so in a very creative way.

Last spring he got inspired by an art installation project sponsored by the Piedmont Blues Preservation Society, but rather than merely create a static piece for a downtown window display, he hit upon the notion to do something that would incorporate his field of study.

“I kept asking myself, ‘Who is experiencing the blues right now in Greensboro?’” he explained. “And the obvious answer was the homeless.”

He then sent out an email to the GC faculty asking for feedback, and almost immediately heard back from music professor Dave “Dr. Drave” Fox, arguably Greensboro’s most revered keyboardist. If the objective were to do something for the city’s homeless, Fox posited, then the logical place to start was the Interactive Resource Center, which is tasked with providing basic services to the homeless population, with the long-term goal of reintegrating them back into society. And if it were to involve music, then the logical person with whom to start was, well, Fox himself.

“He knows every blues cat in town,” laughed Efremoff. “That was an easy call.”

So they, along with GC senior art student Julia Fergus (who happens to be related to monster guitarist Tim Betts), PBPS officers Chris Roulhac and Doug Mokaren, and some of the IRC staff, began brainstorming. And this, in a nutshell, is what they came up with: Gather a couple dozen of the area’s cream-of-the-crop musicians and songwriters, pair them with some of the IRC’s homeless clients, let them tell their stories of what brought them to this stage in life, have the songwriters put that into verse and music, produce a CD and live concert, give the proceeds to the IRC, and call it The Healing Blues Project.

The end result is a stunning 15-song compilation CD, produced by Fox and recorded at Benjy Johnson’s Earthtones Studio.

Fox summed it up best, saying, “The final product is a good documentary of certain people’s lives and hardships, but it’s also a documentary of the music scene here and what a great talent pool we have in Greensboro.”

Lately the project seems to have taken on a life of its own. The CD release concert has grown from one to three, now at the Blind Tiger Sept. 25, Huggins Auditorium on the GC campus Oct. 5, and Ziggy’s Oct. 12, as well as a communion service Oct. 2 and panel discussion Oct. 3 on the GC campus.

The organizers also launched two online fundraisers through Power to Give and Indiegogo, with a \$30,000 goal.

“Tom Phillion (president of ArtsGreensboro) set up the Power to Give fundraiser, which gave us some initial seed money,” said Fox. “He heard about it and said, ‘We’ve got to get involved in this.’ That’s the first time anybody from ArtsGreensboro (formerly known as the United Arts Council) has ever come to me and said they wanted to be involved.”

All the money raised from CD sales, concerts, crowdfunding campaigns and private donations will go directly to the IRC. Some of those funds, and any royalties, will also go to the storytellers, who got equal credit with the songwriters.

“We want to make this a self-perpetuating thing,” disclosed Efremoff. “We have some ideas on how to do that, but they’re not firm enough yet to talk about. But I can say that it’s about engaging people in creative ways to, hopefully, bring about positive social change.”

Added Fox, “There’s a new paradigm being created here. This is the intersection of education, art and community.” Indeed, the seed has been planted. Let’s see how much fruit it will bear.

